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Speed Is My Secret Weapon

BY JOHN BEAVER

“I feel the need, the need for speed.”

— Maverick, *Top Gun*

It happens every time someone sends you an email. It happens every time someone leaves you a voicemail. It happens every time someone sends you a text.

Every time someone reaches out to you, that sender’s internal clock starts ticking.

- Reply quickly, and what the sender hears is, “Impressive response time, I must be a VIP.”
- Reply soon enough, and the sender hears, “Pretty good, I am among this person’s valued clients.”
- Reply eventually, and the sender hears, “I am not a priority. Maybe I can find a source that will treat me as a priority.”

One of the secrets of my success is striving to make every customer feel like a VIP. It’s not always practical, but a rule I learned from a highly respected salesperson gets me as close as humanly possible:

“My day is not over until I respond to every voicemail, every email, and every text I received that day. Sometimes I can respond with the answer they needed. Sometimes the only response I can give is to let them know how long it will take to get their answer. But I find a way to acknowledge everyone who reached out to me today, so no one ever drifts off to sleep tonight wondering if I even received their message.”

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Speed is one of the most critical competitive advantages in our rapid-paced world of sales. Speed and sales are tightly linked in the world of manufacturers' representatives.

Speed can be the difference between closing a sale or losing it, between hitting your principal's sales goals or falling short, and hitting your organizational goals or missing them.

Remember the old joke about two hikers who unexpectedly confront a bear? One of the hikers looks at his companion and says, "All I have to do is run faster than you." At every one of your customers and prospects, there is another hiker who is trying to run faster than you. Here are the ways you can consistently win those races:

- **Process.** Create a strategic approach that lets you get the answers your customers need.

Make sure you understand the customer's question. If there is any doubt, confirm first that the answer you are researching is the one they are seeking.

Find the people at your principals' offices who are your best resources. Cultivate them, make them your friends, thank them profusely every time, and email glowing reports to their supervisors (copying the person you are complimenting) about their expert service.

- **Execution.** Patch any holes in your process. Who responds on your behalf when you are on vacation or out sick? Who checks unanswered inquiries to see if they have fallen through the cracks? Who can you rely



on to respond quickly to emails, and who do you have to call to get an answer?

- Listen to the unspoken messages. Your customers always signal how they want you to respond by the way they contact you. If they call you, they want you to call with the answer. If they email, they expect an email response. Inquiry by text? Respond by text! Being sensitive to your customers' communication preferences is part of speed because they will see your message fastest if you reply how they expect you to answer.
- Discipline. If the question comes to you, you own it until you answer it. If someone is helping you find the answer and that person drops the ball, the failure is still 100 percent yours because you should have checked back when that person didn't respond.

Even if a customer wants to buy from you, sometimes the urgency is so great that the first supplier with an acceptable answer gets the order. So if your response is not first, you can find yourself suddenly on the outside looking in, trying to find a way to regain the customer you have lost.

If your customer response processes are running like a well-oiled machine, are you done? Not yet. As a manufacturers' rep, you have another group that needs VIP treatment to their inquiries — your principals. Your analysis of speed-to-reply to principals' information requests is just as crucial for your principals as it is for your customers.

Because somewhere out in the marketplace, there is someone who is eyeing your customers and your principals, and who thinks they can run faster than you.



John Beaver founded GSA Optimum, Oakdale, New York, in 1984. The metropolitan New York/New Jersey independent manufacturers' representative firm has 28 employees covering Maine to Virginia out of its four offices. The agency specializes in electrical mechanical, electronic, and electrical components. This growth can be partly attributed to his successful acquisition of six firms. He served on the MANA Board of Directors from 2015-2019. He is also an active member of ERA and NEMRA. As a member of ERA he serves as a National Delegate and is the chairperson of Metro NY/NJ ERA local chapter.



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(949) 290-6035
info@agnewpacific.com



John Davis
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Chardon, OH
(440) 285-9597
jd@pauldavisautomation.com



Tommy Garnett, CPMR, CSP
Garnett Component Sales, Inc.
Wake Forest, NC
(919) 801-4627
tommy@gcsrep.com



Marnee Palladino
MARN, Inc.
Middlebury, CT
(203) 217-6433
mpalladino@marninc.com



Kenneth Russell-Murray
ElectraSpec, Inc.
Quebec, Canada
(450) 224-9726
kenmurray@electraspec.ca



Lisa Wilson
L.S. Wilson & Associates, Inc.
Bristol, WI
(262) 891-3500
lwilson7@wi.rr.com