

## More For Your Money

I want to teach you an American word today: *lagniappe*. It's pronounced *lan-yap*, and if that doesn't look or sound particularly American English, it's because its origin is Cajun French, a dialect spoken mostly in our state of Louisiana, with its own origins in the French-speaking parts of Canada.

What does *lagniappe* have to do with printing sales? The strict definition of the word is "a small gift given to a customer by a merchant at the time of a purchase." A more common definition, though, is "a little something extra." In marketing terms, we might express that as "more for your money."

### Value Equation

We might also express it is "exceptional value." How do you calculate value? It's really a pretty simple equation. When you feel like you got what you paid for, that's value. When you feel you got more for your money, that's exceptional value. If you feel you got less than you paid for, that's the opposite of value.

Please note, though, that while I used the word "you", *you* don't define value when you're the seller. They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder; they should also say value is in the eye of the buyer. I have noted that there's often a "value gap" in printing sales, with sellers talking about the value they bring, but buyers not seeing or appreciating it. As an example, last week I was out on calls with a salesperson who confidently stated that he brought value through exceptional customer service. His prospect said "prove it" and the salesperson said "just give me an order and I will." The prospect said: "No, that's not the way I work. You have to prove it to me before I'll give you an order." Lesson to learn: If you're going to make bold statements, you'd better be able to back them up!

### You Get What You Pay For

One of the biggest challenges printing salespeople face here in America is to sell against lower-priced competition — and it shames me to tell you that most printing companies in America make it mostly about price. They say they don't, but they do, and I'll write more about that in a future column. For today, I'm hoping to show you how you can use "reverse lagniappe" to meet this challenge.

If lagniappe means "more for your money", reverse lagniappe means "less for your money." I'm not talking about less value here, though. I'm talking about more value reflected as less pain and aggravation. I'm talking about selling the idea that you sometimes get what you pay for, but not what you need.

This all hinges on a single question: "Are you perfectly happy with what you got — or what you're getting — from my lower-priced competitor?" If the answer is yes, that's a problem. But if the answer is no, you have a real opportunity to defend your price. You can say: "I think what's happening here is that you got what you paid for, and it simply costs more to get what you really want or need."

Here's an observation. I think most people will pay what they have to pay to get what they really want or need. The complicating factor is that they usually don't know how much that is. What they do know is what one or more printers is willing to charge them, and the easiest decision is to buy at the lower price. I'm pretty sure they'll continue to do that unless people like you have the courage to challenge them.

Here's what that means. Suppose you ask the "perfectly happy" question and the answer is yes. As I said, that's a problem, but it's not insurmountable. Here's what I think you could say if you find yourself in that situation.

"I need to ask that question again, and I want to make sure that I stress the 'perfectly' part. Because here's what I'm thinking. I'm not going to lower my price, because our prices support a whole structure of talented people and comprehensive quality control. I want to ask you to consider whether a company with lower prices is providing the same thing. Because if not, I'm concerned that at some point, you might get what you paid for, which would be a loss for both of us."

Obviously it takes courage to continue the conversation in this manner, and there's one more thing that's important to this strategy. Let me close for today by teaching you another American word, this one which has its origin in Yiddish, a language my grandparents spoke. The word is "*mensch*," and the strict translation is "a person of integrity and honor." A more common definition is "a good guy" with I think in Australian English would translate to "a good bloke." When you say something like this, be real, be down-to-earth, be a good bloke — don't be the stereotype of a salesperson. If you can convince people that you're a good bloke and a person of integrity and honor, you'll do very well in print sales.