

Time to Review

The arrival of the slow winter season doesn't mean your business should rest too

Winter is here, and typically the pace in our business slows down with the dropping temperatures. But don't let this less-hecktic time lull you into hibernation as well. There are many things you can do during the slow months to get yourself ready to roll when the weather breaks.

Check Sales Performance

Use this opportunity to look at your overall sales performance in the past year from a more macro level. What are your sales numbers? What types of products are you selling? What areas of your territory are you selling in?

Looking at your overall sales for the year broken down by product types can help you spot areas of opportunity you may not normally see. For instance, does it make sense for 35% of your sales to be in new-construction windows and only 1% to be in exterior doors? Are you missing opportunities to add exterior-door sales to existing customers? Examining sales in more detail helps you identify growth opportunities.

Re-evaluate the Market

Looking back over the previous year, identify your top 20 accounts. Who are they? What volume did they do? Has their business with you grown or declined, and, if so, by how much?

Take notice of customers moving into, or out of, your top 20. This activity should really be done on a monthly basis, but you can dig a little deeper into the data during this once-a-year look back. Also look at the types of products your customers are buying. Can you point to specific reasons for any changes? Is it something that warrants further investigation?

Next, conduct customer audits of your top accounts. I suggest you complete these audits for at least your top 10 accounts, but if you can find the time to tackle your top 15 to 20 accounts, then rock on.

A customer audit is a face-to-face meeting in which you discuss the performance of the company you represent, as well yourself, and even your customer. Did their business grow overall? Did it grow with you? Is your customer planning any changes to their business—taking on different products, adding different services, and so on? What are their growth plans, and how can you help them get there?

Determine Your Response in the New Year

Many large builders view slow months as a chance to switch underperforming suppliers. Take this opportunity to set up meetings with several of them in your territory—these could be bigger contractors you don't presently sell to, or even companies that partner with your competitors for a large part of their business but might be open to giving you a smaller portion.

In setting up the meeting, explain that such get-togethers are something you do regularly to keep abreast of what's going on in the market and to seek opportunities to help companies like theirs find other suppliers if the need arises. Just make sure you base the purpose of such meetings on the value you can offer the potential customer, and not on what's in it for you.

You see, a lot can be accomplished during the slow winter months. Don't let the lack of activity in your market lull you into taking a two- to three-month "siesta." Be diligent, work smart, and create some plans for real growth in your territory while things are quiet. Work those plans and it will put you in a great position to capture more than your share when the business starts humming again.

Former Dallas Cowboys coach Jimmy Johnson once said, "The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra."

Give a little extra in planning and preparing for 2019, and turn an otherwise ordinary year into an extraordinary one! **PS**



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