

Too Much *Features*, Too Little *Benefits*

In my column last month, I mentioned the series of seminars I presented in Australia and New Zealand last May. They were sponsored by Australian Printer and Canon, and one of the elements of the program was “The Top 5 Ways To Talk Yourself Out Of A Sale.” As you may remember, they are: Too much *talk*, too little *listen*, Too much *features*, too little *benefits*, Pitching vs. Storytelling, Making it all about price and Blind Persistence

I promised to write about all five of those “selling sins” over the next few months. Last month it was “too much *talk*, too little *listen*.” This month, it is “too much *features*, too little *benefits*.” I am hoping to turn you away from one of the most common mistakes I see printing salespeople make.

It has been said that a printing salesperson has to make three sales. First, you have to sell yourself. Then, you have to sell your company. Then you have to sell the printed product. But if you do not sell yourself, is any of the rest likely to happen?

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.

One of my clients had a more-or-less standard introductory email. In 3-4 paragraphs, she would highlight her company’s capabilities, note how long they had been in business, identify some of their past and current customers, and make liberal use of phrases like “we know how to make you look good on paper” and “we are committed to your complete satisfaction.”

Another client labored extensively over his “elevator speech” and came up with something similar. In 25 seconds, he could tell you who he was and who he represented and what they were capable of printing and how they were leaders in the industry and how he would love to sit down and talk about your printing needs. This “elevator speech” was also the core of his voice-mail message.

I asked both of them how their strategy was working. The answer was “not well.” That did not surprise me, because I found nothing in either message to provide a truly compelling reason to respond. Beyond that, they put their cart before their horse, trying to sell the company before selling themselves. I suggested adding something like this: “I am the point person for an organization made up of people who are skilled and professional in the arts of printing and customer service. My job is see if there are ways in which we can bring value to your situation, to improve on what you are doing or what you are getting from your current suppliers. I have XX years of experience at this, so I would like to think that I represent a good investment of your time. Can we talk further?”

Features, Advantages and Benefits

Everyone in sales should be familiar with the FAB formula. The basic idea is that every product or service offering has features, which in turn create advantages, which ultimately provide benefits. It has been my experience, though, that few printing salespeople use the FAB formula effectively in their selling, and many do not really understand the way it works in the first place.

The confusion seems to center around the Advantage part of the formula, and specifically about who gets this advantage. It is not the customer! When FAB is applied properly, it is the salesperson! The key to making the FAB formula work for you is to identify Features of your offering which provide you with a Competitive Advantage and provide a Benefit to your customer as well. If there is no Advantage, you are probably selling a commodity, and the only Feature that is likely to help you there is a low price.

In the examples above, both salespeople were stressing the Features of their companies. I added the specific role of the salesperson (point person), an Advantage statement (XX years of experience) and connected to the Features to the Benefit (bring value, improve). Remember, at the stage we are talking about, you are not trying to sell your products or services, or really even your company. Before you can do that, you have to sell them on the idea of responding to your email, or calling you back, right?

You will have better success with that if you stay focused on the idea that you have to get them to engage further with *you*. It is not the company you have to sell at this point, it is yourself! Give them a good reason to talk further with *you*, and I predict that more of them will.