

Sales Manager

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WHAT I LIKE BEST ABOUT THE CAREER

"I love the people contact. When I retire I think that's what I will miss most. You meet a lot of good people in this industry."

THE WORKING WORLD

"If you know you want to work in an industry, get as much as experience in that industry as you can while you are gaining your education. Build relationships and contacts through part-time and summer jobs."



•Fred•Prediger•

EMPLOYER

Old Dutch Foods Ltd.

EDUCATION

*Grade 12,
on-the-job training*

YEARS IN WORKFORCE

35 years

SALARY RANGE

*Negotiated depending
on experience*

CAREER PATH

*Store Manager, Distributor,
Branch Manager,
Sales Manager*

WHAT IS A SALES MANAGER?

Do you like potato chips? If you answered yes, you'll probably appreciate the work of Fred Prediger, whose job it is to ensure that snack foods produced by Old Dutch Foods are on the shelf when you want them. As Region Sales Manager, Fred leads a team with the goal of making sure Old Dutch products receive "optimum space" in chain stores across Western Canada. In a competitive marketplace, superior customer service is required to retain and increase market share. Fred's job is to lead a team of distributor/salespeople and their supervisors in meeting that objective.

WHAT DOES A SALES MANAGER DO?

"Communicate, communicate, communicate," is how Fred summarizes his job. On a typical day he arrives before 6:30 a.m., in time to talk to the distributors out on the loading dock.

Personal contact with the salespeople and their customers is important in order to ensure that the distribution system is working well. Fred deals with problems as they arise, serving as a liaison between the sales force, key account managers, shipping, distribution and production. He does a lot of number crunching as well, analyzing sales figures to know how products are doing. Weekly reports to the general sales manager and quarterly and year-end presentations round out a comprehensive set of communication skills required to do this job well.

Work on the Frontline As distributors and salespeople, Fred's team represents the final contact or "frontline" with the customer. It is this team that executes what marketing and "key account managers" (people assigned to one or two major clients) plan and present. This fundamental understanding is something Fred always looks for in hiring and evaluating performance. As he says,



"marketing can do all the magic tricks and product development can produce the greatest products, but if we don't perform, our company is going to suffer."

A Born Salesman "There are born salesmen out there," agrees Fred "but most of us have taught ourselves how to sell." According to Fred, good salespeople are "people-people". "You have to build relationships, and when you are building a relationship you have to be able to build trust." Intuition is important too: "you need to know when to push and when to back off. There is a lot of give and take in this business." Honesty and integrity added to good listening and analytical skills are essential qualifications for salespeople and sales managers.

HOW TO BECOME A SALES MANAGER

Fred started in this business at the age of 13, working in his uncle's grocery store for a dollar a day. With 35 years in sales, 20 of them at Old Dutch, he has seen a lot of changes. "When I started here we had basically four products available in three package sizes. Now we have 28 products and six sizes to choose from."

Although Fred learned his skills on the job, working his way up from distributor to sales supervisor and manager, he recommends that people looking at entering the sales field pursue a university degree in business administration or a related field of study. "Our education demands are way up," he states. "Without an education it'll be hard getting anyone to consider your skills." Training, however, can only take you so far. "It doesn't matter how many degrees you have after your name," insists Fred. "If you can't sell yourself to people and you aren't excited by the challenge of selling a product, you won't make it in this business."

THE FUTURE

Fred predicts that in the future, the work of sales managers will broaden both in territory and diversity of tasks, thanks to advances in computer technology and telecommunications. While he is confident that food processing is a growth industry in Alberta, he takes comfort in the fact that sales is a field that applies to a wide spectrum of industries. He knows his skills are transferable to any business that offers a product for sale, or a service for hire.

RELATED CAREERS

Key Account Manager

A key account manager is responsible for one or several major accounts (clients or customers) of a company. Key account managers develop and maintain a close relationship with each client, striving to ensure all of the client's needs are met in both products and service.

Sales Supervisor

A sales supervisor looks after a cluster of distributors or distributor salesmen who provide direct service to the customer. Sales supervisors ensure that customers are being well served and that their orders arrive in good order and in good time.

General Sales Manager

A general sales manager is responsible for a wide territory of sales and distribution and oversees the work of sales managers. General sales managers are typically part of the senior management team.



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