

Value vs. Pain

Over the last couple of months, I've been writing about a selling strategy that emphasizes making *proposals* to your prospects and customers as opposed to simply *quoting* on their projects. Last month, I stressed the point that you win at this game by identifying pain—either actual pain and aggravation they've had with printers in the past, or potential pain if a “worst case scenario” should occur on the current project—and positioning yourself as the solution to either the past or potential problem.

That point reminded me of a conversation I had with one of my Sales Coaching clients a couple of years ago, and I went digging through my files to find a note he'd written to me after that conversation. The note listed some of the things that create value in a printer/customer relationship along with some of the things that cause pain. Starting with his thoughts, and then adding more from a number of sources—including a couple of people who buy a little bit of printing and a couple more who buy a lot of it—I now offer you a listing of The Top 10 Things That Create Value To Printing Buyers and The Top 10 Things That Cause The Same People Pain.

Value

First on the list of things that create value is **Advice**—defined as the printer's willingness to offer suggestions that lead to either improved performance or lower price. The printing buyers I spoke with made it clear that it's not always about price, though. “The printing has to sell my services,” one said to me, “and I'm not a marketing genius. Little things like using a nicer paper or printing ‘teaser copy’ on the outside of an envelope have made a big difference for me, and those ideas came from my printer.”

Another buyer told me a story about a very tight deadline situation where one more block of information was needed to complete a brochure which needed to be ready for a sales meeting. “We'd planned to order 5000 of them,” she told me, “and as we got down to the wire and it became obvious that I wasn't going to have this block of information in time, my salesperson asked me how many I actually needed for the meeting, which was really only about a hundred. So she suggested that we drop another picture of the product into the space where the block of information was supposed to go—something she said her company could do for us really easily—then print a hundred for the sales meeting, and then print the 5000 once we had the rest of the information. I took that suggestion to my boss, and he gave me credit for solving the problem which made me look really good!”

Here's the rest of the list:

2. Familiarity: “The more any supplier knows about our business and the way we do business, the better they'll understand and be able to meet our needs.”

3. Absolute Honesty: “Don't hide bad news from me, and don't ever put me in a situation where it's the last minute and I don't have any options. If you can't do something, tell me up front, or else the very minute after you realize we've got a problem.”

4. Price: “You don't have to have the lowest price, although you do have to be competitive. The more you give me in terms of overall value, the more I'm willing to pay.”

5. Dependable Quality: “I want all of my printing to look just as good as those samples you've shown me.”

6. Sensitivity: “You have to understand that I don't set the deadlines, they're imposed on me by the people I work for. I understand that I cause problems for you, but you need to understand that I'm really passing along a problem that's been dropped on me. If you can help me solve my problem, I'll love you.”

7. Additional Services: “When I find someone I like doing business with, I want to do as much business with them as I can. You can't believe how excited I was when I learned that my printer could also handle the mailing for us.”

8. Desire: “You can see the difference in service when a printer really wants you as a customer. I've worked with some printers who never showed me that, and that's why I don't work with them anymore.”

9. Flexibility: “The only constant in my business is how fast things change. I need suppliers who can keep up with the change.”

10. Predictability: “I want to know what I'm getting, in terms of quality, service, everything. If I can count on that, I'm a very happy camper.”

Pain

First on the list of things that cause pain is **Complicating My Life**. “I have a million things going on on a good day,” one printing buyer told me, “and the fact of the matter is that I need help. I need suppliers who will simplify my life, not make it more complicated. I’m even willing to pay more for a helpful supplier, but I won’t keep on using one who makes things worse instead of better.”

Here’s the rest of the list:

2. Unreliable/Inconsistent Service: “I need to know that I can trust you to deliver on time, and to keep me advised about any problems so they don’t turn into bigger problems.”

3. Unreliable/Inconsistent Quality: “Nothing makes me crazier than when one job looks great and then the next one looks awful. It is really that hard to produce consistent quality?”

4. Miscommunication/Untimely Communication: “It’s hard to trust a printer who tells you one thing and then a completely different thing happens. And why do printers always wait until the very last minute to tell you about a problem?”

5. Problems With Files: “I still don’t understand why a file that looks fine to us won’t work for them. Aren’t they supposed to be the experts? If we’re doing it wrong, teach us how to do it right!”

6. Untrained Salespeople: “I think I know more about printing than my salesperson does, and I probably know more about selling too. She’s nice enough, I guess, but she’s really not good for much more than picking up orders and having someone from her office call me back to answer my questions.”

7. Additional Charges: “I award the job based on the quoted price, and then I find out that it’s a whole different price. If you want to keep my business, you’d better be able to tell me up front how much it’s going to cost, and spell out all the possibilities for additional charges so I can avoid them.”

8. Procedures Violations: “We have proscribed ways of doing things—requisitions, purchase orders, shipping standards and a requirement for a packing list with every delivery. All our printers know this, but they still mess up our procedures most of the time.”

9. Lack Of Responsiveness: “There generally are only two times when I’ll call a printer—when I have something (a job) for them or when I need something from them. Either way, I want to hear back from them quickly.”

10. Lack of Empathy: “If my printer had to walk in my shoes for a while, I think he’d understand why I’m a ‘demanding’ customer. I try to understand his problems, but he has to understand mine too.”

Two Sides Of The Coin

I think the thing that struck me most about these conversations with printing buyers is that their perceptions of value and pain reflect two sides of the same coin. In other words, if you give them what they’re looking for they look at that as value, and if you don’t give them what they’re looking for, they experience it as pain. So as Yogi Berra might have said, “All you have to do to have happy customers is to make them happy.”

It’s not that easy, though, is it—especially considering that eliminating some of their pain might cause you pain! I think the situation with digital files provides a perfect example of that. I know printers who have gone to great lengths to try to teach their customers how to design and save easily printable files, but the customers just don’t get it. What do you do then?

The short answer is that you look for better customers. Remember, you can’t sell to everyone and you don’t really want to sell to everyone. The happiest printers I know are the ones whose understanding of value and pain is the same as their customers. When there’s a good fit, there’s usually a good relationship—defined as maximum value and minimum pain on both sides.