

From this week's Focus

Know when to call in an expert to boost your startup's sales

By: Meg McSherry Breslin November 08, 2010



Jeremy Ulmer coaches small businesses on their sales techniques.
 Photo by: Stephen J. Serio

became a part-time employee with the title of chief operating officer. He developed the sales strategy and ran the sales operation—all in one to two days per week.

For Jupiterbay, a small business with three core leaders and an array of subcontractors, Mr. Samples was well worth the investment of about \$40,000, Mr. Picciola says.

“He did quite a bit for us, from the sales plan to the costing to operations and just basically how we should handle things,” says Mr. Picciola, the company’s vice-president of sales and business development. “And he had a huge impact on our sales. In the area he started helping us, we basically doubled our sales.”

Hiring a specialist to parachute in and jump-start sales is one way to increase a startup’s revenue without the expense and commitment of hiring salaried employees.

Working almost exclusively with small businesses, Mr. Samples, 54, offers a variety of engagement options, from as little as an hour a month of coaching to a couple of days per week of consulting and hands-on work. His more involved engagements can cost \$5,000 or \$6,000 per month, he says.

“If we can come in and work with you in putting the right foundation in place, I can go away and you can live in that highly productive business setting for years to come,” Mr. Samples says.

Companies that have matured beyond the start-up phase sometimes see the need to re-energize, and that’s when a sales coach can come in handy.

Jeremy Ulmer, a 33-year-old Chicago-based sales consultant, often calls his clients around the country once or twice per week, helping them with prospecting techniques, presentation skills, even the impression they make over the phone.

For Mary Drotar, a partner and co-founder of Oak Park-based Strategy 2 Market Inc., a new-product development consulting and training firm, Mr. Ulmer also provided a welcome kick in the pants.

“When you know someone is going to be calling you Friday and they’re going to ask, ‘How did you do?’, you

As the software development company he co-founded took off, Tony Picciola faced a tough decision. One year into operations, there wasn’t enough money to hire a full-time sales manager, but Mr. Picciola knew the startup needed someone with the connections, expertise and business savvy to help it grow.

After hearing Aurora-based sales consultant J. R. Samples speak at a business event and getting positive reports about him, Mr. Picciola decided he was a good fit for Arlington Heights-based Jupiterbay Inc., which provides interactive digital signage and touch-screen kiosks for casinos, hospitals and other customers.

For roughly six months, Mr. Samples

definitely feel responsible for having results—whether good or bad,” Ms. Drotar says. “He was kind of tough. He really was. If I didn’t do something, he was really disappointed.”

Ms. Drotar says she didn’t have much time to work on business development on top of her regular workload, so she tapped Mr. Ulmer for ideas on how to grow her business. His advice “definitely helped us build sales and a pipeline,” she says. “He was just very valuable to our firm.”

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