

# The Sales Team

## Dealers address hiring, onboarding & retaining reps

by: Brent Hoskins, Office Technology Magazine

**A**re you seeking ways to improve your sales rep hiring, onboarding and retention practices? If so, perhaps the details shared in these three Business Technology Association (BTA) member dealership profiles will provide guidance that can help you achieve greater success in growing your sales team.

### Adams Remco

Founded in 1972, Adams Remco, based in South Bend, Indiana, has around 118 employees working from 11 offices in three states — Indiana, Michigan and Florida. The dealership offers Ricoh, Toshiba, Lexmark and Brother imaging products, as well as managed IT services.

With 30 sales reps across the 11 offices, how does Kennedy Cross, Adam Remco's director of business development, characterize the current environment for hiring new reps? "It's been a struggle," he says. "Half the time people don't show up for their interviews. Indeed [the employment website] has fallen by the wayside, as have other similar websites. In interviews that do come together [from such websites], the applicant basically wants to be a customer service rep where he or she sits down and works a book of business from a desk at home."

Where is Adams Remco finding success today in hiring reps? "Primarily through our clients, our internal referral program and internships," Cross says. "I started an internship program at the end of last year. Today, we put interns in all of our branches where we have sales managers. That has allowed us to hire a couple of people in sales."

There are seven colleges in the area of the dealership's headquarters, Cross says. "I reached out to all of them to recruit salespeople, marketing people, etc.," he says, noting that the effort evolved into the current internship program. "We've pulled a few employees out of a community college who were working people looking to change the focus of their jobs."

Cross emphasizes that the best sales rep candidates are individuals who have the ability to comfortably talk to others from the first encounter and clearly possess common sense. "In the interview, if the candidate cannot answer common-



sense questions — 'How would you handle this?' 'How would you handle that?' — that makes me nervous, because I'm thinking, 'How are you going to be able to handle yourself when you are in front of a client?'"

Actually, at Adams Remco, the primary interviewer is not Cross, but instead the sales manager "who is going to be growing, grooming and supporting that person," he says. "I trust his or her judgment. I do ask for a Teams call with the

candidate where I normally ask only a few questions. If I see anything as a red flag, I'll share that with the manager, weighing in with my recommendation in terms of what to do or not do with a potential candidate."

Once a rep is hired, he or she "spends every day [for at least 30 days] riding along with other reps — learning about our company, the territory and our products," Cross says. Within or at the end of the 30 days, the rep takes part in Adams Remco's week-long onboarding program along with all other new hires, offered every other month. "For the first two days, all of the departments present to the employees. I want our employees to know exactly what we do as a company. For the next three days, we split the employees into their respective departments. For sales hires, this includes in-person or virtual meetings with our manufacturers, leasing partners and software partners. We also cover prospecting, telephone scripts, cold-call scripts and things of that nature."

With 38 years of experience in the industry, Cross acknowledges that efforts to ensure sales reps are content in order to retain them long term have evolved. "I was raised in sales; I mean, 'you're here to sell,'" he says. "Your 'team building' was your commission check. Your 'having fun' was selling more. That's not society these days. So, we are doing things like Top Golf, pizza, bringing in food — that's what people are expecting. It's also important to show everyone that we are here to support them. You have to say to every hire: 'If you need help, just call me. We'll jump in a car and go to the account. We'll knock on doors.' That's what our industry requires today."

## Metro Sales Inc.

Founded in 1969, Metro Sales (MSI), based in Burnsville, Minnesota, has nine branches across the state and in parts of Wisconsin. In recent years, the dealership has expanded its offerings to include managed IT services, DocuWare and other software products, a ramped-up focus on production print and an MPS program, in part by way of selling HP products.

Today, MSI has around 285 employees. “We have 76 individuals in our sales department, including nine full-time sales managers, three selling managers and 55 sales reps,” says Tony Gruenke, general sales manager. “In addition, we have specialists dedicated to each of our solution categories to support our clients.”

Where does MSI find new reps? In recent years “we have found some really good candidates through our employee referral program — family, friends, someone the employee knew in college, etc.,” Gruenke says. “Our robust referral program compensates our employees well.”

While MSI has also found reps through LinkedIn, Indeed, etc., it rarely hires reps from within the industry, says Gruenke. “Some of our better hires previously worked in other business-to-business roles at such companies as Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Cintas, so they understand what it takes to be successful,” he says. “They have no industry experience, but they have the passion and the drive that it takes.”

In the interview process, Gruenke says MSI determines whether sales rep applicants are a good fit for the dealership, in part, by way of questions based on the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result) method. “That would be: ‘Tell me about an issue that came up with a customer. What did you do? What was the result?’” he explains. “So, you are looking at whether the candidate can speak to it, but also demonstrate a history of having the skills that we are seeking.”

Gruenke acknowledges that is a “pretty tough market right now” in terms of finding sales reps. “The biggest thing is, if you have a good candidate, you have got to move quickly,” he says, advising fellow dealers. “You don’t want to skip anything and you want to make sure the person is thoroughly vetted, but if two or three weeks go by, the candidate is probably going to get an offer from somebody else. So, try to make the offer as quickly as possible to qualified candidates.”

In terms of the onboarding for new hires, MSI is currently transitioning its process, Gruenke says, noting that, traditionally, new reps would learn the CRM, etc., do ride-alongs with

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senior reps and attend a training class team taught by sales managers. “After they graduated from the training class, the manager would work closely with a new rep for the first 90 days, going on most of the rep’s appointments, being involved with processing paperwork ... [Eventually] the manager would take a step back, but still go with the rep [for a period of time] on bigger appointments or as needed,

while also doing weekly one-on-ones to offer coaching.”

Recently, however, MSI has hired a sales trainer “who is going to work alongside the manager to support that rep for the first 12 months,” Gruenke says. “Currently, the trainer is building a curriculum, identifying benchmarks and KPIs, and identifying the knowledge the rep should have at one month, two months, three, four, etc. — what the rep should be accomplishing during the first year.”

What does Gruenke see as the best means of retaining a rep long term? “Obviously, compensation is part of it, but I would say even before compensation is the company culture,” he says. “We did a company-wide study a couple of years ago, asking employees: ‘Why do you stay at Metro Sales?’ The number-one response: ‘I have friends at work.’ Number two: ‘My supervisor values me.’ Number three: ‘Compensation.’ So, it is important to create an environment where people get along, but also where employees feel valued.”

## Systel Business Equipment

Founded in 1981, Systel Business Equipment, based in Fayetteville, North Carolina, has nine additional branches in the state, as well as two branches in South Carolina and one in Georgia. The dealership also covers parts of Tennessee and Virginia. With about 250 employees, Systel’s primary brands include Ricoh, Konica Minolta, HP, Lexmark and Brother. Beyond imaging devices, the dealership’s portfolio includes managed IT, unified communications and document management.

The sales team is comprised of approximately 60 individuals, including two executives, six sales managers, 40 sales reps, four new business development reps and several specialists. “Our down-the-street reps can sell everything,” says Jacqueline Smith, vice president of marketing and business development. “The only distinction we make is we assign the reps a primary brand to sell, either Ricoh or Konica Minolta.”

The most “reliable source of quality sales rep candidates” at Systel is LinkedIn, Smith says. “However, we do find success with other sources, such as Indeed, job fairs at local colleges

and referrals,” she says. “We have also had success using a niche recruiter focusing on athletes coming out of college [Athletes to Careers].”

Systel sales managers put value on office technology industry experience, “but if the candidate has jumped from competitor to competitor, the value diminishes,” Smith says. “And while industry experience can be of value, more importantly, we seek candidates

who would be good fits with the company culture, are motivated and possess key qualities; the best candidates have strong work ethics, the grit to overcome rejection, backgrounds in sports, strong math skills and a willingness to learn.”

How do Systel’s sales managers determine if candidates have what it takes? “In the first interview, the sales manager sets the expectations for the job, making sure candidates know it is not easy but can be very rewarding,” Smith says. “That’s the litmus test to see who can get to the next step — a sales aptitude test [by way of John Wiley & Sons (Wiley)].”

What is discovered about the candidate from the test will guide the sales manager with any resulting second interview, Smith says. “This second interview also involves the vice president of sales or a tenured rep within the hiring branch seeking to determine whether the candidate would be a good fit for that group of employees,” she says. “The most important thing at Systel is team chemistry. If the group gets along well as a team, then everybody’s ship rises with the tide.”

Once sales rep candidates are hired, they attend Systel University, a customized training program focused on the dealership’s customer engagement and sales processes,

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Smith says, noting that the program is built on a platform developed by the business consulting firm On the Ball. “The reps spend a lot of time learning about Systel, our culture and our story,” she says. “They are taught by our sales management team, not just one voice. We want them to get the best guidance from all of our managers.”

In addition to attending the classroom training program,

new reps do ride-alongs with sales managers and a variety of different reps “so they get exposure to different selling strategies,” Smith says. “Some of our sales managers aim for 90 days of shadowing and support. However, most reps begin working independently within the first month ... The managers feel real learning happens in the field; they encourage early exposure to revenue-generating activities.”

In terms of sales rep retention, Systel has found that “two things are the most important — compensation and autonomy,” Smith says. “We want them to know their earning potential is uncapped ... And we want them to treat their territories like they are their own businesses. So, they can achieve that uncapped income through the autonomy in their territories ... Plus, we don’t micromanage. That’s what drives people away. For that reason, we give them the flexibility to manage their own territories.” ■

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