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Eight Key Steps to Building B2B Major Account Client Alliances

By Thomas Baskind

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By Thomas J. Baskind
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Audiences who saw the fabled Broadway musical, Chorus Line, marveled at the intricate timing and seamless interaction of the dancers as they mastered the choreographer's precision steps after many false starts in rehearsal.

At the final curtain, the stage is crowded with dancers whose images are multiplied by mirrors strategically placed about the stage.

That's a tough scene to match.

In many ways one can view the Chorus Line as a metaphor (sans mirrors) for orchestrating enduring major account relationships, which at their optimum, are enduring alliances.

This is a dance, not of two partners, but of many partnerships developed between business entities. A figurative chorus line of relationships that require timing, integrated movement, anticipation, and occasional improvisation played before a senior management audience expecting considerable return for the cost of the production.

With proper direction and judicious investment of resources, a major accounts initiative can become a resounding revenue hit.

How do you recognize a major account hit in the making?

· When your product or service is perceived as an integral part of the customer's business process, i.e. when "you" and "they" become "us." Bill Voltmer, vice president of global sales for Factiva, the online information aggregator, looks for an integrated relationship between the account team and the

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client. Bill believes that "when all is said and done, it is the discipline of the account team to have a live account plan which is documented" that drives and sustains the major account relationship.

- When account plans are supported by a measurable, systematic approach which functions as an identifiable common language within and between supplier and client organizations. One method to build the shared planning process is the "Alliance Relationship Model"*, a proprietary process which tracks four developmental account relationship stages, focuses with the client on its business drivers as well as intangible influences and offers a quantifiable measure of the account team's effectiveness. The model interprets Miller Heiman's "Successful Large Account Management" guideposts for navigating the major account landscape. It also helps the account team examine the specifics of relationship development as it relates to the customer's specific, critical needs.

- When the relationship supports a mutually beneficial long term competitive advantage in the form of

accelerated growth rates, operating economies and increased market share. Here, the client relationship emerges as a strategic partnership, an actual alliance. This is a far cry from the predictable transactional steps of a commodity sales process. Clear client communication, focused interaction and a strategic mindset are essential to achieving a distinct competitive advantage for both partners.

What are the eight precision steps expected from your lead account performers to set and maintain the tempo of a major account relationship?

Your account team leaders should be expected to deliver

- Client acknowledgement and acceptance of elevated account relationship
- Definition of the mutual benefits or shared value dimension
- Agreement on client's short term and strategic business objectives
- Identification and commitment of supplier resources in support of those objectives
- Joint client/supplier planning
- Supplier and client C-level buy-in and participation
- Routine evaluation and re-alignment
- Account management continuity

How to measure account team success?

Short of a standing ovation, Phil Hecht, global vice president of sales and strategy development for AT&T's Signature Client Group, believes that "differentiated value" is at the core of a successful major

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account alliance relationship and the key to gaining a competitive edge. In his view, the value equation includes not only the long term positive impact of a product or service deliverable to the client, but also the value of best practices that the major account team brings to its own company as well.

Equally as important, according to Hecht, are the internal resources available to major account teams. "Owners of major account organizations need a tremendous support structure to feed its sales talent with business intelligence to understand industry dynamics. Given the significant potential rewards equally significant risks, major account leaders need to be particularly vocal about the resources required to anticipate and respond to client opportunities."

The Payoff

Financial payoffs to both client and supplier alliance partners can be substantial. Such performances not only reap the loudest applause, they also become long playing hits as they

- Increase wallet share across the client enterprise
- Contribute to production economies
- Accelerate product or service innovation
- Elevate sales and account management performance standards
- Establish vertical market CRM leadership
- Gain a measurable competitive advantage

Now that's really a tough act to follow.

*Alliance Relationship Model is a quantifiable major account performance model developed by the author. Thomas J. Baskind welcomes inquiries at

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Start doing online business using B2B Portals in Six Steps

By Nowshade Kabir

I registered with a B2B site but what's next?

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This is a question many first time users of B2B marketplaces ask themselves. A few expect that the registration itself will bring them a number of new customers. In some cases this might be true! Especially, if you are a seller of some much coveted items. But for rest of us, things are a little trickier! A large B2B marketplace has a lot of suppliers of similar products, who are vying for the attention of potential customers. To establish your company as a favored one among them is not an easy task! However, a little planning and thorough follow up of some basic guidelines improve your chance of getting noticed by buyers significantly.

Below, I outlined some of the basic steps that you should take once you seriously decide to market your products using B2B marketplaces.

1 Write a nice profile

When a prospective client sees your trade lead ad or your product on the marketplace and feels interested, the first thing he does is – checks your company profile out. That's where the buyer gets his initial information about your company. If you have a virtually blank profile with a very little information on your company, doubtful that the potential client will even bother to make a request for quote. That's why you should spend a little time on writing a nice company profile. Here are some aspects that you should emphasize on while writing your company profile.

Start your profile with something noteworthy about your company. This could be the distinct quality that sets your business apart from your competition.

Describe your present customer base, target market and any new products or projects that you are planning to come up with.

Write a bit about your company history. When the company was incorporated? What is the business form?

If you have something to boast about, do it! If you feel that your sales figures are impressive, why not mention them.

Be brief! The profile should not be more than five paragraphs. You don't want your buyers to get bored!

2 Include your logo on your Storefront page

If you would like to separate your company from many other similar vendors, you have to think seriously about creating a brand for your company. Brand is the distinctive pattern of your business

operation. It portrays the nature of your service or product, your uniqueness in comparison to others etc. A nice looking logo is a key to branding your company. Customers will remember your company name better if you have a great logo to go with.

3 Add products to your storefront

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It is important to have your main products, products that are your primary sale generators, added to your storefront. Products with nice picture and well descriptions capture buyers attention more than any thing else. After all the reason that the buyers are on your page is to look for the products that they need.

New Great Storefront Services

Whether you are a small enterprise, which sells goods and services locally, or you are a medium to large company with global reach, Rusbiz is planning to introduce great storefront services with complete corporate site to match your every business need. Features include:

Basic

Single page storefront

10 products in E-catalog

Sales through e-marketplace

RFQ and Quotation

Negotiations

Internal Messaging Service

Many other features

Available now and it's free!

Enterprise

10 different templates to build multiple-page storefront

100 products in E-catalog

Sales through e-marketplace

RFQ and Quotation

Negotiations

Purchase Orders

Invoices

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Tax Calculation

Shipment tracking

Internal Messaging Service

Merchant Account

Many other features

Coming soon!

Corporate

10 different templates to build multiple–page storefront

1000 products in E–catalog

Sales through e–marketplace

RFQ and Quotation

Negotiation

Purchase Orders

Invoices

Tax Calculation

Shipment tracking

Internal Messaging Service

Merchant Account

Many other features

Coming soon!

4 Make nice pictures of your products

Nothing can turn off a prospective buyer than a hazy or blur picture of the product that he intends to buy from you. If your competitor's product with exactly same features has nicer picture, guess who has a better chance to get the business? Spend some money and take professional pictures of your products. Make sure that you followed all the instructions of the Portal before uploading the pictures.

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5 Post your products for sale on the marketplace

Product visibility is the name of the game! Don't confine yourself just by adding products to E-catalog and your Storefront. Post products for sale on the E-marketplace.

There are numbers of great advantages of posting products on E-marketplaces:

Frequent browsers of marketplace can see your products

Buyers can compare your products with others on marketplace

Buyers can take an immediate buying decision and make an instant Purchase Order.

6 Post trade leads

For many not-so-savvy users of B2B sites it's a bit complicated to make buys and sales through marketplaces. They prefer to get trade leads from the site and make contacts with buyers or sellers by fax, phone or just emails. Posting trade leads is a great marketing method to tap new territories. Don't be disappointed if you do not get immediate feedbacks. Repeat trade leads at least once in a month. Since normally a portal constantly acquires new members, in order to expose the leads to bigger audience, it is worthwhile to post trade leads frequently.

Nowshade Kabir, Ph.D., is the founder, primary developer and present CEO, of

Rusbiz.com

, a global

business to business e-commerce portal with feature like storefronts, aggregated catalog, e-marketplace, trade leads, internal messaging system supply chain solutions, etc. With a doctorate in Information Technology, Dr. Kabir has worked an advisor to government projects and has over 12 years experience in International Trade. An author of many B2B and business related articles; he publishes a bi-weekly E-zine for online business community. You can subscribe to his newsletter free of charge from

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Branding On The Web Is Like Mining For Fools Gold

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Selling Globally through a B2B Exchange

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