Expand Sales in Your Existing Accounts

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When a company's profitability is threatened, particularly in tough economic times when revenues decline, a cascading set of questions starting at the top make their way down through the organization. They are some variation of "how can we raise our revenues and/or cut our expenses?" Not surprisingly, the conversations inevitably end up focusing on where to cut costs. Increasing sales, while a source of significant opportunity for most companies, usually gets less attention than reducing costs because reducing costs is easier than increasing sales. It is more immediate and within the company's direct control.

Keeping with the theme of reducing costs, the options first focus on variable costs which include the cost of employees, advertising, materials, supplies, utilities and maintaining inventory. Of these options, most companies do what they can to protect their employees by cutting other costs first and only when they've done all they reasonably can do, they cut staff, benefits, bonuses and salaries.

After some combination of expense reductions, the company is left to conduct business the best it can with what they have left. The problem, however, is that unless the company reverses its falling revenues, the same exercise will soon need to be repeated. Cutting expenses, while often a necessary action, is short term. Unless accompanied at some point by a reversal of the firm's declining revenues, it only reinforces a continuing downward spiral.

So in turning your attention to increasing revenue, what are your best options? With strategic measures like selling your assets out of the scope of the conversation, you can either sell more to your existing accounts or sell to new accounts. If you have "account level" market share to gain or some flexibility in what you can offer, the "lowest hanging fruit" is generally in your existing accounts. Where you have existing relationships, contracts and a history of good performance within an existing account, your sales effort is easier than with a new account. It may require that you have some flexibility in your offerings, terms or conditions, but if you can adapt, even just a little, it can be a rich new source of revenue.

Here are a few basic steps to follow in finding new opportunities to increase revenues in your existing accounts:

- Identify your top existing customers with market share to gain and their key decision makers.
- Make appointments with their key decision makers and discuss their business needs related to your offerings and how you might better meet their needs – not limiting your discussion to merely your existing "off-the-shelf" offerings.
- Consider how you might extend or change your offerings so that you can best meet their needs. It may require adding services or products to your offerings. It may be that you need to add features to your existing offerings. It may be that you have to change your terms and/or conditions. It may require you to partner with another firm. Be open and consider all the possibilities.
- Craft a customized solution to your customer's needs using all your available resources and capabilities. And of course within the constraints of what is considered "good business" for your company.
- Present your proposed solution to your organization for approval. When profits are down, minds are more open and creative solutions are more feasible.
- Armed with an internal approval to proceed and a verified capability to deliver, share your personalized solution with your customer and close the sale.

There are obviously important details to be followed in executing each of these steps, but they are straightforward and very achievable. Particularly in tough economic times, customers are looking for new solutions and accommodating suppliers are finding new sources of revenues. You and your company can become both a short and long term beneficiary of these tough times with good sales execution along with a bit of creativity and flexibility. And by the way, the same approach works for new accounts.

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