

FREE

# THE 7 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

EVERY AD SALES TRAINING  
PROGRAM NEEDS  
TO DRIVE MAJOR REVENUE IN 2017



TIPS, TRICKS, AND OTHER ADVICE ON HOW  
TO MAKE YOUR NEXT PROGRAM A SUCCESS  
FROM A 20-YEAR NEWSPAPER TRAINING PRO

# Table of contents

<b><u>Introduction</u></b> .....	3
----------------------------------	---

<b><u>Step 1: Will a great trainer be teaching the course?</u></b> .....	6
--	---

- Passion
- Credibility
- Walked the walk
- Nurturing and supportive
- Works well with different personalities
- Keeps it fun and interesting

<b><u>Step 2: Teach great techniques</u></b> .....	10
--	----

- Make sure it's actually a training program
- See the techniques
- Make sure it's newspaper specific
- Makes sure it creates huge revenue opportunities
- Most bang for your buck
- Ensure new hires won't be left behind
- Print and online
- Program needs to adjust to the reps' problems
- Trackable ROI

<b><u>Step 3: Support team</u></b> .....	15
--	----

- Designers

- Managers and publishers

**Step 4: Showing how it's done with actual prospects..... 17**

**Step 5: Hand holding ..... 18**

**Step 6: Working the system ..... 19**

- The Dream 100
- Making it easy on the ad rep and manager

**Step 7: Accountability ..... 21**

- Ensuring serious revenue for years
- Cracking the code of accountability
- Why ad reps work against their best interests
- Pay yourself first
- The right way to hold your ad reps accountable
- Build it into the commission plan

**Checklist ..... 24**

**About Bob McInnis ..... 25**



# The 7 Essential Elements Every Ad Sales Training Program Needs to Drive Major Revenue in 2017

## A guide for publishers and ad directors

Bob McInnis, Robert McInnis Consulting

Are you thinking of creating a training program or hiring an outside training firm to help your ad staff sell more in 2017? Unfortunately, too many general ad sales training programs show only marginal initial returns before being quickly forgotten. Having dedicated much of my life to delivering ad sales training that sticks around long after the trainer has left the building, I've learned some tricks I'm going to share with you that can generate huge amounts of revenue in both the short- and long-term. I'll also explain why others fail.

As you read on, you'll see there are specific elements that'll ensure your next training program will be an unprecedented success. Some you know already, like the need for a great course and trainer. But it's the other,

less obvious ones (that took me years to figure out) that'll really determine the amount of revenue your program will generate and for how long. I think you'll be surprised at how simple and easy these extra elements are to implement within any program, especially with a training company willing to help you every step of the way (which is definitely something we recommend looking for). Most importantly, anyone can add these elements almost effortlessly.

## My desperate beginnings

My obsession with ad sales training started back in 1987 on my very first day as an ad director for a group of community newspapers in a small town outside of Buffalo. The the greeting I received from my new publisher: "We're 20% down and we need to be 20% up or you're fired."

Well, I had just spent most of my savings to move there for what I was hoping would be my first real management position. I even bought a new car to make sure I looked the part. So, with a newly leased apartment and a big car payment, I couldn't afford to turn back.

My survival literally hinged on getting my ad staff to sell significantly more in a very short amount of time.

From what I could see, I had my work cut out for me. One ad rep was already drunk at 9 am. Another, it turned out, was secretly waitressing in the afternoons. Still another was stealing from us. There were a few that were close to retirement and just going through the motions. And the remaining ones seemed to be overwhelmed by an endless series of personal problems.

On the bright side, there appeared to be a lot of room for growth.

I began working with each of them, sharing my own field-tested techniques and, to make a long story short, by the end of the month sales went up, and my new life—car, apartment, and job—were all safe.

Even better, it turned out that the techniques I taught them worked so

well that word got out and four years later I landed the plum position of training manager at Newsday/

## The 7 Essential Elements Every Ad Sales Training Initiative Needs to Drive Major Revenue In 2017



Learn more about how we can help make your next training program a revenue success.  
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New York Newsday. At the time it was a 750,000 circulation daily newspaper and the 3rd largest newspaper in the U.S.

And, the first year I implemented my training program for them, they brought in an additional \$3 million.

Even spread over about 100 ad reps, that was a huge improvement, especially when you consider that we were in the middle of the early 90's recession. Confident that my skills as a trainer and the content of my program were a big part of what was responsible for those increases, I decided to start my own training company and share my techniques with the world.

Now I can share with you what I picked up over the years working with more than 1,000 newspaper advertising departments. I think it'll help you when developing, implementing, and simply recognizing an ad sales training program that will succeed beyond your hopes.

And by succeed, I mean not only implementing a program that will be well-received and have high buy-in, but will enjoy real staying power and result in substantial, trackable revenue both in the short- and long-term.

An ad sales program where you can point to specific sales, week after week, month after month that will make you look like a hero.

Beating the odds and succeeding with training needs

to start with a great program and trainer, and I'll share how to identify the great ones, but that's not what's going to make your program succeed.

As I'll explain, to ensure your investment in time and money will continue to generate major revenue month after month, year after year, there are a few more things you'll need to do, none of which takes too much time but will be the difference between a program that turns into a major, ongoing revenue-generator and one that quickly fizzles out.

Easy ideas that include specifics on the kinds of support you'll need to have in place by management and other areas of the ad department as well as a training firm (or inside trainer) who's also willing to conduct in-field demonstrations, provide the ad reps with industry-specific presentations, and can act as a supporter and "enforcer" for you for at least the first year.

They're ideas that will ensure that the techniques learned will have staying power, despite the barrage of distractions that come and go as a part of an ad rep's and ad manager's life.

If all the steps below are followed, my experience has shown your revenue increases will be dramatic while requiring only a few hours dedicated to it each month. By the way, these are also the things you'll want to look for during any demo.

So here are my seven key elements to ensuring your next training program pays off big.

## STEP 1

### Hire a great trainer

Can the trainer "walk the walk"? Do they have real passion? Are they supportive? Adapt to various personalities? Do they make it fun?



The trainer must show they've been there and able to sell ad reps on the new approach

## Step 1

# Hire a great trainer

Anyone can deliver a training program. But to have a fighting chance of making real change, the trainer must be able to sell the ad staff on the merits of the new techniques. As many newspapers have learned the hard way, that's not as easy as it seems. To gain buy-in, here are a few characteristics I'd look for in a trainer.

### Passion

Even the most passionate, dedicated, and enthusiastic trainers can find it a challenge to keep salespeople engaged. Trainers who aren't excited about teaching their material will reduce your ad reps' buy-in, and your training initiative will suffer.

Look for trainers who really believe in their approach and enjoy their profession (as opposed to those who are mainly passionate about selling training). It should be obvious by reading their [blog](#) or during a demo.

Definitely have the trainer teach you some of the techniques as part of a demo and you'll know if they're the real deal quickly enough. If you think they're just going through the motions for a paycheck, think twice about subjecting your ad reps to them. And if the trainer is the one who developed the course, that's even better.

Ask any prospective trainers how they came to do what they do. Look for people who got into this line of work because they loved training their own ad reps and wanted to do more of it. You should see a natural, organic career progression that led them to what they're doing now. It'll give you a good idea of how interested they are in helping your staff succeed.

For example, I started as an ad rep who figured out a better way of selling advertising. When I eventually became an ad director, I found that I could drive major revenue by teaching my techniques to my own staff.

Soon, I was invited to speak at state, national, and international newspaper conferences (including the American Press Institute) to share my approach. One day, I realized I loved doing this one thing so much I decided to share it with newspapers full-time as an independent newspaper ad sales trainer and consultant.

Trainers who have real world experience in the trenches are the ones with true passion. This passion will become contagious as the training program is rolled out.

### **Credibility**

Most trainers can quote huge revenue numbers they helped generate for their clients. While I have plenty of these numbers, too, I find they're more useful when selling training than actually building credibility with an ad staff. In fact, sometimes throwing out big numbers increases their skepticism and resistance which makes creating buy-in even more difficult.

I find it's much more important for a trainer to spend time showing he's been where the ad reps have been. One way I do it is to conduct what looks like a live video Web meeting where I try to sell to a difficult prospective advertiser. The prospect is resistant, even a little abusive, and vents his frustrations with newspaper advertising. He gives me the typical objections such as he has no money, the newspaper is too expensive, circulation is down, and the economy is weak.

Immediately, I've shown the ad reps that I've walked in their shoes, I understand how tough it is out there, and my course will be directed toward solving their specific issues and won't be an academic exercise.

**If you're trying to help your ad reps sell more local advertising, make sure the trainer has thrived selling local advertising for smaller community publications that weren't the obvious buy in the market.**

So, if you're hiring an outside trainer, make sure you take a look at the background of the trainer to ensure they have solid ad sales, management, and training experience within the newspaper industry. I'll talk more about the importance of newspaper-specific training programs later.

Of course, it doesn't hurt if they held a training position at a big-name newspaper like Newsday, but if that's their only work experience, your ad reps might be afraid the trainer won't understand the real dynamics involved in selling small and mid-sized local businesses.

In fact, some trainers have moved their way up through organizations without ever having sold local ads at all, starting in the research department, moving on to major accounts and then the ad director's position. Even

if you don't notice that beforehand, your ad reps will once the training begins.

So, if you're trying to help your ad reps sell more local advertising, see if the trainer has thrived selling local advertising for smaller community publications that weren't the obvious buy in the market.



### **Has the trainer recently “walked the walk”?**

You'll also want to see if the trainer has actually made a successful sales call recently. Just as good universities require their professors to publish research in a journal each year, I believe good trainers shouldn't hesitate to step in and sell for an ad rep (I do it all the time in Web meetings for my clients). They should be doing this continuously, if for no other reason than to make sure they stay sharp and not forget what it's like out there.

### **Nurturing and supportive**

Trainers have to be secure about the soundness of their training skills and material. When they're not, they can become condescending, defensive and begin talking down to the staff. They can also discourage questions or dissent.

I tell ad reps from the start to challenge me if there's anything I'm teaching that either doesn't make sense or that they wouldn't feel comfortable using in their own territories. This open dialog is critical.

In some cases, I've even witnessed trainers compensating for their lack of confidence or weak material by bullying the staff, trying to show how well they know (and how little the ad staff knows) the very material the trainer has been focusing on for years. This will stop the success of any training initiative dead in its tracks.

So make sure the training room is a nurturing, supportive place where ad reps are able to make mistakes.

Remember, selling is personal. Even when they're hitting their goals, many ad reps still, wrongly, remain insecure about their abilities, as if they're afraid they're going to be found out. An ad rep who is em-

barrassed while in front of peers and management will often fight against the training, and you'll have at least one ad rep spending their energy trying to discredit the trainer as they try to redeem themselves.

So, make sure your trainer plays nice. Besides, public humiliation doesn't work and is just plain mean.

### **Works well with different personalities**

Ad reps can also have a variety of very strong personalities. A good trainer should be able to get along with each of them.

Let's face it. Ad reps have a tough job and being stubborn, independent thinkers often is what makes them persevere and succeed in the face of rejection. So, it follows they can also have their own, tightly-held opinions on selling. A trainer should know how to draw them along without telling them they're wrong and without throwing the better ones off their game.

### **Keep it fun and interesting**

Most ad reps will tell you they got into ad sales because they thought it would fun. Tap into this.

Like most of us, many ad reps don't enjoy sitting in a conference room for extended periods of time. No matter how good the material is, it can be torture unless the trainer keeps it light and fun. When they know their material well enough, a good trainer can relax, focus on the audience, and lighten up. They know the value of humor in keeping the ad reps engaged and are always looking for opportunities to make them laugh.

In fact, when humor is used correctly, I find it's one of the best tools when trying to determine if the staff is buying into a certain key point or philosophy.

## **Other issues**

Certainly, there are a million other things a good trainer pays attention to, like how to manage the dynamics of a room, how to keep on track, how to speak clearly and professionally. Even knowing when it's time to take a break.

I also find that illustrating each concept with a number of case studies helps keep the group engaged and keeps it grounded in reality.

Even any PowerPoint used needs to be interesting. Including lots of video and graphics, instead of endless bulleted points or your group may experience the dreaded death by PowerPoint.

## **A great sales trainer first**

Be extra careful of so-called social media experts

selling online ad sales training. There are plenty of people who know how social media works. Pull any teenager off the street and odds are he'll get you up to speed on the mechanics of social media.

What you need is an excellent ad sales trainer who understands the motivations and misconceptions of local advertisers and how to use these insights to help sell and help them succeed, whether it be from print, online display, directories, "deal of the day" sites, SEO, SMO, or improving their Web sites.

Keep these suggestions in mind when looking for a trainer. A good trainer will go a long way in giving your ad reps religion and genuinely excite and motivate even the most seasoned ad rep who believes there's nothing more to learn.

**Teach great techniques**

Will use of the new techniques generate major, trackable revenue fast? Does it address both print & online? Give big bang for your buck?



Just exposing your ad reps to major revenue opportunities won't produce lasting revenue

## Step 2

# Teach great techniques

Choosing the right course is critical. The techniques need to open up significantly new opportunities for the staff to sell more, larger, and more frequent advertising in both print and online. This means it has to correctly identify and solve the most significant problems your ad reps are facing, be in the best interests of both your business community and your newspaper, and at the same time allow the ad reps to use all the other techniques they've learned in the past.

Here are some of the areas I'd look at when trying to decide which program is right for you.

### **Make sure it's actually a training program**

More and more often, partially out of frustration with the results of previous ad sales training and out of motivation to drive sales, many newspapers are circumventing their ad staff almost completely and bringing in hired guns to sell their advertising. It usually involves a major discount and in the end leaves the ad reps and managers not really knowing how to do it themselves.

I must admit, I've run these "close them at the seminar" sessions" over the years, helping one newspaper in the recent past sell an additional \$300,000 in just a few days. But here's the difference: they were highly targeted presentations, complete with spec ads I developed based on information sent to me after an initial call by the ad rep. The sessions were always held after a more extensive training program had been conducted at the newspaper and before the follow up. Still, I felt like it sent mixed messages to the ad staff.

So, I found a much better solution. In my own training program, I now act as a virtual coach and assistant (something many ad managers simply can't find the time to do) and "set-up" the ad rep, providing the analysis, a stunning ad strategy, a PowerPoint, and a self-guided series of videos. I even assist the ad reps in Web

meetings with live accounts when needed, which I've found is surprisingly more natural than high-pressure "close them at the seminar" sessions, since the ad rep is driving the sale and I only jump in when needed.

### **See the techniques**

Game-changing sales techniques should be obvious when you see them. Insist on a comprehensive Web demo where you and your management team can, among other things, be immersed in enough of the techniques that you'll know if the program will work.

A good demo should cover the background of the trainer, the overall philosophy of the program, a demo of the actual techniques, and typical roll out, including follow up.

While I'm sure this is obvious, the demo should be conducted by the trainer you're considering putting in front of your group, which has the added benefit of giving you a great idea of the trainer's knowledge and passion for the material as well as his personality and training style. This'll help you see if he'll be a good fit for your staff.

Even as busy you are, you'll be making life much easier on yourself if you spend the time to fully understand what your ad reps will be learning.

Remember, a lot will be riding on the success of the program. A little extra time spent up front in a demo meeting will have a huge affect on the revenue you'll ultimately generate.

### **Make sure it's newspaper specific**

Some training companies believe that "sales is sales" and the selling dynamic doesn't really change from industry to industry. While there's some truth to that, there are some fundamental, major challenges with selling newspaper advertising—both print and online—that general sales techniques just don't address. Without starting with a program that recognizes and eliminates these roadblocks, the ad reps will continue to be derailed and ultimately won't adopt the new general sales techniques.

The good news is, once you teach your ad reps how to eliminate the industry-specific problems, all the general techniques the ad reps have learned, or even those they learn in the future, will be much more effective and they'll actually use them.

You can watch me describe the roadblocks we believe exist

in detail in [this video](#). The breakout box on the next page will give you a quick summary of the two biggest problems that I (and many of my clients) believe ad reps are facing, and they simply don't exist in

**Insist on a comprehensive Web demo where you and your management team can, among other things, be immersed in enough of the techniques that you'll know if the program will work.**

## The Two Biggest Roadblocks to Enormous Ad Sales Opportunities

First, your prospective advertisers believe response is very unpredictable, so they hesitate to run at all or limit their risk by running smaller or with a cheaper publication. In effect, what they're hoping to get out of their investment – response – is something they don't believe they'll ever get. This is something other industries rarely encounter and causes huge problems for ad reps.

Second, most local businesses also think advertising is somewhat of an art form, a creative process, and therefore is subjective. If they run at all, too often they run the wrong size, content, and frequency and get no response and blame the newspaper. That nobody's reading it. That print is dead. That it's too expensive. That the economy's the problem. And because their ad was mainly a result of their creative process, they get offended and resist when the ad reps try to explain why the ad was the problem.

Traditional sales approaches won't work on these objections unless the ad reps have some additional skills to be able to change the prospects incorrect underlying theories and offer an alternative in a way that they'll believe, beyond a doubt, will work.

Without incorporating solutions to these problems into their sales process, your ad reps can keep hitting a wall and eventually abandon the traditional sales techniques they've learned. Worse, they may even start to believe some of the objections their prospects are giving them.

Start with an ad sales training course that includes how to eliminate these roadblocks, and it'll be much easier for your ad reps to successfully apply all the other consultative selling approaches you've been trying to get them to use.

most other industries. I'm always surprised that other newspaper-specific training programs don't acknowledge these problems nor take the time to provide real-world solutions. It's a major detail that can make or break the effectiveness of the training.

### Most bang for your buck

Look for training that'll give you most bang for your buck. Does it involve management and other ad departments such as the graphic designers? Do they include extensive coaching? Does the training company support you throughout the year and beyond? Do they have ways to significantly lighten the load of the ad reps and managers? And in general, does the trainer make himself accessible to the ad reps

whenever they need them?

### Ensure new hires won't be left behind

Make sure there's also some kind of a mechanism that facilitates training of any ad reps hired after the initial training program is rolled out. For example, we give our clients access to a 150-page new hires course, one of the most popular in the U.S. More importantly, I conduct a condensed, Web-based version of our Response Oriented Selling course monthly. It's more than enough for the ad rep to get a good foundation in the techniques before I hand them off to their manager and give them access to my Presentation Packs and our long-term follow up.

## Print and online

Look for a course that can be used to sell both print and online advertising sales. Even better if it can incorporate selling your various online products including mobile, “deal of the day” sites, online directories, search engine optimization, social media optimization, and creating more effective Web sites.

For example, with some online products it may seem like the goal is driving more traffic to an advertiser’s Web site, but what your advertiser really wants, again, is response. This might involve the additional step of helping your clients convert their Web site visitors into customers. Many newspapers have found out the hard way that no matter how effective their digital programs are, if the client can’t get the prospect to buy, then they’ll lose the ad revenue.

In fact, with response being so much more measurable online, even with social media marketing, selling response will be even more critical than with print. Your ad reps should be prepared to help with that.

### **Make sure the program adjusts to the ad rep**

Good trainers should already know what the ad reps are running into out there. But it’s still vitally important they listen to the problems ad reps are facing.

At the beginning of the first day with a new group, I always ask for their input in making a list of their problems. They’re usually fairly predictable, but occasionally I find something revealing in the answers. More importantly, it helps the ad reps see that the training is going to be adjusted to *their* needs and not the other way around. It’s also a fantastic way to break the ice and get them to realize they’re all experiencing the same problems.

I then revisit the list at the end of the training and make sure that the staff has better ways to overcome

every one of them.

### **A good program doesn’t confuse what the prospects are saying with what they mean**

Too many ad sales courses and even entire sales initiatives are developed by reacting to the prospects’ explanations of why they don’t want to advertise.

Objections such as “you’re too expensive”, “I have no money”, and “print is dead” are simply taken at face value. Newspapers and their trainers then go to work mapping out answers to these objections, or worse, they begin discounting rates and making other adjustments under the assumption they’re actually responding to their customers needs.

Keep in mind these surface objections are rarely the real reasons your prospects aren’t advertising, or advertising the right size, content, and frequency. Instead, they’re usually symptoms of larger issues. Make sure your training program is going to focus on the “disease” itself and not just the symptoms prospective advertisers are showing and your ad reps will have more success. And so will your advertisers.

### **Easily trackable ROI**

How long will take to start making a return on your investment? Be sure the training program has methods that ensure a large ROI comes in quickly, even while the trainer is still there.

For obvious reasons, the program should provide trackable results. While the training techniques will eventually be incorporated into every sales call, it should be easy to point to the revenue coming in from the new skills on a weekly and monthly basis.

It should also be easy to recognize those ad reps who are using the program and those that aren’t so you’ll know where to focus your attention.



## STEP 3

### Train support areas

Does the program assist publishers, ad directors, sales managers and designers support, motivate and reinforce?



This will ensure the ad reps get the support they need and stay focused amid daily distractions

## Step 3

# Support team

There are two areas that can offer the most support for your ad reps, each in different ways. The things you as a publisher or an ad director say and do, along with your designers, can make or break the success of even the best training initiative. And it doesn't need to involve a lot of time or effort.

### Designers

Let's start with the designers. If you're focusing your training efforts even remotely on selling the thing the customer cares about getting out of the deal—response—then most likely your designers will need to be involved.

Sure, your designers need to know how to create ads that get a response. But, just as importantly, if the ad has any chance of being sold and at the right size and frequency, the new ad strategy must also be *explained* to the prospective advertiser in a way that makes the believe it's not going to be a huge risk if they fork over some serious money.

This means you can significantly drive up sales if the designers also understand the sales process enough to create a strategy that fits into the sales approach your ad reps are using. Training the designers as well can be hugely beneficial to the training's overall success.

In my experience, the designers are an important, and often overlooked, resource in the training and coaching process. Since they're constantly seeing the work coming through from your ad reps, most likely your designers will have some incredible insights.

For example, they probably know who's doing their homework before presenting, who's just going through

the motions, and who's trying really hard but needs some coaching. Encourage your designers to give you a heads up if one of your ad reps aren't using the new techniques and needs some additional one-on-one work from you or the trainer.

If you get them on the same page as your ad reps, you'll be amazed at how much day-to-day support they'll be able to give your ad reps. I find that after investing time in creating an effective ad, most designers are hoping that the ad will sell at the original size and content and, given the right tools, are more than happy to speak up and help get your ad reps back on the right path. Make sure your training program prepares them to support your sales staff in these ways.

One more thing about designers. Invest in the best—find designers that can really make great-looking ads. Now more than ever, local businesses need to position themselves as a viable alternative to the chain stores. Part of communicating that can be with an ad that looks just as good as what the chain stores are running. There are ad production services out there that can help you create stunning ads overnight, including an excellent one we run.

### **Managers and publishers**

Don't think of training as something you do to your ad reps, hoping it'll make lasting changes while you get back to work. It doesn't have to be time consum-

ing, but you'll need to stay involved or the staff will quickly go back to their old ways, even with the best programs.

Some publishers believe that ad sales is so critical a function of their responsibilities that they spend 25% or more of their time in that department. There are other publishers who simply trust their ad directors and focus more on other areas such as editorial or customer relations.

Wherever the publisher has decided to spend his time, it's always a good idea for him to participate in as much of the training as possible.

That's because good training programs are often not just a set of new sales techniques but involve a larger philosophical shift. As the leader of the organization, the publisher can be instrumental in championing the new philosophy.

Just as importantly, a publisher can help the entire department stay focused on the new goals and be sure the new techniques are being used.

Again, it can take very little time to do this, but the publisher understanding the approach and helping to keep everyone's eye on the ball can make the difference between a course that generates \$10,000 per month and one that generates \$100,000 per month in additional revenue.

STEP 4

**Show how it's done**

Will the trainer leave the classroom to demonstrate the techniques live in front of a prospect or group of prospects?



The trainer selling to prospects dramatically helps buy-in and understanding of the techniques

## Step 4

# Showing how it's done

Having someone come in and reveal new, major opportunities that have existed all along can sometimes be rough on ad reps' egos. "If there was any more money to be had in my territory, I would have already gotten it," some ad reps will reason. "My current and prospective advertisers are telling me they have no money and I believe them." Unless a trainer is careful, ad reps can easily dismiss the new techniques as something that might work elsewhere but not in their town or with their people. This "it's different here" syndrome is something every trainer and likely every ad director who is new to the market faces.

There are a lot of things a trainer can do to ensure this doesn't happen, such as showing they've sold successfully in the same kind of market the ad reps are in. Another fantastic way is to supplement the actual classroom training with demonstrations within the market in front of the ad reps' own prospects. Often, I see everything "click" during these sessions for some of the more skeptical ad reps.

For example, I conduct a current and prospective advertiser seminar using exactly the same sales techniques that I've taught the ad reps to use. Just as we teach, there's no pressure whatsoever put on the attendees. But the ad reps see the prospects nodding and witness the group buying into the techniques. Following the seminar, when the prospects approach the ad reps to begin or increase their advertising program, the ad reps can fully understand the power of solid consultative selling applied properly to the newspaper industry. Often it's then that they make the decision to buckle down and memorize the approach.

One-on-one meetings with prospects are another way to accomplish the same thing. This enables me to model the correct behavior while at the same time generating enough revenue to earn my keep fast.

**Hand holding**

Is each ad rep walked through an actual sale with the trainer to ensure any kinks are worked out and success is immediate?



Buy-in and long-term use will fail if the trainer isn't ensuring the first attempt is successful

## Step 5

# Hand holding

OK, so a great trainer who has walked in the ad staff's shoes has taught them some new, game-changing, newspaper-specific techniques. They've shown a ton of great case studies and even successfully modeled the correct way of using the approach with real prospects. But if you want the revenue increases and new behavior to stick, the trainer's job isn't done yet. They need to hold each ad rep's hand while moving through the techniques for the first time.

In fact, I think this kind of coaching is so critical that I do this myself as part of our program with every single ad rep (it can easily be done in a series of Web meetings).

I do this because there are just so many places ad reps can stumble and dismiss the approach as even less effective than what they were doing before. Without someone being there to help them troubleshoot, work out the kinks, and ensure they have a big success the very first time out, the training program will likely fail.

So, the trainer has to help choose the right prospect to go after, prepare them for the first sales call, help them analyze the information they get, ensure the final presentation is flawless, and that the ad rep knows the right answers to every expected objection. It takes a little extra time, but the payoff is enormous.

This step is especially critical for veteran ad reps who, for years, have been using an entirely different approach that's been working relatively well. Sometimes you have to drag them through the entire process once before they see there actually is a more effective way of selling and the ad reps change their approach.

I highly recommend you choose a program that includes this kind of hands-on coaching, at least the very first time out. We call them "target account sessions" and we find that they also act as a nice final exam.

## STEP 6

### Work the system

Is the trainer ensuring a long-term revenue stream with ongoing assistance with reaching revenue goals and coachings?



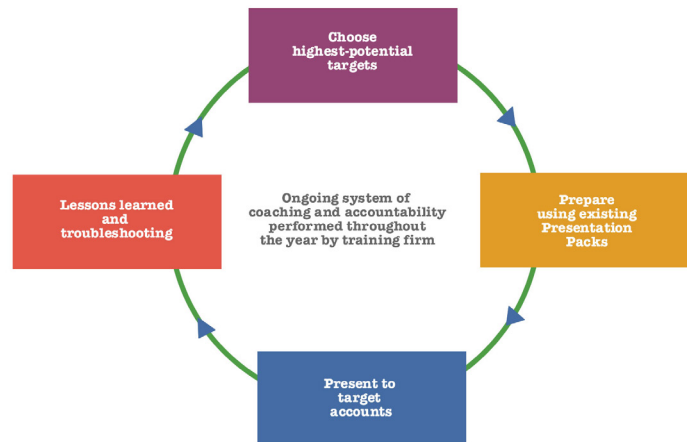
With managers' time limitations, trainer helps ensure system is used and major revenue realized

## Step 6

# Working the system

With steps 1 through 5 in place, working the system is the next critical step that will ultimately determine the long-term revenue stream coming from of the course. If done correctly—and there are some tricks to it—you'll be able to produce astounding revenue increases. If you don't, you risk the program, and any significant revenue, quickly fading into oblivion.

Fortunately, it's easy to do and a good trainer will assist with every aspect.



Even the best piece of exercise equipment won't work unless you use it. Similarly, it's incredibly important that you make sure your ad reps now work the new system they've learned, which can be a challenge for busy managers. In fact, overworked publishers and ad directors with little time to spend ensuring their ad reps are using the new system is one of the biggest reasons even the best training programs don't generate serious revenue. A good training firm knows this and won't leave you hanging. They should, like us, do much of this work for you throughout the year.

Working the system is not complicated. We recommend each ad rep simply move through the process once each week with the highest potential prospect they have. We determine which prospects have the highest potential by looking at how big an advertiser *needs* to run to succeed (usually determined by how few people are about to buy their products or how large their competition is running) and how big they *can* run (usually

determined by how much of a profit they'd make with a poor response).

It's the same process used during the hand-holding step, helping each ad rep choose their best target account and, once the information is retrieved from the prospect, help the ad rep create a strategy. Once the ad is produced by your creative services department, you should role-play the final presentation with the ad rep and work through any possible objections.

At this stage, if the new techniques are any good, your ad reps should be closing almost every sale and just as importantly, by doing this you'll identify any weaknesses and can troubleshoot. As an ad manager, if you're willing to work with your ad reps on specific accounts, this is by far the most profitable.

### **Dream 100**

In fact, we take this part so seriously we help the newspaper come up with a "Dream 50" or "Dream 100" list at the very beginning of the training program and help them go after those pre-determined prospects throughout the year.

These are high-opportunity prospects that we and the newspaper together identify as desperately needing to be running or running larger and more frequently (despite the prospects' claims to the contrary).

I then conduct Web meetings throughout the year to ensure they're on track and using the techniques

properly, helping them troubleshoot and coaching as we proceed to land each prospect.

### **Making it easy on the ad rep and manager**

I actually take it a step further and provide what we call industry-specific "Presentation Packs" that include great ads we've developed that have sold in many other markets, a PowerPoint (or Keynote for the Mac and iPhone/iPad people), and a series of coaching videos that show specifically how to conduct each sales call as well as the logic behind the strategy.

This cuts down significantly on both the ad reps' and managers' time while substantially boosting productivity.

The reason I bring these things up is just to emphasize the importance of this step and the amount of attention we suggest placing on it. Ad reps desperately need support working any system and while the approach we've developed makes things simple, it's not the only way to do it.

You'll be fine if you just make sure your ad reps are going through the entire process for the highest-potential accounts they have once every week.

If you can just do this one thing, you won't believe how many problems you'll uncover with the way your ad reps are approaching the sale and opportunities to make your ad reps more effective. And the revenue will pour in like nothing you've seen before.



**Accountability**

Does the trainer hold the ad reps accountable throughout the year? Do they help push the techniques to the forefront?



The trainer has to be constantly holding the ad reps accountable for ongoing use and success.

## Step 7

# Accountability

The last critical step is holding the ad staff accountable. There's a specific way to do this to ensure it works. In my experience, this will make the difference between a program generating a total of \$50,000 to \$100,000 and one that can drive that amount every month, with unlimited potential.

In many ways, it's the most important step of all for the success of any training program, not just ours, and it took me years to figure out why. Its importance is underrated, counter intuitive, and a little baffling as to why it's so necessary. In fact, if you've correctly completed all the other steps above with previous training programs and only produced a temporary, marginal return, this is probably the reason.

The good news, again, is just like the previous step of working the system, it doesn't take all that much time (we do much of it for our clients) and the payoff is enormous.

Many of my clients believe, as I did for a long time, that it should be enough just to teach their ad reps an easier and more effective way to sell. As long as they really learned the new techniques, had strong initial successes with the approach, and therefore believed in the superiority of the techniques, wouldn't they naturally gravitate toward using them without someone having to hold them accountable? Wouldn't an ad rep be crazy not to automatically use a system of selling they, themselves, believe is easier and more effective?

The answer is a resounding "no." And proof of the dramatic affect on sales of holding the ad reps accountable really hit home for me when I witnessed how Jim Thompson, publisher of the 20,000 circ. daily The Coeur d'Alene Press in Idaho, was using it. After my training, his group began consistently generating an additional \$100,000 per month in added revenue, month after month, year after year, right in the middle of the recession. He's still way up every month and attributes it primarily to my course and accountability.

## **Cracking the code of accountability**

While I always believed accountability was important, he helped “crack the code” in terms of defining the single reason why many training programs drive so much revenue for so long while others newspapers only have an initial, large surge during and immediately following the training before the revenue starts to fade away.

The explanation made so much sense that it prompted us to start managing this part of the process for our clients, too.

## **Why ad reps work against their best interests**

Here's the reason why follow up is such a big deal.

As Jim explains, just about any kind of successful ad sales approach involves your ad reps being more analytical and doing a little more homework—just plain think more—before making their presentation.

It doesn't necessarily take more time to do this. Often it's just a matter of the ad rep simply replacing a less productive activity with a better one.

Still, most ad reps aren't used to this needs analysis mode and the unfortunate result is that as soon as management looks away, ten other, more pressing tasks will drive the new sales approach further and further down their “to do” list.

It's not that the ad rep doesn't want to do it, just as many of us want to lose a few pounds. It's more that with everything else going on in their lives, they just never get around to it.

“It's my job, therefore, to constantly be pushing it up to the top of their list.” Jim explains.

## **Pay yourself first**

It's similar to the dynamic that prompted the popular personal finance strategy “when paying your bills, pay yourself first.” The idea is there's always something more immediate that needs to be paid and if you wait for a convenient time to start saving, it may never come. Similarly, an ad rep who keeps putting off working the new system until after they're done with the relentless, more urgent, but less productive tasks will never get to the activity that'll really drive the major revenue.

I think it's a fascinating dynamic and one most publishers and managers are either unaware of or grossly underestimate its affect on sales.

I've seen this with every program I brought in while training manager at Newsday and, certainly, it happens with my own program if both myself and my client don't keep an eye on it.

And because follow-up and accountability will similarly fall to the bottom of the ad directors' to do list, I'm starting to personally help the ad reps stay on track and hold them accountable throughout the year.

If your training firm doesn't recognize the value in this and isn't supporting you in this area, then, by all means, do this step yourself or find another program.

## **How to hold ad reps accountable**

So, how to you hold them accountable? Like other clients, Jim Thompson certainly took my advice and worked the system. He estimates he succeeded in driving \$100,000 per month by spending only 2.5 hours per week, partly by asking his ad reps for evidence that they're using the techniques properly.

He'd also look at the homework the ad reps had done before the presentation and made sure the ad rep went back to the drawing board when they didn't correctly follow the process after some further guidance from him. He also made sure the ad rep had the presentation down before he allowed them to return to the client with a recommendation.

Again, by tracking the process and not just the outcomes, you'll be able to determine where the problems are and fix them. It'll also be harder for them to appear they're using the techniques when they aren't.

### **Build it into your commission plan**

Jim also did another thing that certainly isn't necessary but kept his staff on track. If each ad rep didn't go through the process at least once a week, he knocked a percentage point off of their commissions.

The interesting thing about that was after three years Jim decided to eliminate this commission penalty, and he said sales instantly dropped, further supporting his theory that the ad reps need help pushing

solid selling techniques to the top of their list.

A couple of months later, when he realized the cause of the sales drop, he imposed the commission penalty once again, but this time knocking off 2% of their commissions if the ad reps weren't working the system. Sales jumped up again and he ended his year 7% up, all due to making the ad reps accountable.

I should add that we started doing this step for our clients out of necessity. Early on, every client tells us the same thing. "Of course I'm going to follow up and hold the staff accountable. If I spend money on a training program I'm going to be sure my ad reps use it. I'll be reviewing the techniques in meetings and I'll be coaching them and tracking them and we're going to make this happen!"

But even the best-intentioned publishers and ad directors get sidetracked, too, and because we think this stage is so important, that's why we now stay involved in the follow-up process. Every ad sales training program should.

# Evaluating a great training program

## Checklist

### Step 1: Will a great trainer be teaching the course?

- ☐ Passion
- ☐ Credibility
- ☐ Walked the walk
- ☐ Nurturing and supportive
- ☐ Works well with different personalities
- ☐ Keeps it fun and interesting

### Step 2: Teach great techniques

- ☐ Make sure it's actually a training program
- ☐ See the techniques
- ☐ Make sure it's newspaper specific
- ☐ Makes sure it creates huge revenue opportunities
- ☐ Most bang for your buck
- ☐ Ensure new hires won't be left behind
- ☐ Print and online
- ☐ Program needs to adjust to the reps' problems
- ☐ Trackable ROI

### Step 3: Support team

- ☐ Designers
- ☐ Managers and publishers

### Step 4: ☐ Showing how it's done with actual prospects

### Step 5: ☐ Hand holding

### Step 6: Working the system

- ☐ The Dream 100
- ☐ Making it easy on the ad rep and manager

### Step 7: Accountability

- ☐ Ensuring serious revenue for years
- ☐ Cracking the code of accountability
- ☐ Why ad reps work against their best interests
- ☐ Pay yourself first
- ☐ The right way to hold your ad reps accountable
- ☐ Build it into the commission plan



# About Bob McInnis

Bob McInnis is a leading newspaper consultant specializing in helping drive significant local advertising sales for daily and weekly newspapers of all sizes. His Response Oriented Selling course is in place at over 1,000 newspapers worldwide, and has helped clients consistently drive up to \$100,000+ per month in added revenue. It can be conducted on-site or via Webinar, making it affordable for virtually every newspaper.

His “Everything You Need To Know To Start Selling Newspaper Advertising Tomorrow” course for new ad reps is one of North America’s most popular ad sales courses.

Bob’s inexpensive but powerful Presentation Packs service includes monthly, ongoing live training and coaching as well as a series of weekly videos explaining how to sell a stunning ad to a specific high-potential category. Focusing on a different category each week, Presentation Packs have helped his clients generate multiple sales of \$25,000 and above with little time and effort.

Before starting to consult, Bob was the training manger at the then-750,000 circulation Newsday/New York Newsday. Before that he was ad director for a group of 10 weeklies in the Buffalo area and sold for and managed sales staffs in suburban Boston before that.

He has spoken often at API, INMA, the World Association of Newspapers, the Society of Newspaper Design, and almost every state and regional newspaper association.

Read Bob’s blog at [newspaperadsales.com](http://newspaperadsales.com) and follow him on Twitter at [@bobmcinnis](https://twitter.com/bobmcinnis). More information can be found at his ad sales Web site or by calling (631) 477-2505.

**Curious how Bob could help your ad staff drive major revenue in 2017? Contact us.**