

Introduction

This book is about sales. More important, it's about driving sales beyond what the market is prepared to give. As wholesaler-distributors, you face tremendous challenges in today's marketplace. Customers are demanding more than ever before, traditional markets are eroding in many lines of trade, and you must work harder for every dollar of profit. Your sales organization is your best weapon in the fight to overcome these obstacles.

Wholesale distribution salespeople are not order takers; they can't afford to be in today's marketplace. You pay your sales organization to produce results that outperform the market. It's that simple. Your sales team's job is not to take what the market is prepared to give them, but to drive sales *beyond* what that market is prepared to give. To do this, you must develop comprehensive systems that guide your sales reps and sales managers in meeting your company's objectives.

The following pages outline a strategy for doing just that. There are four key elements to the strategy:

1. **The guiding idea.** This is a clear, meaningful, articulated vision and mission that serves as the foundation for everything that is asked of the sales team.
2. **A sales management system.** This is a system focused on coaching and developing the sales team.
3. **A sales system.** This is a compilation of the processes, skills, and tools required to unify the sales team around a common vision and standards of performance.

4. **Continuous improvement.** Executive management must ensure that a training, coaching, and development process is in place to help the sales team get better today than they were yesterday.

Many wholesaler-distributors are already putting this strategy to work. As part of the research for this book, 4th Generation Systems surveyed NAW members on a range of issues and trends regarding sales performance. The results of that survey provided a baseline for the information in the following pages. In addition, we conducted in-depth, follow-up interviews with 17 selected survey respondents in an effort to gain insights, examples, and details on their sales philosophies and market strategies. The companies are identified as “leading distributors” in the chapters that follow.

It takes time and effort to learn how to drive sales beyond what your market is prepared to give. So let’s not waste another minute. We’ll begin by presenting the survey results and examining some of the 17 leading distributors’ best practices in sales and sales management next, in chapter 1.