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Opportunity Lurks Where Technology Does Not Fear to Tread

By Dennis Dow,
Customer Success Manager
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It's no secret that the most desirable attributes of good businesses are often the least understood. That may allow the savviest strategists and salespeople to rise to the top, but it also leaves a lot of untapped opportunity for success waiting to be found. To use a school-yard example, the most difficult math problem on a final exam may have an answer that totally bewilders the test-taker, but that does not mean the answer is nonexistent! Study, analysis and the ability to problem-solve lead the best students to a desirable outcome, but that answer remains no less real for those who leave the question blank. The avenues to success exist; it's just up to the student to embark.

Similarly, opportunity abounds in equipment purchase and rental spheres, but it will elude those who do not know where to look. Creating awareness of that opportunity where it may not exist is the mark of the truly dedicated salesperson, and driving action where the current unexploited opportunity lies is the key to growth.

In reality, equipment rental and sales are much more complicated than your average math test. The amount and breadth of study required is similarly much more robust. However, what to specifically study in order to gain a strategic advantage and activate structural and professional changes may be a less-than-clear picture without the right technology to help. With the right technology platform, someone could productize and amplify the gut

How data, insights and technological platforms lead equipment distributors to have the right people pushing the right product to the right places at the right time for the right customers.

feelings of the best sales guru by grounding them in the wealth of data and analysis afforded to us in this day and age.

Under that heading, I have noticed a few things in my time at an OPE customer analytics firm. First and foremost, there are two main things to remember when implementing or adopting a technology solution: Understand quickly how it can affect your bottom line positively from C-suite down to boots on the ground, and make sure the product and insights are presented in a manner that everyone can understand and use. These two things are the products of a good working relationship between distribution and technology companies, and they are the basis of a successful enhancement of professional and product development.

Let me explain the first part of that. For us to build a robust technological platform showing sales opportunities based upon the careful compilation, cleansing, and analysis of data from multiple sources, we needed an expert data team, a crack crew of programmers, a wealth of public and private data at our disposal, statistical analysts bent on finding answers to complex questions, and the ability to understand another industry enough to know what a salesperson or strategist would want to see and do. The wealth of opportunity we found, the deep dives into data to understand trends in a customer base, product category sales by region and time, high-performing dealers vs. low and ways in which to make the latter more like the former, and defined dollar lifetime value for the best customers in each zip code was built into a one-stop platform for our clients. However, the average user is within sales, from the C-suite down to individual boots on the ground. They are not in any way data scientists. Therefore, the personality and communication styles of those in the industry have to be taken into account when designing how we present data and insights, or you will have as much success as you would studying for that math test using a book in a foreign language. Pair the users with the right platform, written with a narrative they can easily understand and filled with insights they can very easily get to and use, and you have the backbone for an unstoppable tool to increase awareness of opportunity and efficiency of execution.

What would be in that platform? Well, we started talking about opportunity that is, as yet, untapped and perhaps unknown. The right platform would have the right insights, allowing the users to see opportunity to sell more or rent more through their existing dealer or rental network, and also identify opportunities to open new points of trade. It would also have the ability to make sure the right product mix is at the right point of trade at the right time to capitalize upon areas where the most valuable customers do business. Data, trend analysis, comparisons of historical sales with regional economic forces, NAICS codes for target customers, and the geo-location of current high- and low-performing dealers all would couple together to show a “heat map” of opportunity that could be quickly understood and exploited.

Not only can we vastly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of a sales force or strategist by cutting down the time spent building these reports and outputs, but we can provide strategic analysis of market potential to allow users to make the best decisions possible in reaction to questions like these: When is the best time to switch our dealer product mix from summer equipment to winter equipment based upon when our buyers or renters do so? When do the highest-value customers rent or buy a certain product line? Who drives the most recurring lifetime revenue when comparing half-year renters with owners? Which of my high-performing dealers or renters hit these key demographics most often and what can I do to replicate that elsewhere? How does weather affect regional sales and rentals of particular product lines and how can I make sure the right product mix is available? A user may be very surprised to know how much goes into the construction of an opportunity, how complex the answer may be, and how easy it can be to visualize when you have technology that marries all the relevant data together in an easy-to-see way. All that's left is action.

Let's take a step back and look at some things that trouble strategists at equipment distributors. Finding opportunity in the marketplace is a large part of being successful, but there is also an internal battle that must be fought. Having the right organizational structure, with the right talent

aligned to your overall strategy, is vital to acting on and executing those newfound opportunities. The ability to adapt and be in the right place at the right time in the market is just as important as the ability to internally have the right people in the right place aligned to the right mission. Just as a technology platform can have the right information in the wrong format, an equipment distributor can have the right ideas but be in the wrong places for execution. Within a distribution network there can exist a plethora of high and low performers of all shapes and sizes: wholly-owned branches and independent distributors in a constant flux of merging and acquisition, multiple channels for dealers and rental companies all targeting customers who purchase or rent at any given time of the year.

With all that in play, the question remains – how can a company organize itself internally around these many moving parts, personalities, and strengths to most efficiently act upon these opportunities? The good news here is that the same analytics technology, which allows users and strategists to see outward opportunity also by nature, shows where the highest performing sectors of the company truly excel and where there is need for improvement. It fosters conversations between high and low performers, thanks to empirical data and analysis that sets the table for learning opportunities and the ability to confidently reorganize to build efficiency. By benchmarking different branches, distributors, and dealer networks and comparing them with geo-regional trends and history, decisions can be made to bolster low performers with high-performer strategies and experience. In this way we can truly exploit the best attributes of the best people, the cleanest insights in the most efficient way, all to make sure the right customers have access to the right products at the right time through the right networks of distribution and dealers, regionally and nationally.

It's hard to argue with solid factual insight into opportunities presented in the right way, and it's hard to fail with the right organizational structure and talent internally to act upon them. The right technology partner makes getting there easy.

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