

Gimme A Good Reason!

As you may have noticed over the years, my inspiration for these columns tends to come from some strange places. This one came from a conversation I overheard between two young men who were sitting in the row behind me on a recent flight from Chicago to San Francisco. One young man (who I would guess to be about 10) was claiming the right to hold the iPad on which they were going to watch a movie. The other young man (who I would guess to be about 8) screamed out: "Gimme a good reason!" Their mother shushed them both, and negotiated a compromise.

It struck me, though, that the second young man had identified the most critical obstacle that most printing salespeople face, the challenge of getting printing buyers to do what we want them to do. That may mean giving you an order. It may also mean agreeing to meet with you. It might even mean just returning your phone call.

It's been my experience that you can accomplish a lot by giving people a good reason to do what you want them to do. Sadly, most printing salespeople don't, but that's a correctable problem!

Return Your Call

Let's think of prospecting as an activity which consists of three stages: the *identification* stage, the *connection* stage and the *conversation* stage. *Identification* is pretty straightforward: identify "suspect" companies and then the person/people in those companies who buy what you sell. *Connection* takes you from there to the first substantive *conversation*, or to put that another way, *connection* is all about calling to set up an appointment. That's where voice mail usually enters the equation.

So let's start with the understanding that "please return my call" is not a very compelling reason for anyone to do that. Nor is "I'd like to talk to you about your printing/graphics/marketing services needs." Both of those represent something that's mostly of value to you. A much better strategy is to position what you want as a value to them!

"I'd like to talk to you about your printing/graphics/marketing services needs," you might say. "Now let me tell you why I think you might want to talk to me about those needs. I have XX years of experience in the printing industry, and I don't think it's too much of a stretch to think that my experience could be of value to you. Give me a call, and let's start that ball rolling."

Alternately: "I have xx months of experience in the printing industry (read that: way less than XX years), and that may not seem like something I should brag about, but with where I am in my career, I don't think you'll find anyone who'll work harder to earn and keep your business."

Still another possibility: "I'm not a printing salesperson who's hoping to sell you on using print to market your business. I'm a marketing person who wants to talk to you about your entire approach to business, and to help you to integrate all of the new media into growing your business."

Now, none of these tactics are guaranteed to work every time. At best, I think they might get you from 1 out of 10 people returning your calls to 2 or 3 out of 10. The point is this, give people a good reason to call you back and more of them will. (By the way, 2 out of 10 is 100% better than 1 out of 10. I'd be pretty happy with that!)

Agree To Meet

The second challenge in the *connection* stage is to give them a good reason to meet with you. Again, "I'd like to talk to you about your printing/graphics/marketing services needs" doesn't seem to be compelling enough. So how about this: "I want to learn about your business so that I can evaluate the role that printing plays in it now, with the ultimate goal of suggesting ways that you might save time or aggravation or even money. And by the way, you won't save money because we're cheap. If anything, you might save time and aggravation and money and grow your business because we're smart. But we're a long way from me telling you exactly what I think I can do for you at this point. To do this right, I need some face time. Can you set aside half an hour for me sometime over the next couple of weeks?"

Again, these are not magic words that will work every time, but the fundamental idea is the same— give people a good reason to meet with you and more of them will

Agree To Buy

One of the most common situations in selling is when you have someone "almost sold"—they seem to accept all of the benefits you've described to them, and they may even have told you that your prices are very competitive, but they still haven't given you any orders.

“Here’s where I think we are,” you might say. “I think I have *almost* sold you on doing business with me, but obviously not quite. If you were me, what would you do to take this relationship to the next level?”

Key point: You don’t have to guess at what the “good reason” might be. You are allowed to ask! I have written before that the best selling is *interrogatory* rather than *declaratory*. In fact, it might be a good idea to go back to that definition of prospecting and add another element of identification to the conversation stage—identification of the buyer’s hot buttons!

I have also written before about “tipping points” (*QP*, December 2007), and you might look back to that column to get some more ideas on how to identify and take advantage of buyers’ hot buttons. Again, the fundamental idea is to give people a good reason to do what you want them to do. If you accomplish that, you have every right to expect that more of them will.

Don’t Be Common!

I overheard another conversation recently between a grandmother and her grandchildren. “Don’t be common,” she told them, and when I asked her later on to tell me exactly what that meant, she explained that it’s a Southern term for being low-class.

I wouldn’t accuse you of being low-class, but I think “don’t be common” is still good advice if we interpret it this way: Don’t be the same as everybody else. Find ways to differentiate yourself in your selling style. Be more assertive, which I think automatically makes you more interesting and increases the likelihood that you’ll be taken seriously.

If you can couple all of that with at least one good reason why it’s in their best interest to do what you want them to do, I’m pretty sure you’ll see better selling results.