

Do You Make It All About Price?

This is the fourth installment in my series on “The Top 5 Ways To Talk Yourself Out Of A Sale.” The topic for today is “Making It All About Price” — which you hopefully do not do. Or do you?

I hear many complaints from printing salespeople about buyers who care only about price. Sadly, at least some of the blame for this lies with printing salespeople and printing companies. One of my early sales trainers had a favorite expression, that he (or she) who mentions price first loses. In my experience, too many printing salespeople are guilty of that selling sin.

The Race To The Bottom

Seth Godin has written twelve best-selling business books that have been translated into 33 languages. He has also posted thousands of blog entries and delivered hundreds of keynote speeches. I was privileged to be on the same program with him some years ago, and I made it my business to get a front-row seat for his presentation.

He talked about marketing and selling in general that day, and he talked about the printing industry in specific, even though this was not a printing industry conference. I sat in embarrassment as he used us as an example of bad selling strategy.

“I buy a lot of printing,” he said, “and the printing industry seems determined to convince me that I should always buy their product from whoever offers me the lowest price.” He said that everyone who called on him had both the same initial strategy and the same follow-up strategy. First, they asked for the opportunity to bid on his printing. Then, they called to see how their prices compared. He always told them, he said, that their price was competitive, but not the lowest he was being offered. And then they always, he said, asked for the opportunity to “sharpen their pencil” and re-submit their bid.

I am not sure I believe the “always” part, but I know that this is very common strategy, certainly in the United States, and I suspect in Australia as well. Godin calls it “the race to the bottom” and I have to ask you, what good does it do you to win that race?

Other Variables

Here are two stories from my own print-buying experience. When I was ready to print my “Sell More Printing” book, I gave three local printers the specifications. The first one told me that it would be cheaper to use a lighter paper than I had originally selected. He never asked me what look or feel I was going for, he just assumed that a lower price would be better.

He committed another selling sin by using the word *cheaper*. Think about the connotation of that word. When I hear *cheap*, I hear the opposite of *quality*. I think of corners being cut on craft and materials to come up with a lower price. If you mean to say *less expensive*, or *more cost-efficient*, either of those is a better term than *cheap*.

Some years ago, I asked another salesperson for a price on 800 postcard mailers. He told me that I should buy at least 1000 to get a better price, and that each one would be even cheaper if I ordered 5000. Now, the reason I asked for a price on 800 was that I had a mailing list of 765. What service was he doing me by telling me to order more? It would have been one thing if he asked about the quantity, and learned that I would probably be ordering similar quantities again. But instead, he simply made the assumption that price was the most important factor in my buying decision.

Voice Mail Strategy

Another complaint I hear regularly from salespeople is about people “hiding” behind their voice mail. I completely reject the idea that they are hiding, they are simply taking advantage of technology to make themselves more efficient. I use my own voice mail to screen calls, and I return the ones I want to return.

Now ask yourself why I want to return some and not others. It mostly boils down to whether the caller gives me a compelling reason to call back. The reason I hear most often is “I think I can save you some money on your...”

Obviously it is not just printing salespeople who are guilty of this selling sin, but I care less about all the rest than I do about you. I hope you can give me a better reason for me to call you back. For example: “I’d like to talk about every aspect of your use of print, to see if I can help you to improve on it.”

Please understand that I have nothing against saving money, and if it turns out that you can help me to do that, I will certainly appreciate it. The point I am trying to make is that I want you to lead with something else. Be the last to talk about price, not the first. Let someone else win the race to the bottom.