

Selling In A Down Economy

*By Judith Filek — President,
Impact Communications, Inc.*

The bad times in sales actually began about five years ago. More and more competitors came on the scene, the time to market became shorter and shorter, and customers had a hard time seeing differences between products. Most of us in sales didn't realize the implications of the problem because the economy was so good. Now the economy isn't good, and we are scrambling to retain and gain market shares. What this means is that we have to change the way we sell our ideas, and everyone must know how to do it.

In response to these troubling times, some companies have laid off salespeople, product managers and system analysts, hoping to "starve themselves to success." They have also frozen training dollars and have mandated that salespeople make more calls and sell more products or services. These actions may actually weaken the organization's chance of being successful.

A more prudent approach would be to make sure that everyone who interacts with the customer has the skills he needs to be successful. A study by the American Society of Training and Development shows that publicly held companies who increased their firms' training expenditures by **\$680 per employee** generated on average a **six percentage point improvement in the firm's total shareholder return**. Those firms that invested the most in training had an average total shareholder return in the **following** year of **36.9 percent**. Another words, the more you spend on training, the greater the return on your investment. Why? Your workforce has the tools they need to be effective.

Today, you have to be a value driver. It is not enough to understand the premise on an intellectual level. You have to be able to demonstrate it by creating value on each call. Strong communication skills are needed. With communication skills training, you can insure that your sales team knows how to listen, understand and diagnose the customer's problem as if they were a doctor. You can insure that they are able to explain how a product or service will solve an existing or unforeseen problem in a way that the customer understands and is motivated to purchase. Customers will pay higher prices if they see value.

In hard times, customers avoid taking risks. Their fear factor is high. Rather than cutting costs, salespeople need to know how to posture themselves as the low risk choice to their customers. They need to communicate that you deliver what you promise.

The best asset of any company is the talent, knowledge and experience of its sales force. Use it to your advantage. Give them the training they need to be effective communicators. Show them how to create value and minimize risks for their customers. If the members of your sales team are good communicators, they will be able to penetrate more deeply into an organization. They will be able to reach the senior level executives who can approve larger spending initiatives. Not only will your company weather the down times, you will thrive.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.

