

But Your Gotta Know The Territory!

My father was a big fan of Broadway musicals, and half of the soundtrack in our house growing up was the Original Cast Recordings of *My Fair Lady*, *Oklahoma*, *The Music Man*, *Camelot*, *Gypsy* and many other great shows. (The other half, of course, was the Beatles and Bob Dylan and Buffalo Springfield and Joni Mitchell and the rest of that 60's rock and folk music that my dad never quite understood.) What does any of that have to do with printing sales? Well, I quoted a line from *The Music Man* just yesterday. It comes from the first song in the show, titled "Rock Island," which introduces the main character, a con man/musical instrument salesman named Harold Hill. "He's just a bang beat, bell ringing, big hole, great go, neck-or-nothing, rip roarin', every time a bull's eye, Salesman," the lyrics tell us.

"But," they also tell us, and I told one of my clients yesterday, "you gotta know the territory!"

This client doesn't believe in assigning salespeople to territories, and I think it's very poor management strategy not to.

Organizational Tool

"I don't want to limit anyone's effectiveness," he told me, "and I don't want to lose out on any opportunities. What if one guy has a relationship with a buyer in another guy's territory, or else one guy hasn't ever made any progress with a buyer, and I want to give another guy a shot at him?"

"Neither of those things rules out a territory strategy," I answered. "There's a lot more to this than geography."

Let's start with this understanding, a territory strategy is all about *organization*. It can be geographic organization, or vertical market segment organization, or target list organization, or a combination of all of the above, but the most important consideration is that most salespeople need help with organization and time management. A sales territory is one of the tools you use to provide that help.

Suspects, Prospects & Customers

No matter how a territory is organized, it consists of three elements: *suspects*, *prospects* and *customers*. As I've written before, *suspects* are companies who might qualify as *prospects*, and the term *prospect* is reserved for companies known to be *fully-qualified prospects*. That means that you know — not just think or hope! — that they (1) buy exactly the kind of printing you're best equipped to sell, (2) buy enough of it to make pursuing them worthwhile, and (3) show some real interest in buying it from you. The term *customer* is reserved for people who are actually buying from you, and the challenge with *customers* is to turn them into *maximized customers*. All of that is important, because far too many salespeople try to go from *suspect* to *maximized customer* without fully qualifying anyone, and without addressing the issues that can turn a *prospect* into a *customer* in the first place.

What does that mean? Simply that most printing salespeople are completely presentation-oriented, and the presentation they can't wait to make is all about "one-stop shopping for all of your printing needs," followed by "do you have anything I can quote on?" That strategy mostly ignores the discussion of any dissatisfaction with the current supplier, or with the way the printing might be doing the job it's supposed to do for the buyer's business.

Here's something else I've written before, *there are no shortcuts in selling, but there are accelerators*. The greatest *accelerator* is to identify a problem and provide a solution, or to identify pain and provide pain relief.

Back To Territories

OK, let's get back to the wisdom of assigning a territory to every salesperson. The reason you do that is to help the salesperson stay organized, and one of the ways you do *that* is establish both a selling process and activity expectations.

Let's say that you've just hired two salespeople and assigned them geographic territories. One territory is the north side of Main Street (where your shop is located) and everything north of that, while the other territory is the south side of Main Street and everything south of that. On Day 1, I would send the northern salesperson out with instructions to turn right and evaluate the first 20 businesses he or she encountered, and the southern salesperson out with instructions to cross the street and turn left and do exactly the same thing. The result I'd expect would be a few businesses that seemed to be worth pursuing, and a larger group that wouldn't qualify in terms of one or more of the criteria above. From that point, I would instruct my salespeople to take a defined next step with the seemingly worthwhile suspects (on the assumption that the walk-in evaluation was conducted with a "gatekeeper,"

the next step I recommend would be an introductory letter or e-mail to the decision-maker. Identifying that decision-maker is part of the agenda on the walk-in evaluation.) After doing that, I would instruct each salesperson to go back out and take a look at the next 20 businesses.

That probably sounds pretty primitive — especially on a walk-in basis — but the principle is very sound. The best advice I could give to any salesperson is to start at a beginning and work your way through your entire territory. Please note that I said to start at a beginning. It doesn't have to be the first business to the right of your front door, but it does have to be done in an organized fashion!

To expand on that, let's look at a different sort of territory. Rather than a piece of geography, let's make it a list of businesses within a 5-mile radius with 25 or more employees. I would instruct my salesperson to evaluate the first 20 companies, identify the decision-makers and take the defined next step with the ones who seem worth pursuing, and then move on to the next 20 — and then keep repeating the process. The first 20 could be alphabetically, or by employee count, or by proximity to my front door. That doesn't really make very much difference in terms of the overall objective, which is for my salesperson to evaluate every suspect in the territory and move forward with the most likely prospects.

Next Month: I'll write more about territories, and about tracking a salesperson's territory coverage and performance.

The Music Man

The Music Man, with music and lyrics by Meredith Willson, debuted in 1957 and won the Tony Award for Best Musical in 1958. The best-known songs from the show are probably "76 Trombones" and "Trouble In River City," but I always thought it was cool that the Beatles covered a song from *The Music Man*. "Till There Was You" was on *Meet The Beatles*, which came out in 1964. I'm pretty sure Dylan never recorded any Broadway show tunes, and "Till There Was You" was almost certainly the only Beatles song that my dad could quote all the lyrics to.