

Rose-Colored Bi-Focals

When I was a kid, “You must need glasses!” was a pretty common insult. I remember saying it to other kids, and once to a Little League umpire. (That got me thrown out of the game!) It turns out, though, that printing salespeople *do* need glasses. Specifically, they need rose-colored bi-focals, because success in the modern marketplace requires good near vision and far vision, and a fair share of optimism.

Near Vision

It's been my experience that most salespeople don't focus very well on what's right in front of them. There is usually some opportunity to gain more value from current customers. Notice that I didn't say *gain more business*, but rather *gain more value*. I believe that every current customer provides you with three levels of value: the value of what they're buying from you now, of what they could be buying from you, and of influence. Working backwards, the value of influence is all about testimonials and referrals. When's the last time you actually asked one of your customers for a testimonial or a referral. When's the last time you got a real referral out of whatever networking group(s) you belong to?

The value of what they could be buying from you is mostly about the *breadth* of your product line. Have you talked to every customer about every element of your product line? I'm not talking, by the way, about that one conversation where you blasted out a list of everything you sell. I'm also not talking about the time you said “think of me for anything that involves printing.” I'm talking about having specific conversations about each individual element of your product line. Because the more you try to cover in any one conversation, the less likely it is that they'll hear most of it, let alone all of it.

Now let's talk about *protecting* the value of what they're buying from you now. The most obvious way to lose a customer is a quality or service failure, but more customers are lost because of something less obvious, even though it shouldn't be. You know that your competitors are calling on your customers, right? That means you have to be calling on them too! But more than that, it means that you have to be calling on them and *bringing* value, not just taking it. “Do you need any printing today?” is not a value-based selling strategy.

Far Vision

We live in an age of almost-immediate gratification. As an Amazon Prime member, for example, I can order just about anything from Amazon and get it shipped to me free within two days. But while you can buy very quickly, you can't always sell very quickly, especially when that involves building trust to the point where someone is willing to take the leap of faith that it takes to place a custom order with a new supplier. And make no mistake, that's a significant leap of faith!

With better far vision, you might realize that it's going to take time to get people to the point where they'll seriously consider buying from you. You'll also realize that while there are no shortcuts, there are *accelerators*. For example, don't just talk about your quality and service, provide some evidence to support your position. And please understand that a handful of hand-picked samples isn't going to accelerate the process. But how about supporting the samples with a description of your quality control processes and procedures, and then some testimonials from current customers? Any one of those may have some effect, and any two are almost certainly better. But why not all three?

Rose-Colored

I read a study recently which noted that optimists tend to be more successful than pessimists. I hear a lot of pessimism from printing salespeople, though. Now maybe this is colored by that fact that most of my business involves working with underachievers, but I'm hearing a lot more about what's not working than about what is.

Here's a fact. There are people doing very well in printing sales, even in a highly competitive market in a difficult economy. Why? I think better vision—near and far!—is probably a big part of it. Do you need new glasses?