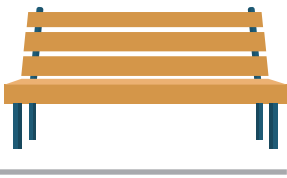


Turn Service Reps into Bench Strength for Your Inside Sales Team

By Ed Shineman, Co-founder, SalesGenomix, as featured in AA-ISP



“Prime your customer service organization with reps who have the potential to sell.”

Here's an idea.

Fill inside sales vacancies with top performers from your customer service group. Kick-start productivity with experienced hands who are already up to speed on your product capabilities and buyer demands.

Trouble is, most customer service reps could care less about selling, and they're not very good at it.

So is this service-to-sales career path idea a non-starter? Not if you prime your customer service organization from the get-go with reps who have the potential to sell.

1. **When you are recruiting for customer service roles advertise that sales is a likely career path.**

This will attract sales-minded candidates and discourage the “I wouldn't be caught dead selling” types. Further encourage qualified applicants with a job title that sounds salesy like “Customer Relationship Representative” and consider over-compensating the position to be sure you're competitive with other firms seeking entry level sales talent.

2. **Screen all candidates with a professional sales talent assessment.**

Assessment is particularly critical for entry level roles where there isn't enough job history for you to make confident hire/don't hire decisions. A superior test will evaluate candidates across the gamut of sales and service roles. You'll want to choose candidates who score in the top 20% on inside sales success potential. Also look for at least an average aptitude for customer service, since you don't want folks to bomb out while they're preparing to step into inside sales roles.

3. **Groom the new service reps for a future selling role.**

There's no better opportunity to sell than when customers call in with an order or service issue. So equip your future inside sales members with structured upsell and cross sell offers and goal and reward them for success. See to their coaching by assigning your current top inside sales members as mentors (also a great way for your seasoned people to demonstrate supervisory potential).

Questions you may have:

Q: Don't we risk reps short shifting serving customers in favor of selling them something?

A: You'll want to complement sales-related initiatives with customer satisfaction and operational excellence benchmarks. Not every in-call is an upsell opportunity. One of my service reps once tried to segue a customer who was apoplectic to the point of threatening legal action into purchasing a higher level of service. Needless to say, this didn't go over well.

Q: Who should lead this group?

A: You'll want an experienced customer service supervisor in charge to be sure things stay operationally sound. However, best if customer service and inside sales report up to the same VP so resources can be more easily shared. Regrettably, when customer service reps at one of my clients were promoted to inside sales, they decided they were "too important" to pick up overflow incoming orders and just let them go to voicemail. Had both groups reported in to the same VP this would never have been allowed to happen.

Q: Our service people report into Operations. How do I get the Ops Manager to go along with this plan?

A: Could be a challenge. Many ops folks impose efficiency metrics that reward reps for getting rid of customers. They won't want folks "wasting time" upselling and cross-selling. Plus, they may not see any personal benefit in hosting a feeder system for sales. Your best hope is persuading them that they will have an easier time getting resources and recognition if their department is seen as contributing to revenue generation.

An aside: even if you can't get ops to partner with you, be sure that sales has an influence in every customer touch point – even phone prompt menus. Believe it or not, all in-calls to a food supplement client of mine were greeted with the prompt "if one of our supplements has made you ill please press 1."

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Additional hurdles to a service-to-sales incubation strategy occur when your customer service people are outsourced to the Philippines – or where both organizations are so large and sophisticated that they can support a single function career path and it's easier to simply build an entry level position into your current inside sales structure.

That aside, for smaller organizations where service and sales are co-located and report into the same leader, using the service function as an incubator and career path feeder for your inside sales team can be a great way to minimize empty territories and ensure uninterrupted revenue achievement.

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