

Planning a Competitive Strategy: Keep it Simple

- Five Steps in Creating a Strategic Sales & Marketing Plan -

The dynamic and competitive business environment we live in today demands that companies in the freight forwarding industry have a well-targeted, comprehensive strategic sales and marketing plan, supported by a robust software-driven CRM process, in order to succeed. While it may seem like a difficult undertaking to develop such a focused and comprehensive strategy given the current global economic environment, the oldest and best rule of thumb, and surest path to success when it comes to developing strategic plans remains the same during any economic condition: keep it simple.

Certain basic operating procedures will always stand the test of time, and should always be part of any business plan aimed at ensuring competitive supply chain sustainability. Of foremost importance in strategic, competitive planning for business success is the development of an insightful and clear-cut sales and marketing strategy supported by a comprehensive, integrated CRM system to capture data and track results throughout the entire process. There are five fundamental paradigms involved:



Lisa Tree, Marketing Manager

- **Identify Your Target Market.** Your company's long-term success depends largely on this seemingly obvious premise – you must understand who you are selling to and how your company best fits in the marketplace. A comprehensive sales and marketing plan starts with careful market research that profiles the demographics of the potential market and identifies your most advantageous positioning within that marketplace. Capturing market research and profiling data in a robust integrated CRM process will enable you to utilize the information throughout each stage of your sales and marketing effort. Market research should also include a detailed analysis of your competition in the market segments you plan to serve and establish how your company's offerings, including product, capabilities, customer services and prices compare to competitive organizations. This kind of market evaluation will enable you to determine your value proposition -- the service offerings that set your company apart from the competition.
- **Develop Your Marketing Plan.** Once you have obtained the required demographic data, determined the target market you will sell to, and identified your value proposition, you are ready to develop your overall marketing communications plan. Identifying your true potential market enables you to set realistic sales goals and estimate revenues, and sets a course on which to focus company resources and activities. This enables you to set your pricing structure and discount models and identify critical collateral activities necessary to support your sale & marketing plan. This includes such programs as targeted public relations and marketing campaigns, trade shows and industry conferences to optimize and maintain your supply chain visibility and sales and marketing superiority -- all of which should be measured and evaluated through your CRM system where the data is stored.
- **Develop a Coordinated Sales Strategy.** A fragmented sales strategy without a common goal and company philosophy behind it is not likely to achieve the success you hope for. The evolution of the global business environment, in which buying decisions have moved from the shipping department to C-level influencers, requires an increasingly coordinated sales strategy that incorporates a greater degree of integrated IT-driven sales tools. It's a good idea to focus the

resources of your sales team based on who is best-suited to address the unique requirements of each market sector -- consider industry experience, contacts, location, skills and strengths -- and identify which members of your sales team are best suited for lead generation, inside sales or outside sales roles. You can then scale staff resources to make the best use of your sales team and provide IT tools that enable them to optimize and document the time spent on their sales efforts.

- **Commit Your Resources and Implement the Plan.** Once you have all your pre-marketing strategies in place, it's time to implement a robust sales & marketing plan that will create sustained name awareness and supply chain visibility for your company. Keep in mind, while many companies are cutting back on sales & marketing resources and capital expenditures during this time of economic adjustment, now is actually the best time to increase your marketing spend. By doing so, you will differentiate yourself from your competitors and better position your company for the long-term. Carefully identify your resources by area of expertise and ensure that all players are in sync with your key corporate philosophies to guarantee success. This requires a more aggressive and customer-focused strategy than in the past and demands a good understanding of your goals and a cooperative effort of all involved in your overall sales and marketing strategy. A robust IT-driven process that provides real-time access to integrated data for your sales and marketing personnel throughout each stage of the sales & marketing process can be an invaluable management tool in this age of personalized services.
- **Measure Success with Tangible Metrics.** Few sales & marketing plans will succeed without comprehensive metrics in place to track and quantify results. An effective and strategic sales & marketing program, supported by a vibrant software system enables you to capture, store and analyze all relevant data throughout the entire sales process, act upon it, and then report results to both upper management and your customers, enabling all parties to make better business decisions through systematic approaches. Remaining flexible to market dynamics is the key factor here, as periodic evaluations of your metrics allows you to make adjustments, as necessary, in order to meet the sales, revenue and ROI targets identified by your management team.

Business dynamics in the freight forwarding industry will always be evolving. But when strategically integrated within a vibrant CRM process, a simple, well-targeted sales & marketing plan will help you meet all the required criteria necessary for implementing a comprehensive and coordinated business strategy to meet changing market demands. It will greatly assist you in properly positioning your company within your industry; and moreover, it will enable you to gauge quantifiable components of your company's ongoing performance. A simple, but strategically developed sales & marketing plan significantly helps maximize your company's supply chain visibility in today's competitive business environment.

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