

The TACTIC: Every product has a buying cycle.

The STORY:

Wendy was not your typical car salesperson. There was a reason why I've bought my last three cars from her and, as I discovered, I was not the only one who had been taken care of in a similar fashion. Once, looking into the side room where the dealership's computer system was, I discovered the ubiquitous "Salesperson of the Month" plaques. For the past 10 years, there were only 10 months out of 120 months that her name was not at the top.

Aside from knowing her product down to the last nut and bolt and knowing how to sell in a professional manner, she had stumbled into an incredibly simple system to keep her customers coming back. A system anyone can use for any product or service.

I have to admit, I talked her into telling me about it. When she first started selling cars, it was obvious to her that folks didn't buy a car every year. But they did buy every three or four years. That was their buying cycle.

That's the key—the buying cycle. Ninety-five percent of her customers would buy another car three to four years out. Guaranteed. The only question was would they buy one from her or someone else?

So she set up a four-year calendar with reminders. She then decided to contact each customer at those predefined points in the future. Always with a phone call or a personal visit. The goal of the contact was always the same: How's the car? Problems? Concern? Good? Bad? At the three-quarter point to three years, the goal of the contact changed.

"If you were in the market for a new car, what would you like it to do for you?"

She found out what their needs were. She then literally asked their permission to let her talk about what was available to meet those needs.

At that moment, she knew ninety-five percent of the people she asked that question would buy another car within 12 to 18 months.

Are you beginning to see why she was so successful?

The RESULT:

Wendy had positioned herself in the customer's buying cycle and in their mind as the person to see for a new car. Think about this from her customer's point of view. "Hey, I'm going to buy another car soon; might as well deal with Wendy since she already knows me."

DISCUSSION:

It is obvious, when you think about it, that everyone will buy some product or service again. In fact, there is no product or service that won't be bought again by the same individual. The only thing that changes is the person from whom they will buy it.

Salespeople have a tendency to focus on who I am going to sell to today or this month to meet the quota. Everyone else, potential prospects, current prospects, current customers and past customers, get ignored in the "meet the monthly quota" frenzy.

When was the last time you contacted a customer who bought from you six months ago to find out what their future buying plans are? A couple of them? Do you contact everyone of them on a planned basis?

The most common excuse given by salespeople is "I don't have the time since I need to meet quota." The second most common excuse is "I don't want to have them think I'm a pushy salesperson." Neither of these excuses is valid.

APPROACH:

The first step is to know what the length of the buying cycle is. For example, food buying is on a weekly cycle. Vehicles are bought on a four- to five-year cycle. Vehicles that are leased are leased on a two- to three-year cycle. Know the buying cycle. Form letters don't count as customer contact.

This is a person-to-person activity. Since you know the buying cycle, you can plan the outreach activity that is appropriate during this cycle.

Initially, it may be a phone call to see how things are going. Toward the middle of the cycle, a personal visit is best to see how things are going.

At the three-quarter point, make sure you visit to set the future date on which the customer decides whether or not to buy from you. He will buy what you sold him again from someone. Will it be you?

As long as you have something of value to communicate to the customer, you can never contact him enough.

THOUGHT:

Find out when the timing is right, and be there.