

The Value Gap

My cousin said: “I can get business cards online for less than \$10. Why would I pay 10 times that much to buy them from one of your quick printers?”

That’s a question I know you have wrestled with. My cousin is a typical small-business owner. He perceives himself as trying to scratch out a living from his business, against all odds in the modern marketplace. It’s hard for him to bring more dollars in, so he’s especially careful about sending dollars out. Except for the BMW he leases through the business, but’s that’s another story.

Not Your Customer

My cousin is one of those guys who can’t be reasoned with. I tried to explain that the business cards he can buy online for less than \$10 are not the same as the ones you might charge him \$100 for. “Business cards are business cards,” he said. “They’ve got my name, my address, phone number, e-mail address, my logo, and that’s pretty much all I need.”

“Did one of ‘my’ printers actually quote you \$100?” I asked. “For how many cards? What kind of paper? Was there design involved, or were you sending them a print-ready file?”

“I don’t know all the details,” he said. “My girl just told me that they were almost \$100. I went online, found a \$10 deal, and told her to take it from there.”

Let’s set aside the fact that you’re probably not quoting anyone \$100 for a typical order of business cards. The moral of this story is that my cousin is not a customer whose business you should be competing for. His definition of value starts and ends with a low price. He thinks business cards and any other printing are commodity products. Given enough time, and the right circumstances, you might be able to convince him otherwise, but even if you could, would that be a good use of your time?

I see you nodding in agreement. But I also hear you complaining about buyers like my cousin. You can’t have it both ways, so let’s make the decision right now that we’re not going to complain about low-price Internet printers and the people who buy from them. Instead, we’re going to focus on prospects and customers who see the value in doing business with a right-here-where-you-can-see-me printing company.

Right Here

I think that’s a key phrase, and a key message. Consider this, the prices being offered by online printers are very attractive, but not everyone buys their printing online. Why not? Because not everyone is all about price! Being *right here where you can see me*—and *right here so I can work closely with you!*—has value to many people.

The real key, of course, is to find more ways to work closely with your customers. That in a nutshell is what the transition from Print Provider to Marketing Services Provider is all about. An online printer can offer low prices, but can it really help a customer to grow a business? Sure, they can make a small business “look good in print” with attractive designs and quality printing. But isn’t there more to it than that? Vistaprint and the others sell marketing materials, but they don’t sell Marketing Services. You may not either...yet, but you are far better positioned to bring that kind of value.

The Value of “Quick”

One final thought for today. As you may have noticed in the first sentence, my cousin still thinks of you as a quick printer. I know that some of you think there’s a stigma attached to that term. Personally, I never saw “quick” as a negative, and I think history has borne that out.

You may remember that NAQP once launched a campaign built around the tagline: “We’re So Much More Than Quick!” A trademark application was actually filed for that phrase in 1990, but it was never pursued. I thought that was a huge lost opportunity, but I can tell you that it wasn’t lost on everyone. Check out the Fastsigns logo and tagline: *More than fast. More than signs.*

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. I think those six words might be worth a thousand pictures!