

5 Winning Fourth-Quarter Plays



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Time is running out on 2013, but you can still score -- and prepare for 2014.

1. Help clients use it, not lose it

Suggest that your customers pay for a first-quarter 2014 pilot initiative or test program in an area they care about, using unspent money from this year's budget. It's a good way to open the door to a larger project, and helps them protect next year's budget, says sales expert Caryn Kopp, author of *The Path to the Cash*. Proposing this idea to inactive customers may help reignite those relationships.

2. Show them you care

Chances are many customers are facing a performance review before holiday bonus season or vying for a promotion. Put in a good word with their bosses -- or the top brass at the company -- by mentioning the bang-up results they've achieved when working with you, advises Kopp. The more job security your key contacts have, the better for you -- and they're certain to find out that you've been raving about them to higher-ups.

3. Trim your budget now

If you overspent -- or overestimated revenues -- this year make the decisions needed to lower your overhead immediately! Waiting until after the holidays to reduce your spending, as so many companies do, will leave you in a serious cash-flow crunch that is hard to reverse. Position yourself to start 2014 with a focus on growth so you don't spend the first quarter undoing the mistakes of the past.

4. React to growth quickly

A sudden surge in sales can sometimes be as dangerous as a dip in revenue, so if you're having a banner year, make sure you "resource up." Get a jump on hiring now -- and beat your competition by snagging the best people. A lot of companies push off this urgent need to the beginning of the next year at their peril, crushing their teams with too much work during the holiday season.

5. Keep the pressure on

Haven't hit your revenue goals for 2013? Companies often give up too soon and revise sales targets downward. Let your team show its mettle with a half-court shot in the last quarter. Post a public scoreboard to show each salesperson's daily progress in closing deals, says Chad Carden, president of sales leadership-training firm the Carden Group in Jefferson City, Mo.: "It creates the environment of a close game."