



What Does it Take to *Win* Healthcare Business?

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The most obvious answer to this question may seem to be...awareness of the healthcare sales opportunities in the market and a determination to pursue that business. This answer is less than half correct... and may not be correct at all under certain circumstances.

The reality is this.... If you are pursuing healthcare furniture sales opportunities without a full understanding of the needs of healthcare's specialized buyers and specifiers, and the process they use to procure furniture, you could be hurting your reputation more than you are helping it.

To be professional, you must possess the knowledge to navigate through the procurement process required to sell furnishings to healthcare customers, having respect for all the players from materials management, hospital end-users, the local Integrated Delivery Network (IDN) and the GPO acting on behalf of the end-user. Also, you can't forget the designer who is expert on healthcare furniture applications and can provide a product solution in a way that meets the buying criteria of each of these players. When you learn to deal with all of these people effectively, success in healthcare will arrive at your doorstep.

Does your strategic plan for tapping into the growing vertical market of healthcare specifically define how you will build the knowledge and the necessary skills for your sales organization to successfully pursue healthcare business? If your answer is no, here is a road map to get you started.

The elements of a sound strategic plan for winning healthcare business must include:

1. A healthcare-friendly product offering. While the healthcare customer has some of the same categories of needs as contract customers, the requirements for healthcare are often different. For example...

- Budget Requirements – Hospitals will spend more money in patient areas and "money making" departments than in administrative areas, even high-level. You must be able to provide a range of low-end to mid-market to high-end options for seating, desk, lounge, and systems ap-

plications. Understanding managed care and the implications on facilities will help you navigate the hospital setting.

- Specification Requirements – Healthcare furniture solutions must meet stringent code requirements that impact fabrics, finishes, durability, load capability, construction, etc. to be acceptable within a healthcare setting. Plus, every type of healthcare setting has its own set of specification requirements. For example, acute care facilities have spec requirements that are different from assisted living or long-term care facilities.

- Range of Product Performance – Healthcare demands "extended performance capabilities" in every product category. For example, a hospital's seating purchase may include recliners to accommodate patients in hospital rooms, dialysis areas or bariatric waiting room seating sized and built for the larger human scale of the patient. Standard filing cabinets must accommodate medical records and medical filing systems. Desking and systems solutions must accommodate special tasks like those performed in nurses' or doctor's stations.

- Ways to meet the product demands of the healthcare furniture buyer:
 - Partner with quality small-to medium-sized furniture manufacturers, designers, and providers of specialty healthcare furniture products. The addition of that special healthcare "hip chair" to your offering might just be the entree that gets you in the door for the office seating opportunity.
 - Partner with textiles and finish providers who specialize in meeting the stringent specifications required for use in healthcare applications. If you are a manufacturer, offer these finish options on your products. If you are a dealer, use an alliance with a textile provider to be able to offer a Customer's Own Material (COM) application of these materials to meet the customer's need.

2. Competent national account or sales representatives who understand how to work with GPO Contract Managers, Integrated Delivery Networks (IDNs) Material Management Departments, and the special needs of healthcare end-users.

- Knowledge of how their products meet the standards of healthcare buyers, as defined above
- Knowledge of how to pursue and achieve GPO or IDN agreements
- Working “with” GPO’s when you are not on their contract
- Working with IDNs when you are not on their agreements
- Building rapport with healthcare end-users and establishing the “integrator” reputation
- How do you develop and maintain a competent healthcare selling organization?
- Provide training programs that blend healthcare buying process information with both a strategic and tactical selling skills application practice. It is not enough just to provide sales reps with a territory of hospitals! If you want your training investment to reap the results of increased sales, you must reinforce proven selling behaviors at the same time as you expand a rep’s insight into a new industry. Provide training in a “workshop” format where proven selling skills are practiced and healthcare information is the topic of those practice sessions.
- Provide a self-paced medium, such as web-based study modules, as a resource for reps to build and reinforce their knowledge of the healthcare buying process and healthcare customer needs. You cannot learn to play the guitar on the web. Real practice lessons are necessary. It is the same with sales; building true skill requires the practice that is done in workshops. But informational web training sets the stage for workshops to be more effective in less time while providing the essential post-workshop reinforcement that secures the retention of both knowledge and skill.
- Involve sales management in the training process. Every training program is a failure if it is not properly reinforced and mandated by the manager of the trainee. Management holds the key to the accountability of every rep to apply newly learned selling knowledge and skill. With HCFI’s web based sales programs, management can evaluate the level of expertise or product knowledge of each rep or region. Imagine looking at your complete sales force scores on the

web and viewing their success and immediately know who isn’t “getting” it or working on the training! Training must be measured for success just as sales, and sales promotions.

- Hire the right people in the first place. Successful experience in selling any product to healthcare buyers points to a degree of understanding of the healthcare buying process. With potential applicants, ask for and confirm examples of when, where, and how they successfully sold and managed healthcare buying relationships in their past to determine if they bring real capabilities. Consider hiring a medical surgical distribution person or a medical equipment sales person.

3. A Healthcare-Focused Marketing Initiative

- Demonstrate your understanding of the needs of healthcare buyers in all marketing materials, websites, and market communications.
- Focus your impact message on how your products and services help healthcare buyers do a better job at reaching and servicing their own customers. Healthcare buyers will recognize your efforts when you are genuinely dedicated to helping them meet their business objectives through your product/service offering.
- Spotlight every instance that you provide a well-regarded healthcare product or service to a healthcare buyer in your market.
- Use a Public Relations firm in your local market to get you known as the organization that understands the needs of the healthcare buyer via your press releases.
- Ways to launch and maintain a successful healthcare marketing campaign...
- Hold a focus group involving local healthcare experts such as hospital end-users, healthcare A&D specialists, IDN representatives and your supplier partners to position yourself as a responsible healthcare provider attempting to provide solutions.
- Write articles that educate healthcare buyers on furniture options, innovations and trends to demonstrate your expertise as a solution provider.
- Leverage your successful healthcare relationships as referrals throughout your local healthcare market.

So, back to our original question...

What does it take to win healthcare business? It does take the awareness of the healthcare

sales opportunities in the market and a determination to pursue that business... by a healthcare-competent selling organization armed with the right products, ongoing education and training, and marketing resources dedicated to addressing the healthcare industry.

HCFI will be presenting the “Health Care Furnishings Executive Forum,” during NeoCon in June, bringing together key executives from GPOs, Integrated Delivery Networks, furniture manufacturers, dealers, A&D, and distributors. You will hear first hand the issues relating to the sales/marketing of products and meeting healthcare customer expectations. This program is being held on Tuesday, June 15 from 8:15 am to 12:15 pm at the Holiday Inn Mart Plaza, Chicago Merchandise Mart and space is limited. If you are serious about selling in the healthcare market, don’t miss this opportunity.

For a more thorough discussion of your sales opportunities within healthcare, HCFI provides a two-hour on-site presentation, “Education in Healthcare,” delivered and customized to your organization. It provides a thorough overview of everything you need to know about pursuing business in the dynamic and growing industry of healthcare!

Designed specifically for the contract furniture industry, we offer, “Selling to the Healthcare Buyer,” a “new business development” program providing web-based and classroom education on the healthcare marketplace and the healthcare buying process that puts in motion the selling activities that result in success with healthcare customers. These furniture industry veterans are a part of the HCFI team to bring you this unique training opportunity... Juanita Brown and Steven Smith, combining 32 years of sales training focus in the furniture industry, and Royce Robinson, a 24-year veteran in field sales and distribution leadership.

For information on HCFI’s Seminars, consulting and training programs, contact Bob Oosdyke at bob@hcfurninc.com or phone 949-500-4636.