

# Navigating Big Businesses' Buying Processes



by JOE RICKARD

**“Although developing business relationships with large companies requires more work, these relationships usually present multiple sales opportunities after the first deal is closed.”**

**A**s large companies become aware of new printing products and services, they open opportunities for aggressive salespersons from innovative small printing companies to develop new business relationships with them. Last month, I discussed the importance of researching, targeting and planning sales calls. This month's column will focus on how large organizations make buying decisions. This knowledge can help salespeople capitalize on the big sales potential of large accounts.

To capture new business from emerging graphic arts markets, many small print shops are developing or planning to add value-added services. These services include variable-data and digital printing as well as mailing, fulfillment, database management and Web services. In addition to these services, many small printing companies also plan to expand their graphic design capabilities. Once these print shops integrate these new services into their businesses, their biggest challenge becomes how to penetrate and develop new business relationships with large companies that need these more complex offerings. Salespeople must understand large-company buying processes to successfully develop these relationships. Knowing how to navigate through these business processes will greatly lessen the difficulties encountered by salespeople pursuing these accounts.

Take the experience of Kevin Trent from Hogue Printing. When pursuing a significant order from a large airline, he learned the decision maker actually resided outside the Purchasing department. Trent comments, “The biggest challenge for my company is raising our level of contact to the people who really make the decisions.” By calling on the human resource department directly, he was able to share the benefits of Hogue Printing's services and earn the airline's business.

## **It's a multiple-step process**

A large company's decision-making process has multiple steps while a small company's decision-making process can contain as little as one step. At each of the steps in a big-business decision-making process, there can be a decision maker and many types of influencers who need to be sold. Many small shop salespeople are accustomed to working with a single-step decision-making process with only one decision maker. To successfully sell to all the decision makers and influencers in big-business buying processes, these salespeople might have to use all the patience, knowledge and persistence they can muster. It is not uncommon for the decision makers to not only include the documents' creators but also personnel from Finance or Purchasing departments.

The big-business decision-making process is more complex, but the sales potential also tends to be larger. This often makes the additional sales calls and time required to close a deal worth it.

## **The Purchasing department's role**

When a salesperson pursues business from a large company, he or she must fully understand the company's Purchasing or Finance departments' role in the decision-making process. Purchasing departments rarely help introduce new printing ideas into organizations. Their goals are to reduce costs, commoditize products, authorize vendors and ensure quality. Sometimes, a salesperson can approach a Purchasing department for information about the organization's structure. To avoid frustration, salespeople would be wise to realize that the Purchasing department rarely is the place to introduce new printing solutions. Price, capability and delivery are cherished within Purchasing department.

If a salesperson is trying to sell commoditized printing that is faster and cheaper than the company's current supplier, then go

to the Purchasing department. If not, find “champions” within the organizations to sell.

### Identifying decision makers, influencers

A salesperson who identifies all the players who need to sign off on an order can significantly shorten the order cycle. Fortunately, in virtually all large-company decision-making processes, salespeople will find that decision makers and influencers fall into four categories: strategy owners, decision makers, recommenders and users.

#### ■ Strategy owners

Big businesses’ print projects often are tied to larger companywide business strategies. Although large companies have many employees, they usually have a single person who is responsible for the strategies’ overall success or failure. This person will welcome innovative printing ideas that can improve his or her company. Finding a strategy owner usually can be accomplished by linking the print shop’s competencies to the person in the organization who would have most to gain from a print shop’s products and services. Strategy owners usually can be found in a company’s Business divisions or Marketing departments; they often have the title of GM, v.p. or director.

Intellective Solutions has argued for years that calling on a targeted strategy owner is preferable than blindly calling an executive at the president, CEO, CFO, CIO or similar management levels. Salespeople should try to win over “strategy owners” because they can become a salesperson’s “champion” within an organization. Strategy owners have the most to gain from a print shop’s products and services. They also have the most

to lose if business objectives are not met.

#### ■ Decision makers

Decision makers usually base their choices on pre-established guidelines and budgets from strategy owners. A decision maker rarely makes choices that change a company’s work process or business policy. To successfully sell to decision makers, salespeople need a good understanding of the boundaries, budget constraints and limits that are placed on decision makers.

#### ■ Recommenders

Recommenders are responsible for analyzing print products and services based on criteria established by others. They make recommendations, but they do not make decisions. Recommenders seldom take risks. They usually can be found in Purchasing or Finance departments.

#### ■ Users

Salespeople often can consult the users of printing products and services to gain information about a large company’s printing needs. This type of influencer often is instrumental in setting a company’s buying criteria.

### There are no shortcuts

Careful research and following a logical and methodical sales process that links the selling effort to the prospect’s buying process can generate enormous results. Once a salesperson or manager has identified a potential large account, the sales rep must thoroughly research the prospect. After the research is completed, a salesperson would be wise to follow the following seven-step sales process.

1. Using his or her research about the prospect, a salesperson should thoroughly understand the

company’s requirements, needs and expectations.

2. A salesperson should identify and call on the strategy owner. This is where a salesperson gains from his or her thorough research of the company. A sales rep should be able to identify the strategy owner by matching the shop’s services with the strategy owner’s business objectives.
3. A salesperson should ensure the strategy owner’s interest. A sales rep should make sure the shop’s services truly are good solutions to the company’s business objectives. A salesperson should honestly ask him- or herself, “If I were in the prospect’s shoes, would I make this decision?”
4. A salesperson should determine if it is profitable to print the job for the price the company is willing to pay. It is important not to waste time and effort on opportunities that are not the right fit for the prospect or print shop.
5. A salesperson should present a selling proposal. A salesperson must demonstrate why the company should use the shop’s services.
6. A salesperson should negotiate the specifics and close the sale.
7. Finally, a salesperson should manage the delivery and look for additional opportunities

Rarely will new business be generated if all of these steps are not completed. There are no shortcuts.

### Significant growth ahead

Small print shops can significantly grow their businesses with just a few large-company accounts. Although developing business relationships

## SMALL SHOP SELLING

with large companies requires more work, these relationships usually present multiple sales opportunities after the first deal is closed. Often, a salesperson can use the relationship with the large company to earn additional business without ever leaving the customer's building.

In 1906, Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto observed that 20 percent of Italy's population owned 80 percent of the property. This is where we get the Pareto principle that states there often is an unequal relationship between inputs and outputs. The Pareto principal, also known as the 80/20 rule, easily can be applied to the printing industry. Many times, 20 percent of a print shop's customers generates 80 percent of the business. The lesson here is that salespeople from printing companies of all sizes, even small print shops, can earn virtually limitless revenues from the right large accounts. ●

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