

The Right Kind of Persistence

Persistence is generally considered to be a positive attribute for a printing salesperson. I've heard many "success stories" which reinforce that belief. Unfortunately, I have also seen lots of salespeople talk themselves out of a sale through blind persistence, which I define as ongoing contact which adds nothing to a relationship.

On the other hand, I've seen lots of salespeople succeed through creative persistence. This is an important difference! You don't want to be the "pushy" salesperson who calls and calls and e-mails and calls to the point where you get deleted the second you're identified. You do want to be the salesperson who engages through creativity and differentiation.

Selling Yourself

We all know that it's difficult to get prospects to return calls and/or emails. I think that's mostly because salespeople don't give prospects good reasons to respond. In fact, I think most salespeople focus on the wrong goal at this stage of the process. I get e-mails and messages from salespeople which focus on why I should buy from them. They'd be better off focusing on why I should respond to the e-mails or calls. Think of it this way, you have to get me to engage with you before you can expect me to buy from you. So don't put your cart before your horse!

Instead of messages about your equipment or capabilities, consider something like this: "If I were you, I'd be wondering if there's anything about this salesperson that's different from all the others who call on me. Well, I have 15 years of experience, and I think it's fair to say that I know just about everything that can go wrong with a print project. With me watching over your projects, you get to benefit from everything I've learned, and all the mistakes I made when I was a rookie. If that would be of value to you, please return my call."

This may not be *your* message, especially if you're short on experience, but part of the point I want to make is that this is a *differentiating* strategy. It's not the same "please call me, I can save you money on your printing" strategy that most salespeople seem to favor.

By the way, if you're short on experience, maybe *this* is your message: "I think you should call me back because I've been working in printing sales for 6 months. That may not sound like something to be bragging about, but here's what I think it might mean to you. At this stage of my career, I have a very keen knowledge of how hard I have to work to earn and keep someone's business. If you don't think your current print salesperson is working that hard for you, please return my call."

Creativity Persistence

Let's talk about "drip marketing." This has proven to be a very good strategy when you have a long sales cycle, which we certainly do in printing sales. The idea is to recognize that you're going to need multiple "touches" to get where you want to go.

What if you were to design a program consisting of 8 "touches" over a 12 week period? Start with the overall story you want to tell, and break it down into 8 parts. Give some thought to mixing media, too. For example, e-mail, and postal mail and telephone. I would actually start this program with a phone call, at an odd hour, which would make it likely that I'd get voice mail, so I could leave a message which described what was to come.

"My name is Dave Fellman. I'm a printing salesperson, and I'd like to be your printer. I think I probably need to tell you a few things about myself and about my company, but I don't want to try to do all that in one sitting. So please keep your eye on your inbox — both e-mail and the USPS — for a series of communications from me. Hopefully I'll convince you — a little bit at a time — that I am worth considering."

Bottom line: Persistence is important, but blind persistence will likely do you more harm than good. Creative persistence, though, is a much different story.