

Differentiate Yourself: Creative Solutions for Sales
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This topic came out of a conversation during a teleconference with some HME sales professionals on the topic of “How to Sell to a Friend”. When competitor’s product offerings and pricing are compatible, how can you entice your physicians, hospitals, rehab facilities, sleep centers, etc. to refer patients to your HME/DME business?

I first must preface this by stating that above all-maintain all ethical standards. If your industry or company prohibits certain activities, DON’T DO THEM. I can’t stress enough the importance of taking the high road in any business situation. Regardless of what your competition is doing-illegal, unethical, or otherwise, don’t engage in activities that won’t pass the “red face test” just because you feel this is the only way to compete.

That being said-what can you do, then, to set yourself apart from everybody else?

- 1) **Know your customer.** Seems obvious, but too often we tend to treat everyone the same way. Do you know your customer’s “hot buttons”? For example, there are physicians out there who are information junkies. They want to see the latest data, the most recent studies, or the cutting-edge science that is coming in your field. If appropriate-do the research for them and share what you find. If you are clever, you can find ways to bridge the conversation from the latest, greatest to your products and services.
- 2) **Provide something for their business that no one else is providing.** Everyone has pens, mugs, sticky notes, golf balls, you name it. And yes, they are a “valuable” resource for any office. But what does your referral source NEED? In my sales experience, I found that most offices relish patient education materials. I’ve used such companies as Krames Communications (<http://www.krames.com/>) who provide print and video patient education pieces on hundreds of topics and disease states. I’ve also bought a great deal from the Anatomical Chart Company (<http://www.anatomical.com/Default.asp?bhcd2=1243816482>) who provides models and wall-mounted charts on body systems, disease states, and more. These are just 2 of the hundreds of companies that offer great products for your referral source’s offices or facilities. Instead of spending your marketing budget on an office lunch or new mouse pads, consider leveraging these resources instead. When you can help the end user (the patient) or help the referral source provide better service to their customer, you stand out.
- 3) **Give them a reason to use your product or service over the competition.** I can’t tell you the number of times I overheard another sales rep say something like, “Hey, if you just buy X amount of my product, I’ll be that much closer to winning my company’s sales contest. I’m trying to win a trip to Tahiti.” PLEASE! This simply reeks of unprofessionalism. And what kind-hearted referral source won’t want to “help”? Guilt is the wrong motivator. Instead, show how your company offers a better product, better service to the end consumer; how you bring value to the referral source by keeping them abreast of the latest news, how you’ve provided them with unique resources (like patient ed material), how you are willing to go the extra mile for them-versus asking them to go the extra mile for you.
- 4) **Go above the call of duty.** You notice that the office you’re calling on is especially hectic this morning because the roof leaked last night and all the files are getting soaked. The staff is frantically trying to relocate them, clean up the mess, and take care of the patients who are piling up in the waiting room. What do you do? Most sales reps would chalk it up as a bad day to make a call and leave. But you can go above the call of duty. Take off your jacket and tie, roll up your sleeves and grab a mop. Your offer of assistance will be a refreshing surprise. Yes, it does mean you sacrifice time where you could be calling on another prospect. Yes, you’ll get

your shoes dirty. Yes, you'll be remembered. I once helped a "no see" office pack and relocate one weekend. It was 2 hours away from my home, I had to spend another night in a hotel, and it was dirty work. But the physician, who NEVER saw reps, would allow me access to his office and gave me time to discuss my products. Always be on the lookout for opportunities to personally go above the call of duty.

Again, these are just a few suggestions to differentiate yourself from everyone else. When you can build a strong relationship with your referral sources, you earn the right to ask for their business. Set your expectations high: if you treat them "right", you can (and should) feel comfortable asking for all of it!