

It takes a tough sales force to thrive in a recession. Case in point: iCore Networks (No. 29 on our list), a McLean, Virginia, company that sells secure VoIP phone systems to businesses, law firms, and associations. Here's a look inside one of the most efficient and aggressive teams on this year's Inc. 500.

BY THE NUMBERS: THE BOTTOM LINE

By MIKE HOFMAN AND APRIL JOYNER ❖ Illustration by MILES DONOVAN

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The Hiring Process

1. An executive recruiter prescreens candidates to find reps with a few years' experience outside the telecom industry.
2. A first interview with sales manager Anthony Chapa. Only 10 percent of candidates advance beyond this stage.
3. Next, a candidate spends a full day with a rep door-to-door cold-calling. "We've had people leave halfway through, because the pace was too much for them," Chapa says.
4. An interview with Michael Bertamini, VP of sales.
5. An interview with founder and CEO Stephen Canton.

Uyen Phan, rep

A persistent cold caller. Phan was hired after talking Bertamini out of rejecting her for the job.

Michael Bertamini,

vice president of sales
Bertamini prides himself on discipline, though his methods have their limits. "We've had good people leave because of burnout, and gotten bigger than customer service could at times handle," he says.

Rich Scott, rep

The top seller in each of the past two months. "He's been such a winner out of the gate that I think he's given the new people a little heartache," Bertamini says.

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Compensation

Base salary + commission

Average first-year income:

\$92,000

Average second-year income:

\$121,000

Average third-year income:

\$150,000

Ed Repa, national account executive

Just closed a \$1.4 million deal with the United Negro College Fund.

Allison Cahill, sales coordinator

Schedules calls and manages the contacts database.

The Typical Workday

7:30 a.m. One or two new reps meet with their manager for individual coaching. "We use this time to help a rep who is poor in a particular area, like learning how to talk about the technology or how to set a realistic forecast," Bertamini says.

8 a.m. Reps gather to discuss successes and failures from the day before and to role-play how to overcome objections.

9 a.m. An hour of intense telemarketing (20 to 25 calls per rep) to cultivate companies that reps can call on later that day.

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The Sales Philosophy

“Without a brand name and without market share, the only way to close deals is through activity—that means feet on the street and knocking on doors.”

—Stephen Canton, iCore’s founder and CEO

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The Employee Handbook

1. **Be willing to be coached and managed.**

Don’t be set in your ways.

2. **Be on time** for the 8 a.m. meeting, and return in the afternoon to plan for the following day.

3. **Be interested in a career track.** The plan is to expand geographically, with account executives becoming managers and opening up new territories, starting with Philadelphia.

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When Calling On Customers

1. On a scheduled introductory call, the goal is to discern whether iCore’s system would be useful for a prospective customer.

2. After that appointment, cold-call every other tenant in the same building or office park.

3. If you get no further than the outer office, make sure you size up the age of the phone on the receptionist’s desk.

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The Expectations

Quotas are set by the number of “seats” the reps sell, which corresponds to the number of individual phones using the system.

Companywide quota:

8,000 seats a year

Experienced rep’s quota:

1,500 seats a year

New hire’s quota:

75 seats per month

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The Results

Total revenue, 2008:

\$17,025,510

Revenue per salesperson:

\$1,418,793

Revenue versus quota, 2008:

+25 percent

Revenue growth, 2007–08:

+45 percent

Anthony Chapa, sales manager

A workaholic whose schedule generally entails a 12-hour day, Chapa is responsible for getting new reps up to speed.

Joel Fister, manager, national key sales

Joined iCore as employee No. 3 in 2003. “He’s been our No. 1 performer for four years running,” Bertamini says.

Inez Sobczak, rep

Came to iCore from a large consulting firm. She is also a competitive bodybuilder.

Ryan Lewis, rep

A second-year rep, he previously sold radio airtime.

Alicia Easby-Smith, rep

A former college rower, she is new to sales. Previously ran three Lilly Pulitzer boutiques.

Craig Rogers rep

Having survived the hiring process, he sees “the value of having a lot of eyes on each candidate.”

10 a.m. → 4 p.m. Reps head into the field for cold-calling.

4:30 p.m. → 6 p.m. Reps return to the office to enter the information they’ve gathered into iCore’s contacts database and Salesforce.com CRM software and to research the prospects and places they intend to visit the following day.