

4 Mistakes Sales Managers Are Making

Attention media sales managers: As you sit here in August, midst of the Olympics and months before the Presidential Election, 2017 feels far away. But don't let that feeling fool you.

Next year will be here before you know it and if you aren't planning for Q1 now, you may be too late.

Now is the time to ask:

What will 2017 look like without the Olympics or an Election?

Am I prepared?

Are my sellers prepared?

Here are the 4 biggest misconceptions about preparing for 2017 and beyond:



#1 Focus on passing the IAB Digital Media Sales Certification

Passing the IAB test should give a person confidence, it's a challenging test that requires a lot of knowledge and experience. However, no one has ever closed a sale – or even got a meeting – *because* they passed.

Statistically, people who pass the test sell more digital. But that is correlation, not causation.

The only people who pass the test are the ones qualified to take it in the first place. 80% (or more) of every sales organization will not be qualified. Of the qualified, only 80% will pass the test regardless of which “prep” course they take. Why? Because qualified people have worked on enough campaigns!

Specifically, they’ve worked on campaigns with performance issues. Over time, they have learned the many “technical problems” (pixel implementation, VAST tags, etc…) that, done wrong, can prevent a successful campaign. They’ve learned these important principles from actively selling and working on renewal campaigns. Simply working for a company that has had a digital offering for the last few years, will NOT qualify you.

Time spent making sure your sales team passes the test in 2016 is time lost on preparing them for sales they will need in 2017.

Advice:

The best way to prepare your team is to help them focus on understanding the business and marketing goals of the advertisers and agencies in their territory. Both local and national sellers will benefit from analyzing their advertisers and agencies. That means learning what they are doing digitally and what the digital opportunity really is before simply pitching inventory packages.

Specifically, salespeople will benefit from training that helps them close more business with the accounts they need most: Auto, Retail, Finance and all of the e-commerce and lead generation advertisers in their territory.

Digital sales training helps properly prepare your sellers to discuss digital opportunities during critical sales meetings. The right training delivers insights from digital thought leaders and examples of successful and unsuccessful campaigns.

Otherwise, your pure-play digital competition selling auto-endemic inventory as well as specialty agencies providing paid and organic search in addition to social media are poised to take away your remaining budget from those major ad categories.

Do your sellers know enough about their own competition and their advertiser’s goals to hold onto traditional “linear” budgets and sell even bigger multi-platform budgets?

If their strongest closing line is “a lot of people watch, listen, and read our great content – they have loved us for many years!” then your team is not ready for the IAB – or 2017. But if your goal is to get your team to pass the IAB’s test, train them to sell more digital. Ironically, it’s preparing for those sales that eventually qualifies salespeople to take the test.

#2 Skip training because we are too busy with other initiatives

There is a common misconception about training – you may think it’s for teaching new things, but really, training is practicing.

Sales training is about practicing so much that when a seller is under the pressure of deadlines and budgets, they get the right words to come out of their mouths during important meetings with decision makers. Sellers need

training to ensure they are prepared when they are up against competitors who are also great communicators and have a compelling solution with even better targeting, reach, and inventory.

If you are not practicing those essential conversations, then you are practicing the art of winging it, which over time locks us into patterns and provides a false sense of confidence. We forget how to learn new things and become increasingly more comfortable in doing what we've always done rather than what's needed to adapt.

Advice:

Focus on training as a springboard to change. When sellers know expectations are higher, and management supports these higher standards through training, they are open and eager to learn.

Direct this eagerness and enthusiasm to topics that are critical to closing multiplatform business with new and existing clients. Some ideas for topics that are practical and will move the needle on sales are:

- Using research more effectively for sales preparation
- Capturing the biggest possible deal for target accounts
- Learning the advertiser's goal(s)
- Thinking like a digital marketer
- Presenting a winning campaign strategy
- Developing success benchmarks for more renewals and upsells

If you aren't delivering this essential training to the troops, how can you expect them to grow? Train now for the skills needed in 2017 and beyond.

#3 Rely on internal training to meet all of our needs

The sales challenge is not to learn from the best and imitate their secrets. It is to blaze new trails. Tomorrow's successful salespeople will have to do new things and go beyond the surface level.

It's a combination of things that few, if any, have ever done before like using not-yet-invented apps, research offerings, data visualization dashboards, and communication tools.

Whatever the future holds, salespeople must adapt quickly.

Even if you've hired the best, most knowledgeable person to train the troops the trainer quickly becomes part of the sales team, and with each passing day, the internal trainers get further insulated from outside influence.

On the other hand, an "outside or external trainers" like myself has the ability to bring in new ideas and a fresh perspective by sharing first-hand observations from across many industries around the world.

Internal trainers, by comparison, become experts on their company's offerings and people in a way that is perfect for helping to extend the outside trainer's message.

Advice:

Utilize your internal training to deliver ongoing reinforcement; but don't expect them to develop and field-test the content too. There are too many specialties, emerging subjects, and best-practices for an internal trainer to develop into workshops.

However, a lot of outside training companies are now compiling this new information into workshops, webinars, and online training portals that internal trainers can tap into.

By working closely with the right outside trainer or resource, your internal training team will help elevate your sales team to new levels.

#4 Recognizing you should have a digital strategy but thinking you have all the time in the world to develop one

No one is better at forecasting than eMarketer's and even they didn't see how fast mobile and programmatic would take off. The perfect storm of programmatic/header bidding, video, social are all hitting our mobile devices at the same time. There is a rising generation—across all age groups – of digitally savvy consumers who are and will continue to drive the economy.

When does that change happen to the degree that every single advertiser has, if nothing else, a digital budget?

5 years? 2 years? 2017? No one really knows.

But, I do know that if you wait until that year, your competitors with a better relationship advantage will prevail.

Your team needs to get there first and stay in front. They need to be covering the marketplace and evangelizing your company's message.

Not getting out there sends a very different message. The media landscape is changing under our feet and doesn't know to wait for us to get ready for it.

Advice:

Start now.

Break down the accounts in your territory to determine their true potential value – linear plus digital.

Branding plus performance.

Blended CPMs that back into benchmark success metrics.

Find your new sweet-spot and build a business around that core. Start today by developing that plan to sell to your target list. Look at your competitor's offerings. Proactively make something happen now before someone else proactively takes away the budget you were going after.