

## Five Keys to Effective Communication with Customers

- 1 Think before you speak and choose your words carefully. When you have a choice, use a simple word over a complicated one.
- 2 Be aware of your accent and try to speak clearly.
- 3 Pay attention to the customer. Try not to let your mind wander.
- 4 Be aware of the nonverbal signals your customers send along with their spoken message. Watch to see if what they say verbally matches their body language.
- 5 Remember that attitude is everything. Your attitude is what your customers will remember most about you as a salesperson.

—Adapted from Award-Winning Customer Service (AMACOM, New York) by Reneé Evensen, a business consultant specializing in customer relations. Reprinted with permission from The Selling Advantage bi-monthly newsletter. To subscribe to The Selling Advantage, call 800-220-5000.



## Use Education to Increase Lighting Sales

Training courses on lighting applications can help your sales staff steer customers to the right products for specific lighting needs.

Look for training opportunities in your area, such as those sponsored by manufacturers or the ALA.

Or order training materials to study on your own. Research shows that lighting salespeople who complete the ALA's *Residential Lighting Training Manual* can increase sales up to 22 percent!

## Tech Tools: Sales Volume vs. Profit Margin Know What Feeds Your Bottom Line

By Ricardo Harvin  
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Which of your products or services generates the most profit for you?

I'm not talking about your best sellers — I'm talking about what you sell that sends the most to your bottom line.

Your best profit makers and your best sellers may be the same, but do you know that for sure, or are you just guessing that's true?

Never confuse an item's sales volume with its net profit margin — and don't rely on assumptions about what's contributing the most to your bottom line.

Tracking item sales is only one part of learning what makes the most money for your business. You also need to track your total costs for each item or service, which includes your purchase price, stocking and inventory costs, shrinkage (product expiration or item theft) and maintenance or licensing fees.

You can't have a clear picture of what drives your profits until you have an accurate picture of your costs. And unless you're only offering a very small selection to your customers, you need help determining where to focus your sales efforts.

There are several types of software suitable for tracking your product costs and net profits, including spreadsheet,

database, accounting and small business productivity programs.

Any of these products can be used to show you what to push to increase your net profit margins, and the results may reveal hidden gems in your product line that you've been neglecting.

If you already track your sales and costs closely, a spreadsheet program may be sufficient to indicate the products with the highest margins and those that contribute most to your net profit.

Point-of-sale, accounting or business productivity software can help with these calculations by prompting you for all the necessary information and by automatically generating reports. When shopping for such software, ensure that it can report on a per-product basis and ideally compare the amount of profit between product lines.

Analyze everything that you sell — including how sales of one item impact other sales. Is a product that sells in high volume but doesn't generate other item sales worth as much to you as something else that sells slower but drives people to spend more?

Use the proper tools to scrutinize your sales numbers and never assume that you know what drives your success until you have hard data to back it up.

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## Hermitage Keeps Web Site Promos Fresh

Hermitage Lighting Gallery in Nashville, Tenn., changes its Web site home page and promotional offers throughout the year to take advantage of current holidays and events and to help keep the showroom fresh in customer's minds.

This summer, the home page theme was Summer Love. Customers were offered the promo code "love" to receive 10 percent off their online order, and a festive table lamp shaped like a short-sleeve shirt was promoted at a special price.