

Who To Call First When Selling Print

By Joe Rickard

Ten years ago there weren't data-driven CRM systems in place in every company. Web marketing and cross-media marketing was yet a dream, and on demand printing was black and white only. Those salespeople who were first in departments and accounts had a tremendous advantage in influencing print generators.

If the print industry remained static with no changes, knowing the person whom the salesperson calls on would be easy. You would consistently call on the same person. Now, calling on the print buyer alone is not good enough.

"When chasing new personalized offerings and/or hybrid workflows (traditional and digital), it is important to call on the players who are responsible for the business results of the print solution," said Cheryl Kahanec, vice president at Fairfield, N.J.-based Sandy Alexander. "This must be done without alienating the traditional print buyer within the organization."

There is no specific hard and fast rule on whom to call first. Ultimately the salesperson is looking for a "champion(s)" to support their proposals who has the ability to make or strongly influence both operational and financial printing decisions. While marketing and sales generate the majority of print, HR, manufacturing, IT, corporate governance, and others generate large amounts and types of printing.

Most potential contacts can be broken into three categories:

- Executives
- Mid-Level/Divisional Managers
- Implementers/Operational Workers

Executives

These senior management customer contacts will make final decisions on significant new printing initiatives, or campaigns that require large outlays of money. They are accountable for the firm's overall business performance.

A survey of 601 senior executives conducted at the end of 2007 by Accenture found that innovation is a top corporate priority. Respondents were not only concerned about their ability to generate new ideas, but also to consistently transform innovation into action. The bottom line? Executives are always looking for new ideas. At this level, you are not only competing against existing printing solutions, but other forms of communication such as the Web or TV. If a salesperson has the capability and a good understanding of their target contact within their accounts, agencies, they should be calling on these levels.

Purchasing managers can be a big help in identifying the correct contact and provide advice on potential areas of interest.

We recommend that you do not call these contacts first without a thorough understanding of the company's business and customers. Executives care most about programs and initiatives that will affect the overall company's shareholder and financial performance. What will get their attention is an idea or best practice that has been developed by competitors or other similar businesses. Do not waste their time with just discussions about printing.

Mid Level/Divisional Managers

Mid-level managers are common contacts for printing salespeople. Managers who fall into this category must compete for company investment dollars.

They must perform within the financial budgets set by senior management. Here a salesperson would find managers, divisional VPs, director of marketing or sales or manager of purchasing. Though they do not generally make final decisions for new high-impact printing initiatives, they strongly influence them.

It is at this level, salespeople find account "champions" who can guide them through the steps necessary to secure business. Building relationships with mid-level managers can lead to an introduction to the appropriate senior manager on the account.

Purchasing managers can be a big help in identifying the correct contact, and provide advice on potential areas of interest. For existing customers, it is often a wise decision to work with the purchasing department.

Implementers/Operational Workers

These are the employees of accounts that are responsible for implementing programs and campaigns. They generally do not have people working for them except the printer, and could include graphic designers, fulfillment personnel, associates, administrative assistants, and project managers. Substantial decisions about printing are seldom made

by these contacts, but they can have significant influence on decision makers. They are often excellent sources of information that can be used to prepare for presentations to a higher level of management.

Salespeople should be calling on all three levels. The key message here is that the top two levels are where decisions are made, but the bottom is where good information can be found. The sooner the printing salesperson establishes the relationship and builds their confidence, the more they can influence print buying needs and requirements.

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