



## Point of View

# Recession-Proof Your Business

by Joanne S. Black

**T**he economy is in a funk in the U.S., and the effects are being felt in many parts of the world. Have your phones stopped ringing yet? The “R” word—recession—is back. Housing starts are falling, the consumer price index keeps jumping, the stock market is like a roller coaster, massive layoffs occur almost daily, and renowned companies are declaring bankruptcy. Is it 2001 all over again?

Traditional indicators of a recession no longer matter. If people think we’re in a recession and behave that way, then we are. Discretionary spending has dropped dramatically. Consumers are choosing to postpone certain purchases or forget about them entirely.

How do you tackle economic uncertainty in your business? Cut advertising, travel, training, marketing, and discretionary expense line items? Cut purchasing? Ouch! The pipeline starts to dry up and the anxiety level goes through the roof. Many people think that since there’s nothing they can do, they should just do nothing. But “nothing” is futile thinking.

**Here are eight “Killer Steps” to accelerate your sales in a lagging economy, retain your loyal customers, and attract new business without increasing your cost of sales.**

### 1. Broaden Your Perspective

What business are you in? Redefine and reinvent yourself. Is Starbucks in the coffee business or the people business? Build new alliances and consider alternate distribution channels. Don’t go solo. Assemble a group of advisors and get their input and creative ideas. With so many people self-employed, the corporate water cooler has gone away. We need to bring it back by talking to people, participating in Mastermind groups, and sharing ideas.

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## 2. Stay Connected

Get out there. Attend at least one networking event a week. Even better—attend three. Talk to people, find out how you can help each other. Pick up the phone. Email is great, but you'll get the best information and the most productive relationships when you have a person-to-person conversation.

## 3. Be Nimble and Innovative

You'll never have all the facts. Make quick decisions. Be fearless and make tough choices. Create new uses for your products and services. Why not a new business model?

## 4. Dazzle Your Current Customers

Your current customers need care and feeding. Don't ignore them at the expense of new business, because they *are* your best source for new business. Call them. Ask what impact the lagging economy is having on their business. Your only purpose for the call is to ask how you can help. You might have a referral for them, an article to send, someone for them to talk to. Whatever you promise, make it happen. If you do nothing else, pay attention to your customers.

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## 5. Prioritize Wisely

The most important activity for any salesperson is to do what's "closest to cash" the first thing every single day—whether it's following up with a prospect, writing a proposal, or closing a deal. Prioritize high-payoff activities. Don't be afraid to call it quits if a strategy isn't delivering results.

## 6. Become an Expert

Companies hire experts because they can't afford to make mistakes. Position your company as the expert with a specific product or in a specific market niche. This is counter-intuitive. The more narrow your focus, the better your position. Choose a niche—a certain vertical market where you have expertise, a special interest group, a job category, such as engineers or teachers.

## 7. Don't Cut Price

Many pundits say that the worst thing we can do in a lagging economy is to cut price. Yes and No. Adjusting your price should never be the first thing you do. A marketing expert told me that 95 percent of salespeople cut price before they're even asked. If you do



adjust your price, always get something in return. (Trim fat, not muscle.) Carve out your work and offer smaller chunks. Get in and get started. Help your clients in a down economy and be there when their business turns around.

## 8. Commit to Building Your Referral Business

What if you could reach your market without hard costs—no marketing budget, no direct mail budget, no advertising budget, no trade show budget. The only budget you need to worry about is your “Time & Referrals” budget—simply your time...your time to ask for referrals!

You know about referrals. When a qualified prospect is referred, you get a new client a minimum of 50 percent of the time, and typically between 70 and 90 percent of the time. Additionally, you are pre-sold, your selling time decreases, you have credibility, and you ace out the competition. There is no other business-development process that can claim these results. Results are the only thing that matter.

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**Bottom line: Sell more with higher margins, accelerate your “win” ratio, and take business away from the competition.**



**Joanne S. Black**

*Joanne Black is a professional speaker and author of [No More Cold Calling™: The Breakthrough System That Will Leave Your Competition in the Dust](http://www.nomorecoldcalling.com) (Warner Business Books.) Visit [www.nomorecoldcalling.com](http://www.nomorecoldcalling.com) to learn more about No More Cold Calling and the power of referrals.*