

SUPERCARGED STAFFING

“Sales-force automation gives you the power to do everything from closing deals on-site to configuring marketing campaigns.”

Sarah Schafer, Sarah.
Inc. Magazine. 1997. No. 2, pg. 41.

Sales force automation, marketing automation, the Internet. All are evolving areas of technology—and all offer tremendous potential to staffing firms. This article offers several ideas on incorporating technology in a way that can give your firm a competitive edge—without overwhelming your sales reps—or your budget!

SALES FORCE AUTOMATION IDEAS

1. Central Contact Database

Do contact manager programs work for staffing sales reps? It's probably not all that practical to fire up a laptop in a client's offices, or even in a car after the call. The business of staffing is really pretty simple—do a good job of putting the right people to work in the right places. So, why do you need a laptop in front of a customer?

Although sales reps may not need laptops, contact management certainly isn't a bad idea. Smart sales organizations really can't survive without it. Staffing companies could benefit from creating a central database of client and contact information. A contact database can serve a few vital functions:

- 1) Ensure client and prospect information doesn't get lost when a sales rep leaves.
- 2) Provide an easy way to analyze client and territory trends.
- 3) Serve as the basis for automated marketing and sales follow-up.
- 4) Track significant client events (e.g., problems and solutions, specific needs, etc.).
- 5) Simplify training for new hires by helping them easily get up to speed on clients.

Contact databases don't always make activity tracking easier. In many cases, old-fashioned paper and pencil reports are much easier to use to keep track of telephone calls, appointments and servicing activities.

2. Opportunity Management

This is a subset of contact management which makes a lot of sense for sales people who focus on major accounts or strategic staffing sales. An opportunity management system can help keep track of all the little details in a major deal, and ensure consistent, timely follow-up with all the relevant decision makers. An opportunity management system also makes sense as a tool to analyze long-term staffing usage. It can be used to identify opportunities for recurring needs, and “tickle” sales reps to follow-up at the right time. Most good contact managers include the ability to do opportunity management.



3. Activity Tracking, Reporting and Analysis

Even though contact managers may be the wrong tools for activity tracking, that doesn't mean automation shouldn't be used in sales management. While paper reports may be the best way to collect data, they are the worst way to analyze it. Paper reports lead to discussions of specific clients and the telling of "war stories." A better approach is to take the raw data and input it into some form of analysis tool—for example, an Excel spreadsheet. By entering the data into a computer, you can easily analyze differences between sales reps and territories, spot trends in activities, and evaluate the effectiveness of your sales and marketing efforts. Also, focusing on the "numbers" balances the qualitative analysis done during one-on-one reviews of weekly reports.

4. Automated Sales Follow-up and Marketing

Do you have a process to ensure that every prospect receives timely, consistent follow-up from your company? Most staffing companies don't. They rely on sales reps to provide all the follow-up. As a result, many of your current clients probably don't know of all your capabilities. Even worse, you may be losing prospects who "slip through the cracks." You may also be failing to differentiate your staffing service from the others in your market.

The solution is very simple. Create an automated process for sales follow-up and ongoing marketing. Many contact managers allow you to create "action plans" which are pre-defined series of activities. New prospects, existing clients, and even former clients can then be assigned to the appropriate plan to help build on-going relationships. Action plans can be used for literature fulfillment, sending follow-up letters, scheduling follow-up calls and action items, and keeping track of significant events like birthdays and anniversaries.

This particular area of sales force automation is what Haley Marketing Group specializes in!

A FEW OTHER AUTOMATION IDEAS

1. Virtual Tours

Wouldn't you love it if you could bring every prospect to your offices to show them firsthand just how good you really are? Well, physically bringing them to you may not be feasible, so why not consider creating a virtual tour of your offices. Professional, multimedia presentations can take months, and thousands of dollars, to create. And, for showing off a staffing company these are overkill. You can create a great, professional looking presentation in-house for well less than \$1,000.



If you have a copy of PowerPoint, you have all the software you will need. To capture images of your offices, just use any decent camera, and take shots of your facilities, staff, testing equipment, whatever you want to show off. The trick is to take the film to a developer who can save the images on diskette or CD-ROM. You can then plug your photos into a PowerPoint presentation to create a simple and easy tour. One trick to keep in mind—keep the presentation short. When you're not using video or audio, slideshows get pretty dull. A short presentation, which can be easily narrated by your sales rep makes an excellent impression.

To ensure your presentation is polished and professional, use predefined templates to help you build a consistent look and feel. You may also want to consider hiring a free lance graphic artist to help clean up your work. It is amazing what someone with a little talent can do to help presentations look better.

2. The Internet

Pages and pages could be written about the use Internet in staffing. The truth is, most of the staffing companies who have web pages are receiving very little traffic. The exception may be IT and contract staffing firms who rely on the Internet for recruiting and applicant communications. However, the Internet can, and should, be a great tool for your company—if you use it for what it is, a communications tool.

The Internet seems to be an ideal way to communicate with existing clients. In its most basic form, e-mail is much more effective than voice mail for sharing job order requirements and presenting candidates. Ultimately, the Internet could be used to create a “self-service” candidate database. Clients could browse to search and review resumes, schedule interviews, and present offers. Done well, this kind of web site could improve service to clients and lower the cost of service!

Note: There are many commercial web sites dedicated to collecting resumes (see www.monsterboard.com for an example). While these sites have advanced searching capabilities, they lack quality controls. The opportunity for staffing companies is to create higher quality databases. Clients will only use a self-serve database if they can trust the data, and if using the database saves them time. If you can provide access to well-screened candidates, you can offer clients a truly valuable tool.

The Internet is also becoming an excellent way to communicate with applicants. In 1996, fewer than 20% of the workforce had access to e-mail. That figure is now up to 50%! The Internet could be a great tool for building relationships with applicants and prospective applicants. The value would not be in creating a web site, and hoping people come to you, but rather in sending information the applicants would value. The Internet offers a low cost way to stay in-touch with applicants, keep them apprised of job opportunities, and solicit referrals.

The Internet could also be an excellent tool to screen job applicants. Rather than scheduling an initial interview, you could have candidates complete behavioral and skills testing on-line. Those who pass the test would be brought in for an interview while those who didn't would receive timely, honest feedback. This may sound impersonal, but in reality, an internet-based screening tool would be much more convenient for applicants. It would also eliminate the discomfort of rejecting candidates (for both the counselor and the applicant).



There are so many possible ways to use the Internet to improve staffing companies. The challenge is to determine how you could best use this low cost communications tool to your advantage.

3. Service Process Automation

Most staffing companies have created a regular service process for follow-up and quality control. These procedures are ideal candidates for automation. From simple things like reminders to make first day calls, to more advanced functions like automatically making reactivation mailings or sending service quality surveys, today's sales automation tools can be easily adapted to customer service. Like sales automation, service process automation will ensure consistency, improve quality, lower costs and maintain top-of-mind awareness with clients and applicants.

For every automation attempt that is successful, there is at least one that is not. For most companies the risk of finding success is worth it. One way to decrease your risk is to thoroughly evaluate your needs and then select a program that fits. Choosing wisely will increase your success rate and give you the results you want.