



## SELLING SMART

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# Strong Selling in a Weak Economy

In 1941, during a national radio speech delivered before the outbreak of World War II, Winston Churchill said, “Kites rise highest against the wind — not with it.” In today’s weak economy, sales people would be wise to remember this and even wiser to do something about it.

Given that the U.S. has enjoyed strong economic times in recent years, masses of sales people have been, in effect, running with the wind with relatively little sales resistance to hinder their selling efforts. Cash was flowing, budgets were strong, and customers were more liberal with their spending and could afford to take a chance in their purchasing decisions. That was then, this is now.

The good news is that as part of the transportation sector, tire/auto services are considered essential services, and most remain open for business. The bad news is with quarantine and stay-at-home restrictions still in place, the number of potential customers calling and visiting these businesses has dropped off considerably.

### Now that the economy has changed, what have you changed?

After the stock market crash in 2008, I produced and conducted a seminar program titled “Strong Selling in a Weak Economy” for dozens of organizations and associations (in and out of the tire industry) all over the country. A popular program at the time, I would hear from many business owners on how they were trying to “weather the storm” and assumed a “bunker mentality” trying to make it through until the economy improved. I would ask how this strategy was working for them and their business. It was not.

Einstein defined insanity as “doing the same thing and hoping for different results.” It amazes me how well this applies to many of the sales organizations I have encountered. They keep selling the same way (they did in good times) and hope for better results. Like walking a flat path and climbing a mountain, you simply can’t reach the finish line using the same behavior.

This is no time for order-takers who are reactive and hoping shoppers will buy and become customers. To make it happen, *you* have to make it happen. This

means taking a proactive approach and raising your game to meet the challenge.

### Sell Value or Pay the Price

In the midst of a weak economy, consumers are watching every single penny and are not looking to spend money. They are looking to save money and lower costs. They have a greater price sensitivity and an increased desire to make good buying decisions. Their expectations of service and value are higher.

This extends beyond just products and prices, down to every aspect of their experience with your shop and your people.

As I wrote in my September 2018 article, “The Discounting Dilemma,” price-sensitive customers want discounts but they can ruin your business’ profitability. The price that tire dealers pay for failing to effectively sell value is discounting. Discounting is most often the case of not effectively selling value, which means communicating value during sales interactions.

As a rule, if your sales staff doesn’t know why a customer should pay more with your business, it’s a safe bet the customer doesn’t know either. Your salespeople need to know what your Value-Area Advantages are — the areas where your business and service are better or more cost effective than the competition’s offerings to which a customer may compare them.

By incorporating these areas into your sales communications, you’ll improve your customer’s perception of value, avoid discounting, reduce price concerns, and increase sales and profitability.

### Sales Through Service

Exceptional customer service is the key to increasing sales in any retail selling environment, but it is critical in a down market. There is no doubt that the better a retailer does at servicing the customer, the more sales they will produce.

Unlike most other industries that rely on outbound selling efforts to generate sales, in the retail tire industry, potential customers call or visit you. This arrangement is the equivalent of throwing you the basketball in a game. One of two things happen: you either score or you miss. You have to make sure that,



when a potential customer does shop your business, your team is capable of engaging them and scoring.

With less opportunities, many sales associates feel the need to be more aggressive in their customer interactions, often under the pressure of a manager preaching to push harder to close more sales.

One of the ultimate truths of retail tire sales is that everyone wants to buy (the reason they're shopping your business), but no one wants to be sold. When there's a disconnect between the way your business goes about selling its products and the way consumers want to buy them, sales results suffer.

Increasing win rates begins with shifting your strategy from the traditional model of selling your products or services to focusing on providing excellent customer service and a genuine desire to help (rather than sell) customers.

### The Role of Training in a Weak Economy

Today's tougher business environment exposes the weaknesses in a salesperson's selling capability. Performance issues that were concealed in a growth market are now being challenged on a daily basis.

Although weak sales skills undermine and limit the effectiveness of a salesperson's efforts even in a good economy—in a poor one it can cripple it.

Keeping sales personnel properly trained year-

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round is always important, but it is absolutely essential for success in a weak economy. Unfortunately, in a down economy many companies adopt a "batten down the hatches" policy of cutting back on what they believe are "non-essential" services. Often this means postponing training efforts until the economy improves, believing that then they can justify the investment. This short-sighted response is the equivalent of taking your troops' bullets away before heading off to the battlefield.

Simply put, in a down economy the best defense is a strong offense. In the case of my Pinnacle Performance clients, I host an online training portal where a short sales/customer service lesson is posted every week. This online training normally supports my bi-annual onsite training visits.

Right now, the weight of professional selling is heavier. To succeed, your sales and service staff must be stronger. **TR**

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