

SOLUTION SELLING IN 2009

By Teresa Hiatt

“Solution Selling”, “Value-Based Selling”, “Consultative Selling”, “Power Selling”, these are all terms being used in our industry to illustrate that the role of a sales professional in the Office Productivity arena is changing. What do all of these terms mean to Ricoh Sales Professionals and more importantly, what do they mean to Ricoh Customers?

Historically in the office equipment industry, the model for salespeople has been to gain expert knowledge of the products their company sold, and then knock on doors until they found a customer that could use those products in their business. Using the example of color MFPs, a salesperson of the past might work at memorizing a list of specs and features of the newest color device and then visit customers with a message of how they could now offer color pages at a competitive price to black and white.

The New Sales Model

That model has changed for successful companies and salespeople. Today, the Office Productivity industry is ripe for consultants who take an interest in the customer's business success and have access to a full range of products, software and services that help businesses meet their objectives. Using the same example of offering a particular customer a color MFP, salespeople must now focus on understanding a customer's goals and then aligning the products with those goals; for instance a customer's goal of “Growing Business by 15% this Year” aligns with the ability of color documents to improve communication, which would help grow business.

The process has changed from knowing the products and finding a customer that can use

them to knowing the customer and aligning products, software and services to help meet customer needs.

The Ricoh Value Proposition

What Ricoh offers our customers today relates to:

- Lowering the total cost of document management
- Increasing efficiency and productivity of people and business processes
- Helping our clients meet compliance requirements
- Keeping information assets secure
- Lessening impact on the environment

These concerns and business goals are the realm of business owners, C-Level executives and strategic members of the management teams that run businesses. They are typically of little interest to purchasing specialists or facilities managers who in the past have been the target contact for office equipment vendors and are focused on gaining the lowest possible price for commodity products used by the business.

Relationship Building

The “Solution Selling”, “Value Based Selling”, or any other terms we use to describe the new customer relationship, means that Ricoh professionals interact with different people in the companies we serve, with a different message and utilizing different skill sets.

The days of using “trick” closings, like the “puppy dog close” or the “Ben Franklin close” are over for the Office Productivity Industry. First of all, the customers know the close tricks better than the salespeople and may resent them, and more importantly, they have

no place in building a long-term business partnership based on mutual value and respect.

If a sales professional brings a customer a proposal based on truly understanding the customer's business goals and accurately assessing the current environment, closing the deal simply becomes the next natural step of the business improvement process.

Gaining New Skills

With uncertain economic conditions facing many businesses today, it is a very opportune time for the Ricoh sales force to reach out to the customer base with a message of business partnership and solutions expertise. While our competitors such as Canon, Xerox, and Konica are pulling back on educational resources for their tenured sales forces, relying almost exclusively on web based product training, Ricoh offers a lifelong learning path to sales professionals focused on continually developing the business collaboration skills and solutions expertise in the environment where students learn best, in hands-on role play and lab exercises that build confidence in our offerings.

Customer Value

What this means to our customers is that Ricoh can offer a combination of award winning products, software and services that can be custom developed around each customer's unique set of needs uncovered by our expert sales force using the highly effective DOCutivity site study process. We have never been in a better position to meet and exceed our customer's expectations.

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