

GrayMatterz

THE ZIMMERMAN GROUP, INC.

Marketing/Consulting

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STILL ABOUT PEOPLE

The economy is weakened, we're shell-shocked after the September 11th tragedies, and the world seems very uncertain — yet one thing remains constant: we crave human contact. When there are problems, we reach out by phone, by email, by fax.

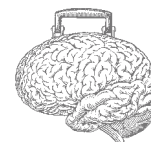
Similarly, our business relationships are built around person-to-person contact. A case in point: Burson-Marsteller/Wirthlin Worldwide recently reported that 54% of those queried considered "personal experience" the single most important factor that impacts a consumer's overall impression of a company. The next most significant factor, at only 29%, was "word-of-mouth" — human-to-human again.

TOUCHING YOUR CUSTOMERS

What does this mean to your company? In part, that your customers' direct experiences with your staff affect their impression of how well you meet their needs. That's why *promising* to be responsive doesn't come close to actually *being* responsive.

Everyone in your organization who interacts with customers must be capable of dealing with phone calls, inquiries, requests for proposal, and project updates — in a timely, appropriate, and confident way.

While providing quick guidelines is helpful, it is not sufficient, especially today. In many organizations, scientists and computer programmers are as likely to interface directly with clients as trained sales forces. And while this former group might be armed with Ph.D.s and finely honed technology skills, they have rarely had training in working with customers.



Brains for hire.

GETTING STARTED

Often, the task of setting up a communications training program falls to the sales and marketing department. To help our clients get started, we first clarify goals, then take these steps:

- Create a program identity – name and graphic element – based around a theme that has "legs," meaning that it's a concept you can sustain.
- Ensure that we have the visible support of upper management.
- Plan the initial session, including such bells and whistles as mood-setting videos, music and decorations that underscore your theme, leave-behinds to reinforce the key messages, etc.
- Advertise and build excitement for the program.
- Launch the program in a group session – so you get everyone on the same page, build momentum, and field initial questions.
- Plan the best formats to continue training, such as email, intranet, and monthly or quarterly updates.
- Determine the frequency of training – a once-a-year meeting is usually not sufficient to change long-held behaviors.

82% vs. 18%

According to a Sales Board survey of over 16,000 customers and 300 salespeople in over 25 different industries, 82% of individuals involved in selling fail to differentiate themselves from their competitors, resulting in a loss of business.

Are the individuals in your company who interact with customers among the 18% who *can* differentiate themselves?

Training can make the difference. If you'd like to discuss setting up a communications training program, give us a call.