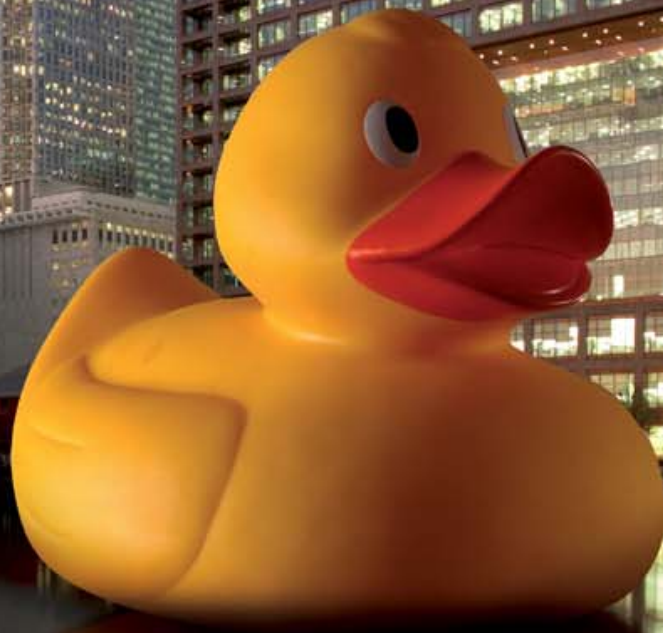


If your clients aren't seeing sales people, who are they seeing? – Maximising selling opportunities in tough times



 **Huthwaite**
Improving sales performance *International*

Change behaviour. Change results.

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In normal times responsibility for sales obviously lies with partners and senior fee earners. Hardly surprising given these are the people with both the opportunity and the capability to sell. But what happens when times get tough? What happens when, because of economic uncertainty, or lack of liquidity, or a simple crisis of confidence, clients simply stop seeing sales people at all?

This is the dilemma many firms now face. At a time when protecting, and if possible growing, fee income is more important than ever, more and more clients are refusing to meet with sellers because, for one reason or another, they are simply not ready or willing to buy. In an instant, one of the prerequisites of sales success, the opportunity to sell, is removed. Even worse, without the opportunity to sell, your 'services' become irrelevant. It doesn't matter what new innovations, or extra features, or aggressive pricing you adopt, if the clients won't meet your sellers they can't sell! So, if your sellers don't have the opportunity to sell, who does?

The answer is your 'service' personnel (e.g. secondees or transactional fee earners). Whatever your practice area or market sector, the chances

are there are people from your firm who have regular and frequent client contact, even in hard times. Almost every selling organisation has some group of client facing people who are not in a sales role, and, in most cases, you will have more of these 'service' people than sellers.

AND, the really good news is, not only are your clients willing to see these people, they actively invite your service personnel to visit them. When times are tough and legal spend is down, maintaining existing service levels and getting more from existing systems and processes becomes crucial. Your service operation becomes busier than ever.

Finally, bear in mind that every client, whatever his or her role, influences their company's buying decisions. They don't have to be senior managers or procurement professionals to have a say. Indeed, when times are hard and every penny spent is scrutinised, it's your day-to-day contacts, with their intimate knowledge of the quality of your services, who are the real judges of your quality and the real decision makers when it comes to buying.

So the answer is simple; if you have lots of service people, and they have lots of client contact (otherwise known as opportunities to sell), and it's nothing to do with your 'products', then all you have to do is get your service people to sell! If

only it was that easy.

Opportunity is only one of the things needed for sales success and, whilst service may have opportunities in abundance, they may lack the other necessary attributes. So what are these other things your 'service' people need for sales success?

Recognition

Many 'service' people, quite rightly see their role as simply that – service. They deliver the services wanted by the client, be it giving legal advice or providing IT support via the intranet, to a pre-agreed level. Selling is left to the partners and never the twain shall meet.

Step one is getting your entire client facing personnel to accept they have a role in sales, to create an understanding of the role within sales that they play.

Willingness

Unfortunately, recognising the need for a role and committing to fulfilling that role are not the same thing. Many service people may recognise a need to 'sell' at an intellectual level but, when it comes to putting it into practice, simply can't bring themselves to do it.

Step two is creating a willingness within the service population to become more sales orientated.

Capability

Knowing what to do is a start, being willing to do it helps, but unless you know HOW to do it you'll still not succeed. It's unreasonable to expect service people to have any, let alone well-developed, sales skills, so equipping service with the skills they need to actually be more sales focussed is essential.

Step three is equipping the service population with the skills and tactics they need to have a positive sales impact.

So, you get your service people ready and willing first, and **then** you train them to be sellers? Again, if only it was that simple.

If it was that easy you would have done it already, so let's think about what's really involved. In most organisations sales people are, rightly or wrongly, perceived as higher in the corporate hierarchy than their service colleagues. The reason many service people work in their area of expertise is precisely because they enjoy client contact but they don't want to sell. When you think about it in that way the chances of turning your service people into sellers is virtually nil.

So are we back to square one? Fortunately no. Like so many things in life service/sales is not a binary state, you don't have to be one or the other; there are shades of grey – what Huthwaite International call

the service/sales continuum. As service operations progress along the continuum they generate more value for both client and seller; service becomes more 'salesy'. The key is that each organisation, and if necessary each individual, can progress along the continuum as far as their capabilities and willingness allows. Service does move nearer to sales, but only as far as each person is comfortable –and hence willing to do.

The service/sales continuum

Whilst this is a true continuum, with a gradual change from one position to another, we can consider it as a number of 'phases':

Service – the client gets what the client has asked for. They get the value they expect and the seller gets the agreed return. Any additional value for the seller (let's call it sales value), for example the goodwill generated by a job well done, is intangible.

Outstanding service – giving the client something above and beyond their expectations or 'going the extra mile'. The client gets more value and the sales value, whilst still intangible may be higher, for example the client tells an associate of his good experience. For some this may be enough - give outstanding service and hope you get more instructions as a result. We feel that's still a bit too passive, we

think you can go further.

Sales awareness. At this stage the service person begins to look beyond the immediate service issue and actively seeks to find potential, tangible sales value, things that can be fed back to the client partners to add to their sales intelligence and perhaps to generate a new instruction. The client gets, at least, the same value as before and, by spotting potential problems or new benefits before they've been recognised by the client, there's a potential to create new, real client value too.

Sales though service. Here the service person begins to move to a more explicit sales role, not only looking for and identifying additional client needs but also offering solutions to them. The key is the additional solution is sold, not simply given free to the client. The sales value is tangible and real, an extra sale, and, by fulfilling a previously unrecognised client need, real additional client value is also created.

Sales. Finally there is the full-blown role of selling; identifying client needs, developing and creating real client value and, in return, creating sales revenue for your own firm. This is the realm of the partner and senior fee earners but, by moving your service people along the service/sales continuum, it is no longer a dark art in the eyes of service. It also stops being an 'us

and them' situation with business development and client service at best remote from each other, and worst, openly hostile towards each other. It becomes, for you, a collaborative and joined up effort to create real client and sales value and, for your clients, it becomes a genuinely seamless experience across every client touch point.

By equipping all your client facing people with the willingness, recognition and capability to move up the service/sales continuum you can maximise the opportunities presented by the economic downturn to build a seamless organisation, creating real client and sales value at every client touch point, every time.



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