

Marketing Executive Report

ment ideas, marketing methods and sales strategies

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REPS, SALES MANAGERS AGREE

How Salespeople Spend Their Time: New Dartnell Survey

Salespeople spend less than 50 percent of their working time actually selling, according to a new Dartnell study. More than 50 percent of an average workweek is spent not selling, but in traveling, waiting, or doing paperwork.

The study, "How Salespeople Spend Their Time," tallied surveys from more than 300 sales representatives in a variety of industries. A previous Dartnell study, "The 26th Sales Force Compensation Survey," asked more than 250 managers how reps spend their time.

In each study participants estimated the amount of time a sales person spent in the following categories:

- Total hours worked per week
- Hours spent on selling activities
- Hours spent on non-selling activities.

Selling activities were broken down into face-to-face and telephone contact. Non-selling activities included traveling/waiting, service calls, and administrative duties, such as paperwork.

Overall, managers and sales reps arrived at similar conclusions, with one exception. Reps estimated they spent more time on administrative work (10 hours per week) than managers estimated they did (6.6 hours).

Otherwise, the results of the two surveys matched closely, but suggested that both groups find ways to help salespeople use their time more effectively for selling.

Reps said they work 48.8 hours a week, and managers said reps work 47 hours a week. The figures show that salespeople, on average, work the equivalent of about six eight-hour days.

Of those total hours, sales reps said they spent 22.5 hours (46 percent) on selling activities and 26.3 hours (54 percent) on non-selling activities. Managers split the two evenly — 23.5 hours each on selling and non-selling activities.

Again, the figures are close. Both groups estimate that non-selling activities take about half the salesperson's time.

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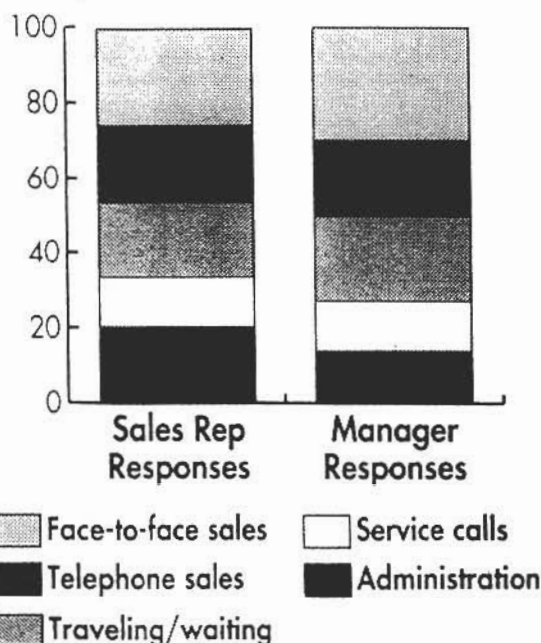
Selling Hours

Salespeople say they spend 12.6 hours a week on face-to-face direct selling and almost 10 hours on the phone. Managers say reps spend about 14 hours per week face-to-face and 9.4 hours on telephone sales. Telephone contact was defined as actual selling or prospecting over the phone — not including call-backs, service calls, or phone tag. The ratio of face-to-face calls to telephone calls is about 7 to 5.

This figure will likely increase as salespeople come to rely on the phone to contact less-profitable and smaller accounts, reserving in-person contact for highly profitable customers and prospects. With travel expenses rising, productive use of the telephone will become even more crucial to profitable sales.

Of the total weekly hours, salespeople spend about 30 percent of their time face-to-face with customers, and 20 percent of their time on the telephone.

Percentage of Hours Sales Reps Spend on All Activities



Non-selling Hours

Sales reps and managers agree that about 10 hours a week are spent on travel and waiting and about six hours on service calls. Travel and waiting hours could be reduced with effective planning.

Contingency plans can effectively reduce time lost from a cancelled appointment, for example. Sales reps may try to reschedule before leaving the build-

ing, or they can plan to see someone else in the company. A list of backup prospects or customers to call on can also avoid wasting time.

Administrative work, according to sales reps, takes up 10 hours of their week — about 38 percent of non-selling hours; managers figure it takes up 6.6 hours, or about 28 percent of non-selling hours. This 10 percent gap points to an area that both sales reps and managers can concentrate on.

In a related question on the sales reps' survey, reps listed time management as the problem most frequently encountered in a sales career, and they listed administrative work second.

Effective time management and planning are key issues for salespeople.

Although they put in nine- to 10-hour days during the week, and possibly several hours on the weekend, salespeople still spend at least half their time on non-selling activities. More efficient planning and self-management could go a long way in reducing non-selling hours, making selling hours more productive, and increasing sales.

This report was compiled by Frances Gorman, an editorial staff member of The Dartnell Corporation.

Hours Reps Spend on Non-selling Activities

