Case Study: Effective Law Office Solutions, Inc.

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I. Case Abstract

Focused around providing mid-sized attorneys’ offices with printing, marketing, and organizational services, Effective Law Office Solutions (ELOS), Inc. is a well-known company within the law office sector. In order to remain competitive, the senior management team at ELOS is meeting to discuss the future business strategies that will be utilized.

II. Organizational Problems

Despite the success that has been experienced at ELOS in the past, the company is currently being faced with multiple negative changes. To begin, the senior management team has begun to realize the decrease in new accounts that are being obtained by the company. Along with this decrease, the loss of business has also become apparent. Each member of the senior management team is completely perplexed by the situation, considering that ELOS has always been the leader in the market due to the expert customer relationships that are formed. Not only is the company being faced with less business, an influx of unhappy customers have appeared. The customers seem to be complaining about every aspect of the company, from product quality to customer service. As a means of possibly justifying these unwanted changes, the company has noted the nonexistence of a key accounts sales team (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 201-204).

Along with these negative changes, ELOS has discovered that hiring and retaining quality salespeople is highly expensive due to salary and benefits expectations, especially for salespeople who have 10 or more years of experience. As a means of combatting the issues that have arisen, “ELOS has enlisted the services of Strategic Marketing Specialists (SMS), a consulting firm that works with law offices to develop effective strategic business plans” (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 201). The following sections will highlight the details of the current situation at ELOS and provide possible solutions to the issues at hand.
III. Background Information

In order to understand the context of the situation at Effective Law Office Solutions, Inc., an account of background information relevant to the organization is necessary. ELOS was founded nearly 30 years ago in London, by John Marston. The company first started out by providing services for a variety of different industries. After the company expanded to other locations, the unique value of the services to mid-sized law offices became apparent. Five years after the company was founded, the decision was made to create a business solely centered on the printing needs of mid-sized law offices. The company quickly became well-known all around Europe. A variety of legal-based services are currently offered by ELOS including the printing of statements, bills, checks, and stationery. Additionally, the company is able to handle the marketing needs of law offices, while also providing organizational products and document templates (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 202).

Throughout the years, innovation became the norm for ELOS. The company has always been focused on remaining up-to-date in regards to the latest trends in the printing and marketing industries. In the late 1990s, Greg Braver was hired to handle the formation of a strong and creative sales force for the company. Braver was able to organize a sales force of 60 individuals in a rather short amount of time. The salespeople, who are distributed around Europe, are divided into two specific regions. Not just anyone was considered as a potential salesperson for ELOS. The company has a firm belief that those individuals who have a background within the field of law are the best suited for a position on the sales force. By already having a feel for the legal industry, the salespeople’s “…training time was shorter and focused more on the products and services offered by ELOS rather than a discussion of the customer” (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 203). In turn, overall costs were reduced. Ever since the formation of ELOS in 1985, customer
service has always been a top priority. The company understands that they must continually meet the needs of the customer in order to remain a competitive contributor of services to mid-sized law offices. Interestingly enough, the company admits to never utilizing a customer relationship management (CRM) system. The next section will relate the situation at ELOS to relevant course material.

IV. Relationship to Course Material

A career in sales is unique in a variety of different ways. One such unique factor is the extensive list of personal skills and abilities that are necessary in order to be successful. The problems that ELOS is currently being faced with, including less customer satisfaction, may be the result of a lack of personal skills that are possessed by the sales force. When the sales force was being created at ELOS, past experience within the field of law was a large contributor to who was hired and who was not. Although past experience in a particular industry is very important, certain skills and abilities cannot be overlooked. In order to have a successful career in sales, ten particular skills, or success factors in sales, are necessary.

As noted by Johnston and Marshall (2013), listening skills, follow-up skills, the ability to adapt sales style from situation to situation, tenacity, organization skills, verbal communication skills, proficiency in interacting with people at all levels of a customer’s organization, the demonstrated ability to overcome objections, closing skills, and personal planning and time management skills are all very useful for an individual to possess when beginning a career in sales (p. 40). Even though the current sales force at ELOS may be well-versed on the unique needs of mid-sized law offices, certain skills must still be present. Each of the skills listed above is useful when creating and maintaining a healthy relationship with a new or long-time customer.
Along with possessing a large skill-set, successful salespeople must also have a firm understanding of the stages within the sales process. Johnston and Marshall (2013), highlight six distinct stages of the sales process: prospecting for customers, opening the relationship, qualifying the prospect, presenting the sales message, closing the sale, and servicing the account (p. 48). For the purpose of relating the course material to the situation at ELOS, the final step of the process, servicing the account, will be discussed in further detail.

As mentioned in the case study, “more complaints about late orders, poor quality, and lower customer service than in the past” have been noticed at ELOS (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 204). Such issues may be the result of poor execution of the final stage of the sales process. Servicing the account is a step within the sales process that may be commonly overlooked by the average salesperson. Many salespeople disregard the importance of continuing to communicate with the customer after the sale is finalized. This may in fact lead to lower customer service as mentioned in the case study. Communicating with the customer after the sale is an excellent way to check-up on the company’s delivery and billing methods, as well as product quality (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 53). If, by chance, the quality of a product is poor, service after the sale gives the salesperson a chance to convince the customer to give the company another try. Otherwise, the customer may simply remove the company from the list of service providers, leading to loss of accounts. Such a situation may also result in a bad reputation being formed about the company. With the prominence of social media in today’s society, such a reputation will spread quickly.

Finally, the concept of customer relationship management (CRM) can easily be tied to the context of the situation at ELOS. As stated by Johnston and Marshall (2013), “CRM is a comprehensive business model for increasing revenues and profits by focusing on customers” (p.
This system is all about placing the customer at the center of all business decisions that are made by the company. Without the customer, the company cannot function. For this reason, organizations that have utilized CRM place a very high value on the long-term relationship that can potentially be created with the customer. Customer relationship management is a system that must be adopted by all levels of the organization.

Just as with the function of creating and servicing a sale, a process of CRM has been defined. The pieces of the CRM process include: knowledge discovery, market planning, customer interaction, and analysis and refinement (Johnston & Marshall, 2013, p. 75). The cycle begins with basic understanding of the information that has been gathered about potential customers. As the cycle continues, determining the specific type of market that the customer fits into becomes important. In addition, the strategies that will be utilized are established. Once the market and strategies have been determined, actual interaction takes place between the customer and the company. Finally, the cycle is analyzed as a means of determining if the customer is satisfied with the company’s efforts. If necessary, adjustments may be made. The next section will provide evidence-based solutions to the problems that have arisen at ELOS.

V. Evidence-Based Solutions to the Problems

As a means of supporting the information provided by the course material, outside sources have been consulted in order to provide evidence-based solutions to the problems at ELOS. As mentioned previously, a variety of abilities, such as verbal communication skills, are essential in order to become a successful salesperson. This point is justified by Anselmi and Zemanetk, Jr. (1997) when they stated, “the more a salesperson exhibits good interpersonal skills (manners and communication ability) and intensity (persistence and enthusiasm), the greater level of buyer satisfaction” (p. 539). With this being said, the salespeople who are hired to work
at ELOS must be able to communicate effectively with the customers. Exceptional communication skills, coupled with past experience within the legal field, will result in a highly proficient salesperson at ELOS. If ELOS is able to create and maintain healthy customer relationships due to the skill-sets of the salespeople, their positive reputation will become well-known. This will ultimately lead to new business opportunities.

Once the relationship has been created between the company and the customer, exceptional service after the sale becomes crucial. ELOS is known to be struggling with customer complaints about product quality and delivery issues. In order to prevent such complaints, advice can be gathered from Apple, Inc. Apple, a global competitor in the field of smartphones, has been commended for their unique after-sale policy in South Korea. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in South Korea is highly impressed with the implementation of Apple’s replacement policy. “Apple’s after-care policies have become an integral component in its success at establishing strong customer relationships” (Reisinger, 2012). The policy, which allows consumers 30-days to return a product, is simple, yet effective. For this reason, ELOS can benefit by taking small steps toward creating noteworthy after-sale standards.

The final solutions that can be offered to ELOS revolve around the well-respected system of customer relationship management (CRM). The system can also be referred to as one-to-one marketing. The first step to implementing a successful CRM system is to educate the salespeople about the importance of such a method. Introducing a CRM system to any organization will result in a multitude of changes across every level of hierarchy. In relation to introducing a CRM system to a company, McGovern and Panaro (2004) state, “change occurs when people understand clearly what changes are expected of them, why they are necessary, and when their efforts to change are shaped, reinforced, and rewarded by all the internal systems that are
designed to drive behavior” (p. 33). A customer relationship management system will be helpful to ELOS in order to combat the poor customer service complaints that are beginning to be discovered. Implementing the system will simply give all salespeople within the company a process to follow. As a result, each member of the sales force will be abiding by the same guidelines, which will improve current customer relationships, while also developing new business prospects. As noted, CRM can also be referred to as one-to-one marketing. Despite the difference in concept title, the system can be effectively implemented if approached in the correct manner. Peppers, Rogers, and Dorf (1999), explain that one-to-one marketing is a very complex system, yet with the proper preparation a company can successfully apply the program (p. 155). They note that education about the system is the first step. With the past advancements of ELOS, one-to-one marketing would certainly be an attainable goal for the company with endless benefits being offered.

In order to illustrate the complexities of CRM, the CEO and founder of Nimble, Jon Ferrara, was interviewed by Rawn Shah (2012). Nimble is the creator of a software program that is used to organize and manage the contacts of a particular business. In the interview, Ferrara stated the difficulties that salespeople face on a regular basis. Some customers are no longer interested in creating a relationship with a business, which completely debunks the foundation of many sales processes. With that being said, salespeople are expected to explain to potential customers the benefits of creating relationships with organizations. This expectation ties directly back to the importance of the company educating the salespeople on the reasons relationships benefit the sales function. Overall, healthy relationships are especially important, yet in order to be successful, both the salespeople and the customers must be aware of the potential benefits of utilizing a CRM system.
VI. Conclusions, Recommendations, and Lessons

The senior management team at Effective Law Office Solutions, Inc., along with Grace Johnson of Strategic Marketing Specialists, must begin discussing the personal skills and abilities of the current salespeople, the way in which the salespeople are currently handling service after the sale, as well as the possible implementation of the customer relationship management system. Each of these concepts will enable the company to address the issues that have recently arisen concerning the loss of accounts and the increase in customer service complaints.

The following recommendations are provided to ELOS:

1. *Hire salespeople who have past experience in the legal field and at least eight of the top ten success factors in selling.* The addition of communication and organization skills will lead to more effective salespeople.

2. *Reiterate the importance of after-sale service to all salespeople.* Stronger relationships will be formed between the customer and the organization if the salespeople continue to communicate with the customers after the sale is finalized.

3. *After researching CRM, implement the system as a means of improving current customer relationships and creating new business opportunities.* The CRM system is complex, yet the benefits of the program are endless.

Overall, ELOS is certain to learn many lessons. After discussing the issues with the senior management team, and reviewing the recommendations that have been provided, the company will realize that customer relationships are generated through the formation of a highly skilled sales force. Moreover, all salespeople must be committed to providing exceptional service during all stages of the sales process.
References


