

## How to Motivate Your Customers to Buy

by Debbie Rodgers

Taking shelter is a natural response when times get tough. But there are glimmers of improvement in the most recent economic indicators. How do you convince your customers that the worst is behind them and it's time to loosen their purse strings?

The recent economic slowdown was labeled "The Great Recession." Companies in every industry felt the impact of reduced spending by businesses and consumers. But recent reports give us reasons to believe that the economy is beginning to pick up steam:



- Leading economists at the National Association for Business Economics indicated they are upbeat about the U.S. recovery, forecasting steady growth over the next two years as businesses grow and jobs return. "We see a healthy expansion under way, although it will take time to reduce economic slack and repair damaged balance sheets," said Lynn Reaser, president of the National Association for Business Economics, which conducted the survey of 48 top economic forecasters. The NABE panel says it "expects the recovery to remain firmly on track." Its forecast is for the economy to grow 3.1% in both 2010 and 2011... "Our economists believe improvement in sales and profits will cause them to put out the hiring signs relatively soon," Reaser said.
- Economists Ataman Ozyildirim and Ken Goldstein of The Conference Board sounded similarly upbeat. "The U.S. Leading Economic Index has risen steadily for nearly a year, led by an improvement in financial markets and a manufacturing upturn. The cumulative change in the U.S. LEI over the past six months has been a strong 9.8 percent, annualized. This signals continued economic recovery at least through the spring."

The signs of improvement are there. And the best companies will be at the forefront of the recovery, preparing for and driving revenue growth. They took steps during the downturn to ensure their survival by increasing productivity, streamlining costs, and eliminating unnecessary work. These forward-thinking businesses are ready to consider solutions that will help them operate more effectively.

But how do you get your customers to move from thinking to doing? Motivate them to action by prompting them to think about key advantages of being on the leading edge.



- **The Early Bird Gets the Worm.** Sellers who stayed in close contact with their customers throughout the downturn—finding creative, cost-effective solutions to their business needs—increased their value as trusted suppliers. It is these trusted suppliers that customers tend to remain loyal to when business picks up. This is your opportunity to get your message and value proposition out loud and clear, especially when there are far fewer competing messages bombarding your current clients and prospects. Staying top-of-mind not only builds mindshare, but also customer loyalty and trust that you'll be there with innovative products and services—whether boom time or bust.

*Action: Ensure your sales team engages their customers regularly to understand their business objectives, in good times and in challenging times.*

- **There Is Value to Be Had.** Prices for many goods and services are lower than they have been in years. Companies that take advantage of this discontinuity to make much needed capital or other investments may experience a shorter payback period and higher return on investment than possible if they wait until prices return to previous levels. An improved, lower cost structure can enable a company to position itself more favorably for profitable growth as the economy improves. If you can find new effi-

ciencies or employ new technologies that will help them operationally or financially in the long run, you enhance your own long-term sustainability.

*Action: Equip your sales force with solutions that can help their customers operate more efficiently or profitably, and train them to communicate the business case and value proposition of each offering.*

- **The Ostrich May Not See the Train Coming.** Your customers will continue to get what they are getting if they continue to do what they are doing. It's your job to help them understand that putting decisions on hold and failing to plan to move their business forward can result in even greater risk to survival. Why should they buy from you now? What will happen if they wait?



The most successful businesses find their competitive advantage—no matter the economic climate—and capitalize on it. As consultative advisors, your sales team can help clients identify and exploit discontinuities in the market rather than lying low and waiting for things to improve. As Franklin Roosevelt said, "Get action. Seize the moment. Man was never intended to become an oyster."

*Action: Train your sales team to be a valued participant in their customer's planning process.*

- **Innovation Creates Demand, Even in a Downturn.** The economic downturn sowed some ripe seeds for product innovation. For example, Apple, a company that pursues creative new products relentlessly regardless of the economic environment, received positive reviews of its new, recently introduced iPad, as the iPhone continues to evolve and enjoy strong demand.

Success in the post-recession era will be based on achieving the right combination of value, product innovation, and competitive differentiation. Now is a good time to focus on business transformation and cost-reduction through innovation. Help your customers to visualize and pursue next-generation opportunities and position your firm to help them realize that vision.

*Action: Offer to facilitate joint strategic sessions with your clients. Encourage your sales team to be as knowledgeable about their customers' business, long-term vision, and competitive challenge as they are about your own firm.*

During the Olympics, we heard in great detail how the elite athletes prepare for competition and anticipate challenges. In addition to incredible levels of physical training, Olympians consider everything from diet, equipment, and high-performance clothing to all possible conditions on the slopes, track, or in the arena. Detailed planning is a key element of their strategy to win gold.

Strong businesses, too, face their competition and anticipate challenges with the same level of planning and strategic vision. And by being a valued part of your customers' planning process, you can help them move their business forward rather than hunker down in survival mode. The benefits to you include a deeper consultative relationship and the possibility of uncovering additional sales opportunities. By making sure your best clients come out of the recession trenches first and fast, you can ensure that your own firm does the same.

*"There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction." John F. Kennedy*

**ABOUT CPS.** Critical Path Strategies helps clients improve the effectiveness of their sales organization. Our portfolio of services addresses the strategic, organizational, and relationship issues that impact selling performance. Our powerful processes enable clients to transform their sales culture, enhance their competitive position, and accomplish strategic business initiatives. Our clients—emerging companies and members of the Fortune 500 alike—typically measure 100 to 500 times their CPS investment in revenue growth.



Visit CPS online . . . [www.criticalpathstrategies.com](http://www.criticalpathstrategies.com)  
Join our LinkedIn Group . . . **The Best Best Practices in Sales Effectiveness**