

## Putting Sales to Work: How Sowing the Seeds for Internal Buy-in Can Reap External Results

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**Your physician liaisons and occupational health reps are constantly out there—presenting a consistent message, keeping customers loyal and generating new revenues or referral volumes for your organization.**

Externally, it is easy to see that they are focused on delivering sales results. However, it can be another story *inside* your organization: the sales staff may be told to generate physician referrals for oncology, but to do it without a dedicated FTE...Rehabilitation indicates they expect the sales staff to generate an ambitious 20 percent increase in market share...Employers are “price-shopping” your occupational health program instead of valuing a partnership with your organization.

On top of it all, physician satisfaction is low. Consequently, you are losing referrals to the new specialty hospital in town. It is a classic case of “the left hand and right hand not working together,” much to the detriment of your customer strategies—and the bottom line of your organization.

### **An Important Partnership**

Think your sales staff needs only to be focused on external customers? Think again. Today’s sales team needs to work with internal customers, too—those who oversee products, departments and service lines. Both camps need to work in tandem to achieve the desired outcomes: customer retention and loyalty, referral volume and revenue growth. Being in tune with your internal customers and their needs will also help everyone deliver a valued product.

### **Sales: Navigating in Rough Waters**

While there are many similarities in working with internal and external customers, there are also some unique issues you have to address for the internal team:

- ❑ **The marketplace has changed—both inside and out.** Define your internal customers. Look at every level, department and team member. Recognize that there are a growing number of internal barriers, silos and ever-present politics, all being used to make sure departmental budgets survive.
- ❑ **Inpatient issues generally get more recognition and a perceived value.** Often sales efforts are not seen as valuable—nor is the resulting feedback, until it impacts a key clinical area.
- ❑ **Assuming it is “business as usual” will not cut it anymore.** If you cannot prove the outcome of your sales efforts, chances are leadership will assume it did not happen.

## Internal Customer Basics

- ❑ **Define your core business.** Research your organization's needs and prioritize against what you offer. Address market gaps and prioritize where you see customer opportunities.
- ❑ **Assess what each department or area offers.** Then rank their value to the organization based on the climate now, and what you might see for the future. Make sure your offerings have a differentiated advantage in the market—if they are not competitive, this is the time to rethink and make changes. Consider the role of sales in determining when and if products are ready to roll out.
- ❑ **Define the approach and the message** you need to relay to achieve the outcomes you want. Establish timelines and outcomes before you launch.
- ❑ **Shift and change** your external outcome expectations and measurements. Just as your internal baseline will shift and change, so will its external counterpoint.
- ❑ **Build communication channels** throughout the organization. Make sure that your plan encompasses internal communication, market interest, sales *and* marketing. Sound simple? You would be surprised how many organizations ignore one of these elements.
- ❑ **Establish a sales plan by territory.** Define tactics to achieve your desired outcomes. Then, and only then, should implementation begin.

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## Talk the Talk

Sales often is a foreign concept to the leadership team. To have the freedom to do the job, you have to first have the respect and attention of these internal decision-makers. Position your plan, process and approach for the implementation—in a way leadership can relate to:

- *Make sure the plan speaks their language.*
- *Offer a process that gets their respect.*
- *Talk about payoffs and outcomes—in terms that are relevant to them.*

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## A Six-Point Internal Selling Strategy

1. **Define measurable outcomes.** Work with finance, information systems and leadership to define what will be measured and how, learn their expectations for success, and determine how to report on progress.
2. **Product.** Work with the internal team to assess how the current deliverable is matched to customers' needs. What is the team's ability to deliver—are there issues around capacity, staffing coverage, ability to deliver on the promise? Most important, how will the team address customer service issues?
3. **Build a business and sales plan** to identify how sales can deliver the intended outcomes. This will also help you identify the marketing and operational support you will need for the initiatives.
4. **Create a structure.** It may be an alignment of how sales is structured and reporting within the organization, or a dotted line to key service lines/operations for successful operations. As the organizational strategies grow by customer group—physician, employer, and customer—it may be more important to align your sales effort by that, rather than the more traditional mode of service line or department.

5. **Get the right people.** Recruit, train and define performance measures, and create a compensation plan to drive the desired results.
6. **Hone your strategy.** Focus on desired outcomes and your customers' wants, needs and desires. Build a strategy that aligns the three elements—organizational, internal and external customers' objectives. This will clearly define sales' roles and responsibilities to deliver.

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## Must-Have Tools for Internal Success

Remember the three S's—sales, service and satisfaction:

- *Assess, develop and train each department's staff on customer strategy and service*
- *Coordinate sales and operations objectives to parallel each other*
- *Dedicate time and staff to issue resolution and accountabilities*

### Selling to Leadership

#### ***Working Well with Operations***

Consider how your proposed strategy will impact the operations team. Keep a few things in mind:

- Offer only what the program provides.
- Define deliverables with the program director and/or clinical leadership.
- Assess the throughput. Do not rely on the customer mistake to point it out; be objective.

You also need to document vulnerabilities you may see. Make sure you have a tool to document any issues objectively and create a forum to discuss and deal with them. Work toward consistent internal communication and you will more effectively move your plan and process forward. Most important, develop a team approach rather than a “we-they” mindset. Too often, our silos become our comfort zone—remember why you are in business and what your ultimate goals are.

### Program Consistency

#### ***Moving Forward***

Once your strategy is in place, your work has only just begun. A successful organization takes extra steps to make sure that the plan is working on all levels:

- Research and planning.** Get help if you need it as you note what is working and what is not. Take it a step further and review the messages you are sending to the internal and external customers. List goals for enhancing the process.
- Assess.** Keep a constant pulse on the staff, product and delivery/service capabilities. People and trends will come and go, products will evolve and so will the methods you use to deliver them.
- Nurture a customer-focused culture.** This should include both internal and external customers.
- Reinforce your strategy from the top down.** If leadership does not stay on board, others will notice. Keep the ranks committed and accountable.

- ❑ **Emphasize sales staff development.** If the sales team does not recognize their role in internal communications, their potential success will be limited.
- ❑ **Look at the data and outcomes.** In today’s culture, tangible proof counts.
- ❑ **Emphasize training for team members.** Initiate education forums, issue resolution, customer and market updates and team strategy sessions.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Your internal colleagues may be your best advocates. If they “get” the message, they will be the best marketing and advertising you can get—and they are free. Plus, you will enjoy the kind of professional collaboration that is truly rewarding. And true teamwork creates incredible customer relations. This is an opportunity to prove your value to your internal peers and administration. Do not compete with yourselves, but focus on working toward a common goal. Sell your strategy and value internally—and enjoy external success!



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