

You Can't Sell To Everyone

You can't sell to everyone! I think you should treat that as one of the most basic realities of the printing industry. I wish you could sell to everyone—I wish that I could!—but that's simply not in the cards.

Of course, as I often tell seminar audiences, the inability to sell to every prospect is not the end of the world for a printing company, because very few of you are ever likely to run out of people to sell to. That's one of the great things about this industry; literally every business, educational, or social organization has at least some level of printing need.

Equation For Success

But there's more to the equation for success than simply understanding that you can't sell to everyone. It's also important to understand that you *don't want to* sell to everyone. There are always going to be “bad matches” between printing companies and printing customers.

Sometimes it's a question of product mix; they're four-color and you're two-color. Sometimes it's a matter of quantity range; they're long-run and you're short-run. Sometimes it's strictly a matter of cost; they're price-driven, and you're trying to sell value-added. And sometimes, it's simply a question of attitude...like that attitude some people have that they don't have to pay their printing bills on time!

So what should you do if you have current customers who are a “bad match” with your company? In all probability you should make changes, but it's not always as simple as that. There is, however, a very simple solution if you are pursuing *prospects* who are a bad match for your company...stop doing it! Stop wasting valuable sales and marketing resources on prospects who are unlikely to ever give you an acceptable return on your investment!

Why They Buy

With the possible exception of some of those “price-monsters” who send every order to the lowest bidder, the decision to buy from a particular printer is based on the buyer's trust and confidence in the printer. Sometimes, that trust and confidence results in orders coming your way that you're not really suited for. The result of that may very well be that your trusting customer pays an unwitting premium for doing business with you.

So what do you do? Do you turn down the job when you know that another printer might be far better suited to a particular job? The right equipment, of course, is the largest single factor in a “competitive” price. Do you accept the job, but lower your price—and therefore your profit—to compensate? Do you simply run the job and invoice the customer?

How about this idea...do you buy the “right” equipment and hope to turn this into a non-issue?

Hardware Heavy

Of these four possibilities, I think the last one is probably your worst choice. I've seen far too many printers hurt themselves by buying an expensive piece of equipment for a single customer. If it's a big enough customer—and if the equipment can likely be applied to other customers' needs that you're not currently servicing—that would be one thing. But unless that is the situation, one of the other options would probably be a much better choice.

I'm not a strong proponent of lowering your price and your profit to compensate for inadequacies in your own equipment, but in the long run, doing that on a few jobs would probably be a lot cheaper than buying a piece of “heavy hardware” that will go underutilized.

And, of course, there is another option! Instead of buying equipment on your own, you can “rent” another printer's equipment—and staff—to produce a job that your equipment or staff are not well suited for. Many printers hate the idea of brokering a print job, but that is often the best choice!

Risk Factor

Many printers view brokering as risky, but others do it safely and profitably every day. The key is to find good suppliers, and there are plenty of them out there. (It has always kind of amazed me that many of the printers who refuse to broker cite the risks of turning a job over to an “outside” source, yet for a lot of those printers, sending a job back to their own presses and press operators is just as much of an adventure!)

The real risk, as I see it, is having a customer realize some day that your price was considerably higher than it “should” have been—solely because of your equipment—and that you knew it and didn't say anything. That violates the trust and confidence that has to be at the heart of the relationship. In my own experience, when you tell a

customer that you're not really well equipped for a particular job—that you can handle it and deliver a quality job, but at a higher than “competitive” price—one of two things is going to happen. They'll either give you the job anyway because of their trust and confidence in you, or else they'll send it somewhere else and appreciate your honesty. If you're not willing to broker, that might very well be your best choice.