

A Lead Generation Program that Even Meets the CFO's Payback Criteria

When Mark Peifer, CFO of Hiline, a high end specialty flooring distributor, decided to improve the bottom-line, he turned to a rare area for proven results – marketing. With ten sales reps covering a four state area and 283,000 square miles of territory, calling face-to-face on every floor dealer, designer or architect was no longer effective, or affordable. He wanted a way to keep his rep's time focused on selling, while expanding customer awareness to drive incremental growth.

One of Hiline's business areas that showed the most promise for growth was commercial specialty flooring. Unfortunately, many of these flooring jobs take 9 – 18 months to come to a decision. Once the decision to order flooring is made, it's too late for his sales rep to influence the decision. Why?

“The flooring materials are specified early in the commercial building cycle, indicated the CFO. “The key to a successful communication strategy is to know which jobs are currently being specified. I needed to get my sales organization engaged at that important stage of the buyer's education cycle.” The Hiline executive decided to bring in outside consulting expertise, Three Deep Marketing, to help him tackle the problem. The goal – provide marketing coverage, know when his target market was making decisions, and use this information to grow top line revenue without adding any more sales reps.

David Woodbeck and Scott Pearson, with Three Deep Marketing, put together a plan that focused on these five areas for Hiline.

1. Find out the key recommenders and influencers making floor covering decisions
2. Understand what decision-criteria they used to narrow the selection process
3. Create a centralized marketing and sales database to capture names
4. Automate and execute the multi-step, multichannel program
5. Measure the business results

Finding the key recommenders and influencers is critical for projects that are being specified by architects and commercial flooring contractors. His team knew this was important.

Understanding when and what decision-criteria that flooring specialists were using was critical. We decided to utilize some on-line survey software and sent out an invitation to key people to find out what they wanted in a flooring distributor. We narrowed their criteria to selection, service, knowledgeable staff, inventory and quick turnaround. We integrated our marketing messages around those key points. By hitting on their hot buttons, we increased market awareness and got more orders.

Creating a centralized database was critical to make the system work. “Each project might have 3 – 7 people involved in every flooring decision,” said Peifer. A sales rep can’t just focus on one person anymore. Decisions are made by committee. We decided to take all separate files that each rep had on his customers and prospects. We had business cards, rolodex, excel spreadsheets and Outlook address files.” By combining all this paper and electronic data in a single marketing database, Hiline took a huge step forward in controlling an asset as important as inventory; a current prospect and customer centralized database. While starting with only 46 names, they developed a formal process for collecting names from reps and web inquires and built a database of 3,241 names in a matter of 6 months.

Automating and executing a marketing plan can often be the most difficult part of the plan. “Like many companies, when sales pressure or other business issues arose, the communications just stopped,” said Steve Hagen, VP of Sales for Hiline. We knew that on-going frequency is important, but we didn’t have the resources, expertise or the discipline to do this effectively and consistently. We gladly decided to outsource the entire communication execution plan to our consulting partners. By assembling a set of communications that showed thought leadership and product differentiation, the company

started to notice a shift in the sales reps focus. “Instead of just calling on everyone, our reps became more focused on who was engaging with us and had active projects being planned.

Business results are important and as the CFO was a stickler for business payback. Like most programs, it took some time for the marketing communications to develop, but once they did, the momentum continued to build. “The marketing focus on high end specialty flooring has really paid off. It’s now our fastest growing business area - with high payback. Much of the credit goes to our improved marketing programs,” said Mark.

For more information about Hiline, go to www.hilineinc.com or if you want to learn more about the demand generation experts, Three Deep Marketing, visit them on the web at www.threedeeppmarketing.com or call their offices at 651-777-6601.

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