

Be Specific!

Last month, I wrote about GPMP (General Prospecting Marketing Plan), and I suggested that every printing salesperson should have one. Prospecting is not something that should be done occasionally and in an irregular manner. The best approach is to be systematic in both method and effort. In other words, a very specific process repeated enough times to yield the desired results.

I also wrote that the purpose of a GPMP is to generate appointments. At that point, *prospecting* ends and something else begins. The first meeting is the beginning of the *convincing stage*, but more importantly, it's the heart of the *opportunity stage*. Your best strategy is to ask questions to identify real opportunity, and once you define that opportunity, the next step is to develop an SPMP to capitalize on it.

Individual Strategy

SPMP stands for Specific Prospect Marketing Plan, and the idea here is that each individual prospect may require an individual convincing strategy. For example, a prospect who's had quality problems with his/her current printer suggests one strategy, while another who's had no serious problems but has not yet been exposed to online ordering suggests a completely different strategy. There's no cookie-cutter approach to the convincing stage, and I think most salespeople don't fail to be convincing, they fail because they don't have a specific strategy to address the real opportunity. Sure, calling month after month and quoting on job after job sometimes works—although all too frequently what really “works” is an unbalanced combination of persistence (20%) and aggressive pricing (80%). I prefer a strategy that can bring in the business without crunching your profit margins.

I'm working with one of my sales coaching clients right now on an SPMP for a prospect with significant volume potential. So far, my client has held a first meeting which indicated a generally high level of satisfaction with the current supplier. The prospect expressed mild interest in my client's variable data printing and mailing capabilities, but he's not the person who makes marketing strategy decisions. He also expressed reluctance to put my client in touch with the person who does make those decisions.

The SPMP we've developed has two principal objectives. First, we want to get this prospect to agree to another appointment in his office and then a meeting in my client's printshop. Second, we want an introduction to the person who makes the marketing strategy decisions. We've established a timeline to accomplish these goals, with the second appointment happening within the next 60 days, the shop tour happening within 30 days after that, and the introduction coming within 120 days of the start of our SPMP.

The timeline is important. We don't expect anything to happen quickly with this prospect, and he didn't seem to feel that another meeting would add anything to his interest level. Our thinking is that with more face-to-face conversation, the salesperson can explore the *status quo* in greater detail, and hopefully come up with some added-value ideas.

Add Not Subtract

The challenge she faces, of course, is to sell another meeting without crossing the line from *persistence* to *pesistence*. (OK, that's not a real word, but I think you'll get the point.) So the next step in our SPMP was to structure a series of “touches” that will add something to the relationship with each contact rather than subtracting something. We decided that every 10 days was the proper interval, so we set up 6 “to-do” activities in her ACT database, working backwards from 54 days out.

Why 54 days out? Think about it. The goal is to have a second appointment within 60 days, so the last “touch” in this sequence will be a phone call to ask for that appointment. It seems reasonable to expect that if we succeed in building interest, we'll be able to set an appointment within a week of that phone call. If we don't succeed, the timing becomes moot, and if we get the meeting but it doesn't happen quite within the 60 day timeframe, we'll still be happy enough.

With that “ask-for-the-appointment” call set for 54 days out, we started thinking about the first 5 “touches” in this sequence, scheduled for 4, 14, 24, 34 and then 44 days out. We decided that the first touch should be a thank you note that would arrive on Day 4. (It's probably worth mentioning that we started building this SPMP the day after the meeting.)

In addition to expressing her thanks for the meeting opportunity, this note also told the suspect about her ongoing plan. “I understand that you don't see any reason to make a change at this point,” she wrote, “even to the degree of meeting with me again. I still believe I can come up with a few good ‘added-value’ reasons, though, so I'm going to

try to convince you that it'll be worthwhile to meet with me a second time. I promise I'm not going to be calling you every week, but please keep your eyes on your mail and e-mail over the next couple of months."

The next "touch" will be a package of samples and testimonial letters, and the "touch" after that will be an e-mail referencing that package. "I hope you noted the names of some of the companies we do business with," she'll say. "The fact that companies like those trust us with their printing should tell you something about our dependability. I'm also attaching a description of our quality control procedures, which should tell you something about how we maintain that dependability."

The fourth "touch" will be imprinted note pads, along with a note that says "I though you might get some value from these. Please consider, though, that this is only a very small part of the value I think I can provide."

The fifth "touch" will be another e-mail, this one with the printing company's capabilities list attached. "What I hope you'll gain from looking over our capabilities list," she'll write, "is the confidence that we're well-equipped to handle your printing. I probably wasn't that far along with you when we had our first meeting, but now I'm hoping that you'll be willing to meet with me again. I'll be calling soon!"

Get The Idea?

I hope you get the idea. Every selling situation is different, and the more specifically your selling plan is tailored to the situation, the more likely it is that you'll succeed. As I've written before, patience and a plan is the key.

By the way, you may remember that the title of last month's column included three acronyms: GPMP, SPMP and SCMP. The one we haven't talked about yet stands for Specific Customer Marketing Plan, and that's the key to maximizing your sales volume with current customers. Don't just hope they'll buy more from you. Give some real thought to your opportunities with these current customers and make a plan and set a timeline to make it happen!