

High-Voltage Contacts

Don't Just Make a Sale – Make a Client

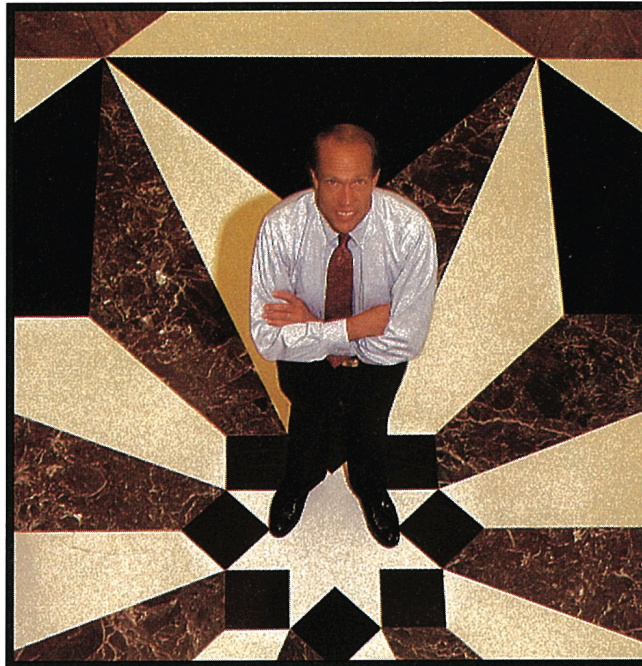
JIM MATTESON OF DATA General Corp. has always known that clients like to party. Like everyone in his industry, Matteson has used corporate events of various kinds to help lure prospects. But he says, “Events are time-consuming to develop and expensive to stage. In the past, they rarely produced the kind of sales I found even remotely acceptable.”

But now Matteson is a believer. As New York regional sales director of a \$1.4 billion computer company, he is arranging more seminars, demonstrations, and hospitality events than ever before. He has thereby painlessly boosted the number of contacts his reps make by 50 percent; and he says that sales have gone up accordingly.

The key to Matteson's dramatically improved results is not a new book, or sales software program. It's a new conceptual approach I shared with Jim that he astutely applied. He has turned the process of getting together with clients into a discipline for getting the most leverage out of each marketing dollar – I call it “event-driven marketing.”

As Matteson puts it: “I've always known selling has to do with relationships. What I finally realized is that this isn't a one-shot deal; you build the relationship systematically.”

The core of event-driven marketing is a fact of human nature and the sales profession that might be termed the Three-Month Rule. Say you call on any prospect and make a good impression.



Jim Matteson of Data General Corp. has boosted sales with a strategy of “event-driven marketing.”

After one month, the impression has faded somewhat; after two months, he will remember you, with some effort; after three months, you are history.

Using event-driven marketing, you schedule special events like trade shows and outings to ball games at least every three months. The benefits of keeping in touch using events are many:

It's safe. Every time you attempt a direct sale, you present your prospect with the chance to lose something: a half hour of his time (if he doesn't buy) or some time plus some money (if he does). How can you maintain contact with your client, without issuing this challenge?

Imagine this approach: “I'd like to invite you to a seminar where you'll pick up ideas, renew old contacts, make new friends, and size up the work my company does.” You're no longer a drain on your prospect.

It keeps you in mind. You may not be able to meet your client's needs the first time you get together. If you create

more opportunities for your paths to converge, the client is more likely to think of you when he needs your product or service.

It saves you money. Assume only one-third of your prospects show up at any seminar or demonstration. That still means you get to influence more people in a day than you would in a month of one-on-one selling.

About one-third of those you invite will want to come, but have schedule conflicts. Make them this offer: “I'll be happy to give a condensed version of our seminar at your company, if you can arrange for the appropriate people to attend the meeting and spring for our travel expenses.”

It motivates the sales force. Even the most seasoned sales professionals fear failure and rejection, and don't make as many calls as they should. Inviting prospects to your events presents your sales force with a nearly risk-free pretext to make and maintain contacts.

There is of course nothing wrong with good, old direct selling. But when you use a balanced program of event-driven marketing, you signal your client that you're willing not only to get his money, but to wait until he's ready to buy.

Matteson is planning a whole fiscal year around event-driven marketing, including a seminar for the publishing industry and a fitness program at Long Island's Southampton Hospital.

In using event-driven marketing for my own business, it has sometimes taken me four or five years to make a sale. But I consider it time well spent. I developed valuable contacts that opened opportunities to me I might never have known existed. ■