MAINTAINING CONTACT WITHOUT BEING IRRITATING

A CONTINUOUS STREAM OF INTERACTIONS

A Mercuri International White Paper

Why this matters to you

A number of trends can be seen in the ways customers are behaving towards suppliers. Some customers are so busy that they do not have the time or focus to think about anything else. Some genuinely have no need for what you do right now (but may do at some point). Some are saying they have no budget. Some need to involve others in their decisions. Some need more evidence before they will commit. Some are simply hypnotised with indecision. Whether baseless or rational these behaviours present sellers and relationship managers with real obstacles to overcome.

There are times when what is needed is a robust, full-frontal assault using your heaviest armour; a direct approach to push obstacles out of the way. But this is not the only strategy.

What is also needed is a light-touch, low-time approach that maintains customer intimacy without causing irritation. It is designed to keep you “front of mind” with your client or prospect. When it works well it maintains awareness and stimulates action without coming across as aggressive or “pushy”. It is absolutely not a substitute for robust, active selling but it is a support to effective selling.

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The chances of calling a contact on the very day she found she had a need were very low. We are talking about light contact over a period. These approaches could be opportunistic or they could be planned.

Opportunistic approaches

Here are two examples of things you can do. None of them take more than a few minutes:

- Use the forwarding option on many articles to send something useful onto a few contacts.
- If your company wins an award or has a piece of good news simply type a single line into your LinkedIn update and include a link to the press release.

In one way these are no big deal but they give you a reason to keep the line of communication open with a client who is not active at the moment and to

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A continuous stream **of interactions.** ***CONT.***

demonstrate to key individual that you're interested and engaged even when the "meter isn't running". Other examples might include passing on an invitation, making an introduction, recommending a book (sites like Amazon make this very easy). It's not planned. It should take little effort. Its effect is rarely life changing but every so often you will strike gold.

Planned interactions

Other streams of interaction are more planned. They are designed to avoid being intrusive but nonetheless to build and maintain customer intimacy. They do not force themselves on the recipient but allow people to respond if they want to. They need to be seen as adding value. Typical interactions include:

- Invitations to webinars (usually free or at a nominal fee)
- Newsletters (electronic or physical)
- News flashes
- Blogs
- Links to or copies of relevant articles
- Summary of recent events
- Opinion pieces about industry events/trends
- Client surveys

The key thing is that these are not heavy sells, focused on product or solution. They are prompts and added-value communications focused on relationship.

A campaign of continuous streams of interactions takes a bit more thought and planning. It may be something you can do as an individual but is often best done as a sector team, an office or a business. You may have access to marketing resources to do this for you or you may need to do it yourself. Here are 10 keys to success:

1. Have an accurate, up to date database whether it's in a standalone spreadsheet or part of your CRM.
2. Plan timing and frequency. Regular is good and more manageable but leave yourself space for one-offs.
3. Don't overdo it. The aim is to elicit interest not irritation!
4. Keep your content interesting and varied.
5. Don't make your content too "salesy.". You are adding value and building intimacy, not selling product on this occasion.
6. Integrate this campaign with others. Be careful to avoid over-exposure and conflict if they are receiving contacts from other parts of your business.
7. Be consistent but flexible. Not everything needs to be branded. You could have a different look or style. You could even have some of your stream of interactions coming from you individually rather than full of corporate branding.
8. Appropriate follow up. You may want to touch base with your recipients occasionally but each interaction is not designed as an excuse for a heavy sales call.
9. Track responses and levels of interest.
10. Keep it going. Once you have started, stick with your plan. You may not have an instant effect – that's not the idea. It's all about building credibility and relationship without incurring heavy costs or making heavy demands on your clients and prospects.

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A continuous stream **of interactions.** ***CONT.***

Practical steps you can take now

For the opportunistic approach, the key is simply to keep your eyes open and keep thinking about your clients (not bad things to do anyway!) Keep reading widely to keep your "client value quotient" high. For planned interactions make your plan realistic and then stick to it.

To keep up to date with trends and practical ideas in the financial sector please follow http://selling-financial-services.com

Is all this worth the effort?

If you have read this far you probably think it could be worth the effort. For most of us it's important to be very realistic about the time we commit to this but it can and does pay off. You should notice an increased openness when you make sales approaches to prospects and clients. There may be improved conversion ratios, time lags and costs in your sales process. You may well be able to measure the number/size of opportunities that come from those in your campaign. There should be measurable results and you should measure them! But there will also be intangible benefits which will make the job of selling easier, more effective and more enjoyable.

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