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## Your sales don't have to cool off during summertime

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Sizzling temperatures often leave sales out in the cold. Summertime can mean slower sales, especially in Colorado, where everyone who isn't already on vacation is pining for the great outdoors.

People are distracted and often short-staffed. In many companies, summertime rivals or even exceeds end-of-year doldrums.

This seeming problem is also an opportunity. As a wise prophet once said, "Investment always precedes return."

Just as farmers plant crops months before they harvest, so should salespeople utilize a summer slowdown to develop customer relationships, and plan for fall and winter sales success.

Jump-start the second half of the year by assessing first-semester goals. What worked and what didn't work? Identify what to keep doing and what to eliminate. Categorize obstacles by assessing if they relate to activity level, skill level, attitude and outlook or industry changes where you haven't kept current.

Once you've identified the core issue for future sales growth, assess options for making change. By far, the most common challenge is a defeatist attitude that assumes summer sales will be slow. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Overcome the defeatist attitude by compiling empirical evidence that establishes the actual sales environment. For example, are competitors continuing to sell in summer? Are they selling at a higher price and/or growing their companies?

Even if the objective review establishes that sales are in a slump, use this as a catalyst to find opportunity amid the slowdown. There's nothing more fulfilling than closing a sale when others are floundering.

Hot-weather sales pursuits that can bear fruit include:

- Incentivize with the "economize" plan. Make an offer so economically attractive, with a very short window of opportunity, that decision-makers must act immediately versus waiting until fall. Of course, you always must weigh the value of an immediate, less-lucrative sale against waiting for a more profitable one.

There are consultants who provide lucrative time contracts to customers during their slower summer seasons. By planning and strategizing correctly, you can make summertime a hotbed of sales potential.

- Do a territory or target customer review. The business world changes rapidly. Determine if you're targeting accurately, spending time in the right places and prioritizing correctly. Set realistic goals for the second half of the year. If sales are seasonal in your industry, make seasonal goals and quotas to reflect busy and slow seasons.
- Ratchet up relationship-building with prospects and customers. Any successful salesperson will tell you relationships are the cornerstone of success. Use summertime to build "trusted adviser" relationships with key decision-making prospects and customers.

Slower summer times are ideal to make contacts with a range of target accounts, and to find out changes and challenges they've experienced in the last six months. New opportunities often arise while changes are being made, or immediately thereafter.

Colorado offers abundant summertime venues to build new relationships and cement existing ones. Picnics, tennis, golf, fishing, boating, hiking, river rafting or just lunch or coffee at a popular sidewalk café are great draws to familiarize prospects and clients alike with your services and products.

Consider developing customer-appreciation events that provide incentives for current customers to bring guests.

- Connect convincingly with employees and suppliers. Many are stressed filling the gaps created by so many people being on vacation. Anything you can do to lessen the pain (e.g., problem-solving or encouraging them to vent their frustrations to you) likely will have a profitable payoff later.

With employees, use the summer lure of leaving work early as an incentive and motivator. Where possible, put salespeople on "goal time." Redirect focus away from the clock onto specific goals.

For example, people can leave after completing defined objectives, e.g., sales call quota. Where established hours are a requirement, allow sales producers to start earlier and/or work through lunch to accommodate an earlier departure.

- Sharpen the saw once in a while. This Stephen Covey suggestion relates to the need to refresh skills and correct bad habits. Summer can be the perfect time to improve performance and knowledge through sales, and industry or computer classes, as well as encourage sales force members to enroll in personal growth programs to strengthen overall job performance.
- Plan. Too often, salespeople miss deals that will bear fruit in the coming seasons because they're looking for the immediate score. Consider industries

and companies that use summer to plan annual budgets and/or make buying commitments for the coming seasons. Examples include companies with fall fiscal calendars and industries whose peak season is winter (e.g., skiing-related industries).

With the right attitude and perseverance, you can give the cold shoulder to a sales slump, and fire up the sales engine for seasons to come.

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