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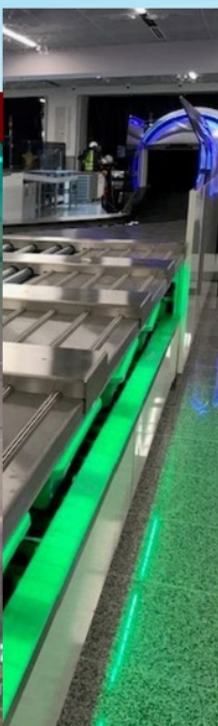
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MAY/JUNE 2021

Business Development: *The Secret Sauce*

UNLIKE CUSTOMER Service, Marketing, or Sales, Business Development is not a “department” in a traditional sense within many organizations. It may be viewed as the aggregate of those departments, with each playing a distinct role to contribute to Business Development. To that I would add another department, called Customer Relations, which plays a role.

This is not to suggest Business Development, or “BD” for the balance of this musing is formulaic – far from it. Instead, BD is more like a recipe, and too much or too little of any one ingredient tends to throw off the flavor of the outcome. Yet, BD involves a bit of each of those four departments.

While the fundamentals do not change from industry to industry, the effort expended on BD varies based on the complexity of a sale. Likewise, the amount of each ingredient in the BD recipe varies too. In the Business and General Aviation (B&GA) industry, a consumer outcome is anything as simple as choosing an FBO to make a fuel purchase, to a multi-million-dollar purchase of a turbojet aircraft amongst competing OEMs. While both are transactions, BD means the relationship

need not be transactional.

Let’s take a look at the main, departmental ingredients to BD: Marketing, Customer Service, Sales and Customer Relations – keeping in mind there’s always a pinch of something else that goes into the soup.

First, the base of the recipe begins with Marketing and Customer Service. Given the distracting malaise of advertisements, product testimonials and more recent phenomena like social media – the battle for consumer attention today is a losing battle. To gain attention is one thing, to keep it quite another. That’s where Marketing and Customer Service truly shine as contributors to Business Development. If Marketing can generate interest, then Customer Service must demonstrate what the hype was all about in the first place. Fail at either and sales will atrophy.

A common point of failure is the value proposition. In the case of a high-cost-low-service misalignment, a customer feels they paid too much for their choice. In contrast, when the value exceeds the price paid by the customer, the customer feels they received a great deal. In short, unless Customer Service maintains a service value consistent with the product or service being offered, the value proposition becomes

misaligned. This affects sales because sales professionals must be able to sell something they believe in themselves, without having to intervene constantly in other departments to assure the customer outcome.

Speaking of sales as a function of the more nebulous topic of Business Development, let’s take a moment to examine the sales professionals’ role, and why all-too-often, the wrong people are placed in the wrong roles within an organization. It is deceptively simple: A salesperson is motivated by a win, period. While sure, pay incentives like bonuses are often aligned to such wins, great sales professionals are competitive and like to win. Further, they tend to work within a commercial program construct of the business they represent, meaning their negotiating authority falls within an internal pricing framework that recognizes volume discounts or incentives provided a single customer must make sense among broader cohorts of consumers and their associated discounts or incentives. Generally speaking, a one-time customer will likely never receive the discounts or incentives of a high volume, repeat customer.

Sound unfair? Not a chance, as even the FAA Grant Assurances themselves recognize the obvious. Per Grant Assurance 22 (b), Airport Sponsors – and those whose subordination to the Grant Assurances is required, such as Airport Lessees – may “...charge reasonable, and not unjustly discriminatory, prices for each unit or service, provided that the contractor may be allowed to make reasonable and nondiscriminatory discounts, rebates, or other similar types of price reductions to volume

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**CUSTOMER
SERVICE**

MARKETING

SALES

**CUSTOMER
RELATIONS**

purchasers.” Even the FAA recognizes that sales professionals must have the tools to provide reasonable and non-discriminatory discounts, rebates and otherwise to larger volume customers.

While all this sounds simple enough, the most common personnel mistake made among businesses is to place high performing Customer Service professionals into sales roles. While many are no doubt are successful, the problem tends to be a misalignment of motivation, as opposed to skill set. Customer Service professionals are motivated – among other things – by pleasing others. A positive, memorable experience which creates brand loyalty is what drives customer service professionals. Said simply, customer service professionals like making others happy – and they excel at it.

By contrast, the sales professional tends to be driven by the “win” of landing the customer in the first place. Once landed, however, the salesperson has little to provide that same customer – other than the occasional check in.

The win in hand, the customer should be turned over to the customer relationship manager – a role played by Customer Relations professionals. Who are these people? What is their role?

As the name implies, Customer Relations maintain the customer relationship post-win. They act as customer advocate within an organization, ensuring the customer’s needs are met or ideally exceeded at every touch point with the company, no matter the complexity of request. Larger companies often assign “Key Account Managers,” a tacit recognition the value provided an organization by certain customers is of a magnitude which requires direct, constant nurturing – lest the relationship be lost. It is the step into Customer Relations – not Sales – where the Customer Service professionals find themselves after years in the trenches of serving others. The goal of course is to ensure the brand being put in front of the customer always is the company’s

brand; not the personal brand of the Customer Relations individual. While the concept of one’s personal brand versus their company brand is a topic for another article, soul searching is sometimes required to differentiate for both company, and employee – because the difference between the two is razor thin.

If Business Development isn’t a department per se, nor a title for many, what exactly is it? It is the sum of an organization’s work towards a single mission: Profitability. The secret sauce requires the generation of interest in a product or service, the consistent delivery of customer service, a strategic sales effort and customer relations to ensure the customer feels valued not only during the first point of sale, but all subsequent sales. Like a recipe however, if even one ingredient is left out, the flavor is off. However, when all four – Marketing, Customer Service, Sales and Customer Relations – are perfectly balanced, the flavor is very special indeed. ▀