



Brain Surgery, Anyone?

by

Barry Trailer

Breaking down the sales process into the C.A.R.E model can help divide duties, open up communication, and keep the customers buying.

A friend who is international sales VP at a biotech company laughed upon passing a room where I was conducting a sales seminar. The thing that cracked him up was me yelling out, “Come on, you guys; this isn’t brain surgery!”

I was wrong. In the late 90’s, I heard a tape series by sales trainer Jim Cecil wherein he compares sales to brain surgery. He gives the example of a hospital administrator employing a surgeon capable of generating \$500 per hour, then using that specialist to do \$10-per-hour work. This situation is repeating itself daily in virtually all sales organizations. Breaking this vicious cycle holds the key to big-time sales force automation payoff.

Sales reps invariably identify “administrivia” and “prospecting and qualifying” as their lowest-payoff activities. Volumes have been written already about CRM’s (Customer Relationship Management) ability to reduce and automate administrative tasks – largely handled by contact management software. But what about the old bugaboos, prospecting and qualifying?



There are a couple of dirty little secrets around this CRM movement. This first and most often repeated motivator for embarking on the CRM journey is increased productivity. From a sales rep's point of view, increased productivity is not necessarily a good thing. If my quota this year is, say \$1.2 million, and at plan I earn \$165,000, with increased productivity my quota may rise to \$2.4 million. At plan I'll probably still earn around \$165,000 (not \$330,000). Did my life get better?

The second "catch" in the sales story is, whatever the quota, the sales rep is on the hook for it. Sure, marketing is scheduling campaigns, educational seminars, and tradeshow. But whether marketing generates a sufficient number of leads or not, sales is still responsible for the number. The message often is, marketing's leads are icing on the cake, but they're not the cake. If your reps get leads from them, fine, but they shouldn't count on these leads to make their numbers.

And so, your brain surgeon goes into the admissions office and starts helping people fill out forms. And if there aren't enough people out in the lobby, you require your highly skilled surgeon to go out in the street and start flagging cars into the parking lot. Once there, she goes around asking, "Anybody have a headache? Blurry vision? Anybody need brain surgery?"

Prospecting is low-payoff work, and besides, sales reps are about the most expensive lead-generating mechanisms around. And they don't do it well. Other than that, maybe it's a pretty good idea.

Here's an alternative. In last month's article I presented a pipeline model, with leads in, orders out, and some number of sales process steps in between. Now, if you agree that having very satisfied, highly referenceable customers and a steady flow of incremental upgrades and referrals is a good source of quality leads, then the things that happen *after* the sale are really important. These are the purview of customer and field service.

Many companies' sales forces are hobbled doing this "post op" care work, because there is no clear transition of responsibility for the relationship. This doesn't mean the rep should abdicate all responsibility and contact, but neither should they remain the primary interface for the customer.

This brings us to what I call the CARE model: Customer Acquisition, Retention, and Expansion.



If sales is the lifeblood of an organization, then the CARE model represents the circulatory system. The sales pipeline acts as the heart, but it can't do the job alone. CARE takes into consideration all the other components that are required to keep the organization healthy, drawing them into the sales information loop.

For example, analyzing leads that fall out from the pipeline, as well as those opportunities that close, provides marketing the information for which they're forever clamoring: "Just tell us what's happening to the leads we're sending you!" This critical feedback loop is largely absent today, and marketing operates in a disjointed fashion, not coordinated with sales. Even engineering, manufacturing, and back-office operations like accounting and credit all can add input to and learn from the information flow of the CARE model.

Sales reps will sign up for higher productivity and higher quotas if at the same time they're offloaded the responsibility of generating all their own leads. Marketing is better able to generate quality leads, because they're able to see which lead sources and cultivation approaches are the richest and which convert to early scrap.

Once the CARE model is in place and sales process is operating, then your opportunity management system should be able to provide operating metrics like average step cycle time and probability to close, average deal size, percent full, and forecast accuracy. Different departments can analyze the Opportunity Management System data, searching for different characteristics. If we return to the circulatory analogy, these test are the equivalent of doing blood work: Iron deficiency results in an anemic condition, lead deficiency in an anemic pipeline. Fatty deposits are the result of poor diet and little exercise. Opportunities that clog the pipeline (don't fall out, don't close) may come from poor lead quality and lack of sales discipline in exercising process execution.

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This series started with “Magic”, the recognition that we are not purely rational beings and that predictability will be more elusive in sales than manufacturing. Last month we dissected process and looked at the important elements that make up the heart of a company’s revenue generating system. Finally, we see these two “soft” ideas within a corporate system, an overall ecology, subject to analysis, statistics, chemistry, and other “hard” sciences. Generalists will look for patterns, while specialists experiment with techniques, the whole supported by systems providing timely, relevant, and individualized feedback.

The end result is a spirit, heart, and brain operating with a single aim, so that the company’s sales revenue production can significantly and sustainably improve. Quoting Louis Nizer: “A man who works with his hands is a laborer, a man who works with his hands and his brain is a craftsman, but a man who works with his hands and his brain and his heart is an artist.”

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Barry Trailer has consulted with companies with complex B2B sales for the past twenty years. At FrontRange Solutions (formerly GoldMine Software Corporation) he served as VP of North American Sales, VP of Corporate Initiatives, and finally, acting as President of the GoldMine Division. In 2002 Barry interviewed hundreds of executives for the just released *'Sales & Marketing Excellence Challenge: Changing How the Game Is Played,'* available at www.csinsights.com