

Getting in the Door & Beyond

The Disciplined, Profitable Persistence of Target Account Programs

By Leslie Vickrey, President & Founder, ClearEdge Marketing

Any successful sales professional will tell you that a strong record of new business wins is the result of extreme persistence. Just as daredevils are adrenaline junkies and entertainers crave the spotlight, talented sales professionals are passionately, doggedly persistent. It's part of who they are.

While you can't manufacture the talent of a truly gifted sales professional, you can use a target account program (TAP) to harness the zeal within your sales force. A disciplined, scheduled marketing program for introducing prospects to a business and its services, a TAP is a highly effective way to focus sales teams, track sales activity and increase new business wins.

The competitive landscape of the global marketplace continues to shift for today's professional services organizations. As it does, many businesses are struggling to find marketing practices that will consistently catch the interest of sought-after prospects and open up new doors. TAPs are one of the key sales and marketing tools of some of today's most effective sales forces. Understanding and using TAPs well is a cost-effective, disciplined solution for increasing marketing effectiveness and sales results.

TAP: What Is It?

Some words sound like what they are and that is true with a TAP. When successfully implemented, a TAP program *tap, tap, taps* at the consciousness of the prospective client. A campaign of multiple touch points, creative marketing messages, attention-getting giveaways and a persistent

sales team all work together to firmly establish the business' name and services into the mind of the targeted prospect.

A TAP program intensively hones in on a targeted group of prospective businesses (and sometimes even prospects within existing accounts) in order to rapidly increase awareness, build branding and create new business opportunities. Both traditional sales collateral (direct mail letters/cards, service offering slicks, case studies, brochures, etc.) as well as attention-grabbing promotional items are delivered to targets on a pre-determined and disciplined schedule (usually on a weekly basis for several continuous weeks). Strategic and easy to measure, TAPs provide sales teams with greater focus, managers with a way to analyze the effectiveness of marketing messages and businesses with a tool for quantifying marketing ROI.

When done well, a TAP also leaves targeted prospects with a powerful impression of the provider's business and brand. ClearEdge Marketing has found TAPs to be 20% to 30% more effective than traditional direct mail campaigns due to the combination of channels used to reach the prospect. To be done well however, a TAP must be undertaken with vigor, which requires multiple touch points, a viable target list, a carefully managed schedule, a creative campaign that ties together messages and giveaway items and, last but not least, a dedicated sales team.

Below is a breakdown of the core

What Makes a TAP a TAP?

Multiple Touch Points

Reaching a client using a variety of tools and mediums, such as e-mail, drop-in visits, mail and voicemail.

A Creative Campaign

A provocative theme that intrigues and educates the target.

A Schedule

A rigorous timetable that ensures the target is hearing from the business in several ways over a short period of time.

Progress Management

The scheduling and strategic planning that go into TAPs also allow managers to easily monitor the participation and progress of their sales teams, allowing businesses to measure the effectiveness and ROI of the program.

elements that make up a TAP. Creative components and program durations will differ with each campaign due to variables such as the size of sales force, the region/territory, budget factors and the entry level (management, senior executive, etc.) into the prospective organization. Nevertheless, there are several standards all TAPs should meet, and here they are:

Multiple Touch Points

Marketing offers many ways to grab the attention of a target, and a TAP is the successful combination of several of those tools. When running a TAP program, you should expect to make contact or "touch" the target using multiple marketing mediums, which

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include direct mail deliveries, in-person deliveries, e-mail, telephone calls, voicemail and even events.

Maybe your TAP will include a direct mail introduction and several weeks of drop-off deliveries and follow-up phone calls and e-mails. Then again it could be several weeks of creative HTML presentations and Web-based marketing tools (podcasts, Web demos) delivered over the Internet and then finished off by a drop-in visit with a final giveaway basket of branded, creative promotional items. These are just two of thousands of ways to structure a TAP. Remember, not all TAPs will incorporate all marketing mediums, but there is advantage in the variety. The use of multiple tools is a friendly bombardment of information, ideas and opportunities that very few targets can ignore.

A Vetted Target List

A TAP must be directed at a carefully selected list of prospects. Businesses need to be sure they are targeting clients they can reach. For example, if your TAP includes weekly drop-in visits to deliver fun giveaway items to the prospect, you need to be sure you can get in the door. That is not always as easy as it sounds with the high levels of corporate security at some businesses. If you can't get through security, you can't make an impression.

In addition, you want to be certain the prospect is viable. If you have targeted prospects too high in an organization, it is unlikely that you will be able to reach them on a drop-in visit. However, if your target is not a decision maker, you risk the chance that your TAP tools and message will never reach the right level in an organization.

Also consider whether the organization is leveraging a VMS. If so, they likely have a very stringent vendor selection process, which makes them a poor choice for a TAP target.

Because a business is investing the time of valuable sales staff as well as the costs of a creative campaign, prospects must be carefully identified. Marketing and sales teams should take the time to complete a bit of research to ensure they are going after targets they can reach, businesses that have a need for the provider's services and organizations with the means and ability to invest in those services.

A Strict Schedule

The scheduling aspect of a TAP is key to the campaign's impact. The

most effective TAPs are not the longest or the ones with the most expensive giveaway items. The most effective TAPs are those with managers and sales teams committed to following the schedule.

The schedule of mailings, deliveries and follow-up efforts (be they e-mail, voicemail or in person) is what ensures that the target prospect is getting the message loud and clear from multiple mediums. If they are not put into action in a tight timeframe, these tools, messages and giveaways lose their potency. No longer a combined campaign, they become one-off marketing pieces that the recipient is less likely to notice or engage.

Just as direct mail pieces are delivered in regular, rapid succession, TAPs

Talkus-nonstopus – noun
(talk-uh non-stop-uh)

Definition:
Born without an "off switch," these individuals are known for their vocal chord endurance and need to share overly personal information. Seriously affecting productivity, a recent discourse by a Talkus-nonstopus ran 5:25 hours and resulted in the resignation of several co-workers.

Giveaway: Ear Phones

Incompetus-frustratus

Definition:
These individuals talk a good talk, but are technically useless. The Incompetus-frustratus usually avoid status reports and performance evaluations. Only after spending significant company time and resources will their true nature be revealed.

Giveaway: Desktop Puzzle

KOREone

must also be carried out in unbroken sequence. If mailings and/or deliveries are skipped or pushed back by a week or two, the sales professionals appear unpredictable to the target who was promised a successive, multi-touch campaign (TAPs typically begin with a letter or note that explains to the target what is going to happen and what they will receive). If a sales professional looks inconsistent and unreliable, the business looks undependable, which is not at all what a good marketing campaign should accomplish.

The Creative Campaign

All TAP programs should be designed and delivered around one central theme. It could be a sports theme, a comedic take on a critical business need in the marketplace or a thoughtful look at industry issues. The message in the note cards delivered each week as well as the weekly giveaways should all relate and speak to that central theme. For an example of how a theme ties a campaign together, take a look at two of the note cards

and giveaway items from a TAP program created for KoreOne, a leading IT staffing firm based in San Diego.

“What we love about this campaign is that it’s both funny and true,” says Steven Quarles, founding partner and CEO of KoreOne. “In IT recruitment, businesses have seen and hired from a wide skill and talent range. What they learn from the creative side of our TAP campaign is that with KoreOne, they get IT resources only from the highly qualified, high-performance end of the skills and talent spectrum.”

A strong creative campaign like the one above knits the program more tightly together. In addition, the theme of the campaign is also a creative way of telling prospects more about the values and character of the organization. A light-hearted, humorous campaign demonstrates the dynamic, creative and fun spirit of a company. An incisive, issues-focused campaign can speak to the expertise and industry savvy of an organization.

Creativity also plays an important role in selecting any giveaway that

prospects receive (when giveaways are an element of the TAP). These items need to echo the chosen theme and peak a prospect’s interest. When they are well chosen, giveaways serve as long-term reminders of the provider and its services. For example, a branded desktop calendar or picture frame sitting in a prospect’s office is a continuous, low-profile advertisement that reminds the individual of the TAP campaign and the service/solution provider that delivered it.

Anyone who has attended a trade show recently can tell you that there are a million promotional items to choose from. But a TAP is not about just giving something away. Rather, a TAP is a way to provide a clear, provocative message in multiple formats (the written word, in person and giveaways) to a prospect. The better the giveaways relate to the campaign theme and the company’s values, the better the TAP will resonate with its target audience.

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The Devoted Sales and Management Team

No matter how fun or interesting the campaign is and no matter how much investment goes into the giveaways, a TAP will only succeed if the sales force is resolutely committed to completing all steps and the management team is committed to driving success through training, encouragement and performance monitoring. You could give target prospects nothing but iPods, gift cards and Swiss chocolates for months and still get nowhere if your sales and management teams are only partly committed to the TAP.

According to Quarles of KoreOne, their TAP has given their sales and management team focus and an analysis tool: "We are running this program across two different markets. The scheduled nature of the TAP allows us to measure how effective our business development professionals are at getting in the door, how well the message is working and how diligent our teams are at delivering the program to prospects," he explains. "We are excited to put some solid measurement behind a marketing and sales program."

Managers need to lead the TAP effort, ensuring that their sales teams are well trained and ready to engage the target businesses. If new sales staff are working on a TAP, be sure they have the training and knowledge to speak with the target. It's not unusual for a drop-in visit to unexpectedly turn into a sales meeting, which means any sales person making in-person TAP deliveries needs to be ready to sell and sell well.

It's also important for the manage-

ment team to set up a simple system for monitoring TAP progress and results in advance. A spreadsheet is all that is needed so that the sales staff can note the dates of the drop offs and mark off each follow-up call and e-mail.

When it comes to engaging the sales staff and assuring their enthusiasm for the TAP, consider bringing them into the creative process. Let them participate in determining strong themes and/or giveaways that will make their prospects sit up and take note. Remember, sales professionals can be excellent resources for marketing teams that are looking for ideas on how to grab and hold the attention of a targeted audience. Besides when they have contributed to the development of the TAP, they will be more committed to seeing it succeed.

The Persistence Payoff

By employing TAPs with precision, enthusiasm and creativity, marketing ROI can be quickly achieved and surpassed. Businesses that successfully TAP will see strong increases in sales efficiency and activity, generating more appointments and requirements to fill. In addition, target prospects who do not immediately respond to the TAP can become part of keep in touch (KIT) programs, which are the regular marketing outreach efforts that we discussed here in the 2007 winter edition of *The Monitor*.

As businesses focus on targeted prospect lists, they will also gain new insights into their sales teams and processes. Thus, TAPs become tools not only for securing new sales appointments and wins, but also for

measuring the effectiveness of marketing and sales efforts. And those are the kinds of results and returns that all businesses should be eager to tap into. ❖



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