

AHERN ADVISORY

How to Improve Sales in a Recessionary Market

About 6 months ago, I wrote a series on “how to create a successful sales team”. I indicated that:

- All sales people are not created equal.
- Many sales people have the ability to perform, but;
- If a sales person doesn't perform it's normally, because the **sales manager** did not provide the right direction for the sales person to succeed.

Each week, I discussed how successful sales people need to be:

1. Focused
2. Consistent
3. Have objectives
4. Ask for the order
5. Set high goals
6. Follow up; and most importantly;
7. They must be a good listener

I've received, many emails, and telephone calls on the articles and a lot of pressure to expand on that subject. Over the next several weeks, I will discuss how to:

- “Think outside of the box”
- “Prepare for the worse”, but excel in a difficult economy, and;
- Discuss “the process” of what's necessary to excel and stand out in “a crowd”

I've stated on numerous occasions, that trucking is a “pennies” business.

- Trucking controls about 87% of product movement in the U.S.
- Trucking is middle America
- 60% of all trucking companies employ 1 to 99 trucks;
- Most of the trucking industry struggled, over the last several years, due to the economy.

I've discussed how a small trucking company can become part of a larger team without losing their identity.

- I reviewed partnership programs.
- I reviewed agent/sales programs, and;
- I reviewed the new tax implications and discussed why it's important to consider the selling process prior to 2011.

I also discussed how difficult it is to “let go”, and how a person that wants to sell their business must be realistic in their pricing expectations.

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in this issue

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Ahern & Associates, Ltd.

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One of the areas I did not discuss, is utilizing the internet and how to integrate the internet into a sales and marketing program; to become a very powerful tool.

Most companies do not utilize the internet properly; they don't understand online strategies: they believe that if they develop a website, it's going to draw a lot of attention; unfortunately, most websites are not as effective as they should be. **I recognized, approximately 3 years ago, the dynamic effect that a properly utilized marketing program with the internet could be.**

- Ahern created our own web marketing staff.
- **Our staff constantly moves Ahern up on the various search engines, and;**
- We are constantly re-designing our website, so that we can continually add more and more content.

I'm not a computer "geek," and I certainly don't profess to understand all the intricacies of the internet. However, in simplistic terms, the internet search engines have, literally, hundreds of millions of tentacles that are searching for information;

- They grab onto information, based upon on words that are embedded in "text".
- **Words have to be constantly changed and constantly "worked", so that you, as a company, are moved up on the search engines. The higher the ranking, the higher the profile.**

I recognize that it's difficult to believe that the internet can be an effective marketing tool, but I have experienced an increase of 25% to 30% in my sales, by effectively managing the internet. **When I say managing, my staff manages, I do not. It is very important that before you implement a marketing strategy for the internet, you choose the appropriate representation,** and that is a very difficult process;

- Any one that builds websites claims to be an expert;
- Many companies, I interviewed, stated they would get me results, but;
- **They all wanted to charge a substantial amount of money upfront, and;**
- **At the end of the day, many of them did not generate results;** the reason; the marketing program was not set up properly.

It is important to understand that when Ahern is engaged to do a consulting assignment, in sales and marketing, the first thing we review is the customer's website. We recognize that:

- **A website needs to be optimized for search and needs a substantial amount of content.**
 1. In most instances, none of the page titles have been optimized and there are no page descriptions.
 2. In many instances, the home page needs to be re-written with keywords and "embedded" text.
 3. In certain situations, Ahern will perform an initial directory submission campaign on each of the markets that our customers serve.
 4. The content that we use can come in the form of blogging, or a structured PR campaign which, will not only add relevant content, but provide back links to a website.
 5. **A company can also benefit from a social media campaign (Twitter) where we drive traffic to specific pages on the customers website, and yes, Ahern does Tweet.**
 6. You can also benefit from a legitimate email marketing campaign.

All of the above are ways to generate sales and sales generate profits. When I started this process, it was very hard for me to comprehend how I could drive sales and distinguish myself from investment bankers and business brokers, **but it worked!**

As I've stated previously:

- The internet is a very powerful tool.
- **If it's utilized properly, it can provide a substantial rate of return on sales and investments.**
- If it's not utilized properly, it will not have the effect that you want to achieve.

The purposes of my comments are not to bore you with detail, but to explain what Search Engine Optimization (SEO) can do for your business.

- The SEO makes sure that your website has the proper page titles, descriptions, and keywords.
- It also makes sure that keywords are embedded into your home page copy.
- By doing this, your company will be properly positioned for search on Google.

Attempting to initiate an online demand generation strategy without taking this step is pointless. The reason it's so important is because the title, descriptions, and homepage copy are the first items that Google crawlers index assigns relevancy to; Website Contact Overview.

Website contact overview is a content creation strategy in conjunction with an initial "on page" search engine optimization effort so that you can properly position your company for search, and you can increase the likelihood of a high ranking placement among the search engines, the content includes:

1. WebPages
2. Videos
3. White pages
4. Press Releases
5. Photos
6. Webinars
7. Blog articles;
8. All tools that are useful, interesting, and value to potential customers

When Ahern began their newsletter in 1998, we had approximately 400 readers. Today, we have 178,000 readers, on a weekly basis, and our readership is growing daily.

An effective sales program should include utilizing the internet as a (powerful) marketing tool, to provide you "presence".

I'm not a computer expert, nor am I an Internet marketing guru. However, I have the staff that is, and I surround myself with people that are much smarter than I, so that ultimately, I receive the biggest bang for my dollar in advertising cost.

It's important to understand that every additional page that you create, on your website, has a chance to rank in the search engines. If you have a ten page website, then you have ten pages that could rank in the search engines. If you have a hundred page website, you have ten times as many pages it can rank, **which is why content creation is the key to a successful campaign.**

Each additional page, press release, white paper, or blog post, provide web visitors the ability to link to that page from other websites, which contribute to off page search engine optimization efforts.

I know this sounds foreign, but I use this as part of my sales and marketing programs, when I redesign a sales program for a customer. If you're a trucking company or logistics company, anytime that you cover any number of news worthy topics, or do a press release, whether it's paid or free, **it provides valuable back links to your website from your company website** which the release is posted on.

My staff also makes sure that we always provide what's called "Anchor Text" and "Anchor Titles" for additional search engine marketing purposes. What does all this high-tech language mean?

- More exposure!
- **More opportunities to sell your services!**
- A larger presence in the industry!

Today, Ahern receives inquiries from companies all over the world.

- **We have received inquiries from:**

- a) China
- b) Japan
- c) India
- d) Great Britain

All of this is a direct result of our efforts, over the last three years, on developing an internet presence.

In closing, it's very important that you differentiate yourself from your competition. In numerous situations, when I review a trucking company or logistic company website:

- They put up an attractive site
- It has all the bells and whistles
- **But they don't work the site to their benefit**

In an economic environment, such as we are in today, you need to "think out of the box" and reach as many people as you can with your services, in the fastest possible way. The internet can work to your benefit or your detriment.

Quote of the week: **"Economy is half the battle of life: it is not so hard to earn money as to spend it wisely."** (Charles H. Spurgeon)