



# The Virginian-Pilot

## Easier to Do Business: Sales Force Effectiveness

**Kelly Warren**

**NAA Marketing Conference  
January 30, 2007  
Las Vegas, NV**



# Four Topics To Be Covered

---

- **Changes Implemented**
- **Sales Force Effectiveness Initiative**
- **Tracking Improvement**
- **Key Learnings**



# Background

---

- **1995-2005 – Engaged outside research firms to expand scope of questioning and ensure non-bias**
  - looked at product, pricing, process, sales reps and competitive set
  - looked at 20 buying criteria and delivery against same
  - key measure was “Value for the Money”
- **2005-Present – Began digging deeper into data**
  - moved the study online
  - cut data by advertiser size and category
  - introduced Net Promoter Scores - NPS



# Advertiser Criteria

---

## Product Attributes

- Ad looks exactly as approved
- Allows me to tailor my message
- Ad runs exactly when it's supposed to run
- Vehicle obtains broad reach
- Being able to reach a target audience
- Vehicle is cost effective
- Ad runs where it's supposed to run
- Obtains immediate increase in traffic & sales

## Process Attributes

- Ad production process that fits my needs
- Provides clear & understandable invoices
- Provides accurate invoices
- Provides flexible contracts

## Rep Attributes

- Understands wants & needs
- Shows interest in my business
- Provides information on my trading area
- Executes unique promotions for my business
- Is knowledgeable about their medium
- Is courteous & professional
- Is a good company to do business with

**The Virginian-Pilot**



# What Our Advertisers Told Us

---

- NPS scores were at the low end versus other measured newspapers
- Small retailers were our biggest detractors
- Four broad themes emerged:
  - Offer more competitive pricing
  - Reach advertisers' target audiences better
  - Manage the process more effectively
  - Provide clear, understandable and accurate invoices



# Bottom Line

---

We needed to change our thinking  
from a monopolistic culture to a  
competitive culture.

**The Virginian-Pilot**



# Monopolistic vs. Competitive Culture

## Monopolistic

- Slow to change
- Little innovation
- Takes customers for granted
- Complacent
- Inwardly-focused
- Mostly satisfied with where they are
- Passive aggressive

## Competitive

- Quick to change
- Very innovative
- Treats each customer like gold
- Impatient for results
- Focused on the customer
- Never satisfied
- Open and frank



# Blueprint for Growth: Sales Force Effectiveness

---


- Implemented publishing-wide Sales Force Effectiveness program in 2004
- Clear mandate for change and innovation
- Five Building Blocks
  - Sales Management
  - Sales Structure
  - Recruitment & Selection
  - Training & Development
  - Support Systems



# How We Implemented Change

---

- Continuously communicated our vision and priorities
- Created a short list of action items against research results
- Assigned items to small work groups to process and problem solve
- Executed against the plan
- Constantly communicated the direction and intent of changes



*“Those who build great companies understand that the ultimate throttle on growth for any great company is not markets, or technology, or competition, or products. It is one thing above all others: the ability to get and keep enough of the right people.”*

Jim Collins

*Good to Great: Why Some Companies  
Make the Leap...and Others Don't*

**The Virginian-Pilot**



# Sales Force Changes

---

## ■ Structure

- Right people are in the Right jobs
- Right Sized teams - Revised rep to manager ratio at 7:1
- Conducted territory analyses to assure right sizing to territories
- Created a Retail Inside Sales team
- Revamped support structure and centralized functions.
- Remote Order Entry

## ■ Multiple Web Channels

- Self-service solutions, Remnant Auction site



# Sales Force Changes

---

## ■ Accountability

- Clear and Consistent Metrics (Active accounts, rebate reduction, quality calls, revenue )
- Clear and Consistent expectations
- Weekly Sales meetings (1:1's)
- Leader Boards

## ■ Career Pathing/Recruitment

- Created “Career Navigator” program and multi-level rep Certification Program



# Sales Force Changes cont'd

---

- Training & Development

- Conducted leader and rep day long “stand downs”
- Weekly sales clinics
- Technology training
- Mentor programs implemented

- Compensation

- Changed to cumulative pay system

- Recognition

- Implemented a monthly and annual recognition program entitled PRISM (Pilot Recognition in Sales & marketing)



# Research Services

---

- Added NPS scores to our metrics
  - advertisers, employees and readers
- Implemented RAM (Research & Analysis of Media) studies to gauge advertising effectiveness
- Conducted added value focus groups and strategy sessions for top customers
  - Sessions focus on customer's marketing objectives
- Created Value Proposition selling tools to tell our story and overcome objections
- Developed an advertiser web-site for easier access to Pilot information and sales channels



# Product Changes

---

- Launched a M-F product aimed at A18-34, entitled *Link*
- Created and offered new and unique ad sizes
- Began offering limited front page positions
- Reduced the number of strategic sections
- Introduced Gang Printing (custom cards)
- Redesigned classifieds
- Introduced free classifieds, Kiosks and CCTV



# Pricing Changes

---

- Centralized billing functions and began process mapping to identify and correct billing errors
- Implemented a year-round rate team looking at yield, inventory, competitive pricing sets, and simplification of the rate card
- Testing eliminating contracts, new pricing scenarios and “pay for performance” solutions



# Results

---

- Revenue gains year over year
- Sales force turnover has been reduced by 50%
- Reduced rebates and billing errors by \$1.5 million
- Active accounts have improved by 50%
- Improved employee satisfaction scores
- New wave of NPS testing is being implemented



# Key Learnings

---

- Know your people and your customers
- Communicate a vision and Clear priorities often
- Prioritize what is actionable and execute your plan
- Maximize your talent pool - Get the right people in the right jobs
- Create an environment of open, honest and consistent communication
- Establish metrics for all behaviors and desired outcomes
- Reward the Doers