

IN FULL FORCE

IN THE BATTLE FOR ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP DOLLARS, ARE YOU DEPLOYING WELL-TRAINED TROOPS OR RAW RECRUITS?

You can't pick up a major trade publication without seeing an article about associations trying to avoid dues increases by finding other ways to increase revenue. Most of these articles relate to selling various association assets (including advertising pages), exploring affinity relationships, selling sponsorships and exhibit space at trade shows, and more.

Examining, pricing, and selling these assets has become imperative for most associations. The packaging, or bundling, of multiple assets represents the next wave in the association world. Yet the people responsible for raising new revenues are not always comfortable with the startling professional and cultural change needed to accomplish this task.

A LOOK BACK

Historically, associations were reluctant to accept advertising or to commercialize any of their services—at least in their early years. Many associations entered into arrangements with marketers through the back door, if at all.

As time went on, associations began to accept commercial arrangements with outside companies but didn't actually solicit them. Often, the prevailing mentality said it was O.K. to accept money from a sponsor

or advertiser provided "the deal" was delineated by a host of disclaimers. It wasn't customary—or necessary—to go out and ask for the business. In some cases, to compete against commercial ventures vying for the same advertising or marketing dollars was considered taboo.

Of course, times have changed dramatically. Today, most association members would rather see advertising or sponsorship programs sold than pay higher dues. Clearly, somebody needs to sell something. But who?

Many associations have simply "drafted" loyal employees to take on new roles, including selling advertising or sponsorships. These employees may be process-oriented or detail-oriented yet are expected to sell or manage a selling process. As the pressure mounts to actually bring in new revenue, the situation often becomes painful for these employees—and not very productive for the association.

WHAT IT TAKES

If you want to generate new revenue, make sure that the people attempting to get it have the attitudes and skill sets necessary

to accomplish this goal. In other words, they must have the ability and desire to sell. The art of selling is asking people to believe in the seller, the product, and the benefit to them—and then to part with their money.

Selling successfully means possessing enormous listening skills, a community of resources, some power to be persuasive and, perhaps most important, a character that is resilient to rejection. (The rejection is what many people find most difficult to handle.) Few have this particular inventory of skills and tolerance for rejection, and they tend to be currently enjoying a successful career in sales—not ensconced in an association's hierarchy.

If your association already has a national sales function, you may wonder if there is a quick way to spot whether someone has been assigned a sales position for which he or she is not suited. Here's one: How protective is the person of his or her turf?

People who don't like to sell often adopt a defensive, provincial style and create closed, isolated, "information silos." Silos are protected areas within an organization where information is not readily available to outsiders, even other departments. These silos become problematic when an association is attempting to create interdepartmental packaging of assets.

BY JAMES G. ELLIOTT

Right for the Job

Provincialism, otherwise known as creating “information silos,” is one characteristic of a person who does not have strong selling skills, says Dana Borowka of Lighthouse Consulting Services (www.lighthouseconsulting.org). In addition, he says, people who seem to struggle with selling tend to be:

- More cooperative and deferential.
 - Not comfortable in social settings. They are usually more private, reserved, impersonal, quiet, and cautious in their approach with others.
 - More process-driven, detail-oriented, organized, and conscious of what the rules and regulations are.
 - Fairly traditional. They typically stay within familiar territory and are uncomfortable with risk or failure.
 - Concerned about self-image and what others may think about them. This may contribute to a high level of stress and tension, a lack of self-confidence, and a fear of rejection.
- On the other hand, says Borowka, his firm has noticed that many top sellers seem to be:
- Very outgoing, expressive, warm, and able to connect with others on a personal level.
 - Open to new ideas and change. They are stimulated by change and challenge, yet fairly practical and realistic.
 - Not strongly organized.
 - Fairly non-conforming and comfortable with risk taking.

Borowka observes that most organizations which employ good sellers have the problem of containing the salespeople within the bounds set by the organization, rather than the reverse.—J.G.E.

PUT TO THE TEST

What are your options if you are not getting the sales results you want? For starters, develop a well-defined job description for your sales positions, including revenue expectations. Specifically address what your organization needs and expects.

“So often what we hear from organizations is that they want to hire a seller because they like the person. However, that can be a grave error,” says Dana Borowka, president of Lighthouse Consulting Services, Santa Monica, CA. The firm offers personality assessments for new hires and staff development, as well as team building, conflict management, and communication training. Borowka observes, “When hiring, it is vital that the candidate fit the job description rather than the interviewer’s personal tastes. Most interviewers aren’t sellers and often don’t identify with them.”

To identify people with high aptitude and suitable temperament for selling, consider administering the 16 Personality Factors profile (16PF), developed in 1949 by Dr. Cattell, the grandfather of industrial psychological testing. Lighthouse Consulting Services administers the 16PF and interprets more than 140 total scales to help with hiring decisions. This process provides

extensive information on how the personality of a seller will match not only with his or her selling responsibilities but also with the sales team’s dynamics and the organizational culture. Although an investment, such testing will enable you to hire the most committed, skillful people.

Another possibility is to try to create an internal structure where information flows among departments by mandate of senior management. If you still encounter internal roadblocks, research selling organizations such as representatives firms. Their personnel can integrate with your association’s current internal structure and recommend processes that will, at the least, open up some selling opportunities.

It’s in the best interest of your members to find a solution soon. Otherwise, you’ll have to sell them on a dues increase while the association’s assets are languishing. ■



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