

Win Sales by Resolving Customer Objections



by JOE RICKARD

“If a salesperson can anticipate customer objections and provide credible answers, he or she will close more sales.”

Better-educated customers, tougher competitors and a constant array of new printing products and services have caused many printing salespeople to rethink their selling skills and strategies. One way salespersons can substantially improve their sales skills is to learn how to manage customer objections. For the next few months, I will address many typical objections customers give printing salespeople and share tips on how salespersons can handle those objections.

Successful management of customer objections improves sales

It is rare for a printing salesperson to win jobs for his or her company without resolving at least one customer objection — the existing or potential client’s disapproval or opposition to a salesperson’s “point of view.”

These objections can be raised during every stage of the sales process. If a salesperson can anticipate customer objections and provide credible answers, he or she will close more sales. Fortunately, only a small number of similar objections cause most printing salespeople to lose sales.

Types of objections

Print shop owners and managers should constantly be looking for common objections from their shops’ existing and potential customers. Using this information, owners and managers can work with salespeople to develop appropriate responses. To help owners and managers begin, I have organized customer objections into five major categories.

1. Resistance to changing print providers

Objections to changing print providers often are heard at the beginning of the sales process. Perhaps, the most common objection is: “I am happy with my current supplier.” While the salesperson would be

wise to concede that a new customer usually will be working with an existing vendor, the sales rep should explain to the prospect that this could be an opportunity to review and compare printing solutions.

A potential answer could be: “Some of our customers have felt the same way initially. For instance, we called on Acme Plumbing six months ago to better understand its business. Acme allowed us to survey its printing needs then gave us a small project. Consequently, Acme has improved its turnaround on new product marketing materials by seven days, resulting in a 20 percent increase in the initial order rate from those sales pieces.”

A salesperson should be able to quickly articulate a specific benefit to the customer’s business. He or she should communicate that benefit with details of how other companies have reduced costs or generated more revenue by using the shop’s services.

2. Skepticism about the benefits of a product or service offered

Sometimes sales reps need to help customers recognize the advantages of a print shop’s specific products or services. Some of the common objections in this category include: “We are happy with our current direct mail pieces,” “We do not see any financial benefit in changing our current method of mailing services” and “We have looked at variable printing, and we do not think it will help our business.”

A sales rep first should establish the reason for the objection. Much of the resistance to digital printing, variable printing, print on demand, Web integration and graphic services is driven by customers’ lack of knowledge, fear of change or the salespeople’s inability to establish an agreeable ROI.

If an objection is the result of the client’s

opposition to change, a sales rep could highlight the benefits of the new service or product compared to what the customer is currently using. Suppose your salesperson was having difficulty convincing a client to start printing his or her company's brochures in full instead of spot color. The customer might say, "I have always used two colors in my brochures. Why change now?" First, the sales rep would acknowledge the customer's objection. Then, using specific examples, references and third party testimonials, he or she would craft a response detailing the new service's benefits for that particular customer. Here is an example of a good reply: "Two-color brochures can be very useful, and I can understand why you feel this way. Why don't we compare the benefits of two-color vs. four-color printing? I have some numbers that compare their cost, workflow and impact."

3. Concern about a small print shop's capabilities

Small shop capabilities objections can be the most difficult to overcome. Again, it is important that salespeople specifically identify why the customer is uncomfortable. Does the customer think the shop will not be able to fulfill all of his or her company's printing needs at a competitive price? Does the customer believe the shop lacks the experienced staff, equipment and manpower? Is the client looking for a provider with a large customer base because he or she believes this will reduce printing costs? The salesperson then must determine if the customer's objection is based on a legitimate problem or based on an incorrect perception of the print shop's abilities.

A prospect who says, "We are concerned that your company is too

small to handle all of our printing needs" can become a customer if the salesperson turns the objection into a question.

A good response to this customer objection is: "Do you feel I have not given you sufficient evidence that my shop is big enough to meet your printing requirements?"

At this point, most prospects would say yes. The salesperson now can open dialogue again with a statement such as "With today's printing technology and workflow, smaller printing companies often are more effective in providing many capabilities that previously were handled by large printing companies."

Another excellent response would be, "I understand your concern, and we have partnered with a 50-year-old printing company with 200 employees. You will receive the capabilities of a large printing company along with our shop's personalized customer service." Working with partners and outside contractors often is useful in handling objections about your shop's size.

4. Disagreement about the appropriate price for products or service

A customer objection about price usually is raised at the beginning and closing of the sales cycle. To properly respond to this objection, salespeople must be completely educated on the value vs. the cost of their shops' services.

This knowledge will help the salesperson determine if the price is really the issue or if it is a "smoke screen" for something else. This type of objection could be used to disguise other concerns or to negotiate a lower price. Salespersons must avoid the temptation to make price concessions early. They also should make a concerted effort to help the customer recognize the value of the product or service.

5. Reluctance to make operational

changes

To take advantage of the latest printing products and services, customers often are faced with the challenge of re-engineering their own internal work processes. Customers might state they do not have the time or people internally to make the necessary changes.

A sales rep facing this type of objection would be wise to tailor a response that would include an offer to help the customer to make the transition. For instance, one of the print shop's employees could help organize databases so the customer can more easily transition to variable-data printing.

The salesperson also can use the many third-party industry case studies and white papers examining the benefits of changing printing processes.

Handling customer objections requires practice

Handling customer objections successfully requires constant practice and rehearsing. Salespeople should be encouraged to share any customer objections that are new or particularly difficult. Shop owners or managers then can work with sales staffs to develop good responses to the objections.

By researching the customer thoroughly and preparing for customer objections, salespeople can find and resolve more potential problems earlier in the sales cycle. And, solid preparation builds a sales rep's confidence.

Tennis great Arthur Ashe said it well, "One important key to success is self-confidence. An important key to self-confidence is preparation." ●

Joe Rickard is a sales training leader and consultant who works with printing and technology companies to improve their sales effectiveness. He is the founder of Intellectual Solutions, a provider of customized sales and sales management training material and services. Contact Rickard at 845-753-6156, jrickard@intellectives.com or visit www.Intellectives.com