



5 Steps to Create a Virtual Sales Team

In the Fast Five Marketing Series, I share strategies that have worked for our business and that I have seen effectively implemented for our customers who are brick & mortar small businesses throughout the world. Given the current situation of the economy, sales are key to the survival and thrival of a business.

Often times it is challenging because hiring an entire sales force is costly and then if you determine you have the budget and can afford one, finding good sales people can prove a costly adventure. I have personally built sales teams from an entire outside sales force of over 150 to a telephone bank with over 50 sales associates. I did this in my former days when I was with Accenture where budgets were lucrative and constraints were minimal. Now, as a small business owner, the tables are turned and I find that constraints are tight, budgets are tight and key decisions are critical.

I’m going to share with you what I have found to be critical in growing small business affordably and efficiently. It is steps to creating a virtual sales team. Let me start by explaining what I mean with “virtual sales team.” One of the most overlooked components of sales is a business’ existing customers. I have found that if you can engage with them, provide them with the right tools and an easy system, they can become a tremendous virtual sales team for you that creates tremendous results and takes minimal effort and virtually no expense since you typically pay when they convert sales.

I’m going to share with you 5 steps you can follow to create your own virtual sales team.

1. Unique Differences – Know what makes your business unique. Can you list three things right now that make you different from any competitor? I don’t mean the typical things like excellent





customer service or quality product or experienced staff. I mean the things that when you say them, it resonates as true unique differences that have value, merit and set you apart from any competitor in the market place. Once you have identified these three things, then you can use them to communicate to your virtual sales team. This will help them help you.

2. Identify your Greatest Advocates – Finding the 20% of your customer base that are true raving fans, willing to become a virtual sales team is key. Now you are not going to go out to them and ask them to come to work for you. You are merely going to give them the tools to make it easy for them to refer and rave about your business. In identifying these advocates, I recommend identifying your top revenue generating customers and also those that currently refer you the most business. You might think that these would be one in the same, but they are typically not. Your greatest advocates are not always your top revenue generating customers. Where do you go for this information? Well, your point of purchase system or database should give you the ability to run a report that allows you to see the highest revenue generating customer. Then, if you have implemented one of the more effective online social media rewards tools that integrates social media, email and texting, you will be able to determine the highest referring customers.

3. Compelling Offer – Now that you have your virtual sales team identified, you just need to create a compelling offer to get them excited to help you. Enlist their help, tell them your goal and then create an offer for them to assist you. You want to incentive, reward and excite them because you want them enthused about helping you grow your business. When they are excited, they will convey your message in an excited manner to their friends. And let's face it, if they are good customers, then you want more customers like them...and who do they know? Friends that are like them. That's why it is critical to get them on board. Create an offer that rewards them for referring customers. This program can be mapped and include rewards for referring a specific number of customers and you can even include a grand prize that rewards the person that refers the most customers to you. This grand prize could be something substantial that could also be used as public relations for your business. Meaning you could take a photo of your customer receiving the reward and place it in the newspaper with an article that talks about new strategies to affordably grow a business in a down economy.





4. **Monitor & Adjust** – Monitoring the progress, response and engagement is critical. The last thing you want to do is launch your virtual sales team out into the market and then leave them on their own. I would recommend running regular reports that show you how many people are engaged, how many are referring people to you and how many are actually active in the program with you. This will tell you quickly how excited people are. If the results are flat, then you need to adjust and consider revamping the rewards or you may need to look at the referral tools and adjust accordingly to make it more appealing and engaging.

5. **Automated Tracking / Reward System** – One thing that will turn off people quickly is if they do the work you ask and actually refer people to you and then the reward you promised never gets delivered. I would never recommend a manual tracking system because you will be asking for hassles. If it relies on humans, it will be guaranteed to have flaws. I recommend an automated system and one that is tied directly into your social media, texting and email system. There are a small handful that are focused specifically on assisting small businesses with solutions. That's what you need to have in place prior to implementing a virtual sales force strategy. This will allow for rewards to automatically be delivered, tracked and used by your customers via their email and cell phone. No interference from you. That's the key. You want a system that allows you to create the strategy, reward levels, messages and then it runs on autopilot from there.

So often I talk to business owners and they tell me their strategies for going out and getting new customers. They talk about the pay-per-click advertising, direct marketing, email marketing and various other strategies. Yet, I have never spoken to a business owner that told me about the strategy he is implementing focused on driving referrals from his existing customers. According to U.S. Bancorp the average cost of acquiring a new customer by a small business is \$230 per customer through TV advertising, \$125 per customer through specialty magazines and \$70 per customer through direct mail campaigns. With a virtual sales team and a focused effort on an existing customer base, a business can acquire a new customer for less than \$10 per customer and that includes the cost of automated tools. Just a proven and cost effective strategy that so many business owners overlook while they are focusing on chasing new customers and spending a lot of excess money.

