



Stave Off “Marketing Myopia” with Solid Prospecting

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Printing is an industry that is experiencing rapid changes in technology and capabilities. These changes have added more complexity to the sales process.

The emergence of digital and Internet business applications has elongated decision-making cycles for prospects. They are taking more time to make decisions about switching vendors or adopting new technologies.

It also is getting more difficult to capture customers’ attention. The growth of Internet, cell phone and other alternative marketing media has multiplied the amount of direct and indirect selling communications the average businessperson receives daily.

Everyone in business has more to do and less time to accomplish their jobs. It has become progressively more challenging to get face-to-face time with prospective clients.

When you add the increasingly high costs of sales efforts, declining margins on traditional printing applications and extended order cycles for new business, it comes as no surprise that salespeople need to rethink how they attract new customers.

An age-old problem

More than 40 years ago, the *Harvard Business Review* published an article by Theodore Levitt in which he describes a common problem among businesspeople who fail to “see down the

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road.” He labeled the problem “marketing myopia.” According to Levitt, many businesspeople narrow potential opportunities by putting too much of an emphasis on current circumstances.

At Intellectual Solutions, we see this

behavior exhibited by printing salespeople in two ways.

1. Sales reps often call on a small number of accounts.

Most salespeople love to contact accounts they know and sell the products with which they feel most comfortable.

2. Salespeople often call on the same contacts within an organization.

In the consulting part of our business, we often look at individual sales reps’ contact lists and call reports. Quite often, we find the sales rep consistently is calling on the same people in the same departments.

Given two options, most people take the easiest. Sales reps are no different. Remarking on this age-old problem in printing sales, Greater Valley Publications Inc. Sales v.p. Jim Mc Laurin says, “Salespeople always gravitate to the easiest sale, which generally comes from an existing customer.”

A difficult yet rewarding process

Because people typically feel most comfortable talking to people they know, it is logical that few sales reps enjoy calling on customers they do not know. Often, the root causes for this behavior are a fear of rejection, a desire for fast results or a lack of sales skills.

Although the process can be uncomfortable, it can be personally profitable. We regularly find successful printing companies reward and cherish salespeople not only for how much total business they bring in but how much of that business is from new customers.

The traditional approach to prospecting is the cold call. When salespeople cold call, they make unsolicited sales calls to potential print buyers. Historically, sales reps who make enough cold calls every week are rewarded with plenty of new business. Unfortunately, most printing salespeople yield disappointing results from this approach.

Better strategies include a combination of planning, targeting applications and markets, evaluating sales skills and defining key products and services.

Key elements of successful prospecting campaigns include:

■ **Targeting specific markets**

Before beginning to prospect, owners and salespeople should identify those markets and industries that would benefit the most from their individual print shop's capabilities. A good way to identify an appropriate market is to look at existing satisfied customers. For example, a shop with a good bit of success with hospitals could successfully build new business relationships with other hospitals. Salespeople will find that companies in the same market have similar problems. Also, they generally are organized, make decisions, raise funds and communicate to

their customers and stockholders in a similar way. There are plenty of markets for printing applications including legal, financial, nonprofit, advertising, manufacturing and education.

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■ **Identifying "hot" applications**

Within each market, find out which printing applications the market needs and compare them with the applications your shop can support. Think beyond price, quality and turnaround. Look for printing applications and communication services that solve important customer business problems. Pay special attention to applications that can differentiate your shop from others. Solutions could include inventory management, customer-friendly billing programs, Web-to-print ordering, graphic design, Web development and specialized printing applications.

■ **Tailoring products and services**

Once the markets and applications

are identified, create custom presentations for each market. Be creative with visual aids, they often leave the longest lasting impression with prospects. Potential sales material could include examples of past work, company information, white papers, customer references, customer testimonials and case studies illustrating strong customer ROI.

■ **Developing sales approaches**

Identify the appropriate contact person within every prospective account then prepare selling approaches for each person. Successful salespeople create sales approaches that draw upon their professional skills such as the ability to get an appointment, generate interest in the shop's services, ask thoughtful questions, handle objections and close the sale.

■ **Following through**

Put all your careful preparation to use by calling the prospects on your list of targeted accounts. Go out there and sell.

When thinking of prospecting for new customers, I am reminded of an old German proverb: "What's the use of running if you are not on the right road." Carefully planning, targeting and executing effective sales calls will put printing salespeople on the right road to earning new customers. ●

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