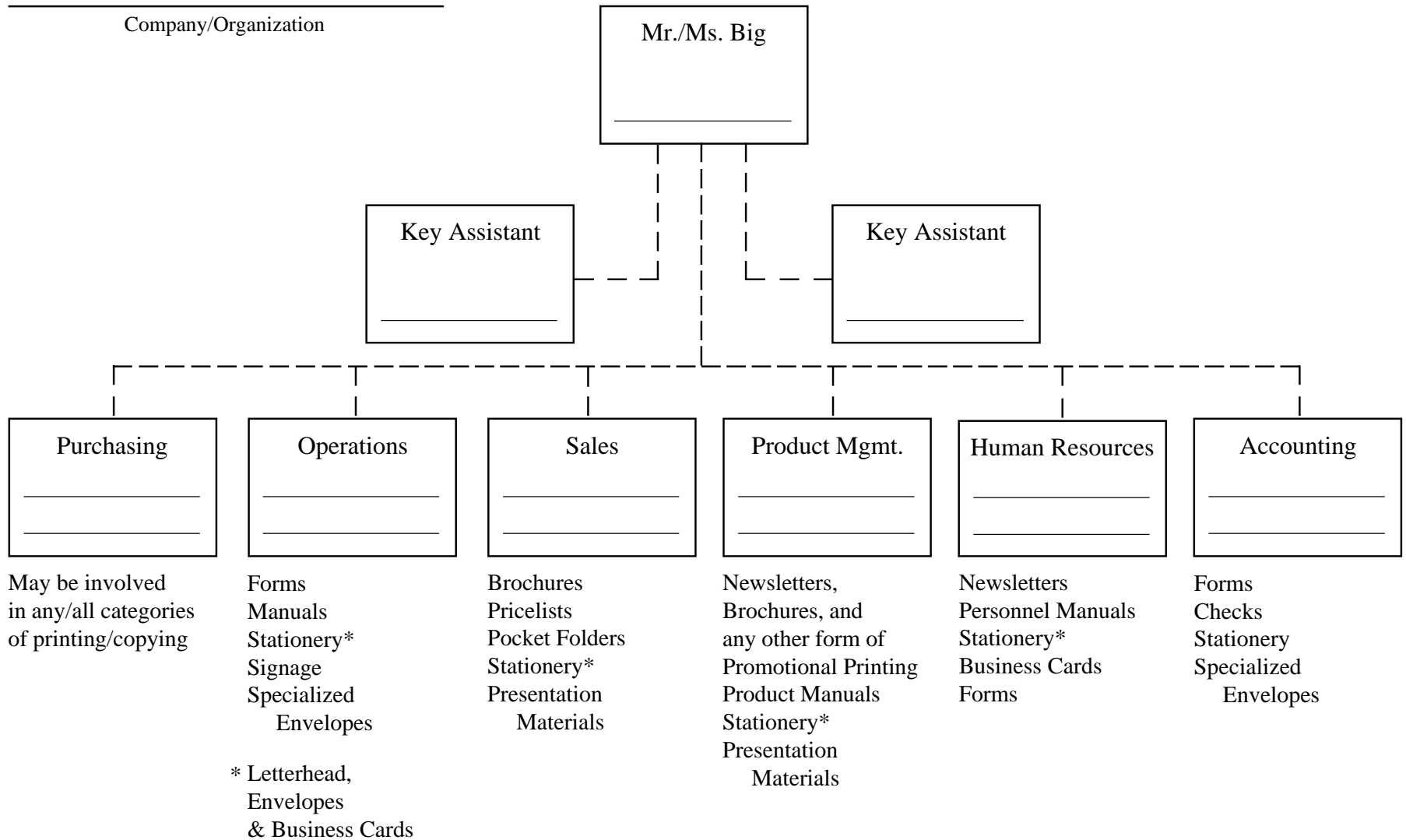


CUSTOMER/PROSPECT ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTING FORM



PRODUCT OPPORTUNITY IDENTIFICATION FORM

Customer	Product Category					
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CUSTOMER/PROSPECT ORGANIZATIONAL CHARTING FORM

There are two things to look at in maximizing the opportunity of capturing more business from your current customers...one is *people* and the other is *products*. This sales/organizational tool addresses the *people* side of the equation. The basic idea here is that more than one *person* is likely to be involved in buying printing/copying at any company or organization, because more than one *business function* has printing/copying needs.

Consider this...*every* business or organization is involved in at least three core business functions: production (creating a product or service), marketing (transferring that product or service into the hands of a user in exchange for money) and administration (keeping track of the entire process.) To these three core functions, we can add several more key “sub-functions”—for example, purchasing and operations within the production function; sales and product management within the marketing function; and human resources and accounting within the administration function. Each of these functions is likely to have some printing/copying needs, and experience has shown that in all but the smallest companies and organizations, more than one person is likely to be involved in buying this printing and/or copying.

That’s not to say that each function has it’s own printing buyer(s), there may very well be some overlap. But the challenge for a printing salesperson is to make sure that he/she knows all of the players within each customer organization. Think of it this way, if you don’t know all of the players, you’re bound to be missing out on opportunities!

The Customer/Prospect Organizational Charting Form is a tool which will help salespeople to develop a “big picture” understanding of sales opportunities relating to multiple printing/copying buyers within existing customers. (Hopefully, you will also realize that this tool has value with prospects too!)

Here’s how to use this tool. Start with your Top 10 customers, and write the name of each company or organization on its own copy of the form. Then simply “fill in the blanks”—asking your current contact(s) for assistance in identifying the key players in whatever business functions they are not responsible for. Remember, any individual may wear more than one “hat” in his/her company or organization—Mr./Ms. Big and/or one of the “key assistants” might very well also be the decision-maker in one or more business functions—but as a salesperson, you can’t afford to assume that you have all of the bases covered. Put at least one name in every box, and you’ll have gone a long way toward ensuring that you’re not missing any opportunities!

Once you’ve completed charting your Top 10 customers, start on the next ten, and then the next ten, and so on. And don’t forget that this tool has value with prospects too.

The Customer/Prospect Organizational Charting Form also features a listing of some of the most common printing/copying “products” used in each business function. This is to help you home in on specific opportunities. Don’t just ask a decision-maker if he/she has any printing or copying needs, ask direct questions about specific products or services! “*Tell me about how you communicate with your employees,*” you might ask the human resources decision-maker. “*Do you put out an employee newsletter, or an employee handbook or a manual?*” If the answer is yes, the next step is to learn more about the specifics of those projects and (hopefully) talk about how well they match your capabilities.

NOTE: The six business functions listed on the Customer/Prospect Organizational Charting Form are largely self-explanatory, with the possible exception of “product management.” It might help you to think of this as the “marketing” department, responsible for such things as advertising, public relations, the development of all sales promotional literature, etc. In large companies with sophisticated marketing functions, the people who make such decisions are often called “product managers.” In smaller companies, a single individual might be responsible for the printing needs of both the sales and product management functions, but don’t assume that! In many companies

or organizations, “sales” and “marketing” are two different animals. The most important consideration for you as a salesperson is that both of these “animals” are likely to have printing/copying needs!

Please also remember that the purchasing function may or may not be responsible for the purchase of printing and copying. The “gatekeeper” may tell you that you have to go through purchasing, but the truth may be that some other printing salesperson is getting a lot of orders directly from individuals responsible for other functions! Please also consider this...if you’re not getting anywhere with a purchasing agent, you probably have nothing to lose by approaching the people directly responsible for other business functions. And it has been proven in the marketplace that the closer you can get to the “originators” of any printing/copying, the more likely you are to succeed at building the kind of relationship that’s based on value (as opposed to price!)

PRODUCT OPPORTUNITY IDENTIFICATION FORM

As previously noted, there are two things to look at in maximizing the opportunity of capturing more business from your current customers...one is *people* and the other is *products*. This sales/organizational tool addresses the *product* side of the equation. The basic idea here is that most companies and organizations will have at least some need for each (or at least most) of the basic printed products. Therefore, if they’re not buying these products from you, they must be buying them from someone else, and if that’s happening, you are missing out on opportunity!

There is no such thing as a “standard” list of products in the printing industry. Your company’s specific “product line” is determined by equipment, capabilities and attitude. Face it, there are probably certain things that you’re good at, and certain things you’re not so good at; things you make solid profits on, and others that are marginal; orders you want and orders you just plain don’t want!

The first step in utilizing this tool is to identify your “product line” and list the key product categories at the top of each column of check boxes. Again, we can’t tell you what your “product line” looks like, but it will probably include some of the following categories:

- Stationery (letterhead, envelopes and business cards)
- Specialized Envelopes
- Forms
- PMS Promotional Printing
- 4/C Process Promotional Printing
- Newsletters
- Manuals
- Booklets
- Color Copies
- B/W Copies
- Digital B/W Applications
- Digital Color Applications
- Design
- Mailing Services

After identifying the key product categories of your “product line,” list your Top 12 customers in the spaces on the left side of the form. Then check off the boxes representing the categories that each individual customer is currently buying from you. (You may be able to do this from memory, but it may also be helpful to look through actual history...say, a year or two of invoices and/or computerized records.) Once you have completed the evaluation of your Top 12 customers, go on to the next twelve, and then the next twelve, and so on.

Remember, your opportunity here is not what they're buying from you now, it's what they might be buying from someone else. The checked boxes indicate opportunities that you're already capitalizing on; the blank boxes identify possible growth opportunities!

Now you will be positioned to ask your current customers about specific opportunities. "In looking through our history together," you might say, "I came to realize that you've bought a fair amount of letterhead, envelopes, business cards and business forms from us, but you've never bought anything in the way of promotional printing. What sort of brochures, flyers, or mailers do you use to put your products and services in front of your customers?" Here are some other product-specific questions you might consider:

Stationery: "My experience is that just about every company/organization uses letterhead, envelopes, business cards and things like that. You've never ordered any of that type of printing from us...where do you buy it? Were you aware that that's another kind of printing we specialize in? How many people are there in the company/organization who have their own business cards? How often do you order someone's card? Do you ever notice differences between the cards from order to order...in color, typestyle, or quality? When do you expect to have to order business cards again? Do you use more than one style of envelope? When do you expect to have to order letterhead or envelopes again?"

Forms: "How many different business forms do you use in the business? Are they continuous forms for computers or handwritten or typewritten forms? Do you have forms that you order in pads? Did you know that we print a lot of carbonless and single-part forms for our customers? When do you expect to have to order any of these forms again?"

Promotional Printing: "What do you have in the way of marketing materials? Are there pieces that are 8½ x 11 or 11 x 17, printed in two or three colors? (Or in full color/four color process?) Would you call these things flyers or brochures...pricelists...newsletters? What quantity of these pieces do you normally order? Were you aware that this kind of printing is right up our alley? Can I take a look at some of your marketing materials?"

Digital Applications: "Do you have any specific printing or copying needs where it would be an advantage to order smaller quantities...things that change often, for example, where you find yourself throwing away printed materials—or else using materials that are out of date—because you bought a larger quantity than you ended up needing because of the 'price breaks?' Would you be willing to pay a little more for each individual item you really needed, if that saved you from paying a lot of money for things that you were going to throw away, or that really didn't help you because they were out of date? Do you have any specific printing or copying needs where turnaround time is absolutely the most important thing, and you don't have the time it takes for a printer to go through all the production steps in traditional offset printing?"

Copying: "I'm sure you have copiers in your office(s)...would you call them convenience copiers or high production machines? Do you have a color copier? Do you ever have copying projects that your machines can't handle, either because of color or because they're just too slow? Do you ever go out to someone like Kinko's or Office Depot or Office Max to get copying done?"

Mailing: "How much of what you print ends up going into the mail? Does someone spend a lot of time stuffing envelopes and running them through the postage meter? Do you send all of your mail out first class, or are there things you do in which you take advantage of bulk mail rates? Do you find the bulk mail rules confusing? Did you know that we offer mailing services, and we know how to make sure that you always pay the least possible postage? Would you like to talk about this in more detail?"

Other: “As I look at our business, we have a few main product lines. We print a lot of stationery—like letterhead, envelopes and business cards—a lot of forms, marketing materials, we do a lot of copywork for our customers, and quite a bit of mailing for them. There are also things which don’t seem to fit perfectly into any of those categories, so I just think of them as “other.” What else do you print that might fall into that “other” category? Do you use any labels in your business/organization? Pocket folders? Specialty items of any sort?”

In the printing business—as in most businesses—you only have two ways to grow. One way is to gain new customers. The other way is to sell more to the customers you already have. Most printers would agree that of those two possibilities, it’s probably going to be easier to realize growth from current customers.

Your choice is to *hope* it happens or to *make* it happen, and the best way to *make* it happen is to be proactive. Don’t wait for them to ask you if you’re interested in/capable of handling something other than what they’re already buying from you. Go out and *ask them* about printing/copying needs that they could be/should be talking to you about. This is a big part of the difference between selling and order-taking!

[MMMMMM DD, YYYY]

[Mr. Martin Cardin]
[Bozell Incorporated]
[4554 International Way]
[Commerce, WA 90009]

Dear [Mr. Cardin]:

I'm writing to introduce myself and the printing company I work for. [Corporate Printing] is a locally-owned firm specializing in "basic" business printing and copying services. I'll explain what I mean by "basic" in just a moment.

Before doing that, I want to let you know that I'm writing to you because I've been told that you're the person most responsible for printing purchases at [Bozell Incorporated]. If that's not correct, I hope you'll at least be able to point me in the right direction.

If you are the right person, the question most on your mind right now is probably "Why should I keep reading, and agree to meet with this salesperson, like [he/she] is going to request?" I'll try to give you as concise an answer as I can.

As I said a moment ago, we specialize in "basic" business printing. If your business is at all similar to the ones we do business with now, you're sure to have many "basic" business printing needs. By our definition, the term "basic" refers to printed products ranging from stationery and business cards to business forms, manuals, flyers and brochures, and other examples of promotional and informational printing. The bottom line is this...we specialize in the kind of printing you use to communicate with your own customers and employees.

Now, the big question. Why should you buy from us, rather than any other printing company? In all honesty, I don't know...yet! I need to know more about your specific needs before I can honestly tell you that we're the best printer to meet those needs.

With that in mind, I'm going to call you within the next few days to make an appointment for us to get together. Please be expecting my call...and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

15 Pretty Good Questions

Back a few months ago, I wrote an article for *QP* called "Easy As 1-2-3." In it, I suggested that you'd get better results in your outside sales efforts if you dealt with the overall challenge of selling one step at a time. My advice in that article was to plan and prepare three individual sales calls, to be executed in sequence with each prospect you're able to get face-to-face with.

The purpose of the first call in that sequence is to learn about the prospect. The second call is for telling the prospect about yourself and your company. The third call—if the first two don't accomplish your purpose of creating a customer—is to deal with whatever objections the prospect might have.

As I wrote then, I'd be willing to invest the time to make those three calls on almost any prospect, at least on any prospect who was qualified according to some set of standards in place to determine the size and type of customer I was looking for. And even though the three calls in this series might not be enough to convince a prospect to buy from you, my feeling is that you're going to know after three conversations whether there's any reason to continue to try.

What Questions?

I've been asked by quite a few quick printers—both in letters and at seminars—exactly what kind of questions I would ask on that first call. Here's a list of 15 questions that I think are appropriate, along with some thoughts on what I would be trying to learn and/or accomplish with each of them. I've arranged them in what I see as sort of a logical progression, but you shouldn't feel bound by it, or feel in any way limited to these specific questions. In fact, I hope what you'll do is add, delete, or modify to come up with a series of questions that is comfortable for *you*, and meets your individual and specific selling needs.

So, after getting the introduction and preliminaries out of the way, I'd ask questions like these on a first face-to-face sales call:

1. Is this a company that's especially dependent on printing—or printing companies—to do its own business? I want to know early if I'm dealing with a company that recognizes the importance of printing to its own business. Remember, you're not just looking for customers, you're looking for good customers. A question like this can also establish it early in the prospect's mind that you're a thinker, not just a "give me something to quote on" printing salesperson.

2. Is your part of the business more concerned with promotional printing or operational printing? One of the principles that should always guide you in selling is that people like to talk about themselves. Get that started early, and show that you're concerned with this individual, not just the size of the company's printing budget. This question can also help you establish that there's a difference between promotional printing and a company's internal/operational printing needs.

3. What kind of products/services does (this company) sell/make/provide? You can never know too much about a prospect at this stage of the game, and I think it's been proven in the marketplace that the kind of customers you really *want* are very likely to be people who want you in turn to understand something about their businesses. They recognize that that's how you can be most valuable to them.

If you want to establish yourself as an even more competent salesperson, make it a point to have at least some idea of what a company sells before you go in on a sales appointment. That might lead you to use an alternative form of this question. You might say, "*I know that you sell/make/provide ABC and XYZ...what else should I know about your products/services?*"

4. Who are your typical customers? Again, a question intended to broaden your overall knowledge of the company, and to keep the prospect talking. But it's also a part of the process of gauging the size of a company's printing requirements. You'll get good indications of how much they spend on printing in the combination of products and customers. Lots of products and lots of customers will generally translate into lots of printing. Smaller product and/or market niches might mean a much smaller printing need.

5. How many employees in total do you have? In how many locations? How many of them are sales or marketing people? The number of employees and locations will help you to

gauge a company's internal/operational printing needs. The number of sales or marketing people is another indication of promotional printing requirements.

6. Is (this company) a market or industry leader? Where would you place yourself in terms of the other players in the markets you serve? I've often found success in giving a prospect the chance to brag on his or her company a little bit, especially the smaller businesses who aren't market leaders yet, but want to be.

7. What are your own responsibilities...to the business as a whole? As far as the printing decision-making process goes? Your ultimate purpose in asking this question is completely selfish. You want to know if you're spending your time with the real decision-maker. But in phrasing it this way, you're submerging that critical question within another opportunity for the prospect to talk about himself or herself.

8. Are there other people in the organization that I should get to know, either now or somewhere along the way? Another important question asked in a non-confrontational way. There may be others involved in the decision-making process, and/or there may be others who buy printing. You obviously want to know who all the players are. This buyer may be reluctant, though, to put you in contact with any or all of them this early on in the process. You show that you understand that with the second part of the question.

9. How many different kinds of printing companies are you dealing with now? It's not at all uncommon for a company to use different printing companies for different types of printed products...basic quick-printer type work, long run/high color, complex or overflow copy work, forms or labels. You go in knowing that the prospect is doing business with other printers, with a goal of gaining at least part of their work for yourself. By establishing that there are different kinds of printing, you set the stage for the contention that you're the best choice for some particular part of their total printing need.

10. Do you use more than one printer for any category of work? It's not very reasonable to expect that any prospect is going to throw all of their work your way immediately, especially a company that has a lot of printing to give. It may be easier to displace a secondary supplier than to displace a primary one, and I'd be happy enough with that as my initial accomplishment with any prospect.

11. Are you willing to tell me who you're buying from now? This can be interesting knowledge, but it's not critical to your success. What's critical, I think, is to ask the question in a non-confrontational way. The really important information about competitors comes out in the next two questions.

12. What do these printers do well? What are the things that you especially value in your relationship with them? I think you'll see that it's not who the other printers are that's important, it's *how well they service the prospect*. Remember this too...to a certain degree you are asking the prospect to defend his or her decision to be buying from these other printers. You should expect there to be high levels of satisfaction expressed. That doesn't mean that you don't have a chance, as you'll see in just a second.

13. Is there anything—no matter how small—about your relationship with any of these printers that you'd change if you could? This is my favorite question. In fact, since I've always known the I'm going to have to displace another printer in order to get any business from this prospect, it's fair to say that everything that has happened so far has been leading up to this question. The answer I get here tells me what—if anything—I have to work with in accomplishing that challenge.

14. Is there any one thing—or more than one thing—that I'd have to show you to get serious consideration for some of your business? This is really the "closing" question, coming as a strong follow-up to the question that identifies any weakness on the part of the other printer(s) involved. The most important thing for you to do is to listen carefully to the answer and make sure you clearly understand what you'll have to do to ultimately win this customer.

15. What's the best way for me to keep what we've started today moving forward? The last question recognizes that you're still only part way there. What you need is the chance to come back and tell this prospect exactly how and why you're a better choice than the printer(s) he or she is already doing business with. I've had a lot of success in asking my prospect to guide me as to how—and how fast—that should happen.

Reasonable Expectations

Now that you have a list of pretty good questions to ask on a first face-to-face sales call, I should give you one more piece of advice: Don't expect it to work perfectly for you every time! It's an absolute truth in the business of selling that you can't sell to everybody.

You'll run into people who won't cooperate very well, who won't answer your questions in as forthright and honest a manner as you'd like. You'll also run in to people whose answers won't give you anything to work with.

That's all right, though, because while you can't sell to everybody, you'll also never run out of people to sell to. The bottom line is this...if you ask the right questions of *enough* prospects, you'll build all of the business you want.

Knowledge Is Power

Knowledge is power.

That's as true in selling as it is in any other endeavor. But when you talk about knowledge as it applies to quick printing sales, it often seems like our appreciation of the power of knowledge is limited to product and technical information.

That's important, sure, but it only scratches the surface of what a quick printing salesperson can know and use to his or her benefit. There's a tremendous amount of power available to any printing salesperson—and any printing company—in knowing all there is to know about the customer.

The Customer As An Individual

The decision to buy from one printing company rather than another one is usually made by a single individual. And it's usually made on the basis of a single consideration. That consideration *isn't* price. It's the consideration of whether the buyer feels comfortable enough with the salesperson—and the printing company that salesperson represents—to trust them with the significant responsibility to *get the work done right*.

Every quick printing salesperson should understand that. You won't break in with a potential new customer until you get that buyer to the point where he or she trusts you. And you won't keep customers unless you're able to consistently duplicate the behavior that encouraged the buyer to buy from you in the first place. When you look at it from that perspective, you should realize that a good deal of the secret to gaining and keeping customers lies simply in understanding what they want from you, giving it to them, and continuing to give it to them.

Do quick printing salespeople operate like this? The best ones certainly do. But it's probably fair to say that the vast majority don't. It's the difference between "rifle-shot marketing" and "shotgun marketing". The top performers in this industry operate by determining exactly what a prospect wants, and using that knowledge as the focus of their selling efforts. The "average" quick printing salesperson typically gains some measure of success by throwing out a broad barrage of statements and promises, some—but not all, or probably even most—of which hit home.

Here's a key point. Understanding what a prospect or customer really wants goes well beyond simply determining what kind of printed products he or she regularly buys. That may determine whether a particular company is a good "product match" for your printing company, but it doesn't address the trust and confidence issues of getting that individual to buy from you!

Today's "average" printing salesperson has to learn to get to those root issues. The way to do that is to initiate a conversation about printing as opposed to simply talking about the printing that this individual buys. Salespeople should learn to ask questions that will identify the individual's attitudes. For example:

What are you looking for in a printing salesperson? In a printing company? Are you getting that consistently from the printer—or printers—you're buying from now? What kind of changes would you make—however small—in the way your current printer treats you? What kind of things could I do to make me a more attractive choice than the printer you're doing business with now?

With existing customers, it might be a very good idea to go back and make sure you fully understand why you're getting their work. What was it that first convinced you to give me your business? Has anything changed in your perspective about what's important in a relationship with a printer? Am I still consistently giving you what you want? Is there anything—however small—that you'd change about our relationship if you could?

The seeds of a specific strategy to convince—or continue with—a specific individual will be found in the answers to questions like these. For a salesperson, that kind of knowledge is at least as important as technical and product knowledge. In fact, it might best be stated like this: the salesperson's product and technical knowledge provide a real benefit to the customer, but it's customer knowledge that most directly benefits the salesperson.

By the way, I am willing to grant you that there are buyers out there who view the lowest price as enough of a reason to trust a printing salesperson and a printing company. But I'd suggest that you might not want those buyers as your customers in the first place! Another of the things that the top quick printing salespeople know is that you do get to choose your customers, at least to the extent of choosing which prospects you'll spend your time and energy on, trying to convince them to buy from you. Buying a lot of printing is not always enough to make an individual a good prospect. The ultimate quality of a prospect is determined by that individual's attitudes.

The Customer As A Friend

Quite a number of top salespeople will tell you that their customers often become friends as well. Not necessarily close personal friends, but something you might think of as "business friends". A simple definition of this kind of friendship is when a buyer and a salesperson come to respect and enjoy each other to the point where the buyer is genuinely happy to be able to give the salesperson business, and the salesperson is genuinely happy to provide products and service that are intended make the buyer look good.

How do you develop a business friendship? The most natural way for any friendship to start is for two individuals to learn that they have similar backgrounds, interests, or attitudes. But, the most important of those factors aren't always clearly displayed in the printing sales situation, especially in the early stages, when the salesperson hasn't yet developed the sense of trust and confidence that ultimately leads to orders.

It's one thing to pick up on surface interests, like an interest in golf or tennis, or being fans of the same local sports team. Those interests can often be determined just by keeping your eyes open in the buyer's office. It's a very rare person who doesn't have some clue to his or her interests in his or her workspace. But remember this...whatever you learn from the knickknacks and decorations in a buyer's office is just as visible to any other printing salesperson. It would be better to find something deeper. What you'd really like to find is the most eclectic or limited area of interest that you and this individual share.

The key, again, is to gain knowledge of your customer or prospect. And the wise salesperson understands that it's he or she who must take the initiative. Some of this knowledge can be gained by direct questioning. A single personal question at the end of the first face-to-face conversation might start the process. Where are you from originally? Where did you go to school? What do you enjoy doing outside of the office?

If a buyer should ask you why you want to know—and that has happened to me—tell the simple truth. I'm looking for some common ground between us.

Other personal—and business—information is available from a variety of other sources, including directories, annual reports, newspaper and magazine articles, or even networking groups. Quite a lot that can be learned through some basic detective work. For example, you can ask the buyer's secretary or assistant if he or she knows where the buyer grew up, or went to school, or what the buyer enjoys doing outside of the office. Gaining that knowledge outside of the buyer's office puts you one step closer to a business friendship once you get there.

Don't overload on the friendship side of the equation, though, especially early on. It's important for a salesperson to build professional respect—trust and confidence—first. In fact, the best strategy might be to recognize that these factors are the "customer-getters". Building a business friendship is more of a "customer-keeper".

The Customer As An Organization

An important part of building trust and confidence is to understand the buyer's business. *What do these people sell? Who do they sell it to? How do they reach the marketplace? Where do they rank in their industry? What are their goals? What are their strategies?*

Why is this sort of knowledge important to a quick printing salesperson? It's really as basic and simple as this...the more you know about what your customers and prospects are trying to do, the better equipped you'll be to show them how to do it better. This is where your product and technical knowledge really pay off for your customers and prospects.

Learning about the customer's business is the absolute essence of consultive selling, and it's no less than the difference between bidding for the lowest price and selling real value. Consultive selling is at the heart of an idea that's growing rapidly in acceptance in the 90's...that the role of a supplier is to improve the client's business, not merely to service it.

That can mean any number of things in the printing sales arena. Reducing costs will certainly improve a client's business situation. Remember that reducing costs does not have to be the same thing as lowering your prices. The consultive salesperson is looking for opportunities where a change in the specs or in the production process can take some cost out of the job without affecting the ultimate performance of the printed piece.

Another possibility is to actually improve the performance of the printed piece. Most of what the market refers to as "commercial printing" is promotional in nature, and it's ultimate purpose is to sell something. The consultive salesperson is looking for opportunities to make the printed piece sell more of what it's intended to sell.

The specifics of those opportunities to reduce cost or improve performance aren't what's important here. What's important is the understanding of the way knowledge turns into money. Especially the understanding that product and technical knowledge won't stand alone in the printing market of the 90's. Without customer knowledge to show salespeople exactly where and how to apply them, product and technical knowledge will have only a fraction of their potential value to the quick printing industry.

The Customer As An Indicator

Customer knowledge offers one more benefit to quick printing salespeople, and to quick printing firm managers and owners. The things you learn about your customers help you to define your own strengths and weaknesses, and allow you to plan for the future accordingly.

The knowledge that customers want to be able to do certain things can guide your equipment purchasing strategy, or your labor planning. The knowledge that problem-solving is of increasing importance might cause you to take another look at the capabilities and make-up of your salesforce. At the very least, it should cause you to stress the importance of asking the questions that lead to customer knowledge.

Simply recognizing any similarities among your current customer base can go a long way toward telling you what prospect companies you should target your sales resources on in the future. If most of your current customers are medium-sized manufacturing companies with small in-house marketing departments, the message from your customers is that you have a talent for convincing the individuals in that sort of company to do business with you. That kind of customer knowledge gives you an opportunity to do more of what the market is telling you you're good at, and less barking up wrong trees.

The Customer As A Critical Business Asset

Here's one final consideration. Beyond the increased sales and profit opportunities provided by better customer knowledge, there's one absolute necessity. And that necessity is that you know all of the "contact facts" relating to each and every one of your customers. What are the names, addresses and phone numbers? Who makes the actual buying decisions? Who signs the purchase orders? Who pays the bills? What have they bought from you in the past. What opportunities does that suggest for the future. And who would you, as the owner, go and talk to if something happened with the salesperson handling the account?

Every quick printing company should maintain a comprehensive data form for every customer, and be working at a complete data form for every key prospect. Any well-run business has to consider it's customer list to be among it's most critical business assets. And maintain is a key word, this information should be checked and updated regularly.

Because information is the basis of knowledge. And knowledge is power.

The 7-Hour Selling Plan

If you believe the TV commercials, you can lose weight and build muscle and look just like those ultra-buff hardbodies on the screen with only two or three 20-minute workouts each week. I'm pretty sure no one actually believes that, but I'm also pretty sure that two or three 20-minute workouts each week will put most people in better shape than they are right now.

The same holds true for selling. You probably won't generate a huge sales increase unless you're able to put forth a full-time sales effort, but you can increase sales volume fairly significantly with even a modest amount of selling time. The key, of course, is a consistent program, and that's what I have for you today. This is a proven program for the owner of a quick printing company—or an employee splitting time between outside sales and other duties—to develop new customers and generate more business from current customers while wearing the “selling hat” for only about seven hours each week.

Basic Strategy and Structure

As I've written before, the first challenge any printing salesperson faces is to identify *suspects*—in other words, companies which look like they have potential to be good customers. The only qualifying requirement for a suspect is that they look like they might buy the kind of printing the individual printing company is best equipped to sell, and they look like they might buy enough of that kind of printing to make the salesperson's pursuit of their business worthwhile. For the sake of discussion, let's set the minimum volume potential requirement for this program at \$5000 per year. You may be comfortable pursuing companies with less potential, but it's important to recognize that the less selling time you have, the more important it is to identify substantial targets.

The second challenge, once a suspect company has been identified, is to identify at least one decision-maker in that company's buying process. The third challenge is to make your first qualifying decision; in other words, after the first closer look at a suspect company, you decide whether they do, in fact, look like they're worth pursuing.

The second stage of the 7-Hour Selling Plan will be to mail six introductory letters every week. The first stage, then, is to identify six people who look to be worth writing to. That might require “looking at” 10-12 companies each week, but that can easily be done within a 2-hour block of time. Since Monday tends to be a difficult day for many quick printers, let's start the 7-Hour Selling Plan on Tuesday, and let's plan to put the “selling hat” on from 9:00 AM until 11:00 AM, giving you time to get the shop organized in the morning, and bringing you back into other management/operational activities well before the middle of the day.

What does “looking at” mean? I recommend a conversation with the “gatekeeper”—either the person who answers the phone, or the first person you meet when you visit a suspect company. With just a few questions, you can learn most of what you need to know in order to make your first qualifying decision. What is the name of the person who buys the printing for this company? What is that person's title? What can you tell me about how much and what kind of printing is used by this company? Can you tell me who (the printing buyer) buys from right now?

Remember, you're looking for companies that buy the kind of printing you're best equipped to sell, and that buy enough of it to make your pursuit worthwhile. Anyone who doesn't—“we don't buy very much printing; we get it all from our home office”—should be immediately disqualified. Your job on Tuesday morning is to find six people who really seem to be worth writing to, and if you can do that in less than two hours, you can take your “selling hat” off early and move on to other things.

Correspondence Day

Wednesday is Correspondence Day in the 7-Hour Selling Plan. Your first task on Wednesday is to generate the letters to the six “suspects” you identified the previous day. Your second task is to make your first follow-up phone calls to the people you wrote to the previous week. Your third task is the ongoing follow-up with your entire suspect/prospect list, and as you expand this list, this part of the program usually becomes the most time-consuming. For that reason, let's allocate three hours to this part of the program, and let's make it Wednesday from 9:00 AM until 12:00

Noon. Again, if you finish earlier, you can take off your “selling hat” early and move on to other things.

What should your introductory letter say? I recommend a brief description of your capabilities, followed by: “I’ll be calling you in the middle of next week to see if we can set up an appointment to discuss your printing needs.” The short-term objective of the 7-Hour Selling Plan is to set up a couple of appointments each week, and that takes us to the final two hours allocated to the plan.

Appointment Day

Friday is generally another difficult day for quick printers, so let’s make Thursday Appointment Day. Your goal will be to set up two (or more) appointments within a two hour block of time. Initially, I recommend that you try to set up one appointment within the 9:00 AM – 10:00 AM block, and another within the 10:00 AM – 11:00 AM block. Both of those blocks include travel time, so the idea is that you’ll be able to get to and from two appointments within those two hours.

In the early stages of the 7-Hour Selling Plan, it will probably be difficult to schedule two “suspect” appointments each week, but you can also use these two hours to meet with current customers. As your prospect list grows, you’ll have weeks when it’s possible to schedule three or more appointments, and one of your options at that point is to compress the scheduling blocks, perhaps from an hour to 45 minutes. Another option is to expand on the seven hours allocated to sales activity. It’s been my experience that most quick printers can make the time to go out on the appointments. It’s the time—and discipline—required to identify suspects and set up those appointments that seems so hard to find.

Discipline

That takes us to the core success factor...a consistent effort! I’ve heard all the excuses, but I remain convinced that seven hours of selling time each week is both reasonable and do-able—and that it’s enough to generate a pretty significant sales increase. I hope you’ve noted that I recommend putting on your “selling hat” in the morning. That’s not because morning is better in terms of reaching your suspects, it’s simply because you’ll still have the afternoon to catch up if something else truly requires your attention in the morning.

Don’t be quick to change your schedule, though. Ask yourself if you truly need to deal with “it” right now, or if the world won’t end if you wait 2-3 hours to get to it. One of the principles of the 7-Hour Selling Plan is that you never wear the “selling hat” for longer than three hours at a stretch, and I think it’s fair to say that most situations that arise in a printshop can wait three hours or less for resolution. They’d certainly wait that long if you took a morning off to go to a doctor’s appointment, or an afternoon off to play a round of golf!

Bottom Line

The 7-Hour Selling Plan—or any other likely-to-be-effective selling plan—requires you to put your “selling hat” on at certain times during the week, for specific amounts of time. The bottom line is that you put your “selling hat” on when you’re supposed to, and do selling work until it’s time to take the “selling hat” off. At that point, you move on to any issues that developed while you were wearing your “selling hat,” or whatever else comes next in running your business. This discipline, coupled with a solid selling strategy, can provide you with a pretty significant sales increase in a minimum amount of selling time. That sounds like a pretty good plan to me!

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Think Like A Winner!

I've come to realize over the years that one of the keys to success in printing sales is simply to think like a winner. Most printing salespeople don't, they think of themselves as "second class citizens" who have to take a subservient role to their customers and prospects. I can't tell you how many times I've heard salespeople talking about "finding an excuse to call on a customer."

Hey, you don't need an excuse. Granted, you do need a reason, but as I tell my Sales Coaching clients, "I want to sit down and talk with you" is reason enough! That's the way winning salespeople think, and experience has shown that their customers and prospects generally respond pretty well to that attitude, especially when it's coupled with the sort of knowledge and professionalism that also defines the winners in this business.

Know Your Objective

The starting point to this sort of confidence is to always know your objective—your *specific* objective. Obviously a salesperson's general objective should be to sell a lot of printing and make a lot of money, but there are specific things you need to accomplish along the way.

For example, in the early stages of prospecting, your specific objective is to find companies that seem to be worth pursuing, which means that they buy exactly the kind of printing you want to sell, and enough of it to make the pursuit worthwhile. The winner goes into this stage of the selling process thinking "OK, I'm going to evaluate 5—or 10, or 25, or 100—companies every week, and I'm going to be very happy if one out of every three or four of those companies looks like it's worth pursuing."

Winners know that not everyone is a real prospect, and they don't want to waste their time and effort on people and companies which are unlikely to provide a solid return on investment. They also know that it's important to be looking at new "suspects" every single week. Some of the real winners do that because they want to earn even more money. Others among the winners do it because they don't want to make *less* money, and they know how fragile a customer relationship can be in the modern marketplace. Winners know that it's possible to lose a customer for any number of reasons, ranging from quality or service failures to pricing situations to things that are absolutely not the fault of either the salesperson or the printing company. Winners sometimes lose the battle, but they rarely lose the war!

Middle Stage Objectives

I think most printing salespeople would agree that the most important middle-stage objective is to get that first appointment. The winners tend to approach this objective differently than the others, though. First of all, winners don't beg anyone for "just a few minutes of your very, very valuable time." Winners offer to spend some of *their* very valuable time with printing buyers!

One of my clients has become a true believer in this philosophy, and just last week he had his first opportunity to employ a response we'd prepared for the middle-stage prospect who says he or she is too busy to meet. "So am I," my client said, "I'm up to my ears in work this week, but I do have some time available next week. How does your schedule look for next Thursday morning?" There was silence on the other end of the line for just a moment, and then the prospect said "Yeah, I guess that would work."

To me, that's just another example of how confidence breeds confidence. I remember back when I was a little kid, being told that dogs can smell fear on you. Printing buyers can smell fear too, but it's a whole different situation when they sense confidence instead.

That's Why...

As I said earlier, "I want to sit down and talk with you" is reason enough to call to ask for an appointment, at least from the salesperson's perspective. From the buyer's perspective, though, there may need to be more of a reason. OK, that's why winners are always prepared to tell the buyer why he or she *needs* to agree to the meeting.

"Mr. Jones," a winner might say, "I'm offering to put all my years of experience to work for you, and I think it's pretty reasonable to predict that I'll be able to save you some combination of time, aggravation and money in dealing with your printing. I can't imagine that you really want to spend

more time or money on printing than you have to, and if you've ever faced any aggravation with this part of your job, I'm pretty sure you'd like to avoid any more in the future. I'm very confident that I can help you, and that's why I think you need to take the time to meet with me."

One caution...even spoken with confidence, a strategy like this doesn't always win the day. Just as a winner knows that not every suspect will turn into a real prospect, he/she also knows that there's no strategy in selling that works every time. If a confident strategy works one out of three or four times, though, that's significantly better than the "wishing and hoping" strategy most printing salespeople seem to embrace, which might work one out of ten times at best.

Negotiating Value

Another area in which winners operate differently is when a customer or prospect raises a price objection. As I've written (*Negotiations And Love Songs, QP*, February 2002), there are three things up for negotiation any time that happens: value, cost and price. The winners address a negotiation in exactly that order, and the first thing they do is explain—confidently!—why they're worth more money. "Sure, there are printers with lower prices," a winner might say, "but I want you to consider that price is only one component of value, and quality, service, consistency, reliability, and all the other factors that underlie exceptional performance are all part of the equation too." Then they go on to discuss specific ways in which the customer or prospect may pay more, but he or she will get more.

Now, here's the real key to making this strategy work. Another of the things that winners do is ask questions with confidence. They're not in a hurry to make a *presentation*, they're much more interested in a *conversation*—and the goal of that conversation is to learn about any aggravation the customer or prospect has encountered with printing in the past. "If you've got problems," the winner thinks, "I'll have opportunities, because I'll be able to position myself as the solution to your problems."

Working Hard And Smart

Winners are generally hard workers, and they're generally smart workers too. They're not too smart for their own good, though, which is a characteristic I see far too often in printing sales underachievers. There are salespeople who are always looking for shortcuts, and the truth of the matter is that there are very few shortcuts in selling.

The winner's attitude goes like this: "If I work smart, there are ways to accelerate the decision-making process. If I work hard, too, I'll find more opportunities to do that than my competitors will. There's a danger, though, in trying to work too smart, or not hard enough. So I won't cut any corners." Most of the winners I've met know that working hard and working smart go hand in hand. In fact, a salesperson I greatly respect once told me that "there's no way to work so smart that you don't have to work hard too—at least, not if you really want to make a lot of money!"

So, do you really want to make a lot of money? If your answer is *yes*, you can probably take a big step toward that goal by starting to think—and act!—more like a winner!

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