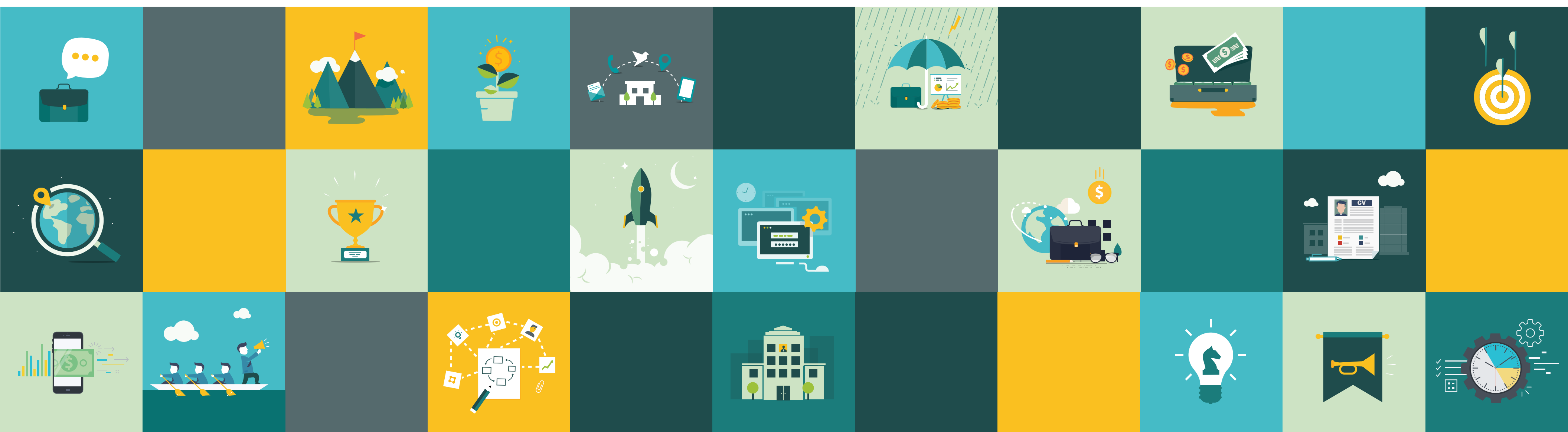
HANDSHAKE

THE SALES MANAGER SURVIVAL GUIDE

A comprehensive guide to hiring great sales reps, managing a high performing team, and using technology to increase sales productivity.



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HIRING

How to Hire Top Sales Performers

By Nancy Bleeke, author of the award-winning book, *Conversations That Sell* and President of Sales Pro Insider, Inc.

According to research by the DePaul University Center for Sales Leadership, the average turnover cost for one sales rep is almost $115,000. Hiring the wrong person for your wholesale sales team can be expensive, not to mention frustrating.

That's why it's so important to make sure you're preparing and consistently executing an effective hiring process. Whether you're looking for direct employees or independent manufacturer's reps, here's how to hire top performers for your sales roles:

1. Identify what kind of sales rep you need, and benchmark the position.

First, determine what kind of sales rep you need for your wholesale business. While many have talked about sales reps as "hunters or farmers," I believe there are actually now three distinct roles you may need for your company.

The Developer is similar to the "farmer," developing existing sales relationships, concentrating on upsell, and introducing new products & lines. This is the rep that is both reacting to your customer's needs and concentrating on building and developing those sales relationships further. They seek buying decisions as they expand opportunities.

The Dredger is similar to the "hunter." The Dredger digs for opportunities and proactively seeks to uncover new buyers. They may have an existing list of contacts for your business to tap into. This is the kind of sales rep you want if a) you're a young brand and you need to start building your customer list, b) your company is growing and you're looking to move into new sales territory, or c) your company is moving into a new vertical and you need new buyers for those products. This person will be great at networking, asking for referrals, and forging new relationships.

The Dispenser is a newer kind of sales rep. This sales rep services and maintains existing relationships, with a focus on providing an excellent experience to your buyers. This non-traditional sales role isn't all about selling in the strictest sense of the word. It's about being a strategic partner with retailers. Buyers value reps who play an advisory role, help them with their assortment planning, provide insights on the competitive landscape, execute quick and easy re-orders, manage inventory and make sure shelves are always stocked. If you're an established company with a roster of long-time buyers, you'll want a sales rep who can effectively maintain and strengthen those relationships.

Once you decide what kind of sales rep you need, whether it's one of the profiles above or a combination, benchmark the position. Evaluate your candidates against that benchmark, not each other. If they don't meet the benchmark, they probably won't become a top performer.

2. Prepare to gather the right data.

Gather data from your candidates to assess their Skill and Will. You may be very good at looking for the right skills needed for your open sales position, but skills aren't everything. Sales "skills" can be taught and developed. "Will," on the other hand, is equally if not more important. Will consists of internally driven factors that are hard to train in a sales rep.

Some people find that their most successful sales reps often did not have a prior sales background when they were hired. It's not surprising. If someone has the will to succeed in sales, they can easily be taught the skills they need. It's that "will" factor that should be there from the start. The "Will" components to seek in candidates include:

Belief in Self is a crucial attribute for a wholesale sales rep. They're working in the field, and they need to be able to set their own goals and have the self-discipline and motivation to achieve them. Do they believe they have what it takes to be successful? Do they believe they can add value to their customer conversations and become more of a strategic partner rather than just an "order taker?"

Belief in Role is belief in what they do. Ask them how they got into sales. I find this to be a really powerful question, because the answers you get from candidates can be extremely telling. If they say something like, "I wasn't sure what else to do when I left school and just fell into it," you might be looking at a less enthusiastic salesperson than a candidate who says, "I got into sales because I enjoy helping people and solving problems."

Belief in Value is their belief in the value of what they sell. It leads to their ability to effectively communicate the value of products being sold--it's a belief that what they sell is worth more than what is paid. I find this especially important in a wholesale context, since retailers are really going to want to trust that the sales rep is 100% behind every product in their catalog before making a purchase.

Goal Transparency is more than being "goal oriented." Transparency means that goals are written, specific, and measurable. PLUS, the goals are visible and detectable by others in words, writing, and actions.

Initiative is a sales rep's self-directed personal energy that leads to proactive action. Top performers bring more energy and focus to their work. They get more done than others and find ways to stay productive every day. This is so important in wholesale field reps – they need to motivate themselves to get out there every day.

Emotional Intelligence can be summed up as resiliency. Top performers bounce back from setbacks, failures, and cranky customers more quickly. They don't let their emotions dictate their actions, and they can also read emotion in others.

3. Execute Interviews and Activities.

Plan on holding at least 3 interviews with each candidate and gather objective information from other activities and assessments to learn the whole picture. You could require them to do a mock sales presentation, or give them an assignment. For instance, give them the scenario that your business wants to expand into a new geographical market. Ask the candidate to research and prepare a 10-minute presentation outlining their plan/strategy for breaking into that market.

On the topic of interview questions, remember that the answers are in the questions. The kinds of questions you ask have a huge impact on whether or not those answers are going to be helpful in making a good decision.

In general, avoid leading questions like, "Are you a team player?" and "Are you a good communicator?" These questions guide the candidate to the "right" answer, and you'll get a canned response. Avoid overly theoretical questions like, "What would you do if a customer had a complaint?" or "What should you do when you have multiple customers at the same time at a trade show?" These almost always elicit a hypothetical response, rather than a response grounded in reality.

Instead, ask behavioral questions that are open-ended, and neither theoretical nor leading. These kinds of questions contain past tense action verbs, and refer to actual events. Using phrases like, "I'd like you to think of a time when..." and "What did you do next?" helps you get the real detail on how a candidate will behave in certain situations.

4. Seek Proof.

I can't believe how many people don't check references anymore. In a world where hiring managers can check out candidates' social media profiles, there may be a misconception that everything is already "transparent," and that there's no need to do the additional work of checking references.

I strongly disagree with that. Checking references is a powerful way to confirm what you have learned from your candidates. The key is to ask for specific references, like a customer they worked through a challenge with, a teammate who was involved in team selling situations or supervisors/sales managers who were directly responsible for writing their performance evaluation. Ask these references about certain achievements that the candidate may have mentioned, as well as specifics about situations that demonstrate their performance, actions, and attitude.

If a candidate cites achievements, awards, or performance numbers, ask for the proof to support those claims. If they don't have data to support what they've said, be suspicious. If they can't provide that proof for you in the most important sell that they have (selling their capabilities to you), they're not going to be able to provide proof to buyers when selling your products. Top sales performers will have no problem giving you the data you need.

Another way to seek proof is to observe how the candidate communicates, acts, and responds throughout the hiring process. Review their emails; are they professional? How do they come across over the phone? As they try to sell you on themselves, you're seeing them at their absolute best. If their communication style does not match how you'd expect them to interact with your customers, it's a red flag.

One of the biggest tips I can give you is to hire slowly and fire quickly. Once you've hired a new sales rep, pay attention. Their behaviors and activity level in the first 60 days is them at their best. If they're not following through on the things they promised or find it difficult to adjust to the demands of a wholesale field sales role, you need to make a change quickly, cut your losses, and move on.

5 Out-of-the-Box Interview Questions for Sales Reps

As the old saying goes, "sales is both an art and a science." This applies to building your team too. You can look at past sales, backchannel for references and have your potential hires pitch you to get a pulse on the science (and you should!). The art, however, you have to dig a bit deeper for––particularly with professional objection handlers. Keep it in context, keep it light, and make it part of the conversation. Here are five out-of-the-box questions to pepper into your interviewing.

Question 1: If you could only listen to one song for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

This one toes the line of "too out there," but it's interesting, mostly because of the last word. A good salesperson is prepared for everything they should anticipate, but you can't anticipate everything. Salespeople get asked questions they don't see coming all the time, and what this questions lets you see is how they handle the on-the-fly thought process.

Question 2: What do you spend your commission on?

This is a much better than "What do you do for fun?" or "What are you personal interests?" It's the same basic question, but it does a couple of things in addition. First, it sets the bar high. By asking "What do you spend your commission on?" what you're saying is, "You're going to make a lot of money here."

Secondly, it lets your candidate know that you're on board with salespeople making money. They got into this line of work for a lot of reasons; the challenge, the interactions, the desire to help people solve problems...but money is a huge motivator. You want to encourage that behavior, and this question does it.

Question 3: Can you talk about a time when you had to interact with a difficult person in your personal life?

Salespeople have customers, and sometimes those customers are difficult. You can ask the standard "How do you handle a difficult customer?" and get the candidate's standard answer, but that won't tell you how they handle difficult customers. It will only tell you if they prepared for the interview. This questions really asks, "How do you deal with people you want to avoid, but can't?"

Question 4: What did your day look like yesterday?

This will give you some insight into how they organize their days and relieves you of asking "How do you organize your day?" Outside sales reps manage themselves day-to-day so how they think about their daily approach is going to directly relate to how effective and productive they can be.

This question can open up more insights, so dig into their answers. "Why did you do X first?" "What did you leave out that you wish you could have gotten to?" This is a great question to open with. It's easy to lose the first ten minutes of your interview breaking the ice and relaxing the situation. This bridges the gap between "who are you" and "let's get started."

Question 5: What's the worst part of being in sales?

Is it the quota? Is it the windshield time? Competitors? Losing shelf space? Management? What the answer is matters, but not as much as how they view the role. Every job has its challenges, and as a good sales manager, you're going to want to know which ones your candidates struggle with the most when they become your sales reps.

MANAGEMENT

3 Key Qualities of Top Sales Managers

Broadly, there are two kinds of sales managers: good ones and bad ones. Those falling into the "good" category are great leaders who drive their sales team's success, while those on the "bad" side of the spectrum are often micromanagers with an inhibiting influence on their teams. Luckily, great managers have a few things in common that we can learn from. Here are 3 key qualities to look for and/or aspire to in top sales managers:

1. Team-Oriented Thinking

Many sales reps make poor managers, and one of the biggest reasons is an inability to manage the needs of an entire team. While sales reps are responsible for their own accounts and quotas, managers are responsible for collective goals, forecasting, and planning. Sales reps are largely independent in their day-to-day work, but managers must constantly work in collaboration with others.

The best sales managers are those who not only care about the success of an entire group, but also help solve problems for others and make sure each individual salesperson's targets align with the team's overall goals and strategy.

2. An Ability to Be a Mentor, Not Just a Manager

The qualities of a great sales manager are analogous to the qualities of a great mentor. Sales managers are generous with their skills, expertise, and assistance. The lead by example, rather than micromanaging their teams.

Sales managers focused only on numbers and quotas can have a negative effect on morale––especially in a tough market. But managers that focus on being great leaders understand that there are both external (i.e. monetary) and internal motivators at play for each individual rep.

While great sales managers are ultimately results-oriented (and by extension numbers-driven), they are also focused on how they can coach and support their sales reps to enable their ongoing development and success.

3. An Emphasis on Giving Consistent Feedback

Sales teams are at their best when they know exactly what is expected of them, and their managers provide systems for real-time tracking and feedback. Rather than working on a performance review schedule that may be on a semi-annual or quarterly basis, top sales managers are great at providing feedback continuously. This way, sales reps can improve and develop their skills, while immediately applying their manager's advice to their ongoing conversations.

Top sales managers have many of the same qualities that all great managers possess––great attitudes, generosity with advice and feedback, and the ability to nurture talent in their teams. Whether you're looking to improve your effectiveness as a manager or aspire to landing that open sales manager position, developing these qualities will go a long way.

How to Manage High Performing Sales Teams

Building a team of high performers is no small feat, but that doesn't mean your work is done once you've got one. No matter how good your sales reps are, any sales team requires strategic management and planning.

If you've gotten to this point, chances are you already have a pretty good handle on managing your team, and you're thinking to yourself, "what else could I be doing?" We've gathered a few fresh ideas on how to plan for the seasons ahead, build and maintain a team environment, and effectively structure your team so they continue performing like the sales powerhouses you hired.

Take an Individualized Sales Coaching Approach

Often, sales reps aren't exactly interested in taking time to strategize with their managers. They'd rather just hit the ground running and spend all their time selling. While you definitely want reps that are eager to sell, it's best to not just send them out into the field guns blazing. Meet with each rep to devise individual goals and strategies.

Yes, you can set quotas, but a better way of pushing your sales reps to thrive is to set a mutually agreed-upon goal. Help your rep map out how to achieve that goal or quota by identifying his or her weaknesses and playing to their strengths. For example, if your rep knows the product inside out, focus on how he or she can use their knowledge to tailor their pitch to each retailer, rather than being a walking, talking brochure.

Take this individualized approach one step further by not only setting weekly or monthly goals, but also planning for the year ahead. What goals or quotas do you want your rep to push him or herself towards? Where do they see themselves down the road? Encourage your reps to set ambitious goals––and meet them––by building their skills at an individual level and creating a yearly plan unique to each rep.

This may sound daunting and time consuming for a sales manager, but ultimately, you want to push your reps to perform at their highest standards. Creating an individualized plan with your reps allows you to tap into their strengths and motivate them to aim higher. As you get better acquainted with your team, you may find that their individual needs and strengths overlap, and individualizing a plan for each rep will not be as time consuming as you move forward.

Build a Collaborative Environment

When you have a group of top sales performers, the competitive energy is high. This can be good, but you want to make sure your reps don't lose sight of the team. Sales reps often get the stigma of "Lone Rangers," driven individuals who are smooth talkers, motivated to be the best. A great way to reel in your "Lone Rangers," is to hold effective sales meetings that build a team environment.

Instead of spending your sales meetings going over mundane administrative tasks, talk about upcoming goals and brainstorm––as a group––a plan on how to get there. Creating a dialogue amongst your reps rather than talking "at" them is a great way to increase communication amongst your team so they can learn from each other and strategize together. Here are some ideas:

- Divide your team into two groups and hold a contest. This is a great way to leverage their competitive spirit while team-building.
- Hold activities when possible, such as team outings, happy hours, etc.
- Have "Snoop days" by dividing your team into pairs and having them scope out your competition to report back to the group.

Recognize the reps who are doing well. For example, if one of your reps landed a big client, or got an existing client to drastically increase an order, acknowledge that rep in your meeting. It will make them feel appreciated by the team, and motivate the rest to keep up.

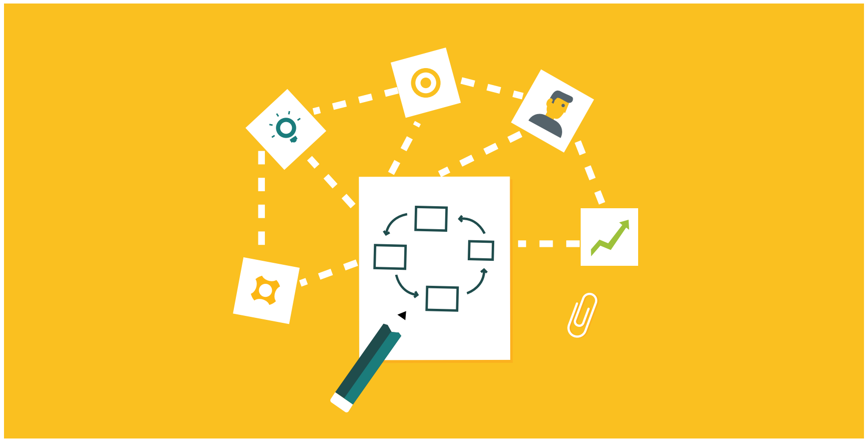
Another good way to ensure that your reps stay committed to the team is to divide your group into subgroups, or "pods." Even if they are very small groups, having a few other individuals to identify with––or turn to for help––can be a great resource for your reps. Competition amongst the pods will keep the high competitive energy that sales requires up, while also ensuring that your reps have a supportive team to rely on and contribute to.

Provide Structure and Delegate Wisely

A problem common amongst wholesale companies and their sales teams is that there is often an assumption that sales reps are responsible for both finding the customers (prospects), as well as selling the product. Managing your team under this assumption can be incredibly inefficient and costly.

Instead, a better way to manage your team is to divide your reps into two groups based on their strengths. One group is made up of those who are effective at prospecting. These are reps that excel at identifying customers and building relationships. The other group is made up deal closers––the team that shines at turning leads into sales. Of course, there will be overlap.

However, part of managing high performing teams is identifying the strengths of your reps and putting them in a position to use them. You want to be sure that you are dividing responsibility evenly amongst your reps. This model breaks down when there is too much responsibility placed on one group, leaving both groups at a disadvantage.



Sales Territory Management Best Practices

For wholesalers, distributors, and manufacturers with larger sales teams, territory management is key to making sure that sales reps are putting their time and energy where it will have the most impact, maximizing every in-person appointment and minimizing windshield time for low-return accounts.

The process involves effectively segmenting customers and prospects so that sales managers and reps can track sales, do better account planning, and improve sales prospecting strategies. Many sales teams, however, neglect to do this kind of planning or have trouble tracking sales performance to revise and re-optimize their plans as time goes on. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to increase both sales and efficiency. Here are a few best practices for better sales territory management.

1. Be systematic to focus on the right appointments.

One of the best ways to go about segmenting your customers is to systematically categorize them, and develop a strategy for each category. Your first group of accounts is made up of your best customers––the ones that require little effort from your reps but generate steady revenue. The second group may be a bit more volatile, but potential revenue gains justify the extra effort required by reps. The third group are those accounts that require large amounts of effort with relatively little return.

By getting this clear understanding of your customer base, you'll be able to better position your reps for success and make sure that they're spending their time wisely.

2. Develop a plan.

Use your customer segmentation strategy to develop account objectives and a plan of attack. How often will your reps visit certain accounts? What looks feasible geographically, in terms of the travel time your reps will have to put in? Are there accounts that you can manage with fewer in-person appointments and a B2B eCommerce portal that allows them to place simple re-orders online?

3. Work closely with other customer-facing teams.

Think about who else in your organization regularly comes into contact with your key accounts. Are the goals of the sales, marketing, and customer service teams aligned? Figure out how to promote better collaboration between these teams to give customers a consistent experience across all touchpoints, drive your objectives forward, and eliminate any unnecessary calls/visits.

4. Think about timing.

Look at sales data over time to make sure you're in the right territories at the right time. Get a granular understanding of your retailers' seasonal buying patterns. What are they buying when, and how much? This will help you set better sales goals and your reps will be more productive in the end. You can also align these insights directly with your product development and inventory management strategies.

5. Always continue to reassess.

After the initial planning period, make sure to measure your progress. Keep an eye on how sales are performing by territory and by individual rep to assess whether or not your current strategy is effective. If a particular rep isn't performing as expected, dig deeper. Are they getting sidetracked? What can you do to improve the situation?

6. Track Performance.

So you may be wondering at this point how to effectively track your sales reps' activities without having to expend an enormous amount of effort gathering data and putting together reports. One way that companies are managing to do this is by digitizing the order writing process.

Brands are arming their reps with mobile order writing software that allows them to access a digital product catalog, customer contact information, order history, and customer-specific pricing from a mobile device. They can write orders digitally, and all of the data can be automatically compiled into useful reports for managers to analyze.

The great thing about these kinds of solutions is that they not only allow sales managers to track performance by territory, including sales rep and regional performance, they also enable a separation between reps, so that reps can only see the accounts and products relevant to them. Writing orders and tracking sales digitally can help make the task of sales territory management much easier, allowing both managers and reps to concentrate on strategy, rather than administrative tasks.

How to Better Motivate Your Sales Reps

Incentive plans are critical to the success of any sales organization. While of course a big part of incentivizing your team tends to be centered on the end goal – commission – it's important to also take a few steps back and think about how you can motivate your team to run harder at exceeding normal targets. One effective way to motivate your team is using sales contests and incentives as prizes.

In part 1 of this article, we'll cover six types of contests you can run to motivate your sales team into meeting (and hopefully exceeding) goals. In part 2, we'll cover the prizes/incentives you can use when your reps get over the line.

Part 1: Contests

1. Group Goals

Rising tides raise all ships. Set a group goal and put a group incentive in front of them. Need to launch a new product? Tell the team to hit 110% of the company goal and you'll let them vote on the location of the next company outing. Still want a little competition? Take your team and divide them in half. Winning team takes all. Send out weekly progress updates to fuel the competitive fire and keep everyone aware and involved.

2. Streaks

In the zone. On a roll. Feeling it. Nothing is as effective as the confidence that comes when a sales rep is getting it done day in and day out. Try rewarding anyone who writes three orders a day for a month. If one of your reps has a particularly long streak running, let the rest of your team know about it. Making consistency the aim of a contest encourages everyone else to aim for a similar level of consistency.

3. Volume of Orders

Big orders are great; everyone loves a big sale. The problem is they're less predictable and harder to replicate. The other problem is that some territories lend themselves to larger orders more than others. If you throw a bonus at the biggest order, your NYC and LA reps are going to anticipate winning, while most of your team considers themselves out of the running. If you boil it down to "the rep who works the hardest, wins" you'll get all of your reps aiming for it. You might end up with a large one here and there, but what you'll certainly end up with is more products in more places.

4. Quick Start

Nothing breeds sales manager anxiety like the end of the month, end of the quarter or end of the year. Get yourself out of playing catch up by setting a goal of hitting 55% of quota by midway through your sales period. Let reps discount a bit more for early purchases and encourage them to be creative about getting a jump start. Your salespeople are conditioned to apply a little more pressure as the end of month comes anyway, so if they start strong and finish strong you end up with a quota busting month!

5. Shelf Space

You want to expand your presence with your retailers. This is critical during pre-book when you're going to establish your "territory" in every shop for the next season. Let your reps know how important grabbing more shelves is by having a "new shelf" contest. Getting more space is great, particularly because if your company is getting more, a competitor is getting less.

All in all, keep it simple and straightforward. You want to keep everyone informed on how they're doing and where they stack up. Contests are an opportunity to inject something light into a pretty stressful day-to-day, so keep it fun! Salespeople are competitive; when given the opportunity, they'll jump at a chance to "win" every time.

6. Most Improved

This type of contest may be the most powerful, simply because it is great for getting everyone involved and motivated. With some contests, you might find that the same people win every time––your top performers. It can be difficult in these instances for your other reps to feel like they have a chance to win. But by conducting a contest that measures progress, you may be amazed at how much your entire team pulls through.

Part 2: Incentives

"First prize is a Cadillac, second prize is a set of steak knives, third prize is you're fired." It's a line that we'll always love from the classic early 90s film Glengarry Glen Ross, but let's face it: some things have changed since Alec Baldwin's epic "ABC" speech. While steak knives and a slightly maniacal cut-throat approach might be a bit outdated, putting a little something extra in front of your sales reps isn't.

The most important thing about your contest prizes is you want to give your reps things they value. If your reps are carrying around heavy sample bags, a massage certificate addresses their pain, literally! Free next season samples for your independents is a big win everyone can run at. The more your team can identify with the bounty, the more likely they are to want it. Below are a few ideas to get the ball rolling.

Tangible Incentives

Gas cards, oil change certificates, etc...

Your road reps are racking up miles every day, and expenses related to driving are your lowest hanging fruit in terms of prizes. Gas cards and oil change certificates are great in a pinch for smaller and shorter contests where you need to move the needle quickly.

A new phone or iPad

These are great gifts, because your team needs them, so the incentive here is the chance to not buy it themselves. As a bonus, most of these double as tools that make your team more efficient, as your reps can write orders on their smartphones or tablets in the field.

Things your reps have said they want

While I've listed some no-brainer items above that every traveling salesperson would need, if you ask your team what would motivate them, they'll tell you. If you can't think of something that's the perfect fit, ask your reps what would make their job easier – or what they wish they had that they just haven't gotten around to buying themselves. It's obvious, but offering a prize that you've confirmed is sought after is a great way to increase participation and engagement in your sales contests.

Experience Incentives

Dinner with an executive

Around the time of sales kick-off meetings or your biggest trade shows, it's likely that key company executives are in town, and your team is attending various group dinners and events. Sales people, by nature, are typically angling to have high-value conversations with someone at the top. If you set up an dinner or one-on-one session with an executive for your top performing salesperson, they will appreciate having the undivided attention, advice, and feedback from a leader at your company.

A day off

You might not want your best rep to take an extra day off – but he or she sure will. Of course, remember that there is also an extra benefit of the energy that comes after a day of recharging, so you're likely to get a lot of productivity out of your contest winner following this short break.

A group outing

When you run group contests, incentivize the team to work together toward a larger goal by making sure the reward relies on, and benefits, everyone. Set up a bar tab for team members that are geographically close to one another. The added benefit is when they get together to celebrate; they'll talk about what went right and how to keep it going for next time.

Name it after them

If a sales rep closes a huge deal, give them some extra special recognition by naming something after them. For those who report to a regional office or to headquarters, you might name a conference or break out room after them. Don't have a common meeting space? Name the sales contest itself after your sales rep that crushed it the first time it was run.

Know and acknowledge your team

These are just a few ideas on how to hold contests and incentivize reps, but remember, at the end of the day, the best incentives are the ones your reps want the most. Make sure to make your contests relevant to your team, and you'll be more likely to get the results you're looking for.

Also, while there's no doubt that tangible and experiential incentives are a great way to motivate your sales reps, don't forget to verbally acknowledge and appreciate high-performing reps, both directly and in front of their peers. A little recognition goes a long way.


TECHNOLOGY

Improving Sales Management with Order Management Technology

Today, B2B companies are increasingly making key technology investments in their front line sales processes. While most wholesale distributors have already invested in ERP or Accounting software to run their back office operations, tools like mobile order writing software and web order management are helping sales managers better track their teams' activities and progress.

With mobile order writing software, for instance, sales reps have their product catalog, customer data, and order writing interface readily accessible on their mobile devices. Orders can be written faster and easier, and managers can see orders as they come in––in real time. Here are a few ways in which these kinds of order management technology are helping sales leaders better manage their teams.

Giving Reps What They Need to Succeed

An enormous factor in a sales rep's success is the information they have access to during a typical sales appointment. The more data your sales rep has on hand, the more likely they'll have a successful meeting.

In the past, sales reps would have to look at handwritten notes from previous visits, memorize names, pricing, and payment terms. They might have to manually pull and print reports to see a customer's order history, while also lugging printed product catalogs, samples, and new release pages into meetings.

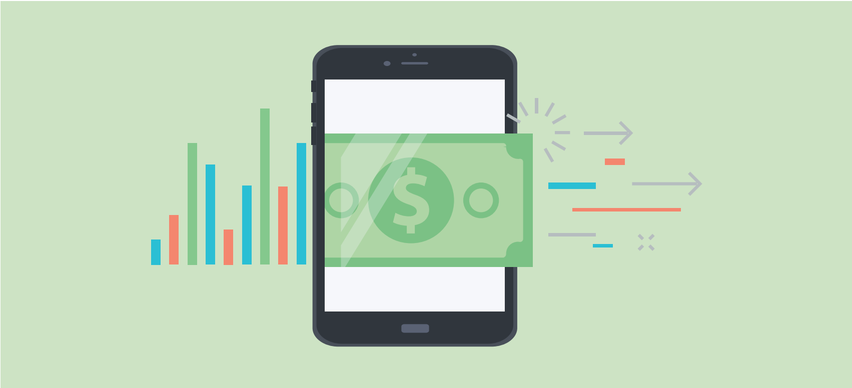
Today, customer order history, product catalogs, and customer-specific pricing can all be accessible on sales reps' iPads, drastically cutting down the amount of manual prep work reps need to do before an appointment.

By giving sales reps everything they need on a mobile device, sales managers know that they can concentrate on what they do best: selling. It also makes disseminating new product information across an entire rep force much easier, as the information can be synced across all reps' devices.

Tracking Incoming Orders and Providing Effective Coaching

Using this kind of software can help managers by allowing them to track sales activity in real time. Sales managers can look at orders as they're coming through, and use the information to provide more effective sales coaching.

If, for instance, a manager sees one rep who was able to successfully push a new product while others are having trouble, they can then call that rep and ask them how they're presenting the product. They can then enlighten other sales reps and provide that insight to help them also be successful.



Emphasizing Strategic Partnerships

For great managers, the role of their sales reps should be about more than just dollars and cents. It's also about providing great customer service and becoming a trusted advisor to that customer. The role of the sales rep is changing––from simple "order taker" to strategic partner.

Ultimately, digital technology is able to help sales reps become business partners to their customers by giving them time––time to concentrate on strategic discussions, rather than the minutiae of writing an order. They can expand on any training opportunities, merchandising opportunities, and additional collections being sold in. In turn, managers can focus on encouraging reps to build these partnerships in new ways.

Apps to Increase Your Sales Reps' Productivity

Let's face it. Paper is a pain when you're on the road. In fact, paper is a pain even when you're not on the road. But for field sales reps, paper-based processes are more painful than they are for most, because success really depends on being able to stay organized and in control, regardless of where the day's appointments go.

Fortunately, there are a number of apps that sales managers can encourage reps to use in order to keep paper processes to a bare minimum, better communicate with customers, stay organized, and negotiate and close deals.

Apps for Sales Reps On the Road

90% of life is just showing up. These apps can help make sure reps get where they need to go, no matter how complex their travel plans are.

TripIt

How many times has this happened to you? You need to check your flight times, so you go to your email to find your itinerary, but you end up having to search for quite a while before you find it. That won't happen with the TripIt app for mobile. The free app lets you organize all travel plans into one master itinerary, and it works on iOS, Android, Blackberry and Windows.

Reps can add or make changes to their itinerary easily, simply by forwarding email confirmation letters to TripIt. They can also share their itinerary with selected individuals (like you, their manager, for example) as well as sync the itinerary with Outlook, iCal or Google calendar.

The paid version has even more features. Reps can keep track of rewards program points, get real time flight alerts and find alternate flights, automatically update their "inner circle" any time an itinerary is set or changed, and much more.

Google Maps

For sales reps on the road, there's nothing worse than juggling a map while trying to find their customers. Well, there is one thing worse – not finding the customer at all. With Google Maps, paper maps are a thing of the past. Simply download Google Maps onto your mobile device, speak your destination (or destinations – Google can handle multiple destination routing) into the microphone, and you're off.

It works for walking routes and public transportation routes as well, if your reps are in a pinch. Satellite connections can be a challenge in some areas, and sometimes GPS has a difficult time finding very rural or remote customers, so don't throw the maps away just yet...but generally speaking, a GPS tool like this is a must-have for any field sales rep.

Apps for Sales Reps to Keep In Touch

Unlike days past, life as a traveling sales rep no longer has to be isolating and difficult to organize. Your smartphone can keep you connected to everything happening in your professional and personal life and can even help you grow your business.

LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter

These are the big three––the obvious choices to help you make connections on the go. LinkedIn is the go-to tool for making professional connections, while Facebook and Twitter can be both a professional and personal lifeline for reps.

The LinkedIn mobile app for iPhone has one great feature that saves a ton of time at trade shows and or any event where making face-to-face contacts: it's called, "the bump." During a conversation with a prospect, ask them to open LinkedIn on their smartphone. Then, bump your phones together lightly. LinkedIn will automatically transfer contact information between phones. Just bump, and the lead instantly goes into your LinkedIn contact list for follow up.

Skype for Mobile

Even the best sales rep can't be everywhere at once. When an in-person meeting isn't possible, Skype enables reps to make video and voice calls, as well as conference calls, via the Internet from any desktop, tablet or mobile device.

They can even share screens if they have something on their desktop that they need to show a customer. It also has an instant message feature. And when reps are on the road, they can video call with all the important people back home, so they're never out of touch.

Apps for Sales Reps to Get Organized

Organization is a real challenge for sales reps, because lost or forgotten information can be the difference between a sale made and a sale lost. Fortunately, technology can make a big difference for even the most seasoned sales pros, making the best reps even better at what they do.

Evernote

Some people use Evernote as a productivity tool, using the to-do list feature. However, for more complex processes like sales, we think it's better to use it for brainstorming and organizing ideas. Say a rep reads an article that gave them some ideas they wanted to share with a customer. With Evernote, they can "clip" the relevant parts and save it into a notebook about that customer, and share it with them electronically.

When they're ready to take the next step, they'll be able to get back into that notebook from any device. Another neat feature is voice recording notes, which is great if reps want to make a note to themselves or record a conversation with a customer.

Asana

Because Asana is a fully functional productivity tool, it can be used for everything from simple task lists to managing highly complex projects and sales cycles. Asana allows you to create workspaces for each rep and/or certain customers, within which you can set up teams, projects, tasks and subtasks. You can assign tasks to anyone on a team, and it integrates with your email as well so that you get a notification whenever a message is sent or an action is taken.

It's also a great place to manage and store your important documents so that you and your team members can easily find the latest updates and most relevant documents for every customer. Finally, Asana allows you to tag your documents, tasks and projects so that you can find what you need even when you don't remember the name of the document or project.

Apps for Sales Reps to Get Closing!

All right, you've positioned your team for maximum success by getting organized. Now it's time to download some apps that will help them close deals and make some money!

Docusign

Remember: paper sucks. So even when it's time to sign contracts and documents, there are e-signature tools that can help reps do it without having to wrestle with paper. Docusign is one of the best, and there's even a free version called DocuSign Ink. Docusign offers document encryption, authentication of signers' identities, and an audit trail showing who signed, when, and where.

Handshake

At a store visit, your reps are talking with a customer and writing an order. Naturally, we think Handshake is the best way to do it. Handshake lets you arm reps with a digital product catalog, all of their customer information, a digital order writing interface––all on a mobile device.

It easily integrates with your bookkeeping, ERP and other back-end systems, and it can even replace your need for a separate CRM system by allowing you to keep customer notes tagged to each customer and order. Reps can review those notes to prepare for meetings, provide feedback about current or past orders, help ensure customers comply with merchandising guidelines, and more. Managers can track sales in real time, look at sales reporting by rep, customer, or territory, and use those insights to better lead their teams. Handshake also offers a B2B eCommerce platform that allows customers to place orders online.

As the old saying goes, “you’re only as good as your tools,” and that has never been more true than it is for today’s sales reps.

ABOUT HANDSHAKE

Founded in 2010 and headquartered in New York City, Handshake is the leading sales order management platform for wholesale, supporting both global distributed sales teams and small to medium sized businesses. Handshake has raised $9.5 million to date from notable investors including Emergence Capital and SoftTech VC.

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