

Train your franchisees to be the best in sales!

How can I ensure my franchisees are selling at their best? This is the question often asked by many franchisors. With the current economic climate, never before has it been so important for franchisors to ensure their franchisees are well equipped to deal with difficult economic times. **Vesna Siljanovska** discovers how franchisors can indeed help their franchisees get better at sales and beat their targets

As the famous American play-writer Arthur Miller once wrote in his widely renowned *Death of a Salesman*: "The man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want." It is fair to say that this basic principle in sales will never change. However, move forward almost half a century and it is now all about "opportunity generation, pre-positioning, needs analysis, solutions selling and securing," as Liggy Webb, Managing Director of The Learning Architect, summarises. How can franchisors, therefore ensure their franchisees are fully briefed and practising the best sales techniques around?

Sales is the foundation of every business, "nothing happens in any

business until something is sold," states Simon Dalziel, Franchise Director of Franchise Marketing Award winner, Bluebird Care. And during challenging economic times, it is fair to say that never before has it been more important that you ensure your franchisees are selling at their best.

In order to be good at sales, your franchisees must be good at all the main disciplines in business, as Chris Goodwin, Managing Director of Results Driven Training Ltd, says: "When you have a manager of a small business like a franchisee, they've actually got to have the skills of a sales person, sales and marketing manager, managing director, marketing director and financial director; but sales is probably the most fundamental skills set." Sales and marketing training should start at the beginning of your franchisees'

induction and training programme. The franchisor, as Simon comments, knows "the best methods of selling their products and services", therefore it is crucial that this filters to the franchisees from the start. It is important that the franchisee is fully trained on the product or service they will be selling and understands its unique selling points. Secondly, the franchisee must be up to speed on their target market.

Caring for the customer

Customer care, particularly in today's economic climate, is critical. Chris explains: "If you think about customer retention now, it's never been more essential. You have to put more time now into customer care than you've ever done before. If there is a customer that normally places an order every day and they don't ring up anymore, you have to find out why they're not buying

and get out to see them. You have to see how you can help them in their business. You may have to reduce prices from your end or remake something another way to save costs." By emphasising this point to both new and current franchisees, you will encourage an adaptable approach, which during challenging economic times will help businesses. Chris adds: "Sometimes in times like these you have to change the model to fit the market place or to fit the client's needs."

Liggy agrees, as "people now react badly to 'being sold to'. But they do enjoy buying! We must therefore create a 'customer-centres' sales model, within which we become business consultants rather than sales people." Liggy argues that no longer is the sales approach from the 1980s suitable for the modern consumer; instead, flexibility, adaptability and really knowing your customers' needs, with a strategic emphasis on customer retention and increasing business, is key.

With flexibility and adaptability in mind, Chris explains that "every time you go to the next level, you have got to develop your skill set further. The skills of negotiation, influence, rapport building, presenting and pitching" must constantly be evolving with the times.

For franchisors, this means perhaps hosting workshops or carrying out 'train the trainer' sessions, as Shaun Thomson, UK CEO of Sandler Training, explains. These courses take place throughout the year, which not only helps reinforce sales skills according to Shaun, but also "is a great place to share business and future ideas."

Build confidence

Lack of confidence when selling can affect sales immensely. In order to help your franchisees with confidence, Shaun also explains how reinforcement training is carried out at Sandler

Training. These consist of motivational courses to encourage confidence. Chris encourages franchisees to go out in the field with experienced franchisees or even the franchisor to observe how someone pitches.

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Role-play sessions also have their benefits. Chris adds that in a typical role-play training scenario it is important to "give good, not negative, feedback as role-plays have got to be a good learning experience. If participants in these sessions take on board what we tell them as well as areas for improvement, they'll grow and learn. That's the best way of actually building confidence."

If a franchisee is likely to be responsible for a team of staff, then Chris also suggests team-building activities as a way of improving motivation, confidence and training people in the overall customer focus, which is inextricably linked with sales.

Ongoing support

Advice and continual support is essential in order to maintain motivation according to both Simon and Shaun. As well as the several training days each quarter that Sandler Training holds, Shaun adds: "Franchisees are kept motivated via regular contact calls, site visits and all franchisees have access in an online team room, which holds extra information and handouts to help the franchisees in their businesses." Ensuring that help is readily available to the franchisee enforces the fact that they are never alone and can seek help if they are struggling in sales or indeed any other aspect of the business.

In these tighter economic times, if franchisors are considering spending money in any aspect of training, Chris asserts: "It's got to be sales more than anything. At this time businesses that want to maintain market share must go for the front end, and the front end is sales." By investing in your franchisees' sales skills, you can feel confident that your franchise will remain strong even in turbulent times. ■

