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Recession reaction: Retreat, or better yet, work harder

Denver Business Journal - by [Colleen Stanley](#)

Bring on the recession. The papers keep talking about it, radio talk-show hosts are predicting it, so let's get on with it.

Recessions can be good for business. After all, the first six letters add up to the word "recess," which means taking a break, retreating or resting. And that's what many sales organizations do during challenging economic times.

But successful sales organizations don't retreat during these times. Instead, they buck up and double up to meet their sales quotas. It doesn't mean they like tough economic times; they just know they must adapt to the times.

Here are three ways successful sales organizations and people continue to hit sales goals during a recession.

- Double your prospecting efforts -- History does repeat itself. We had the dot-com bust in 2000. Now, we're experiencing the subprime bust.

During the dot-com craze, technology salespeople were making lots of money, selling up a storm and demanding high wages. And then it happened. The phone quit ringing, and salespeople were charged with something called "prospecting" and "filling the pipeline."

Many salespeople thought the good times were going to last forever and let go of good sales habits. They forgot how to make a cold call, build referral partners or become involved in an association.

The same thing is happening to many salespeople in mortgage and real estate. The phone isn't ringing, and they need to beef up their prospecting activities.

A sales manager recently shared this story: She was conducting the weekly sales meeting and the team was crying the blues. One salesman raised his hand and asked what he could do to improve his close ratio. The team waited for a high-level, complex answer. The sales manager replied, "Double the number of prospects in your pipeline."

You can be very skilled at selling. But during down cycles, you need more prospects because people are in a wait-and-see mode. If you have enough in the pipeline, sales prospects improve.

- Double your marketing -- The competitor has retreated and cut back on marketing because it's an easy line item to eliminate.

It's much easier than examining processes, systems and people that might be outdated or ineffective.

Take advantage of this shortsighted strategy. While your competitor is at recess, get your company's name out there consistently to prospects who are still willing and able to buy.

Make the marketing piece of value to the potential prospect. For example, we received a real estate marketing piece last month at our home. It was well-done, showing data that more homes had sold in our neighborhood, at a higher prices, with better mortgage rates in 2007 than 2006.

This smart marketing was designed to create a factual piece of news as a counterpoint to all the bad news on TV and in print. It was designed to reach those buyers who are sitting on the fence, not sure if they should buy or sell at this point. By the way, it's much more effective than a postcard with the Avalanche game dates.

- Double your sales training -- A tougher economy isn't patient with dumb sales teams. Tough times require better sales skills, a refresher course on them or acquisition of new ones.

A good sales manager makes it their goal to incorporate learning and teaching as part of the weekly sales meeting. When a salesperson walks out of a sales meeting, they should leave smarter and better equipped to handle challenges faced in the market. That means more role-playing, sharing of best practices and brainstorming on sales stumpers.

The sales meeting is also a mini pep rally to remind the sales team that when the going gets tough, most salespeople get going -- they recess. Remind your sales team this is the best time to sell because low-resilience salespeople are gathering at coffee shops, lamenting about the economy instead of prospecting or coming up with a different strategy.

- Double your sales skills -- Prospects are still buying. However, in tougher times, they want and need greater justification to invest money. If your sales team isn't well-versed in quantifying the cost of the problem and/or opportunity, there's a good chance the prospect will stay with an existing vendor or do nothing.

For example, if the prospect's current vendor isn't hitting quality expectations, the salesperson should be able to walk the prospect through a series of quantifier questions, such cost of re-do's, cost of missed deadlines, discounts given to upset customers, loss of customers and potential loss of customers.

The smart salesperson will help their prospect discover they need to make a change and not accept the status quo.

- Double your efforts with current clients -- OK, so you've done all of the above and business is still a little slow. Use this time to take exceptional care of current clients and new clients.

Are your A-plus clients really getting A-plus treatment? Quit worrying about your business and ask clients what you can do to help them grow their business. Is there a company they're targeting? Do they need resources? People?

Be proactive and invite clients to events that will provide contacts or information that's of value in growing their revenue.

Buck up and double up. Remember, the only time you can choose not to change, grow or improve is when your competition has made the same decision.

About the Author

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