

Move relationships up to move sales up

It's usually easier to develop new business with a customer you already have rather than go out and find a new customer. Or poach a customer from a competitor. This is not to say that we shouldn't look for new business opportunities beyond the customers with whom we already deal, but there are many opportunities to be found within the immediate customer - but perhaps beyond the people that we are used to seeing.

To develop new business within existing account customers we need to put ourselves in our customers shoes – what do they want from us? Over the past few years we have researched a number of major companies in a wide variety of professions and countries to obtain their thoughts about the relationships with their suppliers. Many of their concerns are similar. A few of the more commonly expressed concerns are these:-

- Make an **impact** on our business; don't just be visible and offer a product or service
- Spend more time helping us think and to develop strategies for our markets;
- Don't tell us what we already know. Know more than we do about our business. Tell us what our business is going to look like five or ten years from now;
- Give us a competitive advantage - help us to out-compete our competitors;
- Stay up-to-date on what's going on in our business. Use our data to give us an extra level of analysis. Ask for it; don't wait for us to give it to you;
- Make an extra effort to understand how our business works: sit in on our meetings

What many of these issues have in common is a requirement for Key Account Managers to spend serious effort on getting to know the customer's business and industry in great depth. This will require greater contact with the customer at higher levels, perhaps higher than the people; we are used to seeing and certainly higher than the traditional salesperson-buyer level.

It is no great surprise that, without an active plan to do otherwise, customer contacts tend to settle down to a few regular meetings with the same faces. The feeling of comfort and stability that this can bring is dangerously illusory; when the face changes so can your fortune. Genuine security is usually the result of deep relationships with as broad a range of contacts as possible.

If we consider the way that ideas and decisions are generated in the customer's organisation, we might begin to see the way to uncovering real opportunities, whether for new business or to add value to existing arrangements.



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