

The Role of Sales and Service in Today's Industry – A Complex Drama

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Oh how business has changed. As we look around the industry today, everything is changing - technology, customers, our people and the industry. But, are we changing as well? Are we really adapting to what our customers want and expect? Or, is everything around us changing and we are just reacting or responding to the changes handed to us... maybe because we have to? As you read this, my hope is that you will ask yourself this question: "Is our company just good at reacting to customer needs, or are we adapting and changing how we do business to proactively compete in the industry to retain and grow our customers?"

"Our customers changed how they buy and what they expect...but our sales and service teams were struggling to adapt.

We need to change how we look at their roles!"

Why Change - The Reason is Simple.

For the past 25 years I have been part of the uniform, linen and apparel industry in every aspect... from sales as a supplier and channel partner, to executive sales leadership, to now as a company that is a rec-

ognized industry expert in sales selection and performance solutions. One thing is for certain, never have I seen change occur in an industry as it has in the past 3-5 years - and it is here to stay. In other words, "change" is the word for our decade.

In the last 5 years, we experienced an economic downturn coupled with advancements in technology. As employee numbers decreased and companies did more with less, top businesses embraced technology and solutions to operate leaner to fill the gap, creating more efficient ways to run their company. The goal... to stay in business.

Today, top companies have learned that as their customers have changed how they do business, they must also begin to look at how they do business, how they sell, how they service their accounts and what they will do to better compete, grow and evolve in a highly dynamic marketplace. One thing is for certain, companies that are open to change succeed; companies that rationalize doing business the same will fail. And this includes how they service, sell, retain and grow their customers.



Now, as the industry is improving, companies are more strategic, lean and working to re-develop and grow business. They realize there is an important balance of retaining and mining current customers, developing the "right" new business, and engaging past customers to rekindle business opportunities. They are also being more specific, targeting business that fits their most profitable services to support growth and success. So how are these changes impacting the sales and service teams in the marketplace today?

The Big Dilemma – Traditional Service and Sales vs Today's Reality.

Traditionally, if we look at the industry

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over the past 30 years, sales and service areas of the business operated in a similar fashion: the sales department was responsible for developing and securing new customers, selling programs and service agreements or solutions to a customer, and moving on to the next prospect. Then, the route service team kicked in to service, manage and support the account for ongoing business.

That is until leadership realized sales revenue needed to increase and started expecting the service teams to “sell” additional services, contracts, or products based on the reality that it is easier to sell to current customers than develop new ones. That’s when the game changed - that’s when the role of the service professional became more complex.

What is interesting is when you look at the role of sales VS service: a sales professional’s primary role responsibilities stayed the same - prospect, develop, and sell new business. However, today a service professional must do both - service and sell. Our research shows that service professionals that are very effective at up-selling generally constitute 15% of the team. These top performers have similar traits to a sales person, although they select the service role because they can be very successful without the significant stress of a full-time sales role and it may fit their personal needs. The other 85% often struggle to be effective; they simply seek to support, service and retain customers. That said, what if you partnered your sales team with the service team to “partner” sell?

Integrating Sales and Service – The Advantage to Partnered Selling – An Example:

A service professional has been highly successful at managing a mid-sized uniform account with 200 employees. The agreement is due for renewal and a major competitor is already servicing their mat business. Based on his sales ability, the service professional is fearful of engaging the customer and potentially shaking up or impacting the current uniform contract

and then not be successful in securing new business. So, he asks for help from the sales representative who sold the account and they have a joint meeting with the customer. The service professional is able to utilize the sales professional’s strengths in selling as a value to support the customer, engage them about other services, and earn the opportunity to gain other business by presenting depth in the company’s ability to service the account. This partnered approach allows the sales team to do what they do best and the service team learns how to better mine a current customer...A win-win.

"We engaged our sales and service teams in a program to analyze their roles, define their strengths, and gain their ideas on customer and company growth. Now they are more engaged and focused on how we must service and sell to maintain and grow our business. A huge success!"

Creating a culture of open collaboration between sales and service teams is invaluable in supporting common goals and improving team performance and morale while also allowing team members to learn from each other which benefits the company as a result. Partnered selling is a model being implemented by companies world-wide with departments working together, collaborating and changing how they support customers to assure they keep and grow their business and optimize sales opportunities.

Help Your Team Adapt for Success – Assess and Analyze.

There is one thing for sure, you can’t train, develop or expect strong performance from the sales or service teams without clearly defining top performance in their roles. Defining top performance in a role requires collaboration with company leadership and the team to obtain a realistic view of the company goals, role expectations, sales process, culture and customer environment, as well as compensation and

incentive programs, and characteristics, motivation, and skills needed for top performance.

Once top performance in the role is defined, a validated assessment tool can be utilized to measure sales or service attributes and analyze the skills, strengths, motivation and fit of the existing team. The assessment should be provided to the team member to help them understand how to adapt and utilize the strengths they bring to their role to better service, sell, and support customers.

By engaging the sales and service teams in the effort, company leadership establishes the foundation to change the culture of the organization and lead, coach, develop and drive accountability for sales and service performance and growth.

Sales and Service Success.

Through targeted, effective strategies company leadership can guide change and help the sales and service teams adapt and change to proactively compete and support, retain, and grow customers in a highly dynamic marketplace.

GDI Offers World-Class Sales Solutions for the selection, performance and Retention in Today’s Leading Organizations
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