



Case Study:

Virtual Sales Forces

Situation:

The crop protection landscape is becoming increasingly crowded, while the acres in production agriculture remain relatively flat. This combination has made identifying and creating needs, and responding to marketplace opportunities, more critical than ever. Our client's portfolio had expanded rapidly over the prior few years, creating more opportunities (and work) for the sales force. This virtual sales program was developed to expand the customer reach and maintain a more consistent contact with key retailers.

Issues the Work is Trying to Solve:

- Extend the reach and frequency of the client's limited sales force.
- Strengthen the relationship between the client, the client sales representatives and retail customers utilizing a virtual sales-support team.

Business Objectives:

The objective of this program was to assist the client's sales force by providing virtual "boots on the ground" to conduct customer calls that would build awareness of and demonstrate the need for the client's product portfolio.

Strategy & Action:

The strategic recommendation from AgCall was to:

- Regionalize this program, placing one Associate in each of the five sales regions.
- Contract Associates on a part-time (50 hrs/month) basis.
- Select Associates based on their crop protection sales experience, agronomic background and understanding of agriculture and cropping systems within the sales region.
- Provide each Associate with a client laptop, email address and access to the CRM database.
- Provide five AgCall TeleSpecialists, one for each sales region, with expertise specific to the crops/agronomics and familiarity with major retailer and distributor groups within that region.
- Assign a dedicated AgCall project manager to lead and coordinate the efforts of this team to ensure that all project needs are being met and that the workload is well-distributed throughout the year.

The Associates selected for this program had an average of 35 years of crop protection sales experience at the distributor, retailer and/or manufacturer level. Having this team proved to be an effective strategy, and this team proved itself to be very adaptable. The original intent was that everything be done via phone with email as a follow-up mechanism. We continually added new capabilities to this program every year, including CRM email blasts, meeting and event RSVP management, tradeshow support and CRM maintenance.

Results:

Annually, this team completed ~10,000 calls or emails across more than 150 campaigns and more than 20 client brands. Associates weren't tasked with asking for the order, which made it difficult to attribute sales directly to the efforts of the team. However, the feedback from the sales force was consistent – the calls made a difference and retailers did cite those discussions when placing orders.

As an example, a 2013 campaign involving 226 retail customers was tracked for measurement. EDI for these customers was compared against retailers in these areas that did not receive a call. The impact was an average \$18,000 increase per retailer contacted during this program.