



## Sales Sustainability™ – “Customer Service Process” (CSP)

>> Customer service is more than delivering the order; it's the first step in our next sale to the customer. Developing initial customers into long term core relationships requires superior customer service, well beyond fulfilling or administering the last order received. *Loyalty is driven not just by what is purchased but also by the customer experience. Exceptional sales performance requires a great service process.*

Ever notice how excellent companies have superior customer service programs? Why? Because they recognize that service is a vital element in the sales process. It usually is the last element in the sales cycle and the first element of our next sale to the customer! These companies have a high percentage of repeat orders because their customer service process makes it easier for a customer to place additional orders and removes barriers to the sale.

**Customer satisfaction can be affected by inefficiencies throughout the organization, including non-sales related processes.** Often a company will tailor its customer service program to its base of customers by establishing a process which meets the needs of its core customers. *Why do companies have superior service programs? They make it easier for core customers to order!*

***If we make it easier for our customers to buy from us, the efforts of our sales force will produce results.*** Customer service represents the delivery process for our sales program. Companies often execute service programs that represent little more than a pleasant telephone answering service. Very little product knowledge or authority is given to the role of the customer service representative. These programs are designed to fail because they create the image of service but actually inhibit customer loyalty. Why? They pleasantly respond to customer inquiries, but cannot actually address customer issues. *Poorly empowered customer service programs actually become a barrier to sales by increasing buyer's remorse.*

**Exceptional sales teams have superior integration of the outside sales and customer service roles.** Why? Organizations with best practices understand that even though their sales force may be closing the sale, multiple sales do not produce customer loyalty. What? Yes that's correct. Loyalty doesn't really take place until we know the needs of the customer and maximize the customer experience. Most of the time our outside sales force only receives part of the total information required to meet the needs of our customer base. During initial sales to prospects, this is



especially true. So customer service contacts become increasingly valuable as they obtain vital information to profile customers and identify requirements for the next sales visit. *If customer service representatives are performing an integrated role with sales, your outside sales people are fully informed.*

**Customer service may represent your best source of information for customer development activities.** Why? Service is the final phase of the current transaction but also the beginning of the next sale. Customers recognize they need customer service representatives to ensure they meet their requirements. As such they appreciate the non-invasive sales style of the customer service function. The co dependent relationship between service and customers provides an ideal information gathering opportunity. *Your sales program should recognize that customer service presents a unique opportunity to not only satisfy the customer but to build the foundation for loyalty and account management.*

**Customer service training should include the key elements of customer information required by your outside sales team.** Sales teams require information to ensure they are meeting the needs of their customer base. Much of the information is universal across organizations, industries and products. We miss opportunities to improve sales by not obtaining this information within the customer service process. Information easily gathered by service includes product performance, customer satisfaction, expectations, products or services of interest, and customer contacts or organizational structure. *Training customer service to collect information, allows our sales force to adapt to changing customer requirements.*

**Service programs should increase sales during their routine activities.** How? Do your service representatives asking for add-on sales? Do they ask the customer if they need anything else or make suggestions for additional products or services? Are they asking the customer if there are additional people that they need to be working with in the customer's organization? If not we are missing opportunity because your service staff know the sales history and the customers. So they can active sell during the service process when this activity is perceived as a service rather than a sale. *By simply asking for details, customer service represents an excellent non-intrusive way to increase sales and customer satisfaction.*

Sales activities can be improved with information obtained by service, especially account and business development activities. Customer service provides the opportunity to consistently communicate with customers. If your service people are communicating the sales message for the account, they are supporting sales and



marketing. The sales message and the account management plan need to be actively communicated so service can be a valuable source for expanding the customer contact base. How? Every call received by service represents an opportunity to expand the base of contacts. Service should politely request additional contacts as the names of buyers, agents, managers, and influencers can easily be obtained during service calls. Often this can be done by a simple “is there anyone else I should know in your organization?” *Contacts obtained during customer service calls are documented and passed on to improve account planning and sales.*

**Benchmarking customer service represents the best method for determining performance.** Customer service metrics can be part of the annual sales plan and the active sales program. Integrating these metrics into your sales program establishes the link between sales and service. They can include call volume, response quality, and time to solution, return call volume and order fulfillment efficiency. However, to integrate with sales, metrics should also include new contacts, order add-ons, and customer satisfaction. A good set of metrics will monitor the delivery of a customer service program. *By focusing our efforts on a more integrated set of metrics, we build the service and sales competency essential to a proactive sales organization.*

**Where does this all lead?** The answer is it leads to satisfied customers who believe they have superior service from a core supplier. Your sales people now know the issues at the customer and receive consistent feedback from their service representatives. We communicate a precise image to all of the customers. The customer believes they have a strong advocate within the sales team and we are actively informed of issues. Sales people have an open source of referrals and know the key issues at each customer. *Customer service is fully integrated into our sales activities and our organization is selling as a team, to build customer loyalty.*

Invest in an exceptional customer service process today. *It will lead to sales results well beyond your existing sales objectives and build a core element of sales sustainability.*