

## Same Stuff, Different Continent

I have a friend who likes the acronym SSDD — Same (well, let's say Stuff), Different Day. If you ask him how he's doing, that's the answer you'll usually get.

I've been thinking about him as I sit in a hotel room in Sydney, Australia. I'm three days into my trip here, and as always, I'm struck by the differences and similarities between Aussies and Americans. We all speak English, but it's not nearly the same English. And we all sell printing, but it's not quite the same printing. Sure the technology is the same, but paper sizes are different down here, and they refer to the various printed products by different names. The sales challenges they face, though, are very much the same as the ones you face—Same Stuff, Different Continent.

### American Style

The way they face those challenges is significantly different, or at least that's what they tell me. I've always had somewhat of a disconnect with Australian printing salespeople because they mostly maintain that "American style" doesn't work in Australian culture. Most of them find the selling style I teach to be too aggressive, because Australians, by nature, are not very assertive. This is a very laid-back society. "No worries" is not just an expression, it's a way of life.

I said something in yesterday's seminar that seemed to open up some eyes, though. "You guys probably think that I represent the 'American style.' The truth is that I spend a lot of my time trying to convince American printing salespeople to be more assertive."

The disconnect surfaced yesterday as I was talking about finding pain or problems in the relationship between a prospect and his/her current printer. "If they have no pain or problems," I said, "you have no opportunity. So you can't be afraid to ask if there's anything they would change if they could."

"Wouldn't it be better," one salesperson asked, "to ask what they *like* about doing business with the other company? That's a much friendlier question. It wouldn't be viewed as so demanding or confrontational."

"Probably not," I said, "but here's what I want you to think about. If you find out what they like about doing business with your competitor, all you can really say is 'we can do that too.' If you learn about something they don't like, you can say 'we can do that better!'"

### Price vs. Value

Australian printing salespeople also wrestle with price objections. One salesperson told me: "It's far worse here. I've spoken with others in my franchise in America, and I've heard all their stories, but it's nothing compared to what we face here. Everyone is all about price in the Australian market. There's always a competitor who will trade with them for less." (Please note that he wasn't talking about trade-as-in-barter. *Trade with* means the same as *sell to* in Australian English.)

"You know," I said, "I hear the same thing in America. People from big cities tell me that their markets are more competitive than small towns. People on the West Coast tell me that everything is more competitive there than on the East Coast, and vice versa. I can't say with absolute certainty that Australia is *not* more competitive than the US, but I'd be willing to bet that it's not. And I promise you that there's always another printer who will sell for less, in Australia, in the US, in Vietnam, in Switzerland, wherever you look."

"Now, if you take that to the next step," I continued, "all of your current customers could trade for less with someone else. But they don't. Think about *why*? The most likely answer is that you provide a level of value that appeals to them. Your challenge is to find others with the same definition of value, which takes us back to asking them if they'd change anything if they could. I know this might be more assertive or aggressive than you're comfortable with. I just hope you'll see the importance of—and the opportunity in!—stretching your comfort zone."

So, that's my best advice to Australian printing salespeople. And to American printing salespeople. That changes the acronym a little: Different Continent, Same Stuff.