



Your Sales Team Needs Help

By Julie Rhodes, Not Your Hobby Marketing

Note: You can see this post and others in the Start A Brewery Library or in Julie's blog [here](#).

Selling beer is not easy in normal circumstances, but what most owners and operators have asked their beverage sales reps and teams to accomplish over the past year is nothing short of a miracle. Since the last global pandemic was the Spanish Flu in 1918, there was no experience to draw upon for guidance during a time like this for anyone in field sales, much less the beverage alcohol industry. And one of the hardest elements to tackle was the vast number of question marks about market conditions, which led buyers and wholesalers to become risk-averse and sometimes completely radio silent. Our sales reps were flying blind and the voices of expertise didn't have any concrete answers either. So when you assess the performance of your sales team these days, you should not only be tracking KPIs based on metrics like volume and revenue, but you should also be measuring the morale of your team, assessing their mental health state, and recognizing qualitative activities to get a proper read on the real fitness of your salesforce.

When morale drops, success rates drop as well. Make sure that your regular sales meetings or calls with your reps include time for feedback from the field. Ask questions about the general temperament of accounts and buyers, how they are reacting to working with supplier reps, and the attitudes of their staff. Troubleshoot ways that you can approach the market together. Let them know that they are not alone in a challenging space. Also, try not to spend the majority of your time together mulling over results numbers. Don't forget that your sales reps are human, with feelings, not just numbers on a spreadsheet. Even something as simple as changing negative or declining numbers within your sales tracking tools from red to black can be helpful. Another way to boost morale is to connect with them outside of work-focused activities. Organize a team dinner or game night, visit a key account as a team, or just take the time to get to know your sales team personally. This can make a world of difference in their overall performance in the field because it communicates that you care about more than just results.

Do a mental health check-in with your sales team on a regular basis. In a sales role, you get really used to hearing the word "no", but in pandemic market conditions, the sheer volume of "no's" can be extremely overwhelming. That type of overwhelm can be very discouraging and negatively affects the mental health of your brand reps. And let's not forget to toss in the endless other factors that are causing stress and anxiety for them - reduced volume in the On-Premise market segment, limited interaction with distribution partners and their sales teams, risk aversion of beer buyers and consumers, market share losses to other beverage options like FMBs and RTDs, limited in-person promotional capabilities, and the lack of opportunities for in-store product demonstrations and samplings. Their role as a brewery brand rep has been completely rewritten and you have got to be their pillar of support. Acknowledging that mental

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health is an important issue that your brewery understands and takes seriously shows that your organization chooses to lead with empathy and fosters a company culture that supports mental health awareness.

In measuring the performance of your sales team, quantitative KPI tracking is essential, but the success of your sales reps is defined by more than just results numbers. Qualitative sales metrics are of equal importance. Sales meetings with key buyer personnel, account staff training, product demos, innovative prospecting activities, outside of the box promotional ideas, observational skills, and the ability to actively listen are all qualities that you should take into account when evaluating the efficacy of your sales reps. The past year has been fraught with declining sales numbers and horrific zeros in places that we've never seen before, so it's vital that you acknowledge your sales reps are still fulfilling their job expectations by engaging in sales activities that are advancing buyer and distributor relationships, even if the numbers look grim. Encourage them to keep fighting and moving forward by engaging in as many of these activities as possible. The numbers will come when their relationships in the market are strong. Remind them that results will take time, but their actions today contribute to building solid and profitable bonds with wholesale accounts. And in recognizing both qualitative and quantitative factors, you can foster a sales team culture that is truly inclusive of all skill sets and levels.

Your sales team needs your help, please don't assume that they are all doing okay. The secret to an effective and efficient sales team lies in your ability to manage them in a professional, but also personal way. As we see the market slowly improve over time, the time and effort that you have devoted to improving the infrastructure of your sales team will pay off in spades, both fiscally and subjectively.



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Drawing from a decade of experience in the specialty beer business, Julie is an authority on beer sales, marketing, sales team management, and distributor partnership management.