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Sales System Brings Contractor Growth

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Desert Suns, a mid-sized HVAC contracting company in Albuquerque, was started in 1999 by Shawn Kukowski. The firm now employs 17, who have helped to push annual billings beyond the \$2 million range and currently services nearly 3,000 customers.

Recognized in 2003 by Trane as New Mexico's first Comfort Specialist Dealer, Desert Suns has maintained the Comfort Specialist Dealer status ever since. To do this, Kukowski's firm must maintain customer satisfaction and customer referral rate survey scores of at least 90 percent. The company is currently maintaining a 100 percent customer satisfaction rate.

Approximately 80 percent of the firm's work is residential; 20 percent is light commercial.

"One of the most important things that we've learned along the way in the residential market is to have a sales process that separates us from our competitors," noted Kukowski. "We wanted to find a technology solution to do that for us, since most consumers today are savvy to technology and expect us to be the same."

GROWING THE COMPANY

Employing technology as a differentiator, Desert Suns began using Opportunity Manager in early 2007 to gain an edge in its competitive market. "We could see in our market that none of our competitors were trying to use technology in their sales process," said Kukowski. "So, we saw this as the perfect way to gain the edge we needed."

At its core, the Opportunity Manager system (created by Opportunity Interactive) gives structure to and streamlines the sales process, from running the sales lead to tracking sales staff performance to labor management features that ensure the installation goes smoothly. It also has a special feature to set a desired profitability into the retail pricing. The program's interface is designed to engage customers, giving a sense of ownership in creating their own system while educating them about the benefits of higher-end equipment and accessories.

The software, which is designed to grow and evolve with a company, is accommodating to more sales personnel as they are added. Its design allows Desert Suns to track all of its sales, including details on labor rates, budgets, component costs, and the anticipated time to do all facets of any given job.

"When our salespeople go out on a call, their use of the system has become our primary point of differentiation," said Kukowski.



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"This is the evolution of the industry. The reality is, we are competing with firms who are doing proposals on triplicate pieces of paper. While our salespeople are developing an entire profile of the job, the consultant can say, 'Take a look at the laptop; here's what I'm designing for you.' It all comes together quickly with photos and data and costs built right in."

According to Kukowski, using it last year generated a 70 percent revenue increase and a 248 percent increase in the company's net profits. "I am certain we wouldn't have seen this large an increase without using the system," he said.

As a result of this growth, Desert Suns is adding a third salesperson and another service technician to its staff. The company will also be adding a journeyman installer and apprentice, and will be purchasing a new installation vehicle.

"I have also given my crews substantial raises and instituted a new bonus system," reported Kukowski. "Now in our company, a top-notch installer can make \$70,000 to \$90,000 annually. This really helps us attract and retain the best installers."

SALES FORMULA?

According to Kukowski, using Opportunity Manager took his sales professionals to the next level. Within the first two weeks of its

use, sales at Desert Sun rose, establishing a trend that continued into later months.

“We recouped our entire investment in the software within a couple of months by selling a handful of jobs with high-efficiency equipment and accessories that we wouldn’t have sold without using the software,” he said. “We attribute a substantial part of our growth success to the capabilities of the system that we implemented at virtually all levels of company operations.”

Working to continually improve while implementing the software, Desert Suns began analyzing customer comments. Kukowski found that customers enjoyed the ability to interact and choose from more options than the salesperson may have presented. “They told us that the interactive nature of the presentation and its ability to share multiple options to meet their desires were the keys to us getting the job,” he noted. “We continue to receive nothing but positive feedback from our customers.”

The company now has two residential sales professionals on staff, plus Kukowski, who shares in sales activity. Each of them organizes their work and interactions with

customers around the system’s platform. “Essentially, we’ve built our sales processes around the capabilities of Opportunity Manager,” explained Kukowski. “We’ve completely immersed ourselves in the program and have learned it inside and out.”

Beyond listening to the customers, Kukowski finds taking time to listen to his sales staff is valuable as well. “Now, our sales processes are so much more comprehensive and my retail pricing is accurate and consistent for my desired profits,” said Kukowski. “Each proposal will include data on the building or home, several equipment options, a complete cost quote, and photos of old and new equipment. It maximizes our time in front of the customer and makes our operations more efficient.”

MORE OPTIONS

One module in the software system, Instant Job Packet, includes the instruction sheet, pull sheet, load calculations, details, photos of the existing installation, and information for the installer on the homeowner’s comfort concerns.

Another module, Cyber Showroom, graphically presents to the customer how

different HVAC products work. Using sounds and animations, for instance, it demonstrates and compares the differences between standard and variable-speed equipment.

“It’s not us just telling the customer what they get, but allowing them to see and hear it, too,” said Kukowski. “It’s like a virtual showroom. It is much easier to communicate effectively to home-owners the importance of having programmable thermostats, air cleaners, and other accessories that benefit them directly. Our closing ratios with all of these products have risen remarkably.”

Using this program, the number crunching is all done with the customer and printed out on the spot. Desert Suns then leaves behind a full-color printed proposal with pictures, equipment descriptions, inclusions and exclusions of work, options, and a retail price.

“Our goal is to continue our growth pattern in a controlled and organized fashion,” said Kukowski. “We don’t intend or want to be the largest company in New Mexico, but we definitely intend to be the most profitable.” ■

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