

## Maximising summer sales

© Comms Dealer 2005

Many resellers suffer from reduced sales over the long hot summer months, when customers are holidaying, kicking back and understaffed. Deals remain unsigned and sales staff stare languidly at their charts as things fail to happen. However, some dealers have worked out ways to make the months of July and August hot for sales deals and installation activity, as well as tans.

Piers du Pre, head of du Pre, states that the mere idea of believing there is a lull in sales during summertime is anathema to his company. A slow down in sales for whatever reason is not to be tolerated at du Pre, he says: "I get over the moon when people think that sales are going to go down. I think 'great, you think that chum, and I'll pick up all the sales'. It's all about mind set."

du Pre refers back to an event in the 1990s recession that paints the picture: "A customer asked one of our engineers, 'What about the recession?'. The engineer replied, 'Oh yes, our board heard about that and decided to have nothing to do with it'. That's the attitude you have to take. That encompasses everything; it's in the mindset. It has to be in the minds of the board and the sales staff, and then you can make it happen. We do, and our monthly invoicing stays the same throughout the year."

Yet Pas Ruggiero, managing director at Anglia Telecom, says sales do slump in the heat. "It can slow down in summer, in a lot of ways. Over July and August loads of people are on holiday and those that remain are covering for others, so it's not a great time to start new deals."

However, Ruggiero adds: "Holidays are a great watershed, a great time to tidy things up. If you make sure your pipelines are clear, it can be a really good time to get those deals done that have been sitting on the fence for a bit, but only if you've been working on them and with them. You can use the momentum that people have before they go on holiday, tidying things up, to get them to sign."

James Palmer, managing director at Nine Telecom, comments: "There definitely is a summer lull. In 2003 August was a slow month for us, but we learnt from that and in 2004 it was a good month. We lined up incentives for our dealers. We used track days and bonuses on commissions to try and cover that period, and it worked. We paid out around £25,000 in bonuses last August, and it was worth it; we had a

really good uplift in sales and August was one of our best months last year because of that scheme."

Palmer adds: "In this industry a lot of people say success is down to luck, being in the right place at the right time. But I think that the people that work the hardest get the results. We try to really gee-up our sales team before summer," Palmer says. "Summer is slow, but maybe when all our competitors are on holiday, it's a good time for us to strike."

This year, Nine Telecom is once again running a series of incentives to motivate its dealers. The company has three incentives lined up that according to its predications will cost it around £15,000 in payouts. "You've got to be a bit more innovative over the summer months," Palmer says. "Think of promotions, such as setting deadlines to get customers to sign on the day, as well as commission incentives for dealers."

Sales staff at Anglia are encouraged to concentrate on their sales pipeline before the summer months. The company deals with the larger end of the small and medium sized company market, so its deals tend to move slowly. That means staff need to plan ahead by spending a little time every month concentrating on deals that will be signed in two to three months time.

However, deals for educational establishments closed at the beginning of the summer period can easily be installed during the academic holidays, Ruggiero states. He adds: "Pick your base to fill your cold spot. It's no good trying to sell to a school in summer, but it's a great time to do installations for those customers."

Phoenix link has done just that, using the summer months to put in systems. Paul Humphries, general manager, states: "We do our deals before the summer so we can do installations in the summer. A lot of our clients like systems going in over summer. People are off taking holidays, so companies can afford a little bit of downtime. We tend to get a lot of short notice deals, where people have been planning it but leave it late, so we have to work quite hard to get the kit in."

Because of this tactic, Phoenix Link has good summer sales. Humphries states: "Our summer doesn't really get that quiet in terms of business. To maximise our summer sales we do try and hit it like a summer special. There are deals to be done, so we'll try things like quotations with tighter time scales on expiry dates, just to give people a little bit of encouragement to sign."

Ruggiero adds a word of warning for those that are only now considering what to do about a slow down: "If you're thinking about how to keep sales going in summer and it's gone June already, it's too late.

"There's a great quote by old school sales trainer, Jim Rohn," Ruggiero continues. "He said 'Learn to plant in Spring or starve in Autumn'. And that's exactly the way it works. If you've got lots on the go, June and July is a great time to close deals. If you haven't, it's not a great time."