

SALES STAR



## Carmilla Lau: A Number-One Seller

[By Mary Waldron]

Although she is not a larger-than-life CEO or well-known sales trainer, Carmilla Lau of ThomasNet is one of the most successful and driven selling forces at her company. Having been ranked number one in various sales categories at her company since she was hired, Lau has a direct and smart style of selling that has not failed her yet.

Lau studied business and sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, before she started her sales career. Her first job in the sales industry was humble—she was a precious-metal trader making only \$900 per month.

Since then, she has gone on to manage various sales teams at Fortune 100 companies, including Arrow Electronics, Sprint, and WorldCom, as well as a few Internet start-up companies. After she developed a liking for electronic-distribution sales, it was natural that Lau got the urge to work with ThomasNet in 2002.

ThomasNet is a company that helps industrial sellers target their marketing investments in order to reach the most qualified industrial buyers online and convert them into customers. It is the leading company in its branch of business, blasting away all the competition year after year.

ThomasNet has been around for more than 100 years and is always growing and increasing in popularity. Its print directories and yellow-page-like listings have evolved into the *Thomas Register*, today's "Bible for all buyers and engineers."

Starting out as a sales manager for Southern California, Lau shouldered a tremendous undertaking when she arrived at ThomasNet in 2002. Because of Lau's dynamic building and reconstructing experience and sales background,

she was chosen to manage a sales team that was in need of some serious direction. After she strengthened the team by implementing her own tricks and techniques, Lau revitalized its members. During the year and a half that followed, Lau's team brought in the highest revenue in the entire Western region.

So how did Lau get such phenomenal results from her sales team? She put a lot of emphasis on recruiting and retention. "They are the driving force of revenue in any sales organization," she said. These elements have

been the keys to all of Lau's sales teams' successes throughout the years.

Because Lau has run many sales teams at various companies, she knows a thing or two about hiring and interviewing salespeople. Lau has realized over the years that the components of conversation with clients are the same as those of a professional job interview. "Listen well; talk less," she said. "You need to hear things. Don't show up and throw up."

Lau frequently leads sales training workshops, and that principle is always first and foremost. Sometimes it's not even about what is said; it's about what is left unsaid. And that's something that new salespeople tend to miss when they talk too much.

It is also important to stay on top of the latest sales news and trends because, according to Lau and *Schoolhouse Rock*, "knowledge is power." In fact, Lau would encourage her sales teams to read sales magazines and newspapers for the first half hour or so of work.

Lau also has a very dynamic work ethic, yet she allows room for curiosity. "You always have to work hard; there are no shortcuts," she said. "Don't play it safe, but be focused and organized."

At the end of 2003, though, something unexpected happened. Two of ThomasNet's companies merged, which meant that the

**Q. What do you do for fun?**

A. I love to cook. I really enjoy reading and gardening, too.

**Q. What CD is in your CD player right now?**

A. Nothing. I don't listen to CDs. I listen to news radio.

**Q. What is the last magazine you read?**

A. *Fortune* and *Country Home*.

**Q. What is your favorite TV show?**

A. I don't really watch much TV. I was the only person in Southern California not to have cable TV until last week. I watch the cooking and news channels.

**Q. Who is your role model?**

A. My dad. My grandfather passed away when he was a young teenager. He finished school and college while he worked full-time and supported his mother.



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sales manager positions would be dissolved. Lau was presented with two options: she could move on and join another company or she could stay with ThomasNet as a sales representative. Lau did the unexpected and stayed with ThomasNet, and despite the huge change of pace and the independent-contractor status she had to take on, it has been "one of the smartest moves that [she] ha[s] ever taken."

In 2004, Lau finished first in the company in renewal business out of 500 sales representatives with a rate of 111%. She was also ranked number four in the company as a top business builder. The following year, Lau was rated number one in her company for new business. Also that year, in renewal business, she ranked number two with a rate of 107%.

Although the stats for 2006 have yet to be announced, Lau currently is leading in her branch with the most new accounts and revenue.

Lau attributes some of her success to the valuable lessons and advice she received from one of her most prized mentors. Years ago, while Lau worked for Bell Industries (which was later bought by Arrow Electronics), she met Ted Williams, who was the chairman of the board for that company, and he quickly became a great source of advice and friendship.

"He was not just a mentor; he was a friend, a tough manager. I would go to him and review and discuss things with him that I would not share with my significant other or my parents," Lau said. No matter what problem she had or

what mistake she had made, Lau was never afraid of Williams' judgments; he would always give her the right advice.

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