

## Four Ways to Thrive When All Your Prospects are Crying "Recession"

It really doesn't matter whether the Fed has declared a recession. Perception is reality. And recent polls show the majority of buyers already believe the economy is in a tailspin.

How can salespeople overcome that? According to BNI founder (and referral expert) Ivan Misner, you simply "refuse to participate in a recession."

Here are four tips Misner offers to overcome the "r" word and thrive while competitors are singing the blues:

**1. Ignore the naysayers.** Some salespeople like to blame the economy for poor performance. But buyers still need to buy. The economy is a fixed variable, and every salesperson has to contend with it.

So Misner suggests surrounding yourself with high-energy optimists who are determined to get the job done regardless of economic conditions.

**2. Find the silver lining.** Even in a sluggish economy, there are still opportunities for buyers to capitalize.

That could mean saving costs, or identifying new revenue streams. But Misner challenges salespeople to ask, "How can I create opportunities for each buyer?"

**3. Be visible.** Contrary to popular belief, a lot of buyers are more motivated than ever to find a new supplier.

It's a great time to open new doors by attending seminars, conferences, trade shows or even joining local organizations.

**4. Recraft your pitch.** Priorities are shifting with the economy in spin. Misner suggests angling your pitch so it acknowledges buyers' concerns and outlines solutions.

*Source: I Absolutely Refuse to Participate in a Recession, by Ivan Misner, www.bnipodcast.com. Reprinted with permission from the What's Working in Sales Management bi-monthly newsletter. To subscribe to What's Working in Sales Management, call 800-220-5000.*

## Fromm Electric Partners with Construction Supply Companies to Reach Trade Business

The owners of Fromm Electric Supply in Reading, Pa., knew they had a challenge — their showroom was geared towards walk-in, retail end-users, but the majority of their sales were made to the wholesale business trade.

Their solution was The Design Gallery, a 10,000-square-foot, fully integrated facility for wholesale clients that not only features lighting, but also other products and services used by the residential building trade. To create this grand project, Fromm Electric got a little help from their friends.

"The idea of a collaborative effort between local residential construction-related companies was conceived by company president and CEO Michael Fromm," explains Jon H. Gerhart, vice president of Fromm Electric's Residential Solutions Group, "but he ascertained that to try and create this valuable resource alone would be cost prohibitive."

In 2004, local businessman David Borden, Vice President of the Andes Collection, approached Fromm for assistance in lighting his tile/cabinet showroom and broached the idea of selling lighting from his location.

"At this point, Fromm's vision was shared and plans were made to initiate the concept," says Gerhart. "Borden worked with Fromm to enlist other locally owned building product suppliers to help design, build and furnish a stand-alone facility. Two years later, The Design Gallery was born."

Today, The Design Gallery is the largest regional showroom of its type serving predominantly trade-only clients. The two founding companies are now joined by seven additional organizations, providing products and services such as glass, plumbing fixtures, patio furniture, counter tops, audio/visual and more.

While Fromm Electric continues to sell basic builder's grade product in its eight branches, The Design Gallery focuses on design and concept selling, in addition to up selling.

"This means we no longer follow the traditional model of selling individual fixtures at The Design Gallery, but have shifted our efforts to broader based solutions for the whole room, home or project," says Gerhart. "This strategy allows us to expand our offering into other areas of the residential market such as appliances, lighting control, and other home convenience products."

For showrooms interested in creating a similar facility, Gerhart says make sure you are on the same page as the other companies you partner with. Also, cooperation and support from key manufacturer partners is essential. They too need to share in the vision of a design center concept, where concept selling is a leading market philosophy.

"Our number-one suggestion is to align with other companies who share your marketing and business philosophies," says Gerhart. "In any collaborative group, there needs to be tremendous cooperation based on mutual respect for each other and the mission in order to successfully address all the decisions that go along with shared costs and staffing issues."

Each member company at The Design Gallery provides its own staffing to make use of existing employees and to supply different areas of expertise. Member companies share the rent payment for the building.

The Design Gallery has enjoyed sufficient early success to give Fromm Electric enough confidence to expand the idea into other markets. The recently opened Allentown Design Center is wholly owned by Fromm, but the company partnered with local companies/customers to bring in product.

"Allentown concentrates on Fromm's core residential product lines of lighting, lighting controls and appliances," says Gerhart. "Our plans are to continue to use our valued manufacturer partners and lessons learned in these examples to expand our geographic reach in other branch market areas."