

If You Could Read Their Minds

Have you ever stood across the counter from a customer and wished you knew what he or she was thinking? Is the price you just quoted too high? (Or to low!) Do they really need this job printed by Wednesday? Is there something I should say now to make sure I get the order?

The challenges of selling would be reduced pretty dramatically if you really could read minds. Unfortunately, there is no psychic shortcut in selling printing. There are, however, some things that are reasonably well known about the *dynamics* of your sales situation. If you can thoroughly understand these dynamics, there's a proven sales technique for filling in the *specifics* like those listed above.

Driving Forces

The dynamics of a sales situation are defined as the motivating and driving forces of the participants. Stated simply, what do you want, and what does the buyer want. I would hope that each one of you is sure, at least, of his own motivation, because I think I'm going to surprise you when I tell you what's foremost in your customer's mind.

What should your motivation be? What should you be thinking of when a customer walks in your door? I think one of my printer friends hit the nail right on the head when he told me, "I see money walking in the door...hopefully attached to the need for something I can do. My job is to satisfy that need and earn the money."

The customer walks in with need, but that only means that *someone* has a chance at earning the money. What we're looking for in this discussion of dynamics is a way to make sure that it's us. So what is it beyond simple need that will make this person our customer?

Holy Trinity

When printers are asked what drives a customer's decision on who to buy from, they usually respond with some combination of quality, price, and service. These three words have become a holy trinity in our industry, and in many other industries as well.

When printing customers are asked the same question, the answer is often expressed differently. The words they like to use are trust and confidence. They bring their business to a printer they are comfortable with, because every job involves a certain amount of risk if the printer screws it up.

That's a strange idea to many printers. After all, you might say, I'm the one running the risk here. I could end up having to reprint the job, or worse, eating the whole job. You should understand that your customer would not view this as risk, but as *responsibility*. In your customer's eyes, if it comes down to this, the damage may already be done.

I learned about buyer's risk the hard way, I'm sorry to say. Once, when I was much younger, I tried out a new printer on a job that was part of my boss's pet project. The job was delivered five days late, only one day before we needed to distribute it at a conference, and it didn't look good! We had no time for a reprint. In fact, we had no time to do anything except use a printed piece that made my boss's pet project—and therefore, my boss himself—look bad.

In his eyes, it was not the printer who made him look bad, either. It was the guy who hired the printer. My boss wasn't even remotely interested in the money I had saved. My mistake was in trusting a printer who didn't perform as promised. And believe me, I suffered a lot more for that printer's quality and service failure than he did.

The typical customer walks in your door needing printing done, and looking for someone to trust with the job. That's the most important single thing you'd learn if you could read their minds.

Working Knowledge

It's time now to make this knowledge work for you. And the way to do that is to develop a strategy that focuses on building comfort, confidence, and trust. As a starting point, let me offer you a little semi-mathematical formula...what the customer sees + what the customer hears = what the customer feels.

If you want to build trust and confidence, you first have to show your customer trust and confidence building things. Some of these are so basic that they should already be part of your operating strategy. A clean store, for example, inside and out. Tasteful window treatments. A wall display featuring examples of your work. A total physical presence that indicates professionalism and pride in your work.

Let's go back to those samples for a moment. I'm convinced that most printers use samples for the wrong reason, strictly in the belief that good samples will illustrate the quality of their work. Your customers would agree

to a point, but they might also tell you that no printer has ever shown them bad samples. I saw plenty of beautiful samples from that printer I told you about earlier, and still got a bad job.

I think your purpose in showing samples should be to identify the people and organizations you're already doing work for. It's the best known *customers* I'd put on my wall, not just the best looking jobs. I used to do a lot of work for American Express, and I'm convinced that I *brought in* a lot more work just because of it. I think many other businesses would say, if they're good enough for American Express, they're good enough for me.

Another powerful visual confidence builder would be the letters you (hopefully) have received from your customers praising your quality, or thanking you for especially good service. These certainly belong on your wall, in attractive frames, and it's not a bad strategy to ask your customers to write you such letters from time to time. Any time anyone has ever told me I did a good job for them, I have asked them to put it in a short letter I could use as a testimonial. Very seldom has anyone refused.

Face-To-Face Strategy

The next element of your strategy takes you face-to-face with your customers, and also begins to combine your new understanding of dynamics with the specifics of selling to each individual customer. As I told you earlier, there's a proven sales technique for learning the specifics of each customer's needs.

That technique has two parts, asking questions and listening to the answers. Pretty simple, huh? But let me ask you this...if it's so simple, how come the technique is so seldom used?

I'm a firm believer that if you ask the right questions, you accomplish three important purposes. First, you learn exactly what the customer needs. Second, you build comfort, confidence, and trust. In effect, you are working with the customer to see and solve all the problems before the ink goes on the paper. Third, and perhaps most importantly from the point of view of selling, you learn exactly how to sell to this particular customer. If you need to know—or simply want to know—what your customer is thinking, the best way I know to get the information is simply to ask for it.

The majority of the printing world sells quality, price, and service. The majority of the printing world also gets less than a dominant share of the market they operate in. To me, that really proves something is lacking in the quality/price/service approach. I hope I've convinced you today that your customer really has something far more basic on his mind.

Closing Thoughts

So let me leave you with a few final thoughts. While the others promise quality, I would work on building confidence and trust by describing my quality controls. While the others promise service, I would illustrate my dependability with the testimonials of existing customers, and with the fact that some of the area's leading companies put their trust in me as their printer.

And when the others quote low prices I would not be concerned. Because if I do a good job with my strategy based on trust and confidence, my customers will see beyond price and appreciate my full value, and they'll stay with me as long as I continue to deserve their trust.