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Even a Complex Problem can have a Simple Solution

I was about 22 years old at the time. It's 6 AM and I'm driving to meet a friend in northern NY about 90 minutes from home, when on a deserted road in the middle of nowhere my car dies. I decided to start walking. About 30 minutes went by and along comes a vehicle; a white van. It was a Snap-on-Tool van! Hey, I thought to myself Mr. Waldron is the Snap-on-Tool man, he'll pick me up for sure! I played hockey with his son Jeff and his daughter Tricia was my youthful romantic interest, I kind of resembled Alfalfa and she was more like Darla.

I jumped into the middle of the road in a desperate attempt to flag him down. He just looked at me like I was some kind of nut case and anxiously drove by. I couldn't believe it. I've eaten at his house a hundred times, rode in his car to hockey games all across the state. Maybe it was because he hadn't seen me in eight years and he didn't recognize me. I called him that night when I got home. He said, "That was you? I thought you were some nut case." We laughed.

In the selling world, it doesn't take eight years for someone to forget about you. If you're not constantly in front of them, they'll forget you for sure.

This is a complex problem for many of you. Managing a sales territory and network group, as well as managing business relationships, customer sets and retail consumers all have individual challenges. So, let's take a look at a few of these.

Smaller specialty retailers often use traditional advertising as a method of staying in touch with their customers. But, advertising alone does not differentiate them and, there is no way they can compete with the advertising budgets and buying power of their big business competitors. They have to turn to smart marketing. If I were a specialty camera or computer store, I would simply develop a follow-up procedure for every customer that purchased a new camera or computer at 30 days, 120 days and at 1 year. The big box stores can't make this happen, they rely on mass marketing to generate sales. The trust, respect and word of mouth advertising gained with this follow-up program can outweigh the big box advertising and price advantage.

Direct sales has its own set of complex problems. Managing a customer base and finding new customers can be overwhelming, and there is never enough time in a day. Salespeople turn to networking groups to help generate new leads and spend the rest of their time trying to see as many customers as possible so they remain fresh in the eyes of their customers.

Although they are visiting their customers on a regular basis, we must not confuse an interaction with an impression. The word impression is defined by Webster's as: "a strong effect produced on the intellect, feelings, conscience etc." I don't want you to get the "impression" that I'm not a fan of high activity because I am. I just like the high level of effective activity as opposed to the high level of ineffective activity. The days of stopping by a customer to visit or "touch base" are over. When you leave a customer they should know you were there. Give them something to think about, information to help them with their business, competitive information, or a new product that will help them in some small way. Provide the decision makers with newspaper or magazine articles they can share with others within the office. Now you have them thinking about you while you are with someone else. Be creative and have some fun, this stuff is not rocket science.

As for my car, I later opened the hood to a maze of electrical wires. Talk about complex! I spent some time focused on the problem. A wire had broken off at the battery terminal and it was an easy on sight fix I handled myself. I guess this proves, if you spend some time focusing on your problem, even a complex problem can have a simple solution.