

## Beginner's Guide to Printing Sales

By Joe Rickard

Getting started as a new printing salesperson is not easy. From the top-tier printing companies to the smallest shops, owners and sales managers are often not very patient and they expect salespeople - even the new ones, to perform quickly. Though getting into any sales career is tough, printing presents its own challenges.

New salespeople must quickly comprehend the many technological advances taking place within the printing industry, while also maintaining and developing deep relationships with their customers. Though playing golf with customers is not completely dead, it is way more important to know inside and out what your customer will need to increase their business through printing applications.

In addition to becoming knowledgeable about the printing industry and their company's specific products and services, new salespeople must also quickly develop sales skills and learn the selling process to generate new customers.

Recently, I received an email from a new printing salesperson that was hired by a New Jersey printer. The new salesperson, like many other recent college graduates and those entering this field for the first time, is feeling overwhelmed.

*Dear Joe,*

*Printing sales is harder than I thought! I am committed to giving this a real effort, and know it will take more time to adjust but the pressure is intense. My company has set-up competition from within (other salespeople, eProcurement, house accounts, and brokers) and outside competition is brutal as well.*

*At the same time, I am basically trying to understand our capabilities and products. They are not all that good, pitiful in fact. My manager barely has time for me and doesn't give me much direction. I'm trying to learn as much as I can just from watching but it's a lot to digest all at once. The back office stuff is living in the dark ages, and their systems are incredibly cumbersome. The production team seems to continually make it difficult for us to do business. We just can't seem to get out of our own way.*

*One of the hardest things for me has been managing my time wisely. All of a sudden it is Thursday and I have nothing in the pipeline for calls—frustrating. I did get my first order two weeks ago with a large regional financial services company. This is good new account for me. I go into straight commission at the end of this month so now I'm really feeling the heat. Any advice you can send my way would be very helpful.*

*Best,  
Corrie*

Corrie is correct, and is experiencing the same thing as many other new printing salespeople. It is tough to start in sales. Even when you are talented and committed, those first six months can be a major transition. The key is to stay focused and disciplined. Below, I have outlined five of the key strategies for first-time printing salespeople:

- **Build your road map**

To help build confidence and overcome paralyzing rejection, from both inside the company, as well as from your customers, develop a documented printing sales marketing plan. One with specific metrics that can be met vs. vague objectives.

That plan should include specific business and compensation objectives, targeted accounts and markets, daily sales call, and marketing activity that are required to meet your objectives, regular meetings with production personnel, training, etc. This is the road map on how you will achieve success over a defined period of time. I recommend no longer than 180 days, and make sure to update it regularly so you can track your progress.

- **Know your priorities**

1. Your performance and compensation
2. Your customers
3. Your company

It is always interesting to me that many new salespeople forget why they are hired in the first place. It is about performing and getting new business. This is why salespeople get paid more than most other people. Your company will be very happy with you if you are performing above quota and taking care of your customers. A good rule of thumb in sales is if you are making money, you are doing what your company expects of you.

- **Surround yourself with winners**

This is not an easy business, and there will be times you are going to need to vent and complain. A little of this is completely normal, but keep in mind that negativity and anger will sap your energy and confidence. While you're in the office, stay away from "time wasters" and whiners who love to dwell on failings and failures. Misery loves company. You want to surround yourself with successful people who can help you, and motivate you to bring your skills to the next level.

Can you get some travel time with your company's top performers or managers? Identify mentors and winners who can help and guide you. They may not help you close business, but they will give you insights on your sales process, time management, and skills. Look for people who have been very successful and have a strong track record. The best sales training is on the job training.

- **Get in the know**

Enormous amounts of training materials are available to new printing salespeople, ranging from technical, to basic sales skills training. Check to see if your company belongs to industry associations. For instance, NAPL and PIA/GATF have tremendous training resources. Many printing equipment manufacturers also provide a large amount of sales and technical training. The printing industry has ample amounts of trade magazines, such as Printing News, that provide invaluable current knowledge building material.

Few people can actually say they have had managers that have positively helped their performance in a great way. That said, it may be up to you to be a sponge and learn as much as you can about not only printing, but selling. You should be constantly asking questions from your senior management, reading the trades, and staying up on industry.

- **Your biggest enemy is time**

If we had unlimited time, we could all make our numbers. According to LexisNexis, most business people spend more than nine hours daily working, with most the time spent in meetings, developing presentations, and looking for things.

As a professional, eliminate time wasters and stay organized. Learning to work smart and focus your energies on activities that will generate the greatest results is the trick. This will take discipline, passion, and commitment.

Creating and sustaining the sales pipeline is crucial. Knowing how much time to spend on closeable prospects vs. building prospects is an important skill to learn. Don't waste your time on weak potential customers. Spend your time proportionately with customers who have money, want to grow their business, have courage to change vendors, can make a decision, need to make a decision, and have customers who will benefit from your products and services.

If you can execute on the points listed above you will have a great chance of success. After that, you need focus and perseverance. It is perseverance that is the critical differentiator that separates the good salespeople from the best.

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