

No Crutches In Sales

It is time for each of us to stop citing uncontrollable conditions as reasons for our sales challenges. No more excuses. It's time to get off your crutch. Whether you are selling for an integrator, retailer, distributor, manufacturer, or for multiple products as a representative, every one of you must stop and realize what you are saying when you make an excuse for why your sales are as they are.

You've all heard the phrase "30,000-foot view," so let's start there with our industry. Consumer Electronics generates approximately \$120 billion annually and custom/integration is \$20 billion. There are about 500 manufacturers, 200 rep firms, several dozen distributors (many more locations), hundreds of retailers and thousands of custom integrators that essentially drive the CI business to its \$20 billion ring on the register each year. It has grown, folks, and it has grown in the face of tough times and good, declining prices and margins on gear, as well as escalating prices for real estate, fuel, transportation, and the privilege of watching TV at home.

But, in recent months I have heard many people wax poetic about the housing market decline, increasing competition in (pick a product category, any category), delayed new products, back orders, allocations, confusion over video formats, and on and on. We're too good of an industry to be harping on what are essentially excuses for why the top-line number isn't bigger and the bottom line more lucrative. Stop it now or you're in for a slappin'.

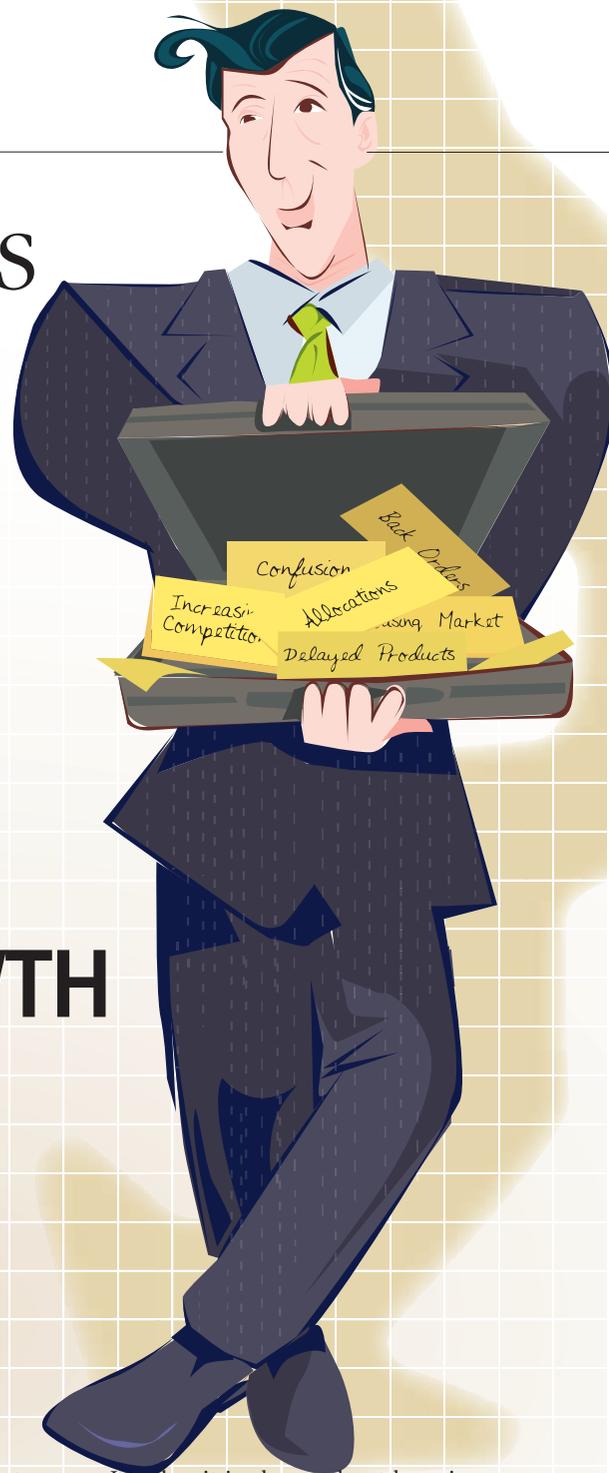
Sure, the housing market has calmed down. We can't change it but we have to figure out how to sell regardless of this trend. Competition has been around since the second guy living in a cave noticed his neighbor had a little fire. Cave-neighbor wanted some of the heat and tried his best to move in on the glowing warmth only to be rebuffed and return to his rock shack to "DIY" his own fire. Deal with your competition by bettering yourself.

Counting on new products to grow your sales? Shame. New products are to be counted on only after they have been shipping for a certain amount of time and you can measure

EXCUSES WILL ONLY HAMPER THE GROWTH OF YOUR BUSINESS

the market response. How many CI products actually come in and immediately reach their sales potential? In the meantime, what are you doing to sell what's in stock?

Back orders, allocations, and format follies don't help sales but none of these are new issues for any of us who have been around for more than a season or two. Plan your buying better, talk with your factory and rep people, and have a contingency plan. As for the format fun, this is simple: pick a platform, know it well, and sell it confidently without bagging on the other format. You are in sales, not on the debate team.



In sales, it is always about knowing your customer. CI businesses know that their customers want entertainment, convenience, and reliability. Manufacturers know that their dealers want useful innovation and support. Reps know that their customers want honest advice, service, and clear communication to all of their staff. Distributors know that their customers need product instantly and communication with a knowledgeable staff.

In your business, do you have a regularly scheduled sales meeting? All sales meetings, no matter what the business model, should contain the following essential ingredients:

- ▶ Actual sales results review
- ▶ Sales performance versus goal review
- ▶ Opportunities
- ▶ Challenges
- ▶ Success stories
- ▶ Failures (from which to learn)
- ▶ Needs
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Date and time for the next sales meeting

A discussion centered on these elements does not provide for excuses, crutches, or other methods of deflecting responsibility for making sales.

When the housing market softens, that's a reality. Good sales people will think of how to deal with it. And if these good sales people don't have the answer, they will ask others for ideas. That's what you want in your organization.

Here are some ideas: attachment selling, additions to essential products, and audio with televisions. Sell a more versatile mount for the TV. Upgrade the remote. Commission a cabinetmaker

to design a beautiful piece of furniture for it. Sell lots of speakers. For instance, sell eight speakers in a 7.1-surround sound configuration.

Electricity needs an attachment sale. There is no shortage of power conditioning products available today. Electricity also likes to make light. Sell some.

Audio products, even in our wireless world, still need great interconnects and lots of them. And there are many nice AV furniture brands to sell, which are great for concealing local zone gear in bedrooms.

Sell distributed audio. Up sell the touch screens and sell server and iPod control. Sell Cat-5 audio systems to clients who have an old system, want to update it but want to allocate most of their new money to spend on the home theater. Cat-5 systems are cost-effective, good-sounding systems.

Sell something ahead of its time. Let's talk IP-based systems. Easy to install, easy to configure, and fun to control wherever you are.

Sell service and experience. As a rep you

should visit your dealers and ask more questions about what's happening in their business. Not because there's a sales crutch lurking but because you want to know more about the dealer or distributor to whom you sell. How many customer touches do you make in a typical month as a rep? How many are with your key dealers and how many are with dealers in your territory that don't do much if any, business with your lines but who are good businesses? You need to visit a few more of these every month.

Sales is a proactive career and when we fall into the mindset of "well, (insert crutch) is hurting sales" then it's time for a reassessment. Things can get tough but successful sales people will always focus on the solution, not the problem.

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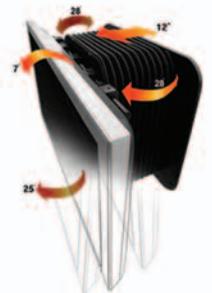


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