

Sales Sustainability™ – Sales Integrated Marketing (SIM)

>> A well-defined marketing program directly integrated with the sales program is a critical element in sales sustainability.

What drives marketing in a small business? Often it's just a reaction to sales performance. When sales are down, a business decides it's time to "do something" about it. "Let's advertise" is often the suggestion made for lower sales. *Why doesn't it solve the problem?*

Failure to have a well-defined marketing program directly integrated into the sales effort is one of the most common mistakes among small businesses. Small business needs to deliver a clear, concise message to prospective customers. *It is more important than we realize.*

Why? Delivery of the marketing message is a core process in the sales program. When sales efforts adhere to the marketing message they build a well-defined image of the company and the product. *This message becomes the company image to your customer base.*

When the message is delivered consistently and effectively, both marketing and sales will be building a brand or service image for the company. Over an extended period this builds equity in your company and produces a defined relationship with your customer base. *Your customers know what they are buying and why they are buying it from your company.*

The key to a successful integration of marketing and sales is a clear and precise definition of the company's desired image 1-3 years ahead. This requires business managers to identify not only what they do well today but also what strengths they need to maintain and develop for the future. *We need to visualize the future image of our business.*

A fragmented message often leads to customer confusion and loss of sales force credibility. Changing the message frequently occurs when we do not have a well-defined image of the company. Our organization must have the discipline to develop the message. Once we agree to the message, we need to stick to it in all elements of the sales effort.

The results of the marketing effort are evolutionary and not necessarily immediate. This is why the sales program needs to adjust their process to ensure that it compliments the marketing message. Sales managers audit the sales activities of their staff to ensure that the message is being reinforced through the statements and actions of their salespeople.

“Lack of marketing focus” is a key problem in many small companies. Small companies need to make their reputation on a single focused message. This process is not a short-term excursion but needs to be well defined and monitored during the daily routine.

Many growing companies try to project an image of selling everything. The fact is that they cannot deliver upon this message. Successful marketing programs often avoid this message. Why? It produces a lack of sales credibility in the prospective customer base. Customers value consistent delivery of your sales promise. *If your company cannot deliver on your sales promise customers will eventually purchase elsewhere. Don't step in this marketing hole, it's too deep.*

Sales sustainability requires customer feedback through a marketing driven process. Prospective, existing, and new customers all provide valuable feedback on their view of your company. They represent the current state of your marketing message. Obtaining feedback is a critical process for adjusting the sales program. *Don't lose this opportunity in your process.*

Methods for obtaining feedback require planned & direct communication. They include: using the sales force to check the views of the customer base, using customer surveys through a third party, management contacting key customers, and customer service follow up at prospective customers. These methods give customers the opportunity to provide highly objective views of the company and its current image. *Actively incorporate one or more of these alternatives into your program today.*

Without customer input, sales management and marketing efforts are operating in a vacuum. Marketing results often are under performing or lead to failure. Why? Often adjustments are not made on either a timely or evolutionary basis. What do you mean? Customer feedback provides clues to identify the changes necessary for achieving your objectives. This allows your company to adapt to the perception of your customer base. Marketing is attempting to influence the perception of these customers over time. *Adapting the marketing mix through customer feedback produces the desired results.*

Most business owners see marketing as purely promotion (advertising). It is much more than just product, promotion, price, and place (distribution/delivery). Today's mix is even more complicated for small business. Why? Resources and customer behaviors limit the time and viability of reaching your customer. Small business has limited resources to effectively employ marketing techniques to stimulate sales and achieve its desired image. That makes the process more complicated but also drives us toward focus. It is also why marketing is often confused with advertising and limits the results achieved for many small businesses.

Small business owners may need to focus advertising on those media that actually hit their audience, but they also need to look at marketing at the fringes. What? Yes, marketing comes in many forms on the fringe of your business. Where? Packaging. What does the presentation of your product or service say about your business? Do your salespeople wear uniforms or use items with the company logo? Do you provide small gifts to customers such as pens? What do all of these items say about your company and are they consistent with your marketing message? These are all opportunities to employ the fringes of the marketing mix to achieve your sales and marketing objectives very effectively. *Consider the opportunities!*

A growing company needs to review its image during their annual review process. This ensures that their marketing effort integrates well with business requirements and the sales program. Sales results should produce a return on the marketing investment. If they don't produce a marketing ROI, then the investment isn't justified. How? The return comes from leads, improved margins, new products, market share gains, and sales volume growth. If you don't see this in your program consider changing the mix or the metrics you use. *Effectively using the marketing element will lead to increased sales performance, a well-defined image, and an improved relationship with your customers.*