

Is Persistence A Positive?

This is the last installment in my series on “The Top 5 Ways To Talk Yourself Out Of A Sale.” We have covered too much talk/too little listen, too much features/too little benefits, pitching vs. storytelling and making it all about price. Today, the topic is persistence, which is generally considered to be a positive attribute for a printing salesperson. Sadly, I have seen far too many salespeople talk themselves out of a sale through blind persistence, which I define as ongoing contact which adds nothing to a relationship.

On the other hand, I have seen many salespeople succeed through creative persistence. This is an important difference! You do not want to be the “pushy” salesperson who calls and calls and e-mails and calls to the point where your message is deleted the very second you are identified. You do want to be the salesperson who engages through creativity and differentiation.

Selling Yourself

As you surely know, it is difficult to get prospects to even return your calls and/or emails. And why is that? Well, I think it is mostly because you do not give them very good reasons to respond. In fact, I think most salespeople are focusing on the wrong goal at this stage of the process. I frequently get e-mails and messages from salespeople which focus on reasons I should buy from them. The real question in my mind, at this stage, is why I should even respond to their e-mails or return their calls. Think of it this way, you have to get me to engage with you and communicate with you before you can expect me to buy from you. So do not, as we say in America, put your cart before your horse.

Instead of e-mails and phone messages which tout your company’s equipment or capabilities, consider something like this: “If I were you, I would be wondering if there is anything that makes this salesperson different from all the others who call on me. Here is how I would answer that question. I have 15 years of experience, and I think it is fair to say that I know just about everything that can go wrong with a print project. With me watching over your projects, you get to benefit from everything I have learned, and all the mistakes I made when I was a rookie so many years ago. If that would be of value to you, we should at least talk, would you not agree?”

This may not be *your* message, especially if you are short on experience, but part of the point I want to make is that this is a *differentiating* strategy. It is not the same “please call me because I can save you money on your printing” strategy that most salespeople seem to favor.

By the way, if you are short on experience, maybe this is your message: “I think you should call me back because I have been working in printing sales for 6 months. That may not sound like something to be bragging about, but here is what I think it might mean to you. At this stage of my career, I have a very keen knowledge of how hard I must work to earn and keep someone’s business. If you do not think your current print salesperson is working that hard for you, we should at least talk, would you not agree?”

Creativity Persistence

On a recent sales call with one of my clients, a prospect introduced me to the term “drip marketing.” “We know that we have a long sales cycle,” she said, “and we know that it typically builds slowly, from recognition to mild interest to real interest. So we have developed the strategy of telling just a little bit of our story with each communication. In that way, we have something fresh to say every time, and we find that this works a lot better than shooting off all of our big guns at the first opportunity.”

In printing, we have a long sales cycle too, so I think “drip marketing” provides you with an opportunity to be different and creative. What if you were to design a program consisting of 8 “touches” over a 12 week period? Start with the overall story you want to tell, and break it down into 8 parts. Give some thought to mixing media, too. For example, you could deliver 3 of these touches via e-mail, 2 via Australia Post (which would allow you to send samples or other “physical” components), and 3 by telephone, even utilizing voice mail as one of your media. I would actually start this program with a phone call, at an odd hour, which would make it likely that I would get voice mail, so I could leave a message which described what was to come.

“My name is Dave Fellman. I’m a printing salesperson, and I would like to be your printer. I think I probably need to tell you a few things about myself and about my company, but I don’t want to try to do all that in one sitting. So please keep your eye on your inbox — both e-mail and Australia Post — for a series of communications from me. Hopefully I will convince you — a little bit at a time — that I am worth considering.”

Bottom line: Persistence is important, but blind persistence will likely do you more harm than good. Creative persistence, though, is a much different story.