
Sales Best Practices for Wide Format Providers

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INTRODUCTION

Finding the right mix of best practices to increase sales staff performance is a key challenge for today’s wide format printing businesses. Although many firms are focused on improving profitability through manufacturing efficiencies, establishing the right processes to increase sales growth may often go unaddressed. The research team at Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends conducts regular web-based surveys to develop an understanding of the overall industry, and one such research study identified the best sales practices of wide format printing businesses that were experiencing sales growth. This paper uncovers the strategies and tactics that high-performance wide format firms can follow to manage the sales process, develop and train their staff members, build the right sales force, develop competitive compensation plans, and leverage the best sales tools for supporting their reps.

THE SALES PROCESS HAS CHANGED

The process of selling wide format products and services is more difficult now than it has ever been. Due to the wealth of knowledge on the Internet and an increased amount of competition, today’s buyers have an unprecedented amount of information at their fingertips. If a buyer has already figured out what he/she needs and has narrowed things down to a list of providers who can complete the job, price and turnaround time will almost always become the deciding factors. Rather than being forced into price-driven conversations, for example, savvy sales reps must identify opportunities where they can create demand and value.

Table 1: What Causes Buyer Loyalty?

Today’s buyers are most likely to become loyal to...
• Reps that offer a unique, valuable perspective on the market
• Reps that help them navigate alternatives and avoid potential landmines
• Reps that educate them on new issues and outcomes
• Suppliers that are easy to buy from
• Suppliers with widespread support across their organizations

In today’s new paradigm, savvy reps will seek out agile wide format organizations that are in a state of flux. These sales reps will use their knowledge of the business and its competitors to create a consensus for change amongst the decision-making team. Once the key players have been identified, the reps will take control of the process by coaching customers on how to buy solutions that will deliver the most value for their organizations.



SALES MANAGEMENT PITFALLS

High-performance sales start with a well-trained team, but many managers aren't sure where to begin when preparing their reps for success. Here are some mistakes that sales managers commonly make:

- **Focusing on selling rather than coaching:** Since many sales managers are former salespeople themselves, they often take too long getting themselves out of selling mode so they can coach and lead their salespeople. Sales managers must shift their focus from selling to mentoring.
- **Investing too much time/energy on low-level performers.** Although it might seem natural to focus on problem employees, doing so can alienate the top and mid-level performers who are actually producing results. It's important to encourage incremental growth and focus on the right group of performers.
- **Neglecting to determine motivators.** Although many managers assume that all salespeople are motivated by money, this is not necessarily the case. Different people are motivated by different things, be it flexible hours, individual recognition, opportunities for upward mobility, or something else entirely. Sales managers that identify the personal motivators of their individual employees will be better positioned to reward them in meaningful ways and improve their job satisfaction.
- **Hiring the wrong people.** A good sales leader will always be in recruiting mode, even when there are no positions to fill. Managers who wait to seek out talent until they have openings will often make hasty decisions to fill the void, but those who are always on the lookout for talent will be better positioned to select a quality candidate when the need arises. It is also important to consider industry experience. For example, an individual with specific expertise in the wide format industry (e.g., knowledge about ink durability or placement options for various substrates) might be a better fit than someone with years of general sales experience.
- **Not building credibility with sales teams.** Sales managers must earn the confidence of their team by demonstrating not only competence as a salesperson, but also competence as a coach and leader. Well-led sales personnel will ultimately perform better.
- **Making changes too quickly.** Although it's natural to want to make changes when something isn't working, doing so without assessing the landscape may cause you to overlook the underlying issues.
- **Underestimating team members.** Great salespeople who have risen through the ranks might end up believing that they alone know the best way of approaching a given situation. Remember that everyone on your team has his or her own strengths. There are many ways to win business, so it's important to identify and capitalize on individual talents.

Because each rep needs to construct his or her own understanding of various concepts, start by helping them to develop the knowledge they need. Simply memorizing a sequence of steps doesn't mean that a rep understands what he/she is doing, so offer training and then use role-playing exercises to solidify the skills. Along these same lines, bear in mind that everyone has a different way of learning. The primary learning styles include **seeing** (e.g., reading, taking notes, identifying visual cues like color), **listening** (e.g., hearing, discussing, reading aloud), and **doing** (e.g., moving around, performing activities,

practicing). Sales managers must get to know their reps on an individual level so they can identify the learning style that is dominant for each.

BEST PRACTICES OF HIGH-PERFORMANCE WIDE FORMAT FIRMS

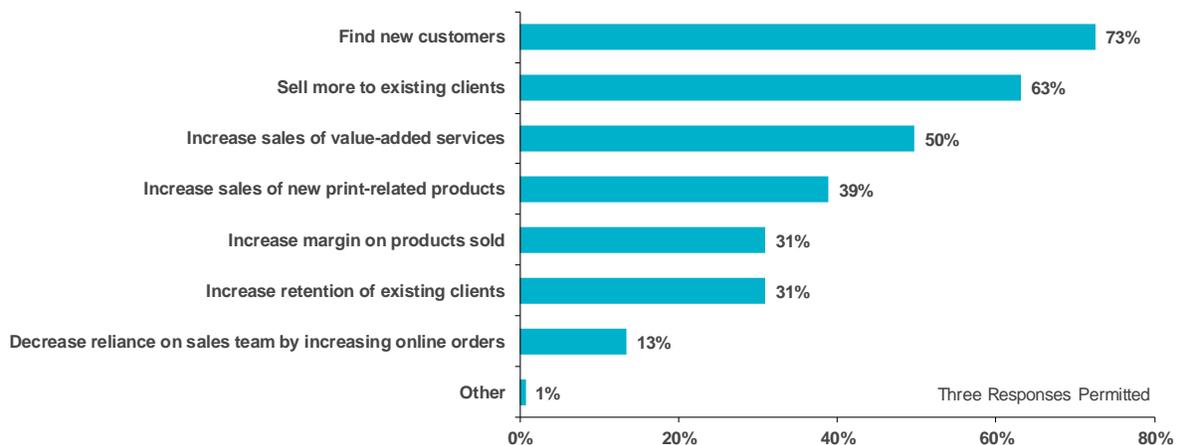
Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends’ research uncovered strategies and tactics that high-performance wide format firms follow for managing the sales process, training their sales staff, and leveraging the best tools for supporting their reps. Of the 272 total print service providers that were surveyed, 195 offered wide format printing services. These wide format providers are the focus of this paper.

Our research found that high-performance wide format print sales organizations follow clearly-defined strategies and continually adapt their organizations to keep pace with ever-changing market conditions. This section outlines the best practices of wide format firms that were experiencing sales growth.

MAKE CLIENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION A KEY PRIORITY

When asked to identify the top priorities for their sales teams in the coming year, wide format firms that were experiencing sales growth cited finding new customers and selling more to existing ones. Successful wide format organizations recognize that building out and filling the sales pipeline requires a focus on account growth as well as customer satisfaction. High-growth firms spend more time identifying strategies for selling additional products to existing clients, so they will keep coming back for more.

Figure 1: What are the top priorities for your sales team in the coming year?

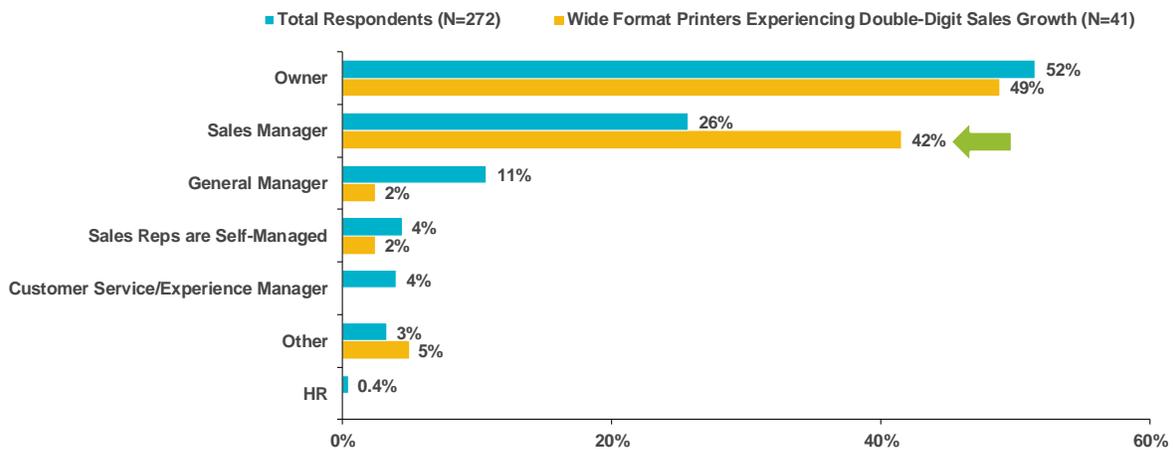


N = 149 Wide Format Printers that are experiencing sales growth
 Source: *Best Practices of High-Performance Print Sales Organizations*; Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

ASSIGN A DEDICATED SALES MANAGER

In many wide format printing companies, sales reps often report to the owner. This model may work in smaller companies, particularly if the owner has a sales background and is comfortable managing salespeople. As a company grows in size, however, assigning a sales manager to lead and guide the sales team makes good business sense. Business growth can make it difficult for an owner to manage multiple tasks, and the sales function is a critical to financial success. According to our survey, wide format print providers experiencing double-digit sales growth were considerably more likely to have a sales manager.

Figure 2: Who is primarily responsible for managing your sales force?



Base: All Respondents
 Source: *Best Practices of High-Performance Print Sales Organizations*; Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

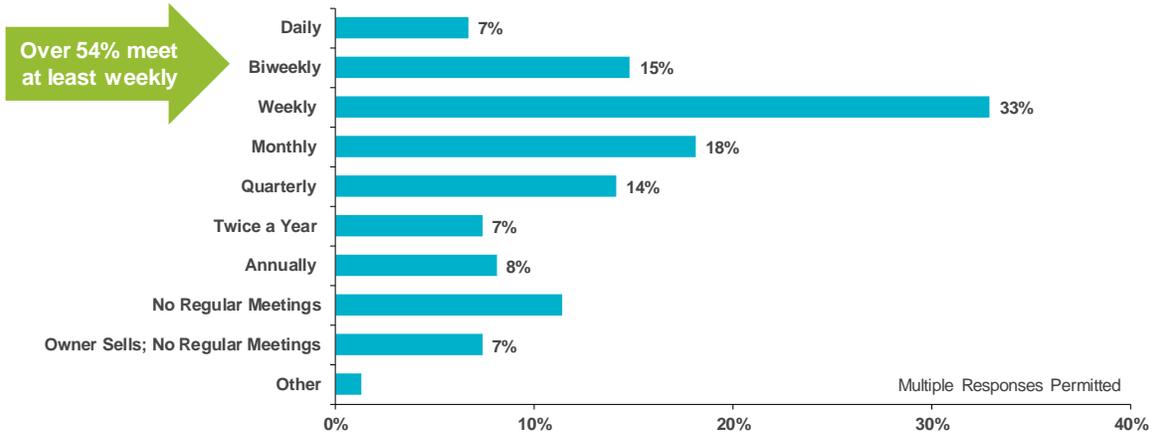
Sales managers handle a variety of responsibilities, including setting sales goals and quotas, building sales plans, providing guidance and direction for account development, identifying training needs, defining coverage models and sales territories, mentoring sales team members, and monitoring and reacting to changes in the sales pipeline.

FREQUENTLY HOLD PLANNING MEETINGS

Over half of growing wide format print providers report holding structured planning meetings at least weekly. These firms clearly understand the importance of holding sales meetings to review performance, provide updates on the sales pipeline, discuss accounts, and share competitive or other influential trends that are valuable to the entire team.



Figure 3: How often does the person handling sales management hold structured planning meetings with sales staff?

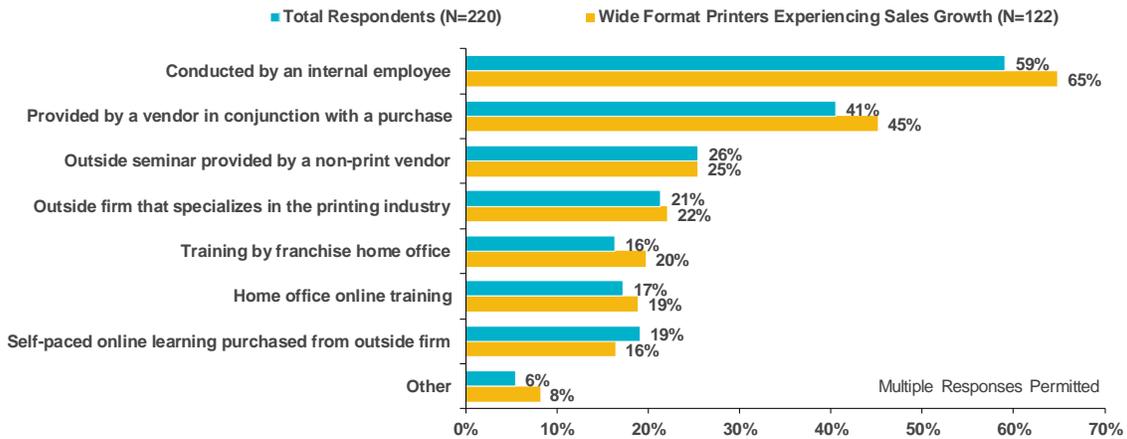


N = 149 Wide Format Printers that are experiencing sales growth
 Source: *Best Practices of High-Performance Print Sales Organizations*; Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF TRAINING

Growing wide format sales organizations recognize that sales force training is critical to the sales effort. When asked to specify their sales training methods, wide format printers that were experiencing sales growth were more likely to report using nearly all of the listed training methods more frequently than total respondents. Growing wide format providers clearly understand the value of leveraging a wide variety of sales training techniques.

Figure 4: Which of the following methods do you use to train your sales team?



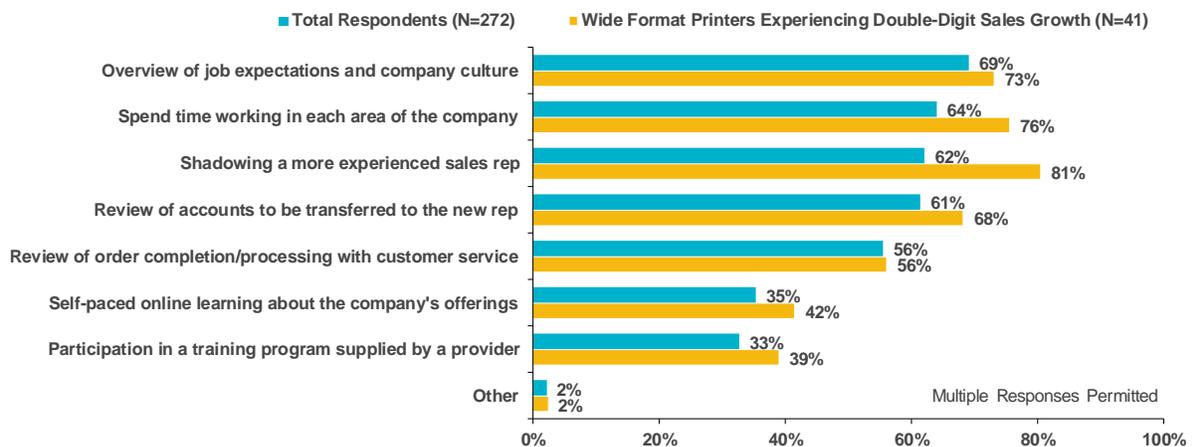
Base: Respondents who regularly conduct training for their sales teams
 Source: *Best Practices of High-Performance Print Sales Organizations*; Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

FOCUS ON BUILDING SKILLS WHEN HIRING NEW REPS

Successful wide format firms have a well-defined onboarding process for new sales hires. Some companies incorrectly think that onboarding is a simple matter of filling out the correct paperwork on a new hire's first day of work and shadowing current employees in various departments. Meanwhile, other firms make the mistake of overloading the new employee with information for a few days and then sending them into the field. The problem with not having a well-defined onboarding process is that by the end of the first week, new reps are often overwhelmed, underprepared, and simply not ready to successfully sell the differentiation that your firm can provide. A good sales onboarding process should be a development program that lasts anywhere from one to four months. During that time, new hires can become fully integrated into your organization by absorbing information in digestible pieces, mastering the tools they need to convert sales, and learning how to become a contributing team member.

High-performance wide format firms implemented a number of tactics to accelerate productivity during onboarding. The most common onboarding tactics for new sales reps included providing an overview of job expectations and company culture, spending time in various departments, and shadowing more experienced reps. It should be noted that in relation to total respondents, wide format printers experiencing double-digit sales growth were more likely to report using all of the listed processes.

Figure 5: Which of the following tactics are typically included in your sales onboarding process?



Base: All Respondents
 Source: *Best Practices of High-Performance Print Sales Organizations*; Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

ASSESSING YOUR CURRENT SALES TEAM

Assessing the quality of your current sales team involves taking a good, hard look at your staff members to ensure that they are representing your company to the best of their abilities and also adequately articulating the *value* of your products/services so that your offerings are differentiated from those of your competitors.

TRAITS OF SUCCESSFUL SALES REPS

What are some of the characteristics that set great salespeople apart from the rest? Although successful selling is a result of skills and practice, the Table below outlines the qualities that top sales reps typically possess.

Table 2: Traits of Successful Sales Reps

Goal-Oriented	Assertive; Likes to Debate
Confident	Organized
Naturally Curious	Disciplined
Analytical	Good Communicator
Committed to Continuous Learning/Sharing	Persuasive

SUITABILITY CAN BE JOB-SPECIFIC!

In some cases, the best rep for the job can depend on the focus of the request itself. Some sales reps will be great at getting people excited about new products and services, such as faster production speeds, dual printing/cutting solutions for improved workflow, new ink/media offerings, and real-time personalization. Others will be better at convincing businesses to become early adopters of new applications. These firms will likely require additional justification before they make an investment. Once an offering has become more established in the market, other selling characteristics will be more effective. Many wide format companies offer a combination of up-and-coming and mature offerings, so they will need multiple types of salespeople to promote themselves effectively. The Table below offers an overview of the characteristics that sales reps will typically need to possess to successfully sell various types of offerings.

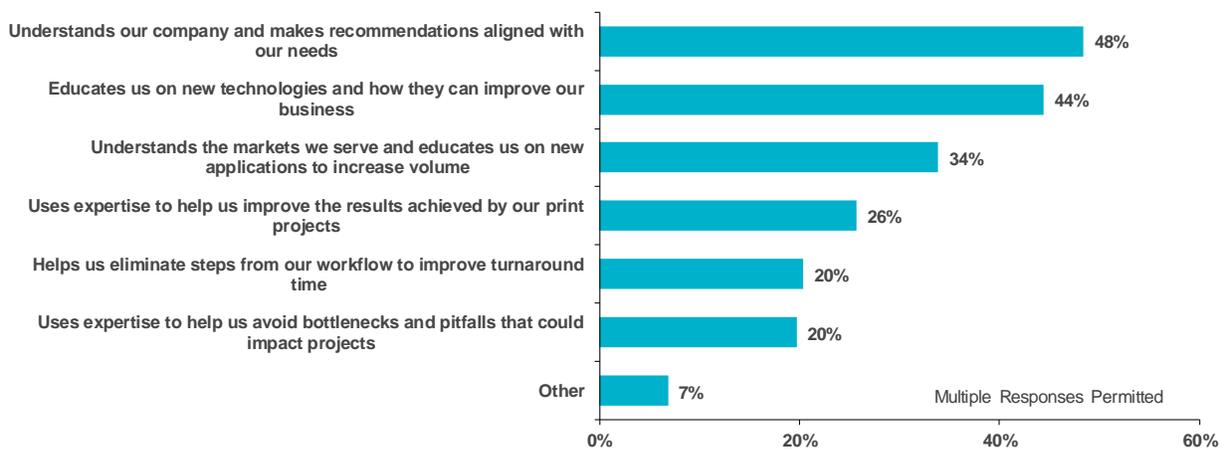
Table 3: Characteristics of Successful Sales Reps by Focus

	Innovative New Products/Services	Early Adopter Businesses	Mature Offerings or Saturated Markets
Rep Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-energy, emotional, and enthusiastic • Aggressive and impatient • Handles rejection well • Driven by money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges the status quo • Even-tempered, analytical, logical, competitive, controlled ego • Able to navigate complex and lengthy sales cycles • Negotiates well; high degree of business acumen • Career-oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disciplined, organized, and reliable • Service- and relationship-oriented • Detail-oriented • Dependable

WHERE DO YOUR REPS EXCEL?

At the end of 2017, Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends conducted an in-depth survey of more than 300 wide format companies, including commercial printers, sign shops, digital print specialists, screen printers, and ad specialty providers. The objective of this study was to learn more about print providers’ wide format investment plans, business priorities, challenges, media/substrate use, and application growth. These print service providers were asked about the areas that their wide format sales reps excelled at, and their responses underscore some of the traits that you should be seeking in your own sales team members.

Figure 6: When thinking about the reps that sell wide format print technologies to you, in which of the following areas do they excel?



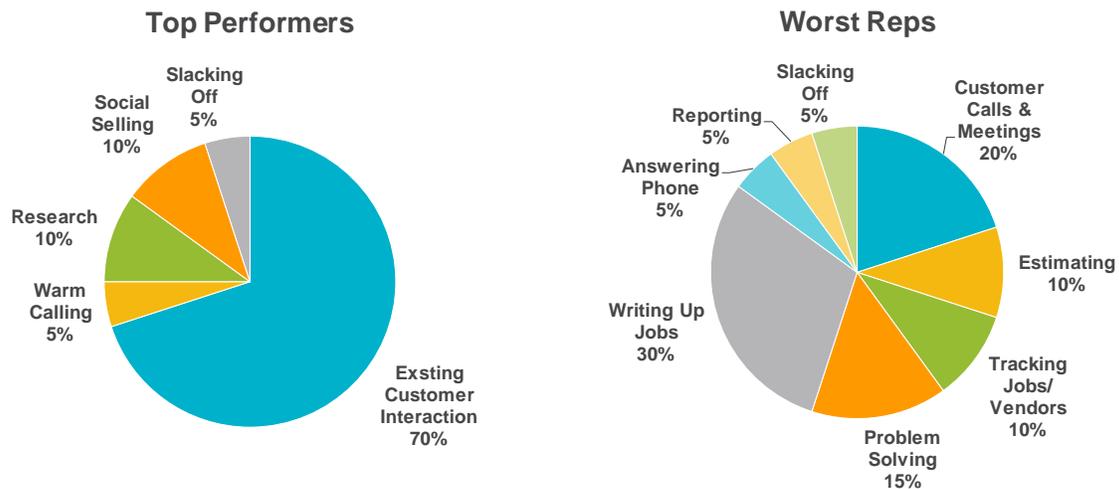
N = 304 Total Wide Format Print Service Providers
 Source: *Looking for BIG Opportunity in Graphic Communications & Specialty Printing*, Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

Based on this data, the most successful sales reps at your wide format company will develop a thorough understanding of their individual clients so they can make suggestions based on their specific needs and understand your technologies well enough to market their value to others.

HOW DO YOUR REPS SPEND THEIR TIME?

Most wide format businesses will have multiple people in the sales role, but there can be wide variations in how various sales reps spend their time even though they all support the same function. In addition to its web-based survey research, Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends conducted a series of in-depth interviews among a number of print industry executives. Part of these interviews focused on how various sales reps spent their time. When respondents were asked to compare their worst reps to their top performers, there were a number of variations in how time was spent. As shown in the Figure below, the best reps spent the majority of their time interacting with existing customers.

Figure 7: Variations in Productive Selling Time



Source: *Best Practices of High-Performance Print Sales Organizations*; Keypoint Intelligence – InfoTrends 2017

Even the best reps spend some time slacking off, but the key message is that the most successful reps are focused on their existing customers. This ties into the earlier discussion about making client retention a key priority—growing wide format firms cited selling more to their existing customers as a top priority. The best wide format sales reps will focus on customer satisfaction to keep their existing clients coming back for more.

GO-FORWARD PLANNING

EFFECTIVELY TRAINING YOUR REPS FOR SELLING

To be effective, sales training must be a regular occurrence. Sending salespeople off for a week of intense training will not leave them ready to run for the rest of the year. Sales training is more effective when provided in regular, shorter bursts. Salespeople who are regularly trained will absorb more information and will be better equipped to represent your company. The best training occurs when a rep can immediately apply the skills that they've just learned.

At the same time, however, training isn't enough! According to an ES Research Group study, between 85% and 90% of sales training has no lasting impact after 120 days. This is what makes sales *coaching* so essential. In fact, a Sales Executive Board Study found that sales reps who received quality coaching achieved a 20% sustained improvement in performance. Unfortunately, managers often engage with the wrong reps—they will typically focus on poor reps to meet territory goals, and their best reps because they're so much fun to work with. The problem is that even the best coaching typically has a marginal impact on the weakest and strongest performers in a sales organization. The real payoff from good coaching lies among the middle 60%—your core sales performers. Ultimately, *who* sales managers coach is just as important as *how* they coach.

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

The best reps will listen to their customers as well as they talk. It's important for your sales reps to ask their clients the right questions about their wide format needs. Delivering the quality that customers expect starts with asking the right questions, because this enables the rep to better understand the customer's needs and make the best recommendations based on those needs. Reps who take the time to understand their customer's goals can leverage this knowledge to guide them through the rest of the sales process. Here are some key questions that can help you determine what the customer is hoping to accomplish:

- **How often do you use this type of wide format display?** The answers to this question can help you gauge the size of the sale and the potential for repeat business.
- **Where will the item be viewed?** Higher resolution printing will be more important if the image is going to be viewed close up. If the image is going to be viewed from farther away, eye-catching details like colorful inks or even backlighting will be more important.
- **How will the item be displayed?** Understanding whether a wide format item will be framed, hung, stood up, or placed in a window will help you determine the media types that can be used and the finishing options that may be required. Duration of use is also a factor, because items that are intended to be displayed for a longer period will of course require additional durability.
- **Where will the item be located?** The answers to this question will once again help you determine the best media types, inks, and finishing options. For example, a display that is hung indoors from a ceiling won't need as much preparation as a floor graphic that must withstand foot traffic or an outdoor billboard that will need the durability to tolerate moisture, humidity, wind, and temperature extremes.

Sales reps who offer sound advice and good recommendations can establish loyalty among their customers and keep them coming back for more. In many cases, it's easier to garner repeat business from an existing customer than it is to find a new customer. Sales managers must therefore encourage their reps to develop an understanding of their customers' needs so they can come up with innovative ideas for new wide format revenue sources.

CONCLUSION

High-performance wide format print sales organizations have a strong sales management structure that is focused on developing and enforcing best practices for enhancing staff productivity, hiring the best sales talent, improving sales skills, coaching sales reps, and growing sales through new and existing customers. Successful wide format print sales organizations will also provide their sales reps with clear directions and guidance for targeting profitable markets with the best applications.

Some wide format printing businesses lack the management focus to mirror the actions of industry leaders. As a result, many of these firms may be tempted to succumb to pricing pressures that can result in lower margins and declining profitability. Wide format businesses that enter into “price wars” will find it much harder to hire the staff that is needed to secure future sales growth. By following the best practices of growing wide format companies, these firms can take the appropriate actions to create a sales environment that generates growth and results!

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