



## **Sales System by the Numbers**

By Michael Temple

As we approach the New Year it is a good time to discuss gardening. Most people reading this will say "Gardening? I have six inches of snow outside!" However the point is that the New Year is a good time to plan for your growth for the next year. As you review how you have done this year ask yourself the questions "Did I hit all my goals? Did I make the revenue goals my school was shooting for? If not then read on.

When you plant a garden most people spend time preparing the soil, picking out the plants, and deciding what you want to grow. Once these tasks are done you can actually get out and plant the seeds for your garden. With water, sun, and care your garden will grow many different plants and help to sustain you throughout the year.

A business is no different; specifically a career school business. Many schools don't spend enough time planning how or what they want to grow each year. Most schools will depend on some type of marketing to draw new students to the school and hope that they get enough students to reach the revenue goals for the year. Following this strategy is like throwing a bunch of seeds into your garden, walking away and hoping it will grow the way you want it to.

Any good farmer or a good sales person will tell you the success in either field is a numbers game. You need to plant enough crops or generate enough prospects to reach the final goal. A career school should be no different.

Further you want to diversify your sources of revenues. A good farmer will tell you that by diversifying his crops if something happens to one crop he still has the others to generate some income. A good sales person will tell you that having more than one product or solution to offer a client increases his chances of finding the a fit between what he is offering and what the client needs.

Naturally, one source of income is bringing in new students. There are multiple ways to bring in new students. You can mail them brochures, post cards, and letters hoping they respond and agree to come to the school. You can advertise for them on the radio, TV, and in magazines. These are all good ways to generate business, but there are also other ways.

Another form of income should be private contracts. How many of you are out seeking private corporate training contracts with companies located near your schools? How many of you can identify the top 100 businesses in your area that would hire your students and would be good candidates for private training contracts? When was the last time someone from your organization sat down and spoke with someone from each of these businesses?

These businesses are the equivalent of your seeds of prosperity. By identifying them, learning their needs, and cultivating a relationship you could be on your way to growing a very fruitful year in terms of revenue.

Businesses that are interested in growing are always looking for ways to improve. Businesses improve through many different ways, but there are two ways they can improve that directly impacts you.

1.) Hiring talented individuals graduates from your school to help them grow their business. They should be getting some or all of this talent from you.

2.) Train the staff they already have in new techniques. Continuing education is increasingly becoming more important to our economy and our labor force in the U.S. Businesses that want to compete effectively will have to invest in their employees.

As a career school you should be communicating with these top 100 businesses in your area on a regular basis. You should have a systematic method for tracking how often you contact these businesses. You want to be contacting them for several reasons:

1. **To educate them about your school and programs.** Communicate with them as to why they should be hiring your students. If they hire your students your name recognition increases and potential students will be more enticed to join your school because they know the job prospects will be good when they finish.
2. **To learn their needs.** By communicating with these companies you will learn what challenges they are facing and what types of skills they need in new employees. This will help your career school continually adapt and improve your programs.
3. **To develop private training contracts.** These businesses need certain skills in new employees but they often need skill enhancement for their present employees as well. By developing a relationship with them you can offer to develop a private training program for them. This training can be customized to their specific needs. It can be on site with customized training materials.
4. **To encourage/promote the flow of new students.** If these businesses come to know you and understand your school and programs and believe you are adapting your programs to their needs they will remember you. When they have new recruits or employees needing additional continuing education they will remember you and be more likely to recommend that these individuals get training at your school instead of somewhere else.

These businesses should be viewed as your seeds of prosperity. If you take care of them and give them what they need you will develop a fine growth strategy. You will be increasing your brand recognition and you will be farming for the future.

Many of you may be saying, "That sounds great, but how do I implement a plan like this?" Here are a few basic steps to implement a growth strategy:

1. **Identify all of the businesses who hire your students.** This list may include a few hundred businesses or it may include thousands. The idea is to develop a good solid list of businesses that can help you with the four goals detailed above.
2. **Rank these businesses by importance.** Some of these companies will be very large organizations who hire hundreds of new people a year. They may have several hundred employees who need continual training and skill updates. Some of these companies will be small businesses. At a minimum you should identify the top 100 or the top 50. These "top" companies will be companies that you focus most of your sales efforts on. You also want to have all the businesses ranked in some fashion such as A, B, C, or Hot, Warm, Cold, etc.
3. **Develop a sales system.** You will want to develop a system for contacting these businesses in a predictable manner. Perhaps you contact your top 50 or "A" group every month. Your contact can be via personalized letters, post cards, flyers, or better yet, personal visits. The next group, let's call them the "B" group maybe gets contacted once per quarter. The point is that you develop a marketing and sales system. A system requires that you schedule your marketing and sales efforts

over a period of time and perform the tasks on a schedule. Each task or activity could be moving them through a long sales cycle or just be "drip" marketing by reminding them you exist. By maintaining this regular contact you will be developing a relationship with them.

4. **Develop new business with these companies.** Over time as you learn about these companies and their specific needs you will be able to identify opportunities for private training contracts and other potential products you could provide such as books or training materials.

The key to this strategy is understanding your customers, which includes more than just your students, but also includes the businesses and companies you are training your students for. However, as with most knowledge it is only effective when it is used. With this strategy you need to develop a structured and measurable sales system. Once the system is developed you need to execute it and begin measuring your results. If you don't get the results you had hoped for, you will have the information and data to adjust your process and re-apply it. The process is always growing and changing as you learn more about your prospects and customers and learn what things work and what things don't. Obviously to benefit from this growing knowledge base you have to be tracking and measuring it.

A sales system is very different than sales efforts. A sales effort is a phone call, letter, appointment, etc. A sales system is a continued combination of phone calls, meetings, and direct mail over a period of time. More importantly it is predictable, measurable, and performed continually. For example, imagine you have identified 50 businesses that employ your students within a 50 mile radius of your school. The next step would be to rank them by size, number of students hired, number of employees, etc. These criteria should be constant and measurable. You should use the same criteria when grading all companies.

After they have been identified and ranked, the information on the company is stored in a centralized place that is available to your sales and marketing personnel. Ideally this information includes contact information such as address, email, web site, and main contact person. You might include other pieces of information such as type of business the company is in, top company officers, number of employees they have, number of students they have hired from your program(s) etc. The purpose of having additional information is to model these "ideal" customers over time.

Next you want to develop a systematic calendar of marketing or sales initiatives that you will apply to each group you have identified. For example, your top 20 or "A" group will get 4 mailings each year, 8 phone calls, and 2 personal visits. This system can be anything you want, but it needs to be consistent. Next you schedule these events at certain times throughout the year. For example, they may get one personal visit one month before classes start. They may get another personal visit one month before classes end. They may get a phone call each month in between and a mailing every other month.

Next, your sales system needs to track the results of each of these marketing and sales events. It is not enough to just complete them. You must complete them and keep notes on what was talked about and the response you received. At a minimum this information should be available for the sales rep and sales manager to review. Ideally you would have a sales and marketing task force that would meet monthly and discuss the results you are tracking and how to use this information to improve the process.

Finally, you will need to apply this sales system to businesses not previously identified. You will want to use the data and information from your system to see what a typical "A" customer looks like and what a typical "B" customer looks like. For example, "A" businesses could be companies with 50 or more employees, 1 million in annual sales, and operate in building trades. Once you have a model of what the customers in these groups look like you will apply that model to new businesses and try to continually add to your database of new prospects.

You can start marketing initiatives to attract these "A" prospects. As this group begins to respond you track which piece of marketing or which campaign they responded to. This will allow you to build a file of what types of marketing are effective and where you should concentrate your future marketing efforts. For

example, suppose over time you find that new "A" prospects always respond to offers for a seminar sponsored by your company, but never respond to newspaper ads about your programs or services. Over time this information will become known and you can begin to apply your marketing dollars to seminars instead of newspaper ads.

You won't be able to build this sales system overnight. It takes time and patience. You need to collect information and take time to analyze what it is saying. By doing this your process will begin to grow and adapt. It will become more effective over time and eventually grow from a seed into a tree which yields an abundance of fruit. This process is a journey and all journeys begin with a single step.

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