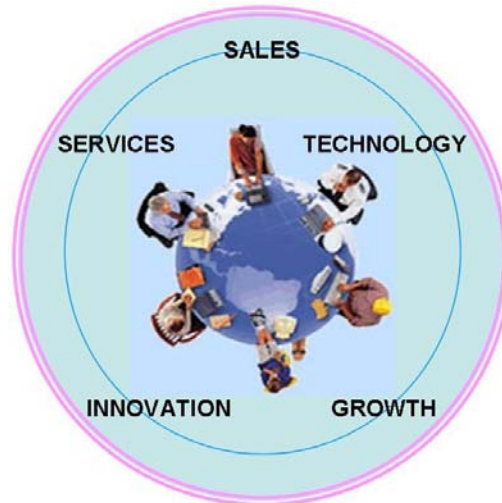


STAR ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

Star Active Management (SAM) is a sales and marketing business model designed to significantly improve the performance of sales and marketing operations of all businesses. There are five people-centric business drivers within the model and each has a powerful influence on the other, with the overall outcome being a measurable improvement on the return on investment, for the company, its customers and its shareholders. The five people-centric business drivers are; Innovation, Technology, Sales, Service and Growth. Together they create the sales and marketing return on investment.



INNOVATION

The challenge is to draw out the benefits of a product or service, to establish the Unique Selling Points (USPs) and to be creative in how the product or service is positioned in its chosen market, priced, packaged, promoted and sold. We actively encourage our customers to be innovative, think laterally and to be open to different ways of doing things. So frequently does one hear that 'we've always done it this way' or 'there is nothing wrong in the way we did it before' that it requires strong leadership to bring about a more open approach. This is often achieved through structured workshops facilitated with external resources, through brainstorm sessions and the like. Whatever process is used the outcome must be a shared vision by those who participated in the process, and a willingness to communicate that vision throughout the company. The formal starting point is the Sales Value Audit ⁽¹⁾ that determines the strengths and weaknesses of the product or service and the opportunities or threats to its success. This evaluation takes in where the product or service is currently positioned in the market, how it compares against the competition in terms of functionality, price and distribution and how it is promoted. This does not limit the free-thinking and brainstorm sessions that seek to be innovative in approach, but it does serve as an anchor point to which one can return. In this way one can pragmatically access how to achieve the innovative approach, mapping out a route from where one is, to where one would like to be. This begins the process of 'Value Realisation'.

TECHNOLOGY

Base technology is frequently a major influence on the success of a product in the market, although there are many instances where specific applications have been successful using the less popular or early generation technologies. The key task is to ensure that the technology being used is the most appropriate for the delivery of the product or service. The process is relatively simple in that one first determines how the product or service is to be used. Is it a component within a solution? Is it a product, application or service in its own right? Will it be delivered as a web service? Or is it a locally based application? There are clearly other questions and considerations such as ease of use, performance, accessibility and integration with other products, applications and services. The task is one of thinking of all the different scenarios and arriving at a common view of the most appropriate systems infrastructure.

SALES

Our goal is to build a successful sales model and a winning team with outsourced, direct and indirect channels as appropriate. We have proven sales processes for new business and account management that have been developed to ensure proper prospect qualification and a 1 in 2 close rate. Today's technology markets are ruthlessly competitive and in 2009 there will be more corporate casualties, many as a result of being ill prepared for a downturn. Failure is frequently directly related to the ability to sell and generate revenues and in the tougher market conditions that we are experiencing, there is a real need to develop a pragmatic and achievable Sales & Marketing Plan that directly feeds into the forecasts, budgets and revenues. The tools we use to achieve this are not new; we are simply ruthless in our qualification of financial budgets and how these interoperate with the Sales & Marketing Plan. The latter must draw in all aspects of product management; market planning, product and service packaging, promotion, PR, sales strategies and distribution models. In many cases alliances and partnerships will be fundamental to achieving the desired success and these should be fully evaluated and incorporated within the Sales & Marketing Plan.

SERVICE

It is measurably more difficult to win new customers than it is retain them, but such a point is frequently ignored with the inevitable result that business is lost. Successful service delivery is fundamental to ongoing and recurring customer revenues and for our part, we encourage our customers to develop both quantitative and qualitative metrics to monitor customer satisfaction. This need not entail detailed customer surveys, but should include some simple levels of communication directly with the customer to ensure that their expectations are correctly set and then achieved. For this to work consistently there needs to be a strong relationship between sales, account management if different, and those responsible for the delivery channels. Progress meetings with the customer should always have sales representation, since these meetings are also frequently a source of additional business. Regular account reviews should be undertaken with the customer and all those involved ensuring there are appropriate levels of communication between all parties. The Sales Account Plan ⁽²⁾ serves as a basis for creating a living document of the objectives, progress and achievements between a prospect or customer and the company.

GROWTH

Few businesses would choose to stand still, but many do. Our goal is to ensure that our clients make the best of their opportunities and enjoy a growth rate at least in the top quartile within their chosen markets. To do this requires many elements to come together, from the innovative thinking that should always be present, to the ongoing assessment of technology, the creation and execution of the Sales & Marketing, the delivery of first class service to the constant assessment, evaluation and correction of the overall business goals. None of this is really 'rocket science' but it never ceases to amaze us how many times companies lose their grip on the basics of driving for growth.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT (SALES & MARKETING)

The Star Active Management (SAM) model seeks to drive the return on investment for sales and marketing activities and can be measured in terms of revenue and profit, by both actuals and growth rates.

We are in no doubt that if the processes we describe are followed and there a sound business case, then revenues and product profitability will increase. With today's competitive landscape there is a thin line between success and failure and all aspects of the sales and marketing process have to work in harmony to achieve the desired results.

Notes:

1. Sales Value Audit [InitioStar's process to establish current value]
 2. Sales Account Plan [InitioStar's proven Sales and Account Management process]
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