Most sales operations are running slim on people and many are shifting resources from field sales to key account management.

This is another "more for less" article. How can we get more sales and more profitability, from less customers, in less time, with potentially less people resources in the field sales team?

It briefly examines several issues:

- Territory coverage
- A Productive Selling Day
- Refocusing on the Sales Drivers at individual customer level
- Target Customer Development

1. TERRITORY COVERAGE

Planned activity needs to fit available time. There are several variations on equations to calculate this, but we prefer one which includes call duration.

Figure 1.

$$\frac{\text{Customers (By Class)} \quad X \quad \text{Annual Call Frequency} \quad x \quad \text{Average Call Duration}}{\text{Annual Selling Days} \quad X \quad \text{Selling Hours per day}}$$

This gives you **five variables** to play with. You can, for example:

i) Vary the number of customers serviced (shift smaller customers to telesales)

ii) Reclassify customers and adjust call frequencies. Eg:
- "AA" customers get weekly instead of fortnightly calls
- High potential "B" customers reclassified to "A" and fortnightly calls.
- "C" frequencies dropped from monthly to quarterly.

iii) Adjust call duration:
- Reduce the allocation of time for routine service calls
- Increase time in selected calls (2 or 3 a day) to create more opportunity to add value

iv) Re-evaluate Annual Selling Days available: The maximum excluding weekends and holidays is about 230, but you may reduce this with allowances for meetings, training or special activities such as new business canvassing, leaving perhaps 210.

v) Selling hours may be reduced from 9 to 8 to recognise that some responsiveness / problem solving may be required (often around 10% of a day)

At minimum, understanding your **facts** gives you more opportunities:

- Identify productivity roadblocks and remove them
- Test alternative activity mixes

You may need to "time log" sales people to find out where they really spend their time:

- routine calls versus value adding calls
- planned versus unplanned activity
- travel
- administration etc

2. PRODUCTIVE SELLING DAY

Most calls have a **routine** element. Eg:

- Check stocks and encourage re-order
- Sell in the current promotion(s)
- Handle consumer or customer problems
- Ensure sales aids are on hand (point of sale material)

It isn't hard to see how these activities can expand to fill a day with routine. Perhaps you will also have fairly contented customers and close to budget sales figures.

But, it rarely grows the business, unless there is natural market growth available. So, override the propensity for routine service and add a quantifiable component of "over and above" activity.

Figure 2: Target Customer Focus

Customer	Average Call Duration Now (Minutes)	Revised Duration	Activity
1	45 *	33	
2	45	**90**	→ **Revise all displays**
3	45	33	
4	45	33	
5	45	**75**	→ **Rationalise range; increase best sellers**
6	45	33	
7	45	33	
8	45	33	
9	45	33	
10	45	33	
11	45	33	
12	45	**75**	→ **Displace a competitor**
	9 Hours *	**9 Hours**	

* Assumes calls start when leaving the last customer.

Customers are busy people and will welcome shorter, more efficient routine calls!

3. REFOCUS ON THE SALES DRIVERS

Most sales people have "cycle priorities" to implement in each of their eg 13 x 4 week sales cycles in a year.

First problem is that there are often **too many** such priorities – cut this down to 1, 2 or 3 per cycle.

Second problem is that this may distract from business fundamentals or "sales drivers". For example, in a retail outlet, a supplier's (and the retailer's) sales drivers are things like:

- agreed range carried
- no out of stocks
- planogram compliance
- secondary displays in place
- major promotions enhanced at store level

You may identify 8 or 10 of these and set out to **measure** their incidence. How well are we scoring on each variable? What are the gaps? Can we develop campaigns to close specific gaps?

In a situation where you don't have sales data for the outlets of a particular customer, tracking the things that create sales is the next best performance measure.

4. TARGET CUSTOMER DEVELOPMENT

This is an extension of all of the above topics. We observe that most sales territories have a distinct Pareto effect – **the top 20% of customers produce 65% of sales**, or more. Sales people are aware of this, but frequently only have their customer sales printouts in alphabetical or daily run order, not ranked by value!

The above sections suggest that you should:

- Identify and classify your most valuable customers
- Adjust call frequencies and call duration
- Reduce routine call duration elsewhere to create time to add value in important accounts
- Identify and score the "sales drivers" to protect and grow the core business.

From this base you can go further: select a small number of **target customers** and plan monthly or quarterly development programs with them. Treat them as **"mini key accounts"**. Remember, they are already more successful than the average customer because they are smarter business people; they respect and respond to a more professional approach.

The tools required are fairly simple. Use an adapted customer record card which includes:

- Account Facts (profile)
- SWOT Analysis
- Objectives and Activity schedule
- Performance Tracker (sales drivers)
- Call report (2 lines per call: objectives and result)

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Note:

These topics can all be found in the training offerings on the website:

- Modular Training packages (Consumer Field Sales Modules)
- Open Workshops
- Team Workshops