



Whose Account Is It Anyway?

Build Staff-Wide Relationships With Your Buyers

Does your customer-relations management process (CRM) build loyalty for your company as well as your account executives? Many CRM systems only build loyalty between the buyer and the seller, which leaves the company vulnerable when a buyer or seller leaves.

Most organizations invest significantly in training their salespeople to build strong customer relationships. But in the long haul, it is the organization-to-organization relationship that will sustain your business. Your organization should have a two-pronged CRM strategy: one to build customer relationships between buyer and seller, and one to build relationships at various levels between the buying organization and your organization.

These 10 tactics will improve your organization-to-organization relationships:

1. Your top-level executives should be personally acquainted with the top-level execs at each of the companies that comprise the top 20 percent of your billing. The higher up the ladder you foster relationships at both organizations, the more importance will be placed upon the organization-to-organization relationship.

Having the ear of the decision maker (versus working with decision allocators) is key to building sustainable revenue growth with your top accounts. Most top-level decision makers do not have time for salespeople, but they will welcome the opportunity to share ideas with executive decision makers in your organization.

2. Exceed the expectations of your key accounts at every level. Promotions, bonuses, and perks negotiated with the buyers are generally considered to be entitlements. The buyer, not the seller, usually takes the credit with their own management for these value-added components. When your president calls the client's president to offer first right of refusal on a major promotion or front-row seats to the game, the organization-to-organization relationship is strengthened. Too often we use value-added promotions to lever new business, rather than to reward our major accounts.

3. Relationships between the buyers at your key accounts and your support staff should be fostered in a strategically planned fashion. In the absence of your AE, does your customer know who to



call for accounting issues? For traffic, creative, and production concerns?

4. Relationships between your AEs and support staff and the frontline salespeople and sales managers in the buying organization should also be strategically planned, fostered, and monitored. Odds are that today's frontline staff will have influence with your buyers, or even become your buyers, in the future.

5. Having creative think tanks with key people in your organization and the customer's organization generates psychological reciprocity — the subconscious need to return something to those who do something for us. Introduce your writers, producers, and programmers to as many levels of your key accounts' management and staff as possible. Talking about the creative process is more fun for your client than talking about numbers. Creative discussions can also remove you from the tendering fray, and make your organization a *marketing partner* with your key accounts.

6. Providing station tours, letting the client sit in on production sessions, and having your accountant explain your invoices and broadcast orders to the client's accountant all contribute to overall organizational relationships.

7. Your top executives should know how your key accounts' top executives measure your performance, and they should have the intestinal fortitude to ask: How are we doing? Frequent customer satisfaction surveys at all levels will give your organization valuable insights on how to serve key accounts better.

8. The executive-level thank you is always a big hit. Your top executives also need to let the executives at your key accounts know about the extra effort and value your company delivers to them.


9. Top-level executives can think beyond cost efficiencies. Having an organizational relationship can help you to maintain rate integrity, and to maintain your rates at a level whereby you can afford to deliver superior customer service to your key accounts.

10. Make sure your staff knows your key accounts, and identifies themselves if they patronize your advertisers. Does your receptionist have an account list identifying the writers, AEs, or other people in your organization assigned to each account?



QUICKREAD™

- Organization-to-organization relationships will sustain your business over the long haul.
- Top-level execs from both buyer and seller should be personally acquainted with each other.
- Generate reciprocity between organizations by having creative sessions with key staff.

Your AEs should be the front line in building strong relationships with your key accounts. Having a CRM process that goes beyond your salespeople and includes everyone from top management to the back office will help build stronger and more profitable organization-to-organization relationships. 

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