

Partnerships Between RTs and Vendors Work Well in Today's Competitive Marketplace

RT managers have a lot on their plate – but that's one more reason to form a solid partnership with vendors

With cost containment ruling the day in most health care facilities, getting into the customer's office and making a sale is no small feat for today's vendor. But technology is still the number one driver of innovation in health care, and that means respiratory care managers are working closely with industry to bring the highest quality care to their patients. How are sales representatives working with respiratory care department managers to maximize today's sales meeting? Here's what some industry people have to say.

"Department managers should always inquire what the agenda for the meeting will be in advance, so that they can prepare themselves for the sales call and avoid wasting time discussing unimportant issues or watching product demonstrations they have no interest in," says Bill Hilton, from B&B Medical. If the meeting is the first with a particular sales representative, he also suggests setting some ground rules.

"Let the rep know if you insist on scheduled appointments or if you are open to occasional cold calls."

Margaret C. Mathews, critical care account manager at Nellcor, recommends that managers develop specific requirements ahead of time when a product evaluation is scheduled. "Since the customer will be using the technology to treat their patients, they should be the ones in charge. Having written guidelines, protocols, and expectations established well ahead of the evaluation will help ensure this."

Glenda Frischkorn, a sales rep with Sepracor, believes in keeping the communication flowing. "Ask questions — and then ask more questions," she suggests. "Next, allow the sales representative to ask questions. Even if I have the perfect feel for a problem or need, I ask questions so that the customer will know I understand."

Frischkorn says flexibility is important and that the customer and sales rep both need to remain cognizant that "the ultimate goal is to improve quality of care for the patient." She adds that honest feedback from the customer is good and that not every product will fit all needs.

Her colleague at Sepracor, Michelle Jones, says managers need to take the lead in driving the agenda of any meeting. "In this dynamic marketplace, and with the demands of the RT workload, time is precious. Challenge the representative to know your market and to address your specific concerns."

Like the managers they serve, these sales reps also emphasize the importance of service after the sale. "A customer should not have to chase down a resource," says Jones. "Hold your sales rep accountable."

Mathews agrees. "When a customer signs a contract, they are buying more than a product — they are really buying into a relationship."



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Bill Hilton says good companies don't take customer service lightly. "If your sales representative doesn't inservice your product after the purchase or call regularly to make certain you are satisfied, perhaps you might want to avoid that scenario in the future."

Glenda Frischkorn believes customers need to get a firm commitment about follow-up before they ever sign a deal. "As a sales representative, I encourage my customers to call any time with questions." She believes in accountability and honoring her word.



What are some of the sales reps' pet peeves?

- Bill Hilton: "Pre-scheduling an appointment and having the client cancel without letting me know in advance. Constant interruption during a sales meeting. Signing an agreement and then calling to ask for a bigger discount because another company said they would beat my deal by 5 percent."
- Margaret Mathews: "Customers who view sales reps as being on the 'other side of the table.' As a Nellcor sales representative, I work very hard to gain the trust of my customers."
- Michelle Jones: "Being underutilized — a good day for me is when I can go home feeling like I've made a difference."

Establishing good partnerships between users and vendors can shorten the path to success for all involved. Every relationship can benefit from the common goal of serving the patient well. 🌸

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