HIGH PERFORMING BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

LEAD GENERATION IN THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

If you’ve been in business for any length of time, chances are you’ve come across the phrase, “eating your own dog food,” which I understand to mean “using your own product or service to demonstrate its effectiveness.” After all, if your company has developed something you want others to buy, doesn’t it make sense to use it internally? Doesn’t that show confidence?

Developing new sales leads is an age-old problem for all types of organizations.

Once upon a time, as illustrated by the expression above, people were called upon to literally eat their product to demonstrate its appeal. In the complex realm of professional services, it’s not quite that simple. Unlike pet food sales, where the “product” can be tested and accepted or rejected immediately and with little risk, successful sales outcomes are built on knowledge, relationships, and trust.

Selling, in most cases, involves one person connecting with another.

I work for a global, professional services firm that specializes in delivering extraordinary outcomes to our clients by providing business process outsourcing, consulting, engineering, and IT solutions. As the head of sales, I am a prime prospect for companies looking to sell lead generation services. In fact, I receive several calls and emails each week soliciting my business.

I have tried some of these services and I have not been satisfied with the results.

The subject of this paper is how we have tackled this challenge – how a company delivering world-class professional services optimally presents itself to potential customers – and what we’ve learned from it.

EVERY SALE STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION

Selling highly complex marketing products takes real skill and training. It requires dedication and investment to develop sales executives. The sales effort often must be highly customized to a client’s business requirements and environment.

Sales executives need to listen carefully to the client and formulate a solution that meets the strategy and achieves the stated goals.

Typically, these sales are long in duration, come with high price tags and require approval from multiple decision-makers across several departments.

Relationship-building is an essential ingredient to success.

After all, as any top-performing sales pro will attest, what is really being sold is peace of mind (and rightly so). Decision-makers can’t afford to make mistakes. They need to have confidence in the capabilities of the sales person, and to believe the supplier can deliver as promised.

Other factors complicate the process. Due diligence must be completed. Multiple people are likely involved and the decision could be political in nature. Timelines and due dates need to be met.

The bottom line is that decision-makers have to be able to trust the people and the company with whom they decide to conduct business. To be successful in this type of selling environment, creating client intimacy is critical, as is acting with complete integrity in all aspects of your business dealings.

These are things that are difficult to outsource to a vendor.
For our company, many “first contacts” are in the form of a cold call. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to have a top-caliber business development team that can effectively articulate, in few words, a compelling value proposition from the heart.

I feel it’s critical that every member of our team have a foundation upon which they can absolutely agree. This foundation is the company’s mission. In our case, our mission is to globalize prosperity to make lives better.

We put a lot of emphasis on this mission so that everyone in our company understands why we are in business – far beyond making a profit. We challenge every employee to internalize our mission and to make it their own; to envision how the company’s mission charts with their own set of core values.

If someone is unable to bring the mission into his or her heart, he or she will not perform at peak levels. Likewise, if there is a misalignment of goals, my observation is that the employee won’t stick around. Just as the corporation is in business for more than profit, the employee must work for something more than a paycheck. This is a fundamental principle that must be emphasized in order to build world-class teams and to deliver industry-leading results.

I firmly believe that any man’s finest hour, the greatest fulfillment of all he holds dear, is that moment when he has worked his heart out in a good cause and lies exhausted on the field of battle – victorious - Vince Lombardi

THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

Last year, after another failed attempt at using an outside firm for lead generation, we decided to double-down on building up our own business development team to generate leads. I guess you could say that we ate double portions of our own dog food. After all, shouldn’t a company known for industry-leading quality in professional services be able to build an effective lead generation engine?

We thought we could. We sent members of the U.S. sales team to India to meet with our business development executives and to conduct intensive training sessions. And here’s what we learned:

1. We quickly realized the business development team in India offered unique qualities and circumstances that no outside firm could replicate.
2. Unlike outside vendors, our employees understand our mission and what it means to them. They know why they are here, and what we are trying to accomplish as a company and as a sales organization.
3. Since our business development executives occupy space in one of our overseas delivery centers, they have unique proximity to the heartbeat of the company’s operations, with easy access to subject matter experts and business unit leaders. This allows them to quickly provide expert answers to questions anyone may have about our capabilities and our offerings.

Going forward, we divided our business development team into three separate working units, each with oversight and direction from a U.S.-based sales leader. We made sure members of the business development team were active participants in the sales process, requiring (and training) them to do more than merely set appointments for our US-based sales executives. Today, these employees carry much of the freight in the early stages of the sales process.

They do prospecting work through various communication channels such as phone calls, emails, social media, and website follow-up. Once calls have been scheduled with prospective clients, they help the sales team qualify and advance opportunities. And they provide momentum within a prospective account by continuing with follow-up and scheduling meetings with other individuals in the same firm.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

Using our own resources for business development has been a boon to our company. But it didn’t happen haphazardly.

FIRST, it was necessary to build a culture based upon shared values and core principles, with complete understanding of the sales environment and how our company’s values mapped to those of our company and our clients.

NEXT, we emphasized and enabled teamwork across continents and cultures, and broke apart silos to enable faster flow of information.

FINALLY, we promoted growth by stretching the boundaries of our business development team and entrusting them to take on a larger role.

The results speak for themselves. For four years running, we have been named by Inc. Magazine as one the fastest-growing firms in America. Our list of clients is enviable. Our pipeline continues to grow, as does our revenue. All because we have a strong business development and sales organization, operating as a single team, with a single purpose. Our team functions using heart and mind, and is grounded in timeless principles of striving toward excellence and operating with integrity - always with keeping the client’s objectives top-of-mind.

No ingestion of dog food required.

MEET THE AUTHOR

JEFF SHELMIRE - VICE PRESIDENT OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Jeff Shelmire is the Vice President of Professional Services at Vee Technologies. His expertise and ability to expand Vee Technologies’ client base into long-lasting relationships brings Vee Technologies ahead of the curve.