



Preface



Welcome! This book has been written to help you increase the selling skills and competitive advantage of your sales team and to address the unique sales challenges facing any sales executive involved in the business-to-business distribution industry.

This book has evolved from my 28 years as an advanced sales and sales management consultant working with companies and sales teams like yours. I've worked with more than 500 clients, most of whom were involved in some type of distribution business. I work only with experienced business-to-business sales professionals, the managers who lead them, and the executives who direct them, and I use a combination of consulting, coaching, and training to help them increase their organizations' competitive selling advantage so they ultimately increase both their market share and their profitability.

Each new client relationship begins with time spent researching and evaluating where the company is when we begin working together. I ask my clients the questions and apply the tests described in this book, tour their facilities, talk with their leadership team, and ride with their sales reps making calls on their customers. From this research, I am then able to identify and evaluate the changes that can best improve the value, uniqueness, and profitability of their sales organization.

Over time, I found that asking the same questions and applying the same tests across companies in a variety of industries resulted in similar responses, allowing me to draw conclusions that I describe in this book. Thus, the seven strategic questions that are the focus of this book evolved over my years of researching, questioning, and testing. These are the same seven major questions I would ask if you, the sales executive—the person in charge of the sales operation in your wholesale distribution company—invited me in as a consultant to evaluate your business and its competitive strength.

This book offers you and your distribution business an in-depth discussion and evaluation of each of these seven strategic questions. You also will find additional questions and tests that can help you better evaluate your team's selling skills, sales structures, and positioning efforts and identify ways you can strengthen and improve them. In addition, you will learn ways to implement new selling structures and philosophies that can increase your profitability, your market share, and the unique value you bring to your customers. This is not a book on how to fix a broken sales organization; instead, it will show you how to take an already strong distribution sales team and make it better.

I am assuming that in your distribution company:

1. You have a direct sales force selling to your customers. You also may have additional independent sales reps or specialized distributors selling to your smaller customers or outlying markets. You have charged your sales team with the responsibility of supporting and increasing the sales volumes from your existing customers, gaining market share by winning business away from your competitors, and finding new businesses to add as customers.
2. You are supported by multiple manufacturing suppliers or by a master distributor (who sells to multiple smaller or more specialized distributors). Your manufacturers or master distributor sells to you through its sales team of either sales employees (usually titled “territory managers” or “regional sales managers”) or independent sales reps hired and compensated by the manufacturer. Territory

managers act as administrative and special ordering liaisons, provide special pricing, participate in sales calls, and provide technical product and use expertise to you and your customers.

3. You sell either directly to end-user businesses or through independent dealers, resellers, or retail stores to reach your ultimate customer, if you work with multiple lines.
4. You have a successful and stable distribution business. Although you always are working to strengthen and improve, as the best organizations do, you do more things right than wrong.

The goal of this book is to help you lead your team to quality through consistency and stability with proactive selling efforts that can increase your competitive advantage and, ultimately, your sales and profitability. By expanding your team members' current selling skills, you will foster your team's growth and progress as you lead it to increased selling success. We know you're good; now, are you good enough to get better?