

Webinar Questions – 10 Myths

Q: We've tried bringing sales folks in from other industries and they make too many mistakes and after a year they barely had sold any business.

A: I often seen salespersons hired and then left to fallow. It's unreasonable to expect someone from outside the industry to grasp the technology nuances and promote your brand without support, training, and tools. I also find it interesting that so many folks point to salesperson "mistakes" while when Operations makes a mistake, it was a team effort. To me, they are all company mistakes. If a salesperson makes a "newbie" mistake, it's because we let them run solo. If they make an error in responsibility or work habits, that is an employee performance issue.

As for the "not selling any business" point, we need to seed existing accounts to new team members to help them work in your system. This also frees up capacity in veteran salespersons to work on new business.

Q: Why does CRM help? I can't get my sales team to use it!

A: Sales people won't use CRM because they don't see the benefit to them. It's a management tool. We have to show sales folks how CRM helps them by shedding light on their pipeline and leads. Let me share an example: Salesperson Mary enters in a lead from a networking event. She doesn't think there is much potential, but she does what she was told. Sales Manager sees the prospect and recognizes the company name and knows that we have connected with other employees at the firm. Sales Manager tags all those individuals and gathers the sales team: "We now have five contacts at the same firm via three of our salespersons. We are going to offer this prospect an in depth capabilities pitch here at our office. Let's design that pitch and coordinate the invitations."

In other words, the insight into leads allows us to direct marketing and business development support towards a new client. This is just one of many positive outcomes from CRM.

Q: Any suggestions as to an easy to use CRM?

A: Salesforce.com is the standard, but there are many, many others. There are free CRMs with limited capacity, but I do not recommend being cheap. The limits they impose are detrimental to a good CRM effort.

Here's my general recommendation. Search for CRMs and watch the demo videos first to get an idea of what they can do and how managers use CRM. Then get the in-depth demo. Pricing is often on the websites, but you can usually negotiate introductory pricing for the first year.

Q: Where do you find new salespeople?

A: First of all, if you are a well-marketed company, salespeople will find you. I would not hire anyone that promises to bring existing business from your competitor – to me that is unethical, but you can set your own standards.

Mining sales folks from the industry pool is generally an exercise in interviewing someone else's failures, but given that so many of our Rental Production community have no idea how to develop a good sales person, I do see good folks looking for jobs.

But the real question is "how do I find new salespeople without dipping into the same old pool?" Look around the venue on the next major event you stage. You will see suppliers from all over the industry. Your client bought from them too. Why? Could be because they had a good sales person. My clients have successfully hired salesperson from Meeting and Event Planning, Decorating, Party Rentals, Exhibit Houses, Scenic Fabrication, Trade Show, Banquet and Convention Sales, Video Production...basically any trade within the industry.

You can also look to your clients. They are buyers, so they know the channel – probably better than you!

Q: You mention not needing 'technical' sales people. How do you strike the balance between that and making sure a salesperson prices the show correctly?

A: Um, management? I think it is ironic that we expect a salesperson to be an expert in technology and pricing, but we send out a "crew" to execute the show. Anyway...

This question has a lot of deeper answers. Pricing is a company decision. You have to determine what things cost and how much can be discounted. The firm

also has to determine what is the correct technology for a given project. Rather than find four technical salespeople (who being technical, may not be great salespeople), have one sales engineer to support three salespersons? You will get a consistent technical response and therefore pricing. The only variable will be discounts – someone needs to manage that too.

Q: In the IT realm it's very typical to pair a salesperson with a more technical role, a sales engineer. Is that something you've seen work well in other AV/Staging/Rental companies?

A: Yes, but “pair” is incorrect. One technical person can support 3-4 salespeople, provided that the salespersons can build the basic order. If salespersons do not build orders at all, then you need fewer salespeople and add an assistant to help build the basic order before the sales engineer fills in the details.

Q: How long do you have a salesperson on board before you seed them with existing accounts?

Feed them a project on day one.

Q: Besides Ebay, where are the best places to sell off older gear.

You missed my point I think. Throw it away. If you have something with remaining value, there are tons of used equipment brokers that will sell it for you. Google [used av equipment].

Q: How does broadening our definition of services for our target customers conflict with the need to focus on core business?

A: Good question. Your services need to be defined in customer terms, not yours. For instance, if you call all technical support the same thing “AV Technician” for instance, then some of your customers may not be satisfied that you are providing experts in a particular role.

Another example. If you define your core business as Video technology and operation, and your customer wants you to edit a video – is that part of your core business? In 2016, it better be. If so, then why don't you market the fact that you have this capability? It increases your credibility and makes you attractive to more customers.

Q: Where do I go to learn about better processes that apply to our industry?

A: The best source is visiting other companies in the industry. Get out, talk to peers. That may be difficult in some markets. Here's a list of other sources I have relied upon over the years:

- InfoComm – courses, content, and networking at the trade show
- LDI – courses, content, and networking at the trade show
- Freelancers – they work with many companies, see best practices (and worst practices)
- Employee candidates – I have learned a lot by talking with folks that wanted to work for me
- Manufacturer Representatives – They visit a lot of companies and probably came from the industry themselves.
- Clients – Yep, they work with multiple vendors and have observations and insights.

Q: yup, we're all hoarders. I agree we need to get rid of old gear. but it's not just the electronics, it's also all the damned road cases. I hate the idea of dumping all my obsolete stuff into a land fill. There are E-waste options, but do have any suggestion for dumping ATA cases that can't be "repurposed"?

A: A roadcase is a sunk cost. If you can't repurpose it, throw it away. I've had some luck dumping them on Craigslist, but then you have to deal with people that buy things in Craigslist. A more important issue for me is not letting my branded cases out into the marketplace. This was such a concern that we destroyed old cases and threw them away.

Q: Do you think it ever makes sense to bring techs into the warehouse for a week or so during lower-volume months just for the team-building advantages? Not because you need the bodies but to reduce us-vs-them?

A: Of course! We brought techs in to work on company and department projects, to replace an operations worker on vacation, or to be trained or provide training. I would never actually call it "team-building", but that's what it is.

Q: Myth = they [technicians packing their own shows] will over pack and take all the gear

A: I think you are suggesting that techs don't over pack? I think a lot of folks would disagree, but it does vary by company. If orders are properly scrubbed and reservations are defined in the system, I find there is less "I'll just throw this on."