

# PST Growth Advisor

*For the Commercial Vehicle Industry*

## Marketing Tips for Tough Times

Marketing Professionals are asking.....

How should I change marketing focus during down times?

PST has talked with marketing professionals at dealerships across the country.

They tell us **there are 3 things to do now:**

- They're staying in even closer contact with their current customers these days. In terms of larger customers, they've made a surprising discovery that represents both an opportunity and a real danger.
- They're using that particular finding as a tool to win business from competitors who aren't aware of what's happening.
- Messages have changed – all because of what they're hearing from customers.

### What Successful Marketing Managers Say

Here's what we hear from successful marketing managers.

**Keep talking to your customers –  
or risk losing not just one sale, but the customers as well.**

Tough economic times increase the risk of losing a customer in two specific ways.

Here's the first one. It's been a surprising discovery for many of the marketing professionals we've contacted.

At large customers, cost cutting has eliminated some middle managers. Those middle managers may have been the people who actually placed the orders with your dealership. Top management or new people may now be making those decisions. You have to ask whether the new decision makers have the same personal relationships with your sales staff and the dealership as whole. If they don't, losing them is an obvious risk if someone from a competitor contacts them.

Is it the sales person's responsibility at your dealership to stay in contact with current customers? If so, there are questions to ask:

- Are they making contact on a frequent enough basis to keep up with the changes?
- When they do find new contact information, are they funneling that information back to marketing so the whole dealership can profit from it, or are they keeping it in their personal files?

Real danger lurks in both of these issues. We talk with many sales people who feel strongly that they're bothering customers by contacting them when they don't know of an impending order.

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We also hear from salespeople who find out that their old contact is gone, but don't take the next step to talk with the new decision maker.

Either of those behaviors creates risk, since in many ways, an old client with a new decision maker is almost like a brand new client, and requires the same marketing and sales effort that you would expend to attract a new client. The additional danger is that if you don't make that effort, someone else in your market will.

If you're getting the information from your sales people, there's another question to ask – "How are you keeping track of it?"

We hear answers that range from Microsoft Word documents and handwritten notes to spreadsheets, databases like ACT or Goldmine, or fully developed customer relationship management systems (CRM). How that data is tracked makes a real difference in how frequently and cost effectively your dealership can stay in contact with prospects and customers.

From talking with people in dealerships of all sizes, we've learned that the "right answer" to tracking that data is not about having the biggest, fanciest, or most costly system. Rather, it's about having the system that is "right sized" for your dealership and your marketing plan.

Here's the second way that tough economic times put customers at risk. The message you send may not be on target. That's why the third tip from marketing managers below is so important.

### **Keep talking to your prospects. You have a special opportunity now to win not just a sale, but a whole new customer.**

Stay in front of your customers and qualified prospects. In tough economic times, it's vital that you stay in front of your current customers, especially your best customers. This may seem like obvious advice. Remember all the new dangers we talked about above that can put your customers at risk? You can use those exact same market realities to put your competition's customers at risk as well.

### **Change your message to meet the customer's current needs.**

Being off target can be as simple as having the wrong person's name in the customer address. But the possibilities are endless. Are you sending a service message to someone who has an in-house service department? Conversely, are you sending a message about bulk parts purchases to someone who owns one truck and has been a loyal service and parts customer for years?

In these tough times, it can be just as offensive to your customer to send information about a new truck when he or she is getting ready to reduce their fleet size. And even if your customer doesn't care, it's certainly a waste of your time and money.

Instead, contact your customers with something of value to offer them, such as advice, an unusual perspective, or special knowledge, extended service hours, or special pricing. Never, never contact a customer during tough times and ask if they have an order to give you. You're going to have to work for it.

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## **In Summary, here's what we're hearing from marketing executives:**

- Customer segmentation is vital to sending a message that's on target.
- A system to track the information for that segmentation is vital.
- When marketing has both of the above, they're sending messages that are on target.
- They're in the mode of "fighting for every customer," whether that customer currently belongs to them or to their competition.
- Fighting for every customer means contacting the customer *more frequently* with information that is *more pertinent* to them.