

# Entry-Level Sales Success

## A model for building a summer intern BDR team

by: Jon Dunkelberger, Ricoh USA Inc.

**H**ow can you break the consuming cycle of progress and setbacks in growing your sales organization? This solution may surprise you: develop some of your future field sales professionals before you hire them into their field sales territories. We began exploring this answer in two previous articles. In the March 2025 issue of Office Technology (“Your Sales Team’s Evolution: Expanding your base & increasing net-new revenue”), I introduced you to the business development rep (BDR) team as a new component of your sales organization. In the September 2024 issue (“At a University Near You: Shaping the future of your sales organization”), I shared how to source the reps for this future team.

Here is a quick review of why you should form a BDR team and how to do it:

- **Grow net-new business** — Generate outbound, sales-qualified leads for your tenured sales reps. BDRs are partial-process sales professionals and their output is booked introductory meetings with targeted, net-new prospects.

- **Recruiting, hiring and development** — BDRs are the “bench” you build for your field sales team. The BDR team’s organizational output is new sales professionals who are prepared to progress to their own field territories with a higher-than-typical probability of reaching productivity quickly and succeeding in their roles.

- **Organizational evolution** — Establish the next generation of your sales organization and your company with future leaders who have bought into your culture, demonstrated the right strengths and made the commitments you seek.

In discussing this strategy with our Ricoh dealer partners, there is an increasing level of interest in this approach, but, understandably, there are questions and concerns:

- Are we equipped to make this organizational change and can we get it right?
- Can recent graduates or aspiring reps with no experience perform in professional B2B sales roles?



Fortunately, there is a way for you to start your BDR team that presents lower risk for both you and the recent grads. As a small-scale, manageable investment of both money and time, a summer intern BDR team gives you a foundational opportunity to test the method and, perhaps, get some quick wins. Here is a basic model to get started:

- **The team** — The team should be made up of four rising-senior college students with sales “experience,” which can include a combination of formal sales classes, participation in sales clubs, experience in sales competitions, and prior marketing or sales internship experience.

- **The teaming** — Include the intern BDRs as part of your field sales team, seat them with your existing team members, have them participate in your weekly call blitzes, expect CRM utilization and include them in the prospect relationships they initiate.

- **The comp plan** — Our Ricoh comp plan is based on 24 hours per week at \$20 to \$25 an hour with a bonus for sales-

qualified leads. For example, we will bonus \$100 for an introductory meeting that is booked with an agenda and objectives, and initial discovery questions answered to confirm the prospect's interest in what we offer.

Ricoh is in its third year of evolving its summer intern BDR program to generate leads for its dealers. We at Ricoh are far from experts, but we are now positioned to share lessons we have learned.

Because many of Ricoh's BDR summer interns fall within Gen Z, to support our approach, I am incorporating an article from Franklin Covey: "Managing Gen Z at Work: 9 Strategies And Tips for Today's Leaders."

As the father of two Gen Zers, I know they do not like the label. "True Gen" is a more appropriate term you can use because we know that Gen Z values open communication. To prepare for this open communication, let's address our concerns about True Gens directly. Franklin Covey shares that 40% of managers find Gen Zers unprepared to work and 45% say they are the most difficult generation of employees to work with. Ironically, 75% of managers also said that they do not understand what Gen Zers need in the workplace. "Concerns about Gen Z's work ethic often stem from misunderstanding. They (Gen Zers) measure effort by results — not hours — and are motivated by autonomy, purpose and impact."

Gen Zers are coming whether we are ready for them or not — they will make up 30% of the workforce by 2030. Thus, it is important to keep this data in mind when building out a sales program that will be comprised of at least some members of Gen Z. Do not wait until then. You can learn from those interns that are Gen Z and partner with university sales programs to understand their motivations and expectations. As Robin Sharma said, "Change is hard at first, messy in the middle and gorgeous at the end."

Here are the big lessons we learned from our 2024 intern team that we are now applying to our approach in 2025:

■ **Use a hybrid work model** — Bring them on-site. Gen Z really wants the power of proximity with the flexibility of hybrid. We are going from fully remote to two or three days in the office each week.

■ **Hire in multiples** — Hire at least two interns at once, but ideally four. Schedule time for them to work with you and your sales team members, work together as an intern team and work individually on their own. I have learned to never underestimate how much interns will accomplish by collaborating as a group without my involvement.

■ **Hire with a head start** — Hire interns from specific sales programs that prepare students with the skills and experience you want. We are sourcing from multiple programs

As the father of two Gen Zers, I know they do not like the label. "True Gen" is a more appropriate term you can use because we know that Gen Z values open communication.

this summer, most notably the James Madison University College of Business and the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina. You can find a guide for your approach in my September article. The Sales Education Foundation (SEF; <https://salesfoundation.org>) can be a great resource as well.

■ **Narrow is better** — Pick one product for the interns to learn and prospect with. You can add another as they progress,

but fight the urge to expand quickly.

Give them a specific product or service to make it more real for them. This summer, Ricoh is focusing on its new SD series IMCs. The interns can see them, touch them and experience the tangible user benefit of high-speed, AI-enhanced scanning.

Next, align each intern with a specific, experienced, field sales rep mentor who can help schedule their introductory meetings. Have them work together to make it easy for the intern to "sell" the intro meetings. Have them set up shared calendar availability, agree on scheduling objectives, understand meeting agendas and objectives, and provide plenty of feedback.

■ **Reward and recognition** — We are going to advance our approach to reward with a \$100 bonus for meetings booked and campaign-based contests with small activity-based milestone bonuses. Our goal is to make it more about the recognition. Franklin Covey states that 78% of Gen Zers want to receive recognition at least a few times a month from their managers or supervisors, and 83% want to feel more appreciated at work.

■ **Communication will be key** — Sharing vision and working on specifics will give them a sense of connection. We will ask our interns to bring something new to us from lessons learned in their classes. For instance, they could extend our social media prospecting strategy by creating short, personalized videos — a common assignment in their marketing classes.

■ **Give them a win** — We have been working on a list of motivators to use in our recruiting and their development, and ways to help our interns with their utmost concern — getting a great job at graduation:

(1) Through their intern responsibilities, they will beef up their online profiles. Our interns will look great on LinkedIn when they finish their summers with us.

(2) If they do well as interns, Ricoh or our dealer partners can make contingent offers to go full-time at graduation to avoid multiple, daunting interview processes.

(3) In showing them the path to full-time BDR positions and beyond — to field sales roles with their own territories — we are establishing a progression with purpose.

Are you starting to see it? Hire your interns from last summer for full-time BDR positions at graduation and, at the same time, hire four new interns. Now you have built a BDR team and the foundation of a future new-business field team in a year.

And how about this next-level idea: Assign a developing sales manager candidate to lead the intern BDR team and progress from partial-process inside sales to full-process field sales along with the team.

But it is June and you are about a year from hiring your first batch of BDR interns, so you can file this article and pull it out in about six months, right? Wrong. You have work to do, but it is very manageable and this is the perfect time to get started:

■ **Make a project plan.** What will be needed over the next year to get this program started and who is going to do it? A good starting point will be onboarding and training — start planning that now.

■ **Make a budget.** Based on the sample plan I gave you earlier for four interns, base compensation will be \$24,000. Fully burden it with bonuses for meetings booked, incidentals, taxes, etc. You should plan for \$50,000.

■ **Get started with your university sales program.** Summer is a great time to make first contact, but be patient waiting for return calls. Use the wait time to do your online research of the program. When you make contact, discuss what it is planning for the students over the next academic year and start collaborating. The university may already be partnering with a company in another tech sector that has a BDR team approach. You can benefit from its lessons learned.

■ **You can start making offers to intern candidates next January — or even sooner.** Your intern recruiting should not be limited to one university. Candidates who live

Are you starting to see it?  
Hire your interns from  
last summer for full-time  
BDR positions at  
graduation and, at the  
same time, hire four  
new interns.

in your area could be participating in sales programs anywhere in the country. SEF offers a national listing of programs.

■ **Create a job description and post it on Handshake.** Use the “Managing Gen Z at Work” article I mentioned earlier as a guide to write a job description that will attract the True Gens you want. There are thought-leading companies in other industries doing this successfully. Read their postings and take lessons

from them. Test it out with a True Gen. We all have access to them. I get truthful coaching from my sons (I just have to suffer through the, “OK Boomer, that’s dumb ...” that they lead with).

■ **Get the whole team involved.** Use your marketing team members for the campaigns, your admin staff members for prospect lists, the engagement process and tracking, sales reps to team and mentor, and management team members to establish training plans and a formal onboarding process.

Have fun with this. It is a dynamic, progressive challenge. Consider these words from former President John F. Kennedy: “Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” ■

*Jon Dunkelberger serves as region business director for Ricoh's Dealer Division, where he is focused on helping dealers develop their sales organizations and grow their businesses. Dunkelberger is committed to the development of the next generation of sales professionals and has taught sales strategy as an adjunct professor at the University of South Carolina's Darla Moore School of Business.*

*He can be reached at  
[jon.dunkelberger@ricoh-usa.com](mailto:jon.dunkelberger@ricoh-usa.com).  
Visit [www.ricoh-usa.com](http://www.ricoh-usa.com).*

