

People Will Pay For A Printer That Performs

In last month's column, I noted that many print buyers will pay for performance. If the choice is between something that costs less or something that works better, not everyone comes down on the side of "cheaper." In fact, a significant percentage of print buyers are motivated much more by performance than by price. Yes, there are price buyers – or "Price Monsters" as I like to call them. But there are also performance buyers, and I think you'll agree that they are more desirable customers.

Last month's column was mostly about the performance of the printed piece, using a mailing featuring "extreme personalization" as an example. This month's focus is on the performance of the printing company. This is where quality and service fit into the performance equation.

Needs and Wants

I mentioned "pleasing color" last month, a term that was common in the US back in the 1990's when it was generally accepted that toner-based, digital, full-color printing just wasn't as good as traditional 4/C offset. Things have definitely changed in the 21st Century. There may still be some "quality snobs" in the marketplace, but I think it's fair to say that current digital printing quality is at least good enough for most applications.

But that doesn't mean the quality of any individual print order will be "good enough" for the person who buys it. We still suffer quality failures, and we still suffer service failures, which means that we still have customers who are dissatisfied with the performance of their print supplier.

I believe that the best selling involves "needs and wants" assessment. That includes questions about the performance of the printed piece, but it also includes questions about the performance of the print supplier. Here's a statement of reality: Everyone already has at least one of those. If they're not buying from you, they must be buying from someone else, right?

(Yes, I'll grant you that there are new companies opening up which do not have a current relationship with a print supplier. But if I were coaching you on prospecting strategy, I would be sending you out after large, established companies with large, established printing needs. Those are easier to identify, in my experience, and there are more of them.)

Here's another statement of reality: Anytime you pursue a prospect who is buying from someone else, the decision to start buying from you has to be accompanied by – or preceded by – the decision to stop buying from your competitor(s). Why would they do that? Setting aside the "Price Monsters" who are only/always looking for a lower price, the most likely reason is some level of dissatisfaction with the performance of the current printer(s).

That's where needs and wants come into the picture. "Do you need better quality than you've been getting from your current supplier? Do you want or need better service? Is there anything, no matter how small, that you would change if you could?"

That takes us back to the question I closed with last month. If you're calling on a prospect who has performance issues with their current supplier, should you have to meet or beat that printer's prices in order to win the prospect's business?

Absolutely Not!

My answer would be: "Absolutely not!" But this is an area where too many salespeople give up their advantage. It's pretty common to identify some level of dissatisfaction, and then to face a price objection when your price is higher than what they've been paying. The situation is really pretty simple, and not at all surprising, most buyers want to have their cake and eat it too. But that doesn't mean you have to feed it to them!

Here's another observation. I've found that most people will pay what they have to pay in order to get what they want or what they need. The problem is that they don't know how much it actually must cost to get what they want or need. They do know how to look at two numbers, though, and quickly identify which is the smaller one, and that's the price that most buyers will want to pay. The opportunity here is for the salesperson – you! – to explain how it's all too easy to buy cheap and get what you pay for.

Next month I'll write more about negotiation strategy. For today, I just want to reinforce the connection between price and performance, and to stress the importance of needs and wants assessment. Here's a simple equation: Dissatisfaction with the current supplier(s) equals opportunity for you!