

Business Rules for Inquiry Management *

By James W. Obermayer
Sales Leakage Consulting, Inc.

Business rules are in every organization. In sales and marketing there are rules for order entry, sales quotas, and booking and shipping orders. But there are seldom, if any, rules about how the extremely important corporate asset called sales inquiries should be managed.

The justification for business rules for inquiry management is simple: People generally follow rules. Once a set of rules is in place, adhering to the rules is less difficult than you might imagine. The vast majority of us are essentially law-abiding people and business rules are generally looked upon as a set of soft laws of business.

The most successful business rules for lead and inquiry management are usually one page in length and with five to ten rules for marketing and sales (and their agencies), to follow. A rule should be specific enough to describe the end result and general enough to allow for a flexible interpretation of how the rule will be carried out. If the rules are properly set, time will not diminish adherence even as marketing conditions and organizations change.

For instance, you have a rule that says:

“Sales will follow-up and report on the resolution of every sales inquiry.”

This statement leaves a lot to interpretation. Follow-up could be in person, by phone or even by email. A little specificity might help, such as:

“Salespeople will follow-up and report on the resolution of every sales inquiry. A least four attempts will be made for every inquiry within a three week period.”

Possibly you can have a rule that states:

“Marketing will measure and report the return on investment for every dollar entrusted to it.”

On the surface this looks good but upon reflection it is not possible to measure and report on the effectiveness of soft-dollar expenditures such as collateral material, investor relations, PR, branding, etc. So possibly the rule should be:

“Marketing will measure and report the return on investment for every dollar spent on lead generation.”

Sales Leakage Consulting, Inc.

www.salesleakage.com

714 998 1737

Ideally marketing and sales representatives should meet together and hammer out the business rules for inquiry management. Here is a sample set of business rules for a B2B company, with direct and reseller sales channels for products that are worth more than \$1,000. Your rules may be different.

Typical Business Rules for Inquiry Management

1. **Database:** All inquiries and leads will be entered into a single database and counted by product, source, source type, and who it was sent to for follow-up.
2. **Profiling:** Inquirers will be asked profile questions that will be used to grade inquiries.
3. **Qualifying:** Marketing will adhere to policies and procedures to qualify all inquiries prior to distribution to the sales channel.
4. **Inquiry Grading:** Inquiry grades will be attached to each inquiry based on the answers to the profile questions.
5. **Inquiry Fulfillment:** Information fulfillment (in hard copy or electronic form) will be completed within 24 hours from the time the inquiry is received.
6. **Competitors:** Every effort will be made to screen out inquirers who are from competing companies.
7. **Inquiry/Lead Assignments:** We will assign inquires and leads directly to the salesperson most responsible for the follow-up.
8. **48 hour Opening Rule:** Salespeople will retrieve and open inquiries and sales leads within 48 hours.
9. **100% Closeout:** Sales will close out and report on investment for every lead generating dollar spent.
10. **Inquiry Retention:** Inquiries will be maintained on the marketing database for three times the length of the company's average sales cycle.

Get the picture? Once you have a set of business rules for inquiry management, your organization will be all the richer for it.

*This information has appeared in the various articles and workshops Obermayer has presented. Most recently it has appeared in his book, James Obermayer, *Managing Sales Leads: Turning Cold Prospects Into Hot Customers*, (Mason, Ohio, Textere an imprint of Thomson/South-Western, 2007) and Racom Books, Page 221.

Sales Leakage Consulting, Inc.

www.salesleakage.com

714 998 1737