

The “C” Myth

Michael Gerber wrote “The E-Myth: Why Most Small Businesses Don’t Work and What to Do About It.” My topic for today is The “C” Myth. That’s the idea that all selling should be targeted at the C Level (CEO, COO, CFO etc.). In theory, it certainly makes sense to be talking to the top dog. In practice, though, most quick/digital/small commercial salespeople can’t get anywhere near the C Level in big companies, and beyond that, very few quick/digital/small commercial printing salespeople are really equipped to sell at that level. That’s OK, though, because plenty of printing is being purchased at the “D” Level and the “M” Level, and that’s where I think most of your initial sales efforts should be focused.

Please note my use of the word *initial*. I want you to build toward a C Level relationship eventually. I just don’t want you slamming into a predictable and probably insurmountable roadblock by trying to start there.

Let’s also differentiate between big companies and small companies. You may very well be able to start with the president/owner of a small company, especially if you’re the president/owner of your company. It’s the idea of C Level selling at a big company that I’m talking about. That would certainly encompass the Fortune 1000, but I think it also applies to most of the companies and/or organizations you’ll find on the Top 50 lists that many business journals or Chambers of Commerce publish.

“D” and “M” Level

The “D” Level refers to “Director” titles, and the “M” Level refers to “Manager.” It’s important to understand that people at these levels may not be the ones who actually place printing orders, but they’re probably the ones who have final authority on who gets the work.

The typical printing salesperson will ask: “Who orders your printing?” The answer often leads that salesperson to a *money-spender*—my term for a person who places orders, but is not empowered to change suppliers. A *money-spender* may be your key contact with an established customer, but he/she is of very limited value when you’re on the outside looking in!

This is especially important when you’re trying to sell advanced capabilities like variable data printing and variable imaging. These capabilities add to the user’s cost, and the only way to justify that is if they add to the user’s value. I hope you’ll agree that *that* sale has to be made at a higher level than the *money-spender*, even if the *money-spender* is pretty senior in the purchasing department.

Cui Bono

I read a lot of crime novels, everything from detective stories to courtroom dramas, and one of the key concepts of law and law enforcement I’ve read about is *cui bono*, Latin for *who benefits?* The basic idea is that, to solve a crime, you look for the person or person who gains the greatest benefit from it.

Cui bono has applications in selling as well. In other words, the person most likely to support a change in the status quo (lots of Latin today!) is the person who stands to gain the most from that change. If we’re talking about variable data printing and/or variable imaging, is that going to be the Purchasing Manager or the Director of Marketing? (By the way, as I’ve written before, I think *personalization* is a much better description of what we hope to sell here than *variable* anything. There’s a real danger of miscommunication anytime a salesperson uses printing industry jargon rather than plain English. I’ve been using the phrase *extreme personalization* to describe these advanced capabilities, and then I always explain exactly what I mean by that term to make sure that I’m not miscommunicating.)

Online Ordering

I think it’s fair to say that extreme personalization is not selling as fast and as well and many printers have hoped. Part of that is the cost factor, but I think that will change as we develop more success stories. Buyers are reluctant to spend more because they don’t *know* yet that extreme personalization will produce greater response. Another part of the problem, though, is that salespeople have been trying to sell the capability to people who don’t really care. I was out on a sales call recently during which a salesperson made a presentation on variable data printing to a purchasing agent. He was singularly unimpressed, especially when he asked about pricing compared to his normal orders. “Fancy marketing is someone else’s department,” he said. “I’m in charge of finding the best prices.”

Online ordering is another advanced capability that has not sold as well as most printers have hoped. Again, I think a big part of the problem has been misdirected sales efforts. If you apply *cui bono* to this situation, I think you'll find two people in most large companies who would appreciate the benefit. I call them *the keeper of the company image* and *the watcher of the company money*.

The *keeper of the company image* is the person who cares most about the consistency of a company's printed image. That may be the artist who created the logo, or the person in the marketing department who's been pushing a branding program. Consistency of image is one of the key benefits of online ordering, and it's a proven cure for the situation where different people all over a company are ordering different-looking business cards, forms and stationery.

The *watcher of the company money* is a person who's concerned more with cost than price, who would appreciate that each individual order of business cards might cost more with online ordering, but the overall cost of processing all those orders would be reduced. That may be the Comptroller or possibly the CFO, but it might also be a fairly junior person in the Accounting department who would look good to his/her superiors by championing a cost-saving change to the status quo. I think that person might be easier for a quick/digital/small commercial printing salesperson to get to than someone on the "C" Level. What do you think?

Bottom line? Let's spend more time on *cui bono* and less time chasing the "C" Myth.

Something Interesting

I came across something interesting a few weeks ago, a website called "Jigsaw" where contact information can be bought, sold and traded. The developers call it a "Global Business Contact Marketplace" where members get two contacts back for every good business contact they add to the database. Theoretically you might find the name, direct phone number, e-mail address and all kinds of other information for the Director of Marketing at a company you're interested in (or any other specific title for that matter.) The membership cost is \$25 per month, or 25 of your contacts added to the database. I'm not endorsing this product, but I think it might be worth looking at: www.jigsaw.com.