

Things Can Always Be Better

There's a new commercial running on TV these days. It's from Honda, and the theme is that "things can always be better." It's in praise of people who are never satisfied with "good" and always searching for "better" — which, of course, is what Honda believes its 2013 Civic to be.

Good vs. better is a situation that printing salespeople have to deal with too, and this is a reflection of one of the basic realities of printing sales — that everyone already has a print supplier. It's either you already, or else someone else is getting the orders that you'd like to be getting!

Now, I'll grant you that there are new businesses starting all the time, and they can provide an opportunity which doesn't require the displacement of a current supplier. But I hope you'll grant me that the people who start those businesses often have relationships with printing companies through their previous work or experience. And I hope we can also agree that the people who buy a lot of printing for established companies already have at least one, and probably more than one current supplier. The bottom line is this, if you want or need to displace a current supplier, you have convince the buyer that you're *better*.

Solids, Liquids, Gases, Etc.

In one of my first columns for *Australian Printer* (April 2013), I wrote that all printing buyers will fit into one of five categories: *Solids, Liquids, Gases, Players* and *Price Monsters*. *Solids* are happy with their current supplier and they're not going to change. *Liquids* are happy with their current supplier too, but they'll talk with you. *Players* are the people who split their work among multiple suppliers, and they can be either solids or liquids.

The key, of course, is whether they'll talk with you or not. But the bigger key may be whether you talk *with* them or *at* them when you get the chance. Sadly, most printing salespeople seem to be guilty of talking *at*, which is why their selling efforts are so often unsuccessful.

Presentation vs. Conversation

"I want to work on a 'killer' presentation," a salesperson recently told me.

"I don't," I replied. "Let's work on a conversation instead. Let's build a model for the ideal printing sales conversation, which would focus first on learning about the customer, identifying problems and/or opportunities to position yourself and your company as a better way of doing whatever it is that they're doing."

Please understand that a presentation is mostly about you, while their buying decision is mostly about them. Doesn't it make sense to learn about them before you start telling them what you can do for them? And doesn't it make sense to find out if they have problems before you start talking about solutions?

Problems Are Good!

If I'm right about everyone already having a print supplier, it's a logical next step to understand that the decision to start buying from you must either be accompanied by, or preceded by, the decision to stop buying from someone else. Why would a prospect make that decision? The most likely reason, I think, is if they have some level of dissatisfaction with the current supplier, or with any other element of the status quo. It could be the quality of the printing. It could be the service they're getting — or not getting! It could be the performance of the printing, whether it works as well as it needs to in communicating the prospect's message to their own customers and prospects. The point is this, you won't identify buyers' hot buttons by talking *at* them. It's much better strategy to engage them in conversation. And if you find that they do have problems, that's a reason to get excited. Problem with print suppliers generally cause pain, and pain is a pivot point. It makes people think about changing suppliers.

If You Could Change Anything...

I think the ideal printing sales conversation should be built around a single question. *If you could change anything about your printing or your dealings with your printing supplier(s), what would it be?* I'm not sure you can walk in, sit down, and ask that question without creating an environment that will get you an honest answer, but that's a topic for another day. For today, I'll be satisfied if I've convinced you that your greatest selling challenge is getting from "good" to "better."