

Take A Longer View Of Selling

If I walked into your printshop and tried to sell you something tomorrow, would you buy from me? The answer is that you probably would not. No matter what I was selling, and no matter how good a deal I offered, isn't it true that you'd be wary of buying from any salesperson the very first time he or she called on you?

Let's take this hypothetical example a step further. If I walked into your printshop without an appointment, would you even see me? Or if I cold-called you on the telephone, would you (a) promptly return my call if you weren't available when I called; (b) take my call and answer all of my prospecting questions; and/or (c) agree to an appointment for me to come in and see you based on just that first phone call?

If you're anything at all like the typical business person in the 90's, the answer to those questions is probably "no." So, let me ask you one more question...why would you ever think that selling techniques that don't work *on you* are going to work *for you*?

Need To Sell

I'm going to describe a technique that will work for you. But before I do that, I may still need to address a more basic issue with some of you...is outside selling really that important to today's quick printer?

I believe strongly that an outside sales effort opens the door to growth and volume levels that would simply not be possible otherwise. Yes, you can get business as a result of a yellow pages ad. And yes, you can definitely build business with an aggressive direct mail campaign. You'll gain customers from radio advertising too, and even from a home page on the Internet. But please realize that, from each of those channels, you're only going to get the easy conversions. (I use that word "conversion" to describe the change from prospect to customer...the point where someone becomes willing to give you business.)

If you've got enough easy prospects in your area, you can get rich without ever leaving the shop. But is that your situation? If not, you'd better accept the reality that not every potential customer will come to you. If you want to gain the next level of growth, you'll have to go to them.

There are hundreds, and maybe even thousands, of quick printers who have found some level of success in outside selling. There are many thousands of others who have "tried it" without success. What's the difference between those who succeed and those who fail? Is it individual sales ability? Personality? Is it the kind of prospects they went calling on? Is it the prices they charged? No, the make or break issue isn't any of these. In fact, I don't think the key issue is anything more complicated than the understanding that sales success doesn't come overnight. The winners are the ones who have kept making calls...who kept working at it. The losers made a few calls, didn't get any orders, and simply gave up.

Trust and Confidence

What is it that the buyer wants from you anyway? How do they decide which printer to buy from? When I ask printers those questions, I usually get some combination of quality, service and price—the unholy trinity—as a response. When I ask printing customers the same questions, the answer is often expressed differently. The words they like to use are "trust and confidence."

Trust and confidence. It takes time to build trust and confidence. For years, I've been quoting a statistic in seminars from the American Sales Association that 82% of all orders come on the sixth sales contact or beyond.

The 6-Step Process

With that in mind, you should realize that a big part of the selling challenge is to get to six! And that's a daunting challenge to many quick printers. My God, you say, what am I going to talk about on six separate sales calls and where am I going to find all that time?

Before you sink into despair, I want you to know that a *sales contact* and a *sales call* are not necessarily the same thing. In fact, I think they're two different things, and the system I teach in the *PRINTSELLING* seminar uses *contact* (sales letters and phone calls) and *calls* (cold calls and by-appointment calls) in concert to build recognition and then trust and confidence. It's a whole process that gets you to the point where a prospect is willing to give you the chance to perform.

An Easier Cold Call

I like to start this process with a physical cold call. But the goal is not to get in front of the buyer. And that's a good thing as far as expectations go, because the buyer often doesn't want to see me any more than I want to see

him or her. The purpose of this cold call is only to start a process that gets you to six. I would actually be disappointed if I *had to* see the buyer on a cold call. To my mind, that would mean that I had to make my presentation at a point well before the prospect is fully receptive to hearing it. I want this person to trust me at least a little bit and have some level of confidence in me before I pull out my main sales and marketing guns.

My goal on this cold call is to *learn something* and *leave something*. I want to learn the name of the person who makes the printing decisions, and I want to learn anything else that could help me later on. That might include getting samples of the prospect's printed materials, learning something about the quantities they order, and maybe even learning the name of their current printer.

I think you'll be surprised how much of this you can learn from a receptionist or secretary if you present yourself in the right way. And that way is as a salesperson doing research for a written follow-up, *not* as someone looking for immediate time with the buyer. One of the most powerful phrases I've ever spoken in selling is: "I'm just looking for information right now so I can send him /her something in the mail."

Getting information is only half of my goal, though. I also want to leave something. And in the system I teach, that's a business card and a little handwritten note to the buyer. The note says something to the effect of: "I was here. I asked some questions about your printing needs. I'm going to send you something in the mail. Please be looking for it."

A Simple Letter

What do you send? A brief sales letter. And by brief, I mean only a couple of paragraphs long. And I don't mean writing a separate letter for every cold call you make. I mean to write one basic letter and use your computer as a word processor to personalize it for every prospect.

Why a letter rather than a phone call? Because you haven't yet built up enough recognition to ensure that the buyer will take your call. And because the simple timing of your phone call can cause your efforts to fail. There can be a bad time to get a phone call; I think you know that from your own experience. I don't believe that there's a bad time to get a letter, though, and the right kind of letter will get read and keep the process rolling along. The secret is to keep it very short, so it looks easy to read. Two short paragraphs is all it takes to get the job done.

Paragraph 1 should say something to the effect of: "I was in your place. I learned that you're the person I need to deal with. I'm a local, full-service printer (or copy center) and I think I have something to offer you. (Yes, that is pretty much what the note you left on the cold call said. Repetition is good, though, not bad or unnecessary.)"

Paragraph 2 goes on to say something like: "With that in mind, I'm going to phone you to ask for an appointment. I'll need 15 (or 20 or 25...whatever) minutes of your time. Please be expecting my call."

It's the brevity of the letter that will ensure that it gets read. It's short and it's straight to the point. Paragraph 1 tells the reader why you're writing. Paragraph 2 tells him what comes next. Most salespeople (if they write letters at all) feel the need to construct long, complex documents that attempt to put a full-scale sales presentation in writing. What they don't understand—and I hope you will—is that the letter doesn't have to stand on its own and sell. It's just part of a process. The real purpose of the sales letter is to add another contact, one that increases the chances that the buyer will take your call when you phone to ask for a face-to-face appointment.

Think about it this way. On the cold call, you leave your business card and a brief note. Your prospect sees two important things...your logo and your name. Then the letter comes, and again, there are your logo and your name. There is also a promise that you're going to be calling on the phone and an explanation of the reason why.

Your challenge in selling has always been to build trust and confidence. The added reality of our times is that you usually have to build some level of recognition before you'll even get the chance to do that. That's what the cold call and the letter do for you. They "warm-up" the telephone call that asks for the appointment. They increase the chances that you'll get the appointment that will allow you to do the real selling.

Completing The Process

Beyond even that, the process builds in enough sales contact that—by the time you actually do see the prospect face-to-face—he or she is much closer to the point where you could realistically expect a decision to give you a try. The cold call, the letter, and the phone call to ask for an appointment all count toward six! If you can make the system work just this way, your first face-to-face contact occurs at Contact #4. A follow-up phone call or letter might be Contact #5. A second personal visit might be Contact #6.

Here's the bottom line. You have a much better chance at getting business at this point than you did after a ten minute cold call presentation with a sample pack and some notepads left behind. Recognition, trust, and confidence pave the road to printing orders.

A Closing Thought

There aren't any shortcuts in selling, especially when you get beyond the "easy" conversions. In fact, the only way I know of to even make it seem easier is to recognize what makes it so hard. And what is that? It's the fact

that the challenge before you when you start in with a new prospect is to change that person's mind. You may never have thought about it that way, but it's true. The person already has a printer and thinks that printer is the right printer. If you want to get the business, you have to change that person's mind.

That won't happen on a cold call, so don't feel pressure to make sales on a cold call. The cold call is really only a starting point in cracking the "hard cases." The key is to make lots of them and put lots of prospects into the whole selling process...and profit through a longer view of selling.