

BUILDING A BEST-EVER

ONLINE SALES TEAM

These five elements are key to a salesforce that leads the industry

By Mike Lyon, Contributing Editor



Every year there are builders who can account for more than 50 percent of their sales coming through their online sales program. Their conversion rates are probably higher than yours, and their cost per sale is probably lower than yours. How do they do it?

Successful online sales and marketing programs all share something in common: They've mastered the five elements listed below. Each element builds upon another and strengthens structure. In fact, every organization I've worked with and that sees above-average results has mastered these building blocks.

→ **A GREAT WEBSITE**

Your website is central to online sales—a no-brainer, right? But you also have to invest money, time, and resources in building a world-class customer experience. Your site delivers the first impression: Don't botch the opportunity to wow visitors. The site needs to effectively and accurately reflect your company and the product you offer. Never assume that website visitors know who you are, what you do, or how well you do it.

Remember that once you actually launch your website, it's not something that you can then ignore until the next relaunch. This tool is a dynamic representation of your business; it must keep moving and growing. You must deliver an experience that's responsive—it should render beautifully on any device, whether it's a tablet, smartphone, or laptop. Your website should be fresh, with a design that's compelling and easy to read. If the first thing your visitor sees is old content or blog posts from a year or two ago, you appear out of date. Frequently add and change photos. Post updates.

You need to start thinking "mobile first" when it comes to your site design and structure. Check your analytics data and you'll see that more than 40 percent of visitors come to your website via a smartphone or tablet.

Unique visitors (actual individuals) to the community pages of your website will account for four to five times the amount of walk-in traffic in your models. Buyers start their research online, either to eliminate you from the running or to put you on their short list. A great site will ensure that you make the cut.

→ **STRATEGIC ONLINE MARKETING**

Imagine that you hosted a grand opening but forgot to send out the invitations. Your website all on its own is in a similar situation. Great content doesn't matter one bit if customers don't know it's there. If you don't exist on search engines, you're invisible. When builders complain about low lead volume, the first place we look is at their online marketing. Spending 20 percent of your budget online just doesn't cut it these days—not when the medium delivers more than half of your leads that become sales.

To generate a constant flow of leads, allocate at least half of your marketing budget to search engine marketing (SEM), search engine optimization (SEO), listing sites such as Zillow and NewHomeSource.com, and hyper-targeted display advertising. The goal is to intercept homebuyers who are already researching online and to divert them to your killer website. Don't waste energy and money trying to motivate the unmotivated.

→ **THE RIGHT CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Once you've successfully achieved No. 1 and No. 2, you'll begin to create more leads. That's a good start to building foundational excellence, but it's just the beginning.

A lead is worthless if it isn't properly managed. This starts with a good customer relationship management (CRM) system, which should make your job easier. Not all CRMs are created equal, so make sure you have the right system for the job. Do your research: test-drive a CRM, if possible; do online research; and poll colleagues in other markets to get good information.

Your CRM is the engine that powers an effective online sales program. It allows you to streamline your follow-up process by using sales automation. A CRM provides you with details about your leads, as well as insights into their activities and interests, so you know what's likely to motivate them to move forward. A CRM will expedite your customer communication, delivering targeted, valuable messages to more prospects. It will empower

a sales pro, giving him or her the ability to communicate with up to several hundred new leads every month.

→ **AN ONLINE SALES SPECIALIST**

Your CRM and website won't make the calls for you. Beneficial as the tools mentioned above can be, they shouldn't replace personal communication, only enhance it. Your online sales specialist represents the bridge between marketing and sales in the digital age—an appointment-generating, lead-cultivating machine. This is a key role, not one of the "other duties as assigned" for someone who already has enough responsibilities. Managing the online sales environment must be seen as a full-time job. The results are only as substantial as the effort put in.

→ **AN ONLINE SALES PROCESS**

A process is something you can consistently replicate. Many builders don't have one, and it shows. In the Lead Response Survey that we conducted with Lasso CRM, less than 3 percent of builders had a combined personal contact that included more than one call and more than two emails over the first 30 days. That's not enough. Creating engagement takes multiple points of contact. Your process should consist of seven to nine contacts in the first 30 days, and the right CRM will make that an easy task for your team to accomplish.

After that, move into your long-term, follow-up process on a monthly basis. Every lead that hasn't taken action or responded should receive at least one email and one call each month.

Make sure your follow-up has variety and relevance: Redundancy will push your messages into the trash. Context is crucial in a digitally cluttered world. Craft every email, call, video email, and text message—anything to capture the attention of your distracted customers. Your CRM can help you automate the process once you've built these messages.

Take a moment to evaluate each section of your online sales program so you can get rid of the deficiencies. Make the commitment, with time and with dollars, to strengthen the structure of your online presence. Every day you don't is another day where you fall further behind the competition. **PB**

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