

The New Rules of Attraction

New techniques are needed when selling digital printing applications



by JOE RICKARD

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Virtually every printing industry analyst agrees there are great opportunities being created by new technologies. Workflow improvements, digital devices and better software can help printing companies develop new services that create opportunities to sell.

The significant issue for many small printing companies is how to relay information about new technologies and services to customers. Specifically, the challenge is how to use new capabilities to win more business from companies your shop already serves and how to earn new customers.

I find it terrifying when print shop owners invest in new technologies without having in place the sales personnel and marketing programs that can attract customers. Successful print shop owners like Pat Vitale, owner of Jaguar Graphics and Print in Peabody, MA, make sure their shops have the marketing and sales support for their printing capabilities. Says Vitale, “During prime selling hours of the day, I am selling, not working on production issues. I schedule time before or after selling hours to work on production issues. This is not an easy task.”

His efforts have been rewarded with continued growth within Jaguar Graphics and Print’s accounts. Vitale explains, “We have not found it very difficult to gain new business.”

Become more attractive, become more successful

As with any major industry shift, successful companies frequently can be identified by their ability to attract new customers with new capabilities. Printing companies that successfully attract new business are continually seeking new applications that solve their customers’ and prospects’ problems. Regardless of their size, all companies need to be relentless in their search for new customers and new applications.

Seek out the “new”

It is essential that print shop owners and managers don’t overlook their new business development responsibilities. After all, identifying capabilities and markets that are good fits to their business models is an important and ongoing process. They need to know what new products and services can be delivered using their shops’ financial models and are within their staffs’ abilities.

Solid sales efforts should follow good business development practices. Once shop owners identify what products and services their companies should sell, they need to find the right combination of management direction and compensation to encourage salespeople to uncover new opportunities. Sales reps can have a tendency to call on the same accounts and the same contact persons within those accounts. Salespeople should look for opportunities to build new relationships.

How to become more attractive

When print shop owners and managers are attempting to attract new customers or gain new business from existing accounts, they should consider the following characteristics commonly found in successful shops.

- **Everyone in the print shop is responsible for sales.**

Gone are the days when owners, CSRs and salespeople were the only people responsible for attracting new business and ensuring customer satisfaction. All employees should have accountability for generating new customers.

- **Salespeople look beyond traditional print buyers.**

Says Intellectual Solutions Industry and Product Content Development senior manager Dick Harrell, “A common

mistake printing salespeople make is calling on the same types of executives, usually purchasing agents and office or administrative managers.” New customers looking for innovative ideas often are found in other departments.

■ **Owners hire experienced salespeople with proven abilities to generate new business.**

In the hiring process, look for a history of success. Be prepared to look outside the printing industry.

■ **Inexperienced salespeople are brought in if they have the “right stuff.”**

In a new hire, look for energy, openness to be trained and excellent interpersonal skills. Pre-employment testing is inexpensive and can identify many important traits required of salespeople.

■ **Owners and managers target prospects with needs that best fit their shops’ capabilities.**

Because customers and outstanding salespeople have a limited amount of time, shop owners carefully identify the markets, applications and products that are well within their shops’ capabilities.

■ **Management sets objectives and manages results.**

Owners and managers set specific objectives for new revenue, new profits, new customers and new applications, then evaluate the results. They aren’t afraid to adjust and make changes in direction or support.

■ **Sales reps adopt and reinforce consultative selling processes.**

A successful salesperson knows better than to waste a decision maker’s time with manipulative selling techniques or sales gimmicks. Sales reps can communi-

cate their shops’ “value propositions” quickly and succinctly.

■ **Owners and managers develop tools to support sales efforts.**

Customers frequently remember more of the visuals a salesperson uses than what he or she says. To help the selling process, successful shops create supporting sales materials, including work samples, best practices, testimonials, white papers and documents with industry data specifically tailored to their customers’ business needs. Gaining a customer’s interest with supporting ROI data will help position the sales rep to move the sale forward.

■ **Management uses incentives to encourage salespeople to focus on gaining new business.**

Compensation plans that treat all revenue streams equally will move salespeople to the easiest sale and away from a more difficult, new-business sale. Owners and managers would be wise to compensate salespeople at a greater rate for new business, especially high-margin sales.

■ **Owners and managers are prepared to get involved.**

Customers often will not do business with a small printing establishment unless the shop’s upper management is involved in the sales process. Selling high-impact applications to new accounts often requires the involvement of an owner or manager.

Common traits among great salespeople

For years, Intellective Solutions has trained salespeople on how to better their selling skills and sales processes. We have observed that only a small percentage of salespersons is adept at generating new business. The vast

majority of new business comes from a small number of exceptional sales reps.

The differentiators between a great salesperson and a marginal sales rep are strong interpersonal skills, industry knowledge and the ability to understand, identify and solve customers’ business problems.

Helping good salespeople become great

To help salespeople develop their abilities to identify printing-related solutions to customers’ problems, have them meet with print buyers with targeted job functions in fields such as marketing, sales training, IT and finance. After making two or three calls, a sales rep should be able to identify patterns that point to common problems with printing solutions. It also is a good practice to schedule meetings where salespeople share their findings and discuss potential solutions with others within the shop.

Taking advantage of new printing opportunities to gain new business requires not only strong salespeople but also committed management. Compared to the cost of retaining established clients, the cost of winning new business is higher and the order cycles are longer. But, the benefits reaped from growing repeat business and long-term relationships are well worth the effort. Remember the words of Ben Franklin: “Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement and success have no meaning.” ●

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