

## Known Hazards

The Peace Street Bridge ate another truck this morning.

This railroad bridge stands a little less than a mile from our townhouse in downtown Raleigh, NC. It's a local legend, and even has its own Twitter feed: "I'm a bridge. Bane of existence to those who can't read numbers. Undeatable. Undeterred. 12 feet, 4 inches. Last meal, February 26, 2020."

There are numerous signs as you approach the bridge, noting its 12'4" height. Still, it's eaten five trucks since we moved here in 2017. To me, the Peace Street Bridge is the epitome of a Known Hazard – just like the ones so many printers and printing salespeople keep running into.

## Price Monsters

I believe that only a small percentage of print buyers make their decisions on price alone. Having said that, there are price buyers – I call them Price Monsters! – out there. They tend to have Purchasing titles rather than Marketing titles. They also tend to be far away from the actual use of the printed materials. Print is just another thing they buy.

The classic hazard takes two forms with Price Monsters. On the "front end," too many salespeople spend too much time trying to turn Price Monsters into customers, when it's unlikely that they're ever going to get their prices low enough to make the sale. I'm not just talking about the salesperson's time, by the way, I'm also talking about the estimator's time. (Have you ever noticed that Price Monster estimates tend to be extra-complicated?)

On the "back end" is often an even worse result. The salesperson keeps quoting lower and lower prices until they're low enough for the Price Monster, and then even more people's time and energy are spent on a customer who isn't contributing much profit. Everything from sales time and customer service time to production capacity is committed, at a sub-standard return on investment. This is especially dangerous to a printing company that doesn't have a great handle on its real costs. The volume looks good, but at end of the month, the bank account doesn't!

It would be far better to disqualify a real Price Monster, very early in the process. But salespeople tend to get tunnel vision, especially when a prospect has a lot of volume potential. This may be an area where Management has to step in and say, hey, we don't want this business. If you don't pay attention to the signs, you risk getting caught in the hazard!

## Bad Hires

One of the reasons that so many salespeople get that tunnel vision is that they're not really very good salespeople. In my coaching work, I'm often asked to "fix" people who never should have been hired in the first place. You have hopefully had better success at this, but I think it's fair to say that most printers are really bad at hiring salespeople.

Admittedly, it's not easy. In fact, the most dangerous person to you in the hiring process is the person who can talk the talk, but either cannot or will not walk the walk. The world is full of salespeople who can sell themselves to a potential employer, but can't or won't do much beyond that. That candidate for your sales position is another Known Hazard!

How do you avoid this one? With a much more careful and patient hiring process. If it takes less than two weeks from receiving a resume to offering a job, you're moving too fast! Think in terms of 2+ interviews – at least two conversations between you and the candidate, plus interviews/conversations with key members of your current team. Check references. Test for intelligence and the kind of personality traits that lend themselves to success in sales. In other words, make a careful buying decision.

Back to those interviews. All the way back in April 1999, I wrote a column for Quick Printing titled "21 Pretty Good Questions To Ask A Potential Salesperson." You probably don't have that issue anymore, but you can find the column in the Article Archives at my website: [www.davefellman.com](http://www.davefellman.com).

## Bottom Line

The bottom line for today is pretty straightforward. Some hazards are truly hidden. Others are simply unavoidable. But some of them, like the Peace Street Bridge, are neither of those things – if you pay attention to the signs!