

IQDD—An Acronymic Approach To Successful Selling

As Bob Hall pointed out in his editorial in the May issue of *QP*, we live in a world of acronyms. Some of them are used to identify people, places or things. Others are used as mnemonics; combinations of letters strung together to help us remember important things. A good example of the latter is the “GUMP” check I perform on final approach every time I fly my airplane: **G**as (fuel valve set on the fullest tank); **U**ndercarriage (make sure the landing gear is down and locked in place); **M**ixture (set the fuel/air mixture to full rich for maximum power, which might be needed in a “go-around”); **P**rop (set to maximum RPM, again for maximum power in case I need it.)

I still remember my grizzled old flight instructor telling me that I’d have a much better chance of remembering one word than memorizing the whole approach/landing checklist. “Remember GUMP,” he said, “and at least you’ll never embarrass yourself by landing with the wheels up.” He was right. (At least he has been so far!)

So what does this have to do with selling printing? I want to suggest an acronymic approach to *prospecting*, the first stage of the selling process. The acronym is IQDD—pronounced IQ Double D—and it stands for **I**dentification, **Q**ualification, **D**iscussion & **D**ecision. These are the steps a printing salesperson should follow in determining who is worthy of a concerted selling effort.

Identification

The first challenge any salesperson faces is to identify individual companies which look like good prospects; in other words, they look like they buy the products or services you sell, and they look like they might buy enough of those products or services to make it worth a salesperson’s time and effort to go after their business.

As I’ve written before, it’s very difficult to measure those things from the outside. Many “large” companies or organizations don’t buy any of their printing locally, and many “small” companies or organizations buy a lot more printing and/or copying than you might think. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves! At the identification stage, all we care about is whether they *look like* they might buy what you have to sell, and buy it in sufficient quantities.

This is an area where I think a quick printing salesperson has a significant prospecting advantage over his/her large-format commercial printing cousins. It’s a pretty safe bet that *every* company or organization will have some need for letterhead, envelopes, business cards, simple business forms, and maybe even other examples of the typical quick printer’s “product line.” It’s not nearly as safe to assume that every company in an office building or business park will have need of the sort of long-run, high-color printing that the large-format commercial shops are equipped for.

On a scale of one to five—with one representing the most general prospecting requirement and five the most specific—a typical quick printing salesperson’s prospecting requirement would be at level one. At the other end of the scale, level five would apply to the salespeople working for a printing company operating high-color web presses. A “digital imaging” company specializing in manuals or complex documentation might also face a level four or five challenge. The bottom line is this; the more general your prospecting requirement, the more companies or organizations will look like genuine prospects at the identification stage.

Identification, Stage 2

The first step in prospecting is to identify a company which looks like it’s worth following up on. The second stage of the identification process is to identify the individual who makes the buying decisions.

There are any number of ways to approach this part of the prospecting challenge, ranging from networking to library research, but I still say that the best way to do this—especially for a quick printing salesperson—is to walk in the front door of the company and ask the “gatekeeper” to tell you who is responsible for buying the kind of printing and/or copying you’re selling. Tell the gatekeeper—usually a secretary or receptionist—who you are, what you’re doing, and what you want. *“I’m Dave Fellman from ABC Printing. I’m out prospecting today, looking for companies who have a need for what we do. I want to send some information about our company in the mail to the person who buys printing for your company. Can you tell me who that is?”*

Experience has shown that you’ll get that information most of the time, especially when you make it clear to the gatekeeper that you do not expect her/him to interrupt the decision-maker; that your intention is to send information in the mail.

Qualification

Another reason I like prospecting with cold calls is that you can identify prospect companies *and* begin the qualification process on the same visit. Experience has shown that most gatekeepers will tell you much more than

just the name of the decision-maker, especially if you prompt them with further explanation and/or intelligent questions.

If a gatekeeper looks at all confused about what I'm asking for, I usually continue and list some of the products and services I want to talk about. *"The person I'm looking for would be in charge of buying your letterhead, envelopes, business cards, and promotional printing like flyers or brochures."*

Sometimes the answer is: *"Oh, we get all of that from our home office."* That sets up an immediate qualification issue as to whether you believe that answer or not. From my perspective, there are only two possibilities. One is that the gatekeeper is telling you the truth, in which case you've probably learned enough to disqualify the prospect. The other possibility is that the gatekeeper is lying to you, and that the company does, in fact, buy your products and services locally.

If that's the case, I would still probably disqualify the prospect. Here's how I look at this situation; if you make enough of these prospecting cold calls, you'll find plenty of situations where the company will cooperate with your initial efforts at doing business. Why then would you spend any more effort on a company which doesn't seem willing to cooperate?

When I am given the name of the decision-maker, I always make it a point to ask: *"What is his/her title?"* If the name I've been given is that of an office manager or a purchasing agent, I usually continue: *"Is there a marketing department or a marketing person here? We usually find that a marketing-type is the person who ends up doing business with us."*

Please note that this question doesn't mean that you disqualify any company without a marketing person or a marketing department. It does, though, help you to rank each prospect and prioritize your follow-up activities. Isn't it true that the customers who produce the largest sales volume are usually those for whom you produce promotional printing—the kind of printing that supports a company's own sales and marketing efforts? I've also found it true that office managers and purchasing agents are most likely to make their buying decisions on the basis of price.

Discussion

You may have noticed that I don't ask gatekeepers how much printing and/or copying their company buys. There are two reasons for this, and one is that many gatekeepers come right out and tell you when they don't have a very large printing requirement. The other reason is that I have no objection to signing up small customers! From my perspective, anyone who looks like they'd spend a minimum of \$1000 a year is worth taking the next step with. And the next step takes you beyond the gatekeeper, to the actual decision-maker.

(Before I go on, I know that some of you will say that \$1000 a year is to small a customer for a salesperson to bother with. That may well be true for some established and successful salespeople, but the majority of salespeople in the quick printing industry don't fall into that category. I'd rather see most salespeople working at signing up smaller customers, instead of putting all of their eggs into "big customer" baskets—especially when their talent or experience level doesn't position them very well to compete at the highest levels.)

The objective the discussion stage is a candid conversation with the decision-maker. As a salesperson, you want to explore three issues: what kind and how much printing he/she buys; how well satisfied he/she is with current suppliers; and what you should do next in terms of establishing a relationship that would allow you to displace on or more of those current suppliers.

The real key to a successful discussion stage is to make it just that; a discussion, not a presentation. Don't do all of the talking! Ask questions! Get the prospect talking so that you can explore all three of the issues listed above!

Decision

The final stage of the prospecting process is the decision on what to do next. Based on what you've learned so far, is this decision-maker and the company he/she buys printing for really a qualified prospect? If not, the decision is pretty straightforward—take them off your hot prospect list!

Remember, there are three principle qualification issues: (1) Do they buy what you sell? (2) Do they buy enough to make them worth the time and effort it will take to get the business? (3) Do they show any real interest in buying from you?

If the answer is not "yes" to all three of those questions, you're not looking at a qualified prospect...at least, not a currently qualified prospect.

That's not to say that things won't change in the future. I'd hate to completely write off a company that spends \$20,000 or more each year on my kind of printing, but I'd also hate to see a salesperson spending a lot of time trying to change a mind that's currently pretty well made up. In a case like this, the decision might be to get back in touch in six months. With a prospect who shows a great deal of interest, the decision might be to set up another appointment for the following week!

I can't tell you what the right decision will be with each individual prospect, but I can tell you that it's usually a waste of time to apply more "contact" than is appropriate to the specific situation. One of my favorite techniques has been to simply ask each qualified prospect how I should proceed. I've asked many times: *"What's the best way for me to keep this relationship moving forward without becoming a pain in your behind?"*

As a general rule of thumb, if I'm asked to call in a week or in a month, I do just that. If I'm asked to call in 2-3 months, I'll usually follow that request to the letter. If I'm asked to call in six months, I'll usually call in five. (There is a point where a salesperson has to push the process!)

Without A Plan

I think it's a fair—and unfortunate—observation that most quick printing salespeople are working without much of a plan in mind. They make a few cold calls or phone calls. They get to talk to a few people. They turn up a few jobs, or at least a few opportunities to quote on jobs. Then they chase those jobs, calling a small list of often questionable prospects each week to ask: *"Are you ready to go yet with that job we talked about?"* That isn't a very effective selling strategy!

I'd rather see you—or your salespeople—embrace IQDD. Get out there and identify a steady flow of prospect companies and the decision-makers within them, and start the qualification process on those prospecting cold calls. Then try to set an appointment with each prospect who seems qualified after your conversation with the gatekeeper. Go out on those appointments with the objective of having a candid discussion, further qualifying the prospect, and providing the information you need to make an intelligent decision on what to do next.

Selling is a process, and if you approach it that way, you'll get better results. I hope IQ Double D will help!