

Stop Selling Quality; Start Selling Quality Control!

Imagine yourself as a printing buyer for just a minute. And if it's not too painful a concept imagine yourself as a printing buyer who has just finished talking to 100 printing salespeople in a row.

The odds are that every one of those salespeople talked about quality. In fact, we'd be willing to bet you that every one of those salespeople spoke about quality as one of the major reasons for you to dump the printer you've been dealing with and give all of your business to them.

We'd be willing to bet you that you've been offered at least 80 sets of samples to illustrate quality. You've probably heard the words "commitment to quality" at least two dozen times. You've almost certainly heard Malcolm Baldrige's name mentioned, and if you were really lucky, no more than a couple of them told you that "quality is free."

Now go back to being a printing salesperson and tell me how eager you are to be Number 101 on that particular parade.

Quality Is A Given

We're not trying to tell you that quality is unimportant in your business. Far from it, we all know that consistently high quality is one of the absolute keys to keeping customers. But that's the point we want you to understand. Quality has more of a role in keeping customers than in getting customers. Because in the selling stage—when you're trying to get people to make the decision to become your customers—quality is *nothing more than a promise that every printing salesperson makes*.

The truth in the marketplace is that printing buyers treat quality as a given. The general assumption is that all printers produce about the same level of quality...and that all printers have at least occasional quality failures. That's the reason that many customers will stay on with a printer even after a job—or more than one—has been screwed up. With the perception that all printers are more or less equal in terms of quality, it's a common feeling that you might as well stay with the devil you know. (That's especially true if the printer is not so much a devil as a person who responds quickly and fairly to any problem—quality or otherwise.)

As for all of those samples, who do you think you're kidding? Printing buyers know that printers hand-pick the samples they show from the best work they've ever done.

The Role Of Samples

Samples *do* have a role in your sales presentation, and there is a way to tie them to quality. We just don't want you out there thinking that beautiful samples are accepted as automatic proof of a consistently high level of quality.

The full value of samples includes the illustration of your *capabilities*. We'd much rather see you presenting one each of a variety of printed "products" than four or five fancy letterheads. One of the things you want samples to do for you is to minimize the possibility that you won't get a job somewhere down the line because "I didn't know you could do that."

Maybe the greatest value of samples in the selling situation is the most subtle one. Have you ever stopped and thought about the fact that every job you've ever done is a piece of evidence naming a company *who has already decided that they trust you to handle their printing?*

With those two things in mind, I hope it's obvious that your selection of samples should be chosen to demonstrate a wide range of capability, and the most recognizable names among your current customers. If you ask us, the very best samples you can show are the ones you've printed for companies who are themselves acknowledged as the best at what they do in your city or town.

Selling Quality Control

If you're out there selling on the *promise* of quality, you're just another printer in our book. If you really want to get our attention, show us how you're going to keep that promise! We say that the best way to differentiate yourself from all of the other printing salespeople in terms of quality is to focus on quality control.

Do you have a set of defined quality control procedures? If you don't, make yourself the quality leader and sit down with all of the people involved and make sure those procedures get written. Who looks at each job at each stage? Who is responsible for the final check of the order documentation? Who makes the phone call to the customer if there is something that is not clearly understood? Who takes the last look at the job before it goes out

of your door? How do you make sure that any problems with the job stay as your problems, and don't get out of the shop to become a problem for your customer?

This doesn't need to be a complicated set of procedures. In fact, like most everything else, it will work best if you can keep it simple, And you stand to gain two things. First, you stand to improve quality by formalizing a set of procedures to guard against quality failures. Second, you gain a sales tool—a document that you can actually place in front of your customer.

We see the presentation of this document as the last part of the sales call on which you show a prospect your samples. "Now, Mr. Jones," you might say. "I know that you know that these samples alone can't guarantee you quality. *Here* is how we do that. These are the quality control procedures by which we insure that every job we print for you will look as good as these hand-picked samples."

Does selling quality control work? We'll offer you the following evidence. Do you remember the advertisements that started back a few years ago in which Chrysler told you that they were building the best cars built in America? That was a statement of quality...a quality *promise*. (If you remember, the promise was also backed up with a new standard in automobile warranties.) At the same time, Ford was running ads saying simply that Ford had made quality "Job 1".

Who sold more cars? Ford did, because they held out more than a promise and a warranty. Sure, there's a certain comfort in knowing that someone will fix it if it breaks. But what we really want—in cars and in printing—is a job done right the first time.

If you can *show* your prospects how you're going to do that, you'll be a lot more than just another printing salesperson with a quality promise.