

## Shuffle Up And Deal!

One of these years, I'm going to play in the World Series of Poker. Probably not the Main Event, which had 7319 entrants last year and required 12 full days of play just to get down to the Final Table. I can't imagine being able to work that into my schedule. The WSOP is made up of 57 individual events, though, and most of them only take a couple of days to play.

I've been playing poker since my college days, and I have enjoyed the "poker revolution" that's been stimulated by televised coverage of the major tournaments, and of course, by the 24/7 opportunity to play online. Some may be troubled by the gambling aspect, but I think poker is a great game, and over the last few years in particular, it's given me an outlet for my competitive nature—now that I'm too old to play competitive basketball anymore!

And, it turns out, some of the lessons and strategies of poker can be applied to the challenges of printing sales. So whether you approve of poker or gambling or not, please read on!

### Bluffing

The most obvious similarity between poker and selling is probably the element of bluffing. In poker, that means making a big bet with a small hand in order to push an opponent out of the hand. (It's been said that poker is not a game of cards, played with people, but rather a game of people, played with cards. Every time I hear that said, it reminds me that the most successful printers I know are not printers who open for business every day, but rather business people whose business happens to be printing!)

I have written before that I believe in a very *transparent* selling strategy. Does that mean that there's no place for bluffing in printing sales? Of course not! But it's important to understand when it's OK to bluff, and when it's not.

It is OK to bluff when you quote a price. In fact, the negotiation process that often follows a bid or quote is very much like the rounds of betting in a poker game. The seller starts the process by quoting a price, and the buyer has the option to accept that price (call) or simply reject it (fold). The buyer can also "raise" by voicing an objection to the price. The seller can then walk away/decline to negotiate (fold), offer a lower price (call), or "re-raise" by defending the original quote. Either the raise or the re-raise could be a bluff, and in fact, the best example of "calling the bluff" would be for the seller to push back at the buyer's objection. If it turns out that it's not a bluff, and that the buyer is committed to gaining a lower price, then the seller loses. If it was a bluff, though—or if the seller can present a compelling defense of his/her price—then the seller wins.

Here's when it's not OK to bluff: (1) when you don't know what you're talking about, and (2) when you're asked for a delivery commitment that you have little chance of meeting. Both of these have more blow-up-in-your-face potential than any rational gambler would be willing to take.

### Doubling Up

The most common variation of poker being played today is no-limit hold'em. The "no-limit" part refers to the player's ability to bet all of his/her chips at any time. In "limit" games, you can't bet more than the set limits, although you can raise any bet by that amount. If you're short on chips or money relative to the limits of the game, you might be able to get all of what you have into a pot, but that's the exception rather than the rule. In no-limit, you have a real opportunity to double up your money on any hand.

How does that apply to printing sales? I've been working with quite a few of my sales coaching clients to *double up* on their sales activities. For example, when a sales call or even a delivery takes you to ABC Company, make a prospecting call along the way. And when you're making that sales call or delivery, try to accomplish two things with ABC Company rather than just one.

That could include talking with your customer about something other than what he/she has been buying from you. It could also mean talking with your customer about the possibility of a referral, either internal or external. (An *internal* referral would be another potential customer within the same company or organization; in other words, someone else within that company or organization who might buy what you sell. An *external* referral would take you into the realm of friends, family and business contacts in other organizations.)

Please look back at the words "another potential customer within the same company or organization." I think it's important to understand that your customers are not companies or organizations, they are the *individuals* within those companies or organizations who trust you to handle some of their printing/business needs. If that company or

organization has more than one person buying what you sell, you want *all of them* as customers, and referrals—leading to introductions!—are the most effective way to accomplish that.

You also want all of them to buy as much of your product line as possible, which means talking to all of them about things other than what they have been buying from you. Those conversations generally end in one of three ways: (1) I didn't know that I could buy that from you. That's great! I buy a lot of it! (2) I don't buy any of that, but I can tell you who does, or (3) No, neither I nor anyone else here buys anything like that and we probably never will. Response #3 would probably represent a dead end, but I hope you'll agree that the other two responses would be pretty positive. Sometimes selling is no more difficult than that!

### **Closing Thoughts**

I want to end this month's column with some remarks about owners and salespeople making deliveries, and doing \$8-10 per hour work when they should be spending their time on activities with much greater value to the business. If you're one of those business people whose business just happens to be printing, I think you already know the value of your time. If you're not, well, at least I can give you an example of how to "double up" and do some good for your business while you're making those deliveries.

Having said that, there are times when an owner or salesperson should make deliveries, starting with the first order after an order that didn't go well. When you let a customer down, it's important to let them know that you regret what happened—and that you appreciate the second chance!