

SalesBUZZ

The best selling strategies for wearables salespeople

By Jen Zorger

ROOM TO GROW Expand Your Services to Expand Your Sales

Corbin Sapp, CEO of Ivars Sportswear Inc. (asi/232263), has a plan for countering shrinking sales – and even a way to grow them – during the recession: Offer more services to complement the products you sell. “Our overhead is such that we’re never going to be the low-price provider – never wanted to be and never will be,” Sapp says. “So it’s about trying to find some type of value that we can add to the product.”

One service the distributorship offers is handling inventory for clients. The program started a few years ago when a customer who had trouble keeping track of her promotions closet continually got caught with no stock and had to place rush orders for more. “That was the first customer who came to us and said, ‘Can

you help us? We can’t manage this in this building with 200 people and salespeople coming in and out and taking stuff,’” Sapp says.

Having a client’s inventory on-site makes it possible for Sapp’s team to observe when stock is getting low and contact the client, instead of waiting for the client to contact them. And it has other benefits, too: “When they need something outside the inventory, who are they going to call?” Sapp asks. “Well, us.”

Ivars also does its own embroidery in-house, which helps control quality and cut down on production time. This, combined with a large facility, also allows the company to maintain a good quantity of blank wearables that are ready to be

embroidered and sold at the drop of a hat. In addition, Ivars manages 15 online stores for clients.

“The value-added side of the business is my vision of the best way to compete and be successful in an industry that – for lack of better terms – has no barriers to entry,” Sapp says. “You’ve got to differentiate yourself from everybody that gets into the industry and tries to sell and be successful.”

Lend Clients Your Marketing Expertise

Most promotional wearables buyers are not trained marketing professionals, according to Corbin Sapp, CEO of Ivars Sportswear Inc. (asi/232263). “I can guarantee you with 90% of the companies that buy promotional products, there’s nobody with that in their job description,” he says. “It’s more like, ‘Here’s your job description, and oh, by the way, the last item is you’re in charge of buying promotional items.’ ”

With clients in that situation, he and his team stress the benefits of ordering enough stock for the whole year. “We sit down with them and say, ‘OK, if you’re ordering 500 koozies five times a year, first of all, you’re probably not getting the best price,’” Sapp says. “‘Second, five times a year, that comes across your mind, you have to spend time thinking about it, and you have to check with everybody else and say, ‘Do you need more? How many?’ All that is time, which is money.’ ”

Ivars provides guidance for its clients on when and how to get the info they need from other departments and branches. Once that info is collected, Ivars quotes the client a volume price for ordering a year’s worth of stock upfront. “Then,” Sapp says, “if one of their satellite offices calls a month in and says, ‘We’re out of Koozies,’ they can say, ‘Wait a minute, you provided a plan and a budget for us at the beginning of the year. What happened?’ So it helps our customers figure out budgets and determine costs.”

To Sapp, providing this extra guidance is all part of successful selling. “What I’m trying to do is build relationships that are going to last beyond a single order,” he says.

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