3 Strategies to Boost Your Sales

As a retailer, you know that costs and overhead expenses increase on a steady basis. That means you need to continually seek ways to boost your sales to offset these expenses. Here are three, low-cost strategies you can use to increase your sales with your existing customers.

Upsell. The first, and most important strategy, is to teach your sales associates how to upsell. This does not mean telling your team to ask, "Do you want this too?" Effective upselling means suggesting items that are appropriate to each customer, using descriptive words and phrases, and demonstrating enthusiasm. Here is an example,

"And for dessert, we have this incredible Bombastic Brownie that will electrify your tastebuds. We start with a fresh homemade brownie that's warmed up until it is piping hot. We add two scoops of rich French vanilla ice cream to it and then drizzle chocolate fudge over the top. Then we swirl fresh whipping cream over that and top is off with a bright-red maraschino cherry. It's only $4.95."

Are you drooling? Can't you visualize this luscious dessert in your mind? Compare that presentation with this one: "And for dessert, we have a brownie with ice cream. It's $6.95."

Experienced restaurant servers understand the importance of using descriptive words to enhance their dishes. As a retailer, you can also use this concept when talking about your products. Create mental images that help your customers visualize the item. For example, "This scarf will look amazing with your blazer. The blue looks great on you and highlights the pinstripes in your blazer."

You should also involve staff by encouraging them to share ideas on improving their results. A simple way to do this is to have them create a list of which add-on items can be suggested for primary products. Engaging your team in the process will increase their level of buy-in which means they will be more inclined to use the ideas that are generated.

Recruit the right people. Hiring tends to be on-going challenge for most retailers. However, one of the most common recruiting mistakes is to hire people based on technical skill rather than cultural or attitudinal fit. I believe you can teach people almost anything if they possess the right attitude and have the desire to learn. Focus on hiring people who genuinely like helping others. Your part-time, minimum wage associate affects your customer's experience and will influence their decision to return. Employing caring and friendly people with a can-do attitude will influence your sales more than most advertising and marketing efforts.

I recently read an article that stated most managers spend more time on almost everything else compared to hiring the right people for the business. I recommend teaching your team how to properly interview candidates and suggest that a minimum of two interviews be conducted for every high-potential person. Plus, the use of assessment tools can ensure the person possesses the characteristics you want and need in a team member.

Another approach is to have other sales associates spend a few minutes talking with each applicant. They are the ones who will have to work with the new hire so it's important that they connect. Plus, the interviewee often lets down his or her guard when talking to a peer versus a manager. A few words of caution: allow your sales associate to participate in a few interviews before you ask them to undertake this on their own. You should also give them some specific suggestions and ideas on what you are looking for. Lastly, make sure the individual is mature enough to take on this responsibility.

Run occasional contests. Contests or incentive programs can be effectively when used properly. I worked for one retailer who ran contests for its sales associate virtually every month. In many cases, the same people always won which meant that everyone else stopped trying after a while.

Here is one retail contest that very effective:

Pass The Buck. Here's how it works: Choose one item in the store that you want your associates to focus on selling. At the beginning of the shift, hold up a twenty-dollar bill and tell your team that the first person who sells that item will receive the money. The second person to sell that SKU then takes the $20 from the first person. Continue this process until the end of the shift, day or scheduled time frame. The person who has the money gets to keep it.

These strategies may sound simple but my experience has taught me that it is always the basics that work. Rather than spending thousands of dollars to drive new customers to your business, invest the time implementing these strategies and maximize your sales with your existing customers.

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