

A DIFFERENT DEFINITION OF VALUE-ADD

By Joe C. Ellers

For the past few years, the distribution community has talked about value-added approaches to business. These have generally been defined as kitting or assembly although there are other definitions. While these are very important aspects of value-add there is another value-add that is often not considered: the sales process itself.

Many salespeople do not view their function as being valuable to the customer. They believe the value comes through the products they sell (and the services they offer). In today's world however, salespeople who wait for their organization to value-add they may not even get a chance to sell.

The first question each salesperson needs to consider is, "How will I differentiate myself from all the other salespeople who call on this customer?" Ideally, the answer to this question will be some form of additional value to the customer. Salespeople still believe they have to bring gifts to differentiate themselves. One old-timer still leaves pieces of candy for each person he calls on. Others still rely solely on personal relationships. Relationship selling will always have a place, but it is less valuable (and less effective) than it was even a few years ago--and will continue to become less valuable in future.

Think about it, in the old days if a person liked you, they could give you the order. Today, there are many levels of review, and a lot of decisions are made by committee. When you are under careful scrutiny to justify each and every purchase, it is less of a factor than real value. The challenge of a professional salesperson today is to define what you will do to be value-add to your customers. Some strategies that are being successfully used are to:

- Know the customer better than your competitors
- Make certain the customer approves all presentations in advance
- Set professional appointments (and keep them)
- Follow-up when you say you will (always)
- Learn the customer's goals and make all proposed solutions conform to what they care about
- Bring in technical experts to solve specific problems
- Take time to learn how their internal systems work and do not propose things that will require the customer to go through major gyrations

What other things can you do--without anyone's permission--which will help the customer understand spending time with you will be valuable?

Many salespeople today complain about not being able to get appointments and about having appointments cancelled. The reason for this is simple--most salespeople do not add value on their calls. How many times have you presented a product to someone and had them tell you they were not the right person or they were not interested? Every one of these calls made it just a little bit harder for you (and every other salesperson) to make the next appointment.

Your challenge is to make your sales approach so valuable your customers will always want to see you. You do this by adding value on each and every sales call--and every time you try to set-up an appointment. Make a list of what your customer's value and give them more of it--starting right now!

All the best,

JCE