



WHY HAVE GAMES?

The only reason to run a game or a contest is to improve a sales metric or a selling behavior.

If you knew of a game that would get your salespeople to do extraordinary things to increase their sales, wouldn't you take a shot at it? I'm betting that you would!

Let's say you discovered that running games or contests all the time would breathe some life into your store, creating an atmosphere in which both your customers and salespeople really enjoyed themselves. Would you begin to run games and contests? Naturally . . . all the time!

I strongly believe in games. There's no question about it—games and contests have a stimulating effect on people. They bring out the fun, the challenging and competitive spirit in all of us. After all, who doesn't want to play and win?

Think about how tremendously involved we become when watching professional basketball, baseball, boxing, or horse racing. Emotionally, we get right out there with the key players, don't we? We want them to measure up to our expectations and prove they can go out there and do it. We want them to win!

And what about the games we participate in, such as bowling, golf, and tennis? People actively involved in these games feel very strongly about the idea of competing and the results of stretching themselves to their own individual limits.

There is an excitement and an enthusiasm that builds as players prepare for “the game.” They can’t wait to see how they’ll do. Both top professionals and amateurs in any field work very hard to reach their personal best. Their object is to be the best they can be: to get a better score than last time—to show progress.

Using games and contests, you can create the same competitive and challenging atmosphere. But that atmosphere isn’t the only thing you’re looking for.

The improvements in selling behaviors and sales statistics that result from that atmosphere are the real reason that you run games. Your salespeople will constantly find ways to improve their skills and beat their figures for each event.

Games and Contests Improve Statistics

I think we would all agree that salespeople who make their living from commissions, or who are otherwise held accountable for their sales, love the idea of knowing how well they’re doing. They want to know how their sales rate in relation to store averages, company averages, their friend Frank’s averages, or even to their own personal potential.

Scores and statistics are important. They become benchmarks. They let us know how well we’re doing, whether or not we reach our mark, or when we top it. The object of any retail game or contest is to get your salespeople to want to reach a goal—to do better or to meet or beat a sales statistic. That’s what makes games very competitive.

So, if you want to improve a statistic—any statistic—run a game or have a contest! When you put that kind of attention on something, spotlighting a part of your business, things happen.

For example, I had a shoe client in the early 1980s that needed to improve the items-per-sale statistic. The average was running at about 1.30 pairs of shoes sold per transaction. In

After you run a contest or game and your store’s numbers improve, you should never expect those numbers to go down again.

Behaviors may very well be determined by the consequences that follow. Get a prize for doing something special, and you will probably want to do it again.

the shoe business, as with most retail operations, add-on sales are the key to growth and profit. We labored through extensive sales training and many meetings, extolling the virtues of adding on, but the resultant increases were small.

Around that same time, Imelda Marcos, wife of the Philippines' deposed president, was pictured in the papers with a closet full of shoes (about 2,000 pairs). A light bulb went on, and a contest was formed: the Imelda Marcos Cup!

This contest awarded terrific prizes for those individuals who maintained large items-per-sale increases. The Imelda Marcos Cup ran for about a week, and items per sale rose to a company-wide average of 1.75.

Everyone was happy, and a number of prizes were distributed. After a couple of weeks, the average settled at about 1.45 items per sale—0.15 above the original average. Now that the sales staff knew they could sell more items per sale, management was able to expect the staff to maintain a higher level of performance.

Why is this so? In the above case, the staff already proved that items per sale could reach as high as 1.75. Since the object of a game or contest is to beat a statistic—to do better—and items per sale increased to 1.75, that became the new score to beat. Now, each store may not maintain that statistic all the time, but the incremental increase over 1.30 is where all the money is made. That's what's so exciting about contests and games!

Games and Contests Improve and Enhance Selling Behaviors

Improved selling behaviors are directly related to the focus that games and contests place on sales statistics. A behavior is an activity that can be seen, described, or measured. Selling behaviors are how your sales staff sells. All behaviors, including selling behaviors, can be reinforced with positive consequences.

For example, if running the games and contests in this book becomes a behavior on your part, and you see your store's sales statistics go up, then the likelihood that you'll continue to run more games and contests will increase, right? Of course it will, because the experience was positive and rewarding and what you accomplished was exciting and successful.

When your salespeople start associating desirable events like winning money and prizes with improved selling behaviors, they'll want to keep on improving their selling behaviors. When they associate doing extraordinary things on the selling floor with having fun, they'll want to do those things over and over again.

The Socialization Process

One more benefit of running contests and games, particularly team games, results from the socialization process. The process of being teamed up with others and working toward a common goal encourages cooperation and improved communication. People learn to share ideas and feelings with each other, becoming sensitive to each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Some of the best games are team games. Just watch the behavior of a group of people divided into two separate teams. The same people who may not have been friends before, when placed on the same team, suddenly won't communicate with anyone but their teammates! They bend over backward to help each other out. They support each other through the duration of the game, and they get to know each other better as well.

A while back, one of my clients ran a team contest called Feed 'Em Beans. For this contest, the winning team was instructed to dress up for a limo ride and a meal at a nice restaurant. They were permitted to order anything they wanted from the menu. The losing team was to dress in very casual clothes for a ride to the same restaurant in an old pickup truck, where they were served water and beans.

During the contest, I visited the store to see how everything was going. Right away, you could sense a difference in the atmosphere. Everyone was pumped up. They were telling me how they had to "get going and figure out what they needed to do to get the job done!" Both teams were scoring and making some very impressive sales. Still, they were constantly challenging themselves to do even better. They wanted to win!

Why Have Games? (What's in It for Me?)

Your answer to the question “Why have games?” is *to improve selling behaviors or sales statistics*. However, as a manager, you need to be aware of games and contests from your sales staff's point of view. Your staff needs to understand that games are set up to benefit the store. And how many teams have performed at their best with no knowledge of their performance—no feedback, no scoreboard, no prize? The answer is *hardly any*.

In all sports, games, and contests, there is a passion for numbers, for the score. There is an intense desire to know how well we did and how well we are doing. Golfers carry their scorecards in their pockets. They mark down each score after each hole played. They compare each score to a previous score on that same hole. They compute whether they're ahead of or behind their previous performance. That's an important part of the game. That's what makes it fun, stimulating, and challenging. The same holds true for the games you run in your store.

Why Get Better if You Don't Keep Score?

I also happen to believe that the prize, the reward or the payoff for achieving a goal—for accomplishing something significant—is very important. I'm not saying that the challenge and the competitiveness needed to accomplish each goal aren't the driving forces—they are. But each prize becomes the symbol of the corresponding achievement. That is *recognition*. And we all like recognition.

Recognition can be money. It can be merchandise. It can be time off with pay. It can be a certificate of merit, a victory medal, or maybe a permanent plaque nailed to a wall in your store with the winner's name engraved on it. You can recognize your staff in a million ways. Whatever the reward, it is a symbol that the salesperson has done something remarkable and worthy of everyone's attention. So, when you plan your contests or games, never forget the celebration—the emotional compensation. It answers that all-important question “What's in it for me?”



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