

Magic Words

For a few years now, I've been teaching a set of "magic words" that a printing salesperson can use to uncover opportunities. Those words make up one simple sentence... *what would you change if you could?*

Lately, I've come to realize that these "magic words" have applications in quick printing that go beyond the sales situation. But before we talk about those applications, let's look at the way a salesperson can use them to build business.

Handling Objections

The *objection* to doing business with a particular salesperson—or a particular company—can take a number of forms. And here's a key piece of understanding...if you ask someone to do business with you and they don't say yes, they simply have some sort of *objection* that you have to try to deal with. *Handling objections* shouldn't be a foreign concept to a printing salesperson.

It's been my experience that the common objections fall into four basic categories. There's the "price is too high" objection. There is the "I don't do the kind of printing that you specialize in" objection. There's the "I've already got a printer that I'm happy with" objection. And, there's the one where the prospect doesn't understand what you're trying to say.

My "magic words" won't help much with the first and last of these objections. The only way to handle the first one is to decide that you're willing to sell at a lower price. (That assumes you are really facing a strong price objection. The fact that they speak the words doesn't always mean that your price is too high. Many times, it's just a tactic to see if you'll make the price lower.)

The fourth objection reflects a major communication problem, either a serious lack of ability on the part of the salesperson, or a thick-headed prospect. The truth is probably that the worst communications problems are a combination of both. Either or both, I don't know any "magic words" strong enough to make a connection when there's no communication.

I Don't "Do" That Kind Of Printing

The "magic words" work best on Objections #2 and #3. Because their purpose is to get a prospect thinking about another magic word... *value!* The prospect who doesn't "do" your kind of printing might find value in considering it. If they're two-color and you're into four-color, you want to get them thinking about whether the promotional pieces they print might work better, create a better image, *sell more stuff* if they added to the piece's impact with process color. This is the classic opportunity for a printing salesperson to *sell up*.

If they're four-color and you're two-color, you might profit from the response that "I'd like my printing to cost less". That's a much different statement, by the way, than "your price is too high". You might successfully *sell down* in this situation by showing a prospect how to design effective catalogs, brochures, etc. in two or three flat colors.

I'm Happy With My Printer

One of the toughest objections to overcome is the one where a prospect expresses satisfaction with another printer. Many salespeople seem to feel that the best "solution" to this objection is to try to position themselves as a back-up supplier.

I'd rather see you try the "magic words" here, and I might use them something like this:

"Well, I certainly understand that, and I appreciate your loyalty. I'm sure it won't surprise you that my own customers feel the same way about me. But let me ask you one question. Is there anything, no matter how small, that you'd change about your dealings with this printer if you could?"

"See, I think there's always room for improvement. And I'll bet that if the other salesperson asked you that question, you might be able to suggest ways—even small ways—to make the relationship work better."

If you get any sort of response, you'll have something to work with. And that's all you can expect from "magic words", to uncover opportunities that might otherwise have stayed hidden. It's all you can expect, but it might also be all that you need. I've often been surprised by just how much I've found to work with, even when the prospect first told me that he or she was more than satisfied.

Magic Team-Building Words

I had a quick printer tell me a while ago that he has only two sources of frustration...his customers and his employees. That got me wondering if my "magic words" could help him solve some of his internal problems. I'm convinced that they can. Because I'm convinced that most of our industry's people want to do good work, and the problems we have with them often grow out of the dumb way we ask them to work.

In a room full of owners and managers, *participative management* is an easy subject to discuss. I've heard plenty of printers agree that the person who actually does any job is likely to be the one who best understands it. And that's the person who'd be most likely to be able to improve the way the job is done, if—and it can be a big *if*—the work environment actively solicited his or her input and contribution.

What we're talking about here is teamwork, something that has to start between manager and employee before it can most effectively spread to encompass an entire department, and ultimately a whole printing company. Each individual must be made to feel like a valued part of the team before the team can ever gel.

How do you make that happen? How do you communicate that you as the manager have power and authority over an employee, but you also respect that person's knowledge, experience, and ability to contribute?

I believe that my "magic words" will help you here. With a single, simple question, you offer the chance to be part of the *team* that makes policy and ultimately determines how the whole company will be run. If you further show people that good ideas will be implemented—and *all* ideas will be respected—you can truly create something in your company that's much stronger than the sum of its individual parts.

Most quick printers face a wide range of problems right now to at least some degree...the need to build sales, the need to increase productivity, the need to improve and maintain quality, the need to find and keep good employees. I see *team-building* as a key component in the solutions to all of these problems.

The bottom line for today may be this...I don't think there's ever been a better time to ask our people—our most valuable resources—what *they'd* change if they could!