

My Dentist Follows Up On Leads. Do Your Sales People?



My dentist, Dr. Paul DiMattia, cares about my health. How do I know? He regularly sends me a postcard to remind me to come in for my semi-annual appointment. And if I don't respond, he sends me an email, followed by a voicemail message.

I'm a busy guy and I appreciate the reminders. Dr. DiMattia knows he provides an important service. And he is confident enough in the value he provides that he is not afraid to regularly reach out to me. Dr. DiMattia does not worry about bothering me or becoming a pest. He does not agonize over the optimal time to send his reminders or if I will be offended by his message.

In contrast, B2B sales reps behave very differently. And their behavior has significant consequences for revenue generation.

New research from the National Association of Sales Executives indicates that 80% of all complex B2B deals require at least 5 contacts or touches for a prospect to respond.

Yet according to the same research, the vast majority of sales reps (82%) stop trying to reach prospects in their target market after 3 attempts. Another way to put it is that only 18% of all sales reps hang in there long enough to get the sales process started.

This results in what I refer to as the *sales follow-up gap*.

Why does a sales follow-up gap exist? For one thing, it is emotionally exhausting for sales people to continually reach out to prospects with no response. A common refrain from sales people is that "if they were really interested, they would call me back." This is a potentially dangerous assumption.

Recently, when I was called in to help a company figure out how to sell a life-saving device to schools, I went on a number of cold calls with their sales team. It was relatively easy for me to make cold calls because I believed in the product. After all, a child's life could be at risk if this new technology was not adopted quickly. My desire to save lives outweighed any anxiety I had about making cold calls.

I often hear from sales people that since they are unclear how a product will benefit a particular prospect, they don't want to damage an emerging relationship by becoming a pest. Their commitment to the product is not strong enough to overcome their follow-up anxiety.

Of course, it is easy to fault the sales person for their lack of persistence.

However, product marketing must share some of the blame for the follow-up gap.

Product marketing teams fail to create compelling value propositions and explain how their product will change a customer's life. In addition, they fail to give the sales people the ammunition to keep pursuing a prospect. They don't provide the sales team with compelling stories to engage the prospect and explain how your product contributed to the success of similar organizations.

Sales people often are forced to chase prospects without the appropriate tools or training.

With the right support from product marketing, your sales people will be able to follow-up as effectively as Dr. DiMattia. And your sales follow-up gap will become old news.

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