

## Best Practices Jump Revenues

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When she joined Breault in 1992, Kathleen Perkins, CEO of Breault faced quite a hurdle. Hired to shore up the company's marketing efforts, the former cosmetics marketing executive found that working with engineers required a new approach to marketing.

The company now follows several best practices, but you might say there was a learning curve.

As a consultant and executive in technical firms for 25 years, I know how technical people often believe that marketing and sales are somewhat dirty activities.

If you think that's an exaggeration, consider what one Breault engineer told Perkins soon after her arrival at her marketing and sales post. "I need to take a shower after talking about marketing," the engineer told her after a marketing strategies meeting.

Whether your players are technical or not, any team can align, develop powerful best practices, be 55 percent ahead of year-to-date sales or projected revenues, and jump start profitability.

The following best practices have helped Breault achieve 60% revenue growth in the past year:

1. **Alignment.** "Engineers are skeptical by nature. They challenge every assumption," Perkins realized early on. While struggling with developing creative, productive marketing strategies in this environment, she discovered, "The in-house engineers fit the same profile as the company's highly technical elite customers." Rather than force the engineers into a traditional marketing model, she and the engineers aligned to create precise marketing step-by-step strategies respected by both the in-house engineers and the customers.
2. **Understand your processes.** A common barrier to success is the failure to make effective use of knowledge learned. Once Breault married technical specifics to powerful marketing, Perkins said, "We took a hard look at each step of the sales cycle." This included looking at how leads were followed up. 7% of Breault's new leads are now converted into sales within 6 months.
3. **Focus on customer service.** A lot of firms give lip service to this concept but Breault

lives by it. And it's not easy in a firm where the producers are technically competent, skilled PhDs who always receive their highest rewards for competency and skill. The scientists solidly relate to needing to help a customer get a project done and not be stopped cold by a technical problem. The value of some of the other steps of total customer service required a shift. "The cycle doesn't stop with the sale but continues on with customer service—over 50 percent of our revenue comes from repeat clients."

Discussions are held in the company where scientists can expand their vision of customer service. "It's important for us to think about what it is to be a customer," Perkins said. "So we have discussions where we can all identify that cycle. Many of our scientists have built custom homes. Some people are really satisfied with their contractors and some are not. The discussions about what it was like to be a customer of the contractor helps us see our customers' needs and the sales cycle more clearly." Breault is all about best practices in alignment, excellence in technical ability and customer service. "Whenever something is not working and I step back to take a look and see why, it always come to a problem with alignment," she said. "Someone not listening, compromises needing to be made, and someone needing to be heard."

She also stresses the ability of the staff, "We get the best engineers here; they are top notch."

The guiding light of Breault Research, however, is the unrelenting best practice commitment to customer service.

"You can't go too wrong if you are focused on customer service," Perkins said. "If I had the choice of calling a customer to talk with them about the service they are receiving or doing many things that cross my desk in my role of CEO, hands down I like to listen to customers."

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