



Proven Tips to Generate Tech Leads and Sales

by *Blaine Fox*

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It's no secret that in this economy leads are hard to come by and closed sales even more so. Customers are taking longer to make decisions and they have less disposable income, which makes new equipment sales a big challenge for any oil dealer. But there is opportunity out there, and you can tip the scales in your favor. When I managed a \$32 million dollar HVAC contractor, we spent nearly \$1 million annually on advertising and marketing, but the No. 1 lead generator for us was our technicians (followed next by our Warm Thoughts customer newsletter).

Many fuel dealers love the idea of adding hundreds of thousands of dollars in new sales, relatively inexpensively. But they are conflicted. They're afraid their guys will spend too much time selling and not get enough repairs done. They're afraid they'll push unnecessary equipment and parts that will cause customers to get upset or find a new dealer. And there's the issue of making the sales happen anyway.

There's a reason most techs choose careers that put them in the basement most of the time.

Most of them aren't "born promoters." They think "sell" is a four-letter word. But that doesn't mean they can't perform better. In my experience, for every 10 techs you have, one or two can be great, three or four can rise up to be good, and the rest are likely to remain indifferent, no matter what you do.

The good news is that there are ways to reconcile and work through each of these issues. You can manage your effort to develop the right type of sales culture to fit your company, and you can help your techs adjust their attitudes around selling—and teach them better skills in the process. If you follow the tips I've outlined below, you can increase your sales by 30%, even 40%. And

you'll be well on your way to turning your technicians into bona fide lead-generators who can help you achieve your company's sales goals. They'll be happier (and wealthier) for it, and so will you.

Determine your path and build toward that.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" sales approach. Some companies use their techs to generate replacement leads and service plan sales. Others empower them to actually sell the installation. Some only let them loose during the slower times. There are pluses and minuses to each approach, and every situation is a little different. But you can improve your performance, no matter what path you choose. So choose how you want to utilize your techs and build your plan around it.

Set expectations.

Maybe you've heard the expression, "the things that get managed, get done." As an owner or service manager, you need to create the "sales culture," set expectations around

that, and manage to it. If it's clear to the members of your team that generating leads and sales carries as much weight as the other parts of their jobs, then they'll be much more sales-focused. If you tie lead-generation performance and customer

satisfaction into their reviews, then they'll really get the picture.

Establish criteria for the "replace vs. repair" decisions.

Some of your techs like to be "supermen — trying to keep customers' systems running as long as possible. While this might make them feel good and even get them a tip,

"Develop the right type of sales culture to fit your company and you'll be able to adjust your techs' attitudes towards selling."

it may be the wrong move for both the company and the customer. When you set criteria for the “replace vs. repair” decision, you want to support your techs by giving them the ground rules so they can make the best decision for the customer. For example, repeated breakdowns, inefficient operation, noisy systems, and equipment that is outside of its expected lifetime are all excellent reasons for recommending replacement.

Establish the right kind of incentive plan.

More people respond to the carrot than the stick. So, develop a reasonable incentive plan that pays out on leads that close and direct sales (and “reasonable” doesn’t mean \$10 per closed lead). Once you’ve established appropriate financial incentives, scatter additional contests throughout the year to get the competitive juices flowing and give the department a boost during the most important times.

Train regularly.

You’re making the right move if you are investing in training. But you can’t expect one session to do the trick. To maximize your staff, you’ve got to train regularly through the year. Train your team in a formal manner at least two to three times per year. (This works best when you bring in a seasoned professional to facilitate.) And plan as much informal training during the year as possible. Here’s a tip — role practice. Practice handling objections in this forum, and you’ll be amazed at the strides your team will make.

Give your techs the right tools.

Every person on your team stands a much better chance to generate leads and close more sales if they’re armed with the right ammunition to close the deal. You need to give them the tools that can compensate for their deficiencies in verbal skills. The deal won’t necessarily be done on the spot, so leave-behinds, brochures and effective company websites are extremely important — even more so when you are using your techs, and not just well-trained salespeople, to sell directly.

Approve leads on time.

Nothing will turn off a leads program faster than an arduous approval process. You need to match your words with your actions and ensure that when your techs are busting their humps to generate business for the company, that they get paid quickly. Track leads to closed sales properly. Ensure your internal process runs efficiently. And handle internal disputes fairly and quickly.

Anticipate and solve internal communications problems.

If your techs are generating leads, it’s critical they know what’s come of them. Give them a report that identifies which turned into sales. Have a meeting with your equipment sales guys and your techs. This way you can avoid dealing with techs who think the sales guys never followed up, or the sales guys screwed up a deal ready to close. Plus, your sales guys can then provide feedback on how techs can qualify leads better, so they aren’t running poor or weak leads. A meeting once every week or two can make a big difference to having everyone feel they’re on the same team.

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Do your hiring homework.

It all starts at the beginning. If your team is filled with techs who are both technically proficient and inclined to sell, you win. And if you set up a compensation plan that rewards them well, you’ll attract more of the right people. Do the very best you can with your existing team, and when you hire new techs, make sure they’re comfortable in a sales culture.

Remember, every one of your techs has high communication potential. If you establish a culture that rewards good salesmanship and give them the training, the tools and the support they need, you’ll stand a good chance of having a breakout year.

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