

REGIONAL ALTERNATIVES

with **Rob Shirley**



Selling by the Book and Using Technology to Maximize It

In today's frenetic markets, your customers are shopping. Build your contacts within existing accounts while you have easy access to them. It is a competitive world, and running your team has aspects that are both offensive and defensive. You should take on the role of coach to excel in this environment.

My Top Tips

I. Utilize technology to improve communications and cut costs

- Help your customer utilize your online services to place orders with you. This may often include loading their customer base into your system. Make it as easy as possible, and you will end up with a lot more orders.
- Tie your contacts within each account together and communicate ideas, improvements and new services to them via email. If done right, you will become the mortar keeping the many bricks of major accounts together.
- Provide reports electronically; use voice, email, text and face-to-face meetings.
- Show them how to use the information you are gathering for them to better communicate with their customers. Some ideas here include knowing the frequency of orders, number of recipients, size of orders, urgency of orders and who pays for them.

II. You need some basic building blocks to set targets, measure and manage your goals. Generally, the 10/90 rule applies to a company's customer base; this means that 10% of your customers are creating 90% of your revenue. Spend half of your time on each of the two. Let's call the 10/90 group "Large" and the 90/10 group "Growth."

• Large Accounts

1. These are your best opportunity to sell your "full suite" of services and have the most potential contacts in multiple departments — shoot for three as a minimum. Build your defensive network up because when a customer spends more they are more likely to shop vendors.
2. Set up a regular account review every quarter with emphasis on metrics to be measured, and find ways to get them online to buy more easily, more frequently and more consistently. This helps you *and* them save costs.
3. Educate department contacts on how to use the data you are gathering to more efficiently sell, bill and manage their customers. This can be done quite effectively in an online demo like GoToMeeting. You can even include multiple (non-competitive) customers at once.

• Growth Accounts

1. These accounts are many times your future! It is a percentage game, and they all need to be contacted. You will be surprised how many of your contacts have turned over.
2. Account penetration to "end users" is often the best path. Many times you actually have their names and can call them to ask how service has been and how you can improve.
3. These accounts appreciate a call because they know they are a very small fish for you. Find ways to tether them electronically; mail them articles of interest and email them regularly. I find electronic newsletters to be effective. ■

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Advice from Experts

Larry Forbes has been in the business of relationship selling for over 30 years in Texas, and he has some customers that have followed him for 20 years through three industries. Larry has three well-honed tips:

1. Use the "Pop By" technique of calling your customer while en route saying, "Hey I'm stopping by Starbucks on the way to see you; what can I pick up for you?"
2. "Send out at least five hand-written notes per day to someone you have met; take customers to lunch."
3. "Always carry business cards; I literally buy them by the thousand."