

AMP UP Your Customer Relationships

by Janet A. Gregory

Sales is all about making a connection. Do you have contacts that span a wide variety of business and/or generational styles? Have you been trying to connect with them but can't seem to figure out what makes them tick? Have you wanted to experiment with new ways to communicate with clients, customers or partners but weren't sure what would work? Today there are more options than ever that can help you amp up your customer relationships.

Compatible Connections

The workforce is very diverse. Align your communication style with your prospect or customer so that it will be compatible with their preferences. Consider the business and generational style to appropriately position your communications. The insights below are drawn from Cam Marston's book *Motivating the "What's in it for me?" Workforce*.

- *The millennials* (born 1979-1988) grew up with technology and will experiment; they prefer multi-media (YouTube, podcasts, vlogs, music, Facebook, etc.) over plain text and text or IM over email. If you are selling to them, you will find they are loyal buyers looking for things that are unique or common with a twist, but they don't want to be rushed.
- *The Xers* (born 1965-1978) embrace technology; they prefer blogs, email and IM but are willing to try anything. In a buyer-seller relationship, they are skeptical buyers and reluctant to give buyer loyalty unless they feel in control of the sale. They value peer-to-peer referrals, can spot a phony miles away, want open communication and don't want to "be sold".
- *The boomers* (born 1946-1964) prefer individualized email, IM and F2F meetings. Buyer loyalty is established based on teamwork, partnership and the recognition of their individuality. They value work ethic in others and products/services that will allow them to gain more control of their time.
- *The matures* (born before 1945) prefer personalized F2F, phone, fax and snail-mail communications. They are very loyal buyers once trust is established. They value superb interpersonal skills, tenure, timeliness and quality in the companies & people they do business with.

New Ways to Connect

Email & phone are the norm today. Yawn. It's time to try some new ways to connect with your customers, partners and clients. Funny thing is that snail-mail and even F2F meetings can be attention getters because they are less common in today's business world. There are also other media that can be useful in customer communication.

- *Use conference calls* liberally but do it differently. ... Have people drop-in based on your agenda; not everyone needs to be on the entire call. ...Have the conference call, call them.
- *Use IM* (instant messaging) to catch customers early in the day, between meetings, on conference calls, or late at night. IM is great for confirming information, checking facts or requesting data as you are building a proposal. (www.aim.com or www.meebo.com are pretty good for IM anywhere)
- *Text messaging* is a great tool for appointment reminders (c u @ 2 – Joe, ABC Company),

updates (con call moved to 4, same numbers – Sue, Acme) and real time information (in your lobby – Tim, XYZ, Inc).

- *Set up a blog or wiki* for a specific prospect or customer. It is a great place to capture Q&A specific to a customer project. Multiple people can make entries and as new members join the team they can be brought more easily up to speed. Blogs and wikis don't have to be text only ... add art, video (vlog), audio (podcasting), docs, whatever.
- *Communicate in multiple media.* Everyone has figured out that text needs to be supplemented with images like graphics & photos. Audio is great for our highly mobile, cell phone toting society providing information in webcasts, podcasts and music integrated media. Video exploded online with YouTube & Facebook but it is big for business communications now. Everyone loves video from professional to home grown, from serious to humorous, from acted to animated and everything in between.

Take a Walk on the Wild Side

Don't let your communications become boring or routine. Spice it up. Have a little fun. Dare to be different. Make it memorable.

- *Listen to your prospect or customer.* When they tell you that they don't have any time for you because they are buried or under water. Send them a beach pail & shovel to dig themselves out or a snorkel & fins to catch some air. (The Eddie Mac close)
- *Let them know that you are serious.* Have everyone you can find sign the box, the disk or something tangible representing your product offering and bring it with you to a F2F meeting. Place the company signed item prominently in the room. If it is a system in a big box, park it on a dolly in the back of the conference room. Then tell the customer that you just can't take it back because it would disappoint everyone in your company. You will sweat a little on this one but come prepared with multiple contracts hidden in your brief case (full purchase, lease, rental, pilot, trial, etc.). (The Kyle close)
- *Have a sense of humor.* When the customer asks for a traditional thud-weight RFP response. Do your home work and prepare a great proposal then consider delivering it with some flair. Have your proposal delivered in a big colorful box with bow or with a singing telegram.
- *Work around their schedule.* Finding that customer or prospect difficult to reach? They have to eat some time. Get some insight into what they like and bring them breakfast or lunch. If they are in before sun up, drop in with a quad-soy-latte or breakfast-in-a-bag. If they always work thru lunch bring over a burrito. If you are not nearby send them a gift card to a favorite spot.
- *Try a walking meeting.* Break from tradition. Not all meetings need to be conducted in an office or a conference room. On a nice day go outside and cover your business by walking and talking or find a spot outside to sit and talk. Fresh air clears the mind and will open up the conversation.

Put it all together and you can have a little fun while you connect with some of the really amazing people that you meet. Selling is all about making connections. Experiment with communication technology that is new to you. Generational style affects not only your customer's receptivity but it influences the way you communicate. Break out of the box. Learn to move comfortably with all generational styles. Have a little fun. It makes business memorable, enjoyable and quite often even more effective.

Acronym & Buzzword Decoder

blog = A blog (short for weblog) is a website that provides commentary or news on a particular subject. A blog will contain a combination of text, images and links to other media or materials related to the topic. They are typically interactive allowing readers to leave comments or questions. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order.

F2F = F2F is a simple way to write face-to-face, as in face-to-face meetings in peoples offices, over coffee, off-site or walking meetings outside on a nice day walking around the office building.

IM = Instant Messaging (IM) is a form of real-time communication between two or more people based on typed text. Some even allow for drag & drop images, links or documents to be conveyed.

podcasts = A podcast is a collection of digital media files distributed over the internet for playback on portable media players and personal computers. Podcast is a contraction of iPod broadcast since the first scripts were made for playing on the Apple iPod, but this form of communication has branched out to include any brand of portable media player & personal computer.

vlogs = A vlog is a video blog whose primary medium is video and can also contain links with supporting text, images or other data.

wiki = A wiki is software that allows users to create, edit & link web pages. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites. Wikipedia is a great and useful example of a public wiki (www.wikipedia.org).

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