

Craftsmanship or Salesmanship?

Is printing a craft or a product? Throughout the history of the industry, there have been proponents of both opinions. And the debate hasn't been resolved yet, not by any stretch of the imagination. I think you'll find proponents of both opinions working side-by-side—though not necessarily with full cooperation in many printing companies of all sizes right now.

Now on one level, this could all be nothing more than an interesting philosophical debate. You could tell me that printing is a craft. I would tell you that printing is a product. We would give each other reasons, and you might ultimately ask me to agree that there are elements of both in the “real” definition of printing.

But I think there would be a problem hiding inside that apparent compromise, and the essence of the problem is this: If printing is a craft, then many printers will continue to believe that people will come to the craftsman to buy it; if it's a product, most printers will agree that it's almost certainly going to have to be sold.

Granted, not all of the craft proponents would take the attitude that far, but it has been my experience that many do. And that's an attitude that worked better in the sixties and seventies and early eighties than it has in the last ten years—and better than it will in the future. The quick printer who bets that craft and quality alone will bring customers to his or her shop is almost sure to fail.

Purpose

The real defining issue here is the purpose of the printing. People don't buy printing to admire the way it looks. They buy it for what it does! And what it does is to teach, inform, explain, convince, create interest, project an image, communicate information. That's the bottom line right there...the purpose of most printing is to communicate.

Communicate what? Is possible to narrow down our definition of the purpose of printing? I think there is. I think we can separate just about everything that goes through a typical quick printshop into just two categories: *promotional printing*—which I define as any piece of printing whose purpose is to sell something, or to support the sale of something—and *other stuff*.

What falls into the category of *other stuff*? Let's not even worry about that. Because I think if you'll take a look at every job that runs through your shop in the next week or two, you'll realize that the vast majority of what you print is promotional in nature.

Business cards, letterhead, and envelopes are all promotional. (Well, maybe not an imprinted window envelope in which a company sends out its invoices, but certainly the envelope in which the letterhead goes.) Each of these products helps to convey a company's image, and that's a promotional consideration.

Flyers, brochures, booklets and catalogs—whether they're printed or copied—are promotional printing. So are manuals, a specific product which represents a significant part of many quick printers' businesses. A lot of printers might argue that point, but by my definition, a manual supports the sale of the product or service it provides documentation and explanation for. If you buy a product and the manual or instruction sheet is difficult to understand, you'll probably think twice about buying another product from that company.

Resumes are definitely promotional printing. After all, what is a resume if not a promotional tool to sell a person into a job that he or she wants. And even dull and boring looking reports that a client needs copies of should be viewed as promotional printing. Because when we talk about selling things, don't be limited in your thinking to the sale of tangible objects. It's equally important for many of your customers to be able to sell their *ideas*!

How about business forms? That's the most common example I'm given when I ask quick printers in seminars to give me examples of *other stuff*. Maybe many forms do fall into that category, but when a customer comes to realize that using color or screens to highlight certain areas on a form can increase the likelihood that people will actually read it, understand it, and fill it out properly, or that printing their logo on their invoices or statements in their exact PMS colors can effect the image the forms convey, even business forms take on a promotional component.

Products With Purpose

Here's the point: the printing—or copying—that comes out of your shop is a product that serves a purpose for your customers. That purpose is the most important part of the equation for your customers. If the product doesn't work—if it doesn't communicate and sell as well as the customer needs it to—it's a bad product no matter how

little or how much it cost; no matter how beautiful it looks; no matter how much craftsmanship went into it's production.

Printing is a product. That means it has to be sold. And the way the best printing salespeople sell it is to help their customers get better *performance* out of their printing. You simply cannot expect that craftsmanship alone will bring people rushing to your door in the 90's. But ask yourself this...if you learned of a supplier who could definitely help you sell more printing and copying, wouldn't you go rushing to that supplier's door?

Buying Or Being Sold

I've had this subject in the front of my mind since hearing a commercial on the radio a day or so ago. It was a commercial for a local Mercedes dealer, specifically about the new Mercedes S Class sedan. The thrust of the commercial was that all of us discriminating consumers should go to this dealership and check out a Mercedes S Class to experience "the difference between craftsmanship and salesmanship; the difference between being sold a car, and buying one."

Maybe Mercedes S Class sedans can sell themselves. Or it may be that the commercial is intended to play on another emotion...the fact that most of us would rather go to the dentist than have anything to do with a car salesperson. What does a car salesperson do anyway? I think what most of us would want them to do is simply to give us honest, informative answers to our questions about the products their companies sell. What we normally get instead is a "pressure agent" who goes back and forth between the customer and the dealership's sales manager, serving mainly as a biased messenger in the process of negotiating the price. The pinnacle of achievement in the car business is "closing the sale." The most important question any car salesperson seems able to ask you is "what will it take for us to get you to buy this car today?"

Selling printing is not the same as selling cars...or is it? Maybe it is if you have the attitude that your customers already know what they want, and they're going to buy it *somewhere*. If that's the case, they'll make their buying decision on the issues of quality, service, convenience, or price.

Now ask yourself this: How many printers in your town print just as well as you do? How many printers in your town are as fast and as friendly as you are, and how many of them might actually be closer to some of the people you want as your customers? How many printers in your town sell at the same general price levels—or at lower prices than you do. If you think you're unique on the basis of quality, service, or convenience in your marketplace, you're almost certainly kidding yourself! (And if your orders come in largely because you're willing to sell at low prices, you're probably not making very much money...if you're making money at all!)

Want Or Need

Selling printing is not the same as selling cars. In my new seminar on *Building Sales Inside The Printshop*, I try to build an understanding of what selling printing really is with a couple of questions. Question #1: Is it your job to give your customers what they want, or what they need? (The answer I want—and usually get from audiences—is to give them what they need.) Question #2: Is there often a gap between what they come in thinking they want, and what they really need to accomplish the purpose behind their printing? (The answer—usually given with a fair amount of laughter—is that there very often is a *large* gap between the two factors.)

"Well then here's what I want you to understand," I say. "I think it's your *responsibility* as the kind of helpful, knowledgeable, professional printing salespeople that I want you to be, to give your customers what they really need; not just what they came in thinking that they wanted. Now here's the really good news...it's also your *opportunity* to be a better supplier of printed products for them than any competitor can be!"

I think the key point here is this: A Mercedes S Class sedan isn't going to get you to the supermarket any more effectively than a Hyundai. It may be more comfortable, and you might feel better about driving the Mercedes in terms of your ego and self-image. But in terms of fulfilling the purpose behind owning an automobile on that trip to the supermarket, there simply won't be any measurable difference.

That is not true of a piece of promotional printing. A well-designed flyer is going to sell more of what it's intended to sell than a poorly designed one. A printed piece using more color is going to sell more of what it's intended to sell than a piece using less color. For certain purposes, a printed piece that goes out in an envelope is going to sell more of what it's intended to sell than one designed as a self-mailer.

Maximum Value

The salesperson who can address these issues—and help his or her customers get better performance and better results from their printing—is a lot more valuable than a salesperson who can only take orders. That salesperson will recognize that appearance is part of performance, but that the quality and appearance of the ink or toner on the paper will only take a customer so far. The real issue is will it communicate and sell...the products, services, or ideas that the customer is trying to sell!

In the modern business environment, printing is a product and not a craft. Printing is used as a tool in business; it's not an art form to the customer. Your customers will appreciate quality printing and the craft that lies behind it, but they'll appreciate *you* a lot more if you can help them to get their printing to *sell more stuff!*

Do you need more proof of that? I tell a story in seminars about a woman I interviewed several years ago as part of the research for an article for *QP*. She was responsible for buying most of the printing for her company, and she told me that she'd been buying printing and dealing with printing salespeople for 15 years. As a result of all of that experience, she told me, she'd come to view two things as absolutes: first, there's always a lower price on any print job; and second, there's always a better way to do the job in the first place.

Her exact words on the subject of price were these: "If price is all you care about, and you don't like the prices you have, just call more printers. The chances are very good that you'll find someone who'll sell it to you for less." As for a better way to do every job, she actually listed two categories of *better*. She told me a couple of stories about times when a printing salesperson made technical suggestions that lowered her cost on the job, and she was careful to make sure I understood that she was talking about reducing cost, and not lowering price. She also told me a couple of stories about times when a printing salesperson made suggestions that helped her printing to be more effective by selling more of the products her company sells.

And then she said this—the most significant part of the story: "In the 'big picture' here at my company, if I have a choice between saving \$100 on the front-end cost of a typical print job, or having something added to that job that for some reason or another causes it to sell even two or three or four more of what we sell, we're a lot better off getting the extra sales than we would be just saving some money off the front end cost."

I'll grant you that not all of your customers would share that attitude, but please grant me this...there are plenty of people out there who need help from *someone* in getting better performance from their promotional printing tools. The printer who can provide that has an awful lot more to sell than just craft.

Closing Thoughts.

Where do learn how to provide that sort of help? That's my topic for next month. For today, I want to close with two more quotes for you to think about. The first is from a man named Harry Quadracci, the owner of a very large commercial printing company called Quad Graphics. Five or six years ago he said "We used to be an industry of craftsmen who operated printing presses. Now, we're becoming an industry of technicians who operate the computers that operate printing presses." The quick printing industry isn't quite there yet, perhaps...or is it? In the very near future we have Xeikon and Indigo and who knows what else. Right now we have the Heidelberg DI in our industry, and Docutech and Lionheart and a wide range of "smart" copiers handling a great deal of work that was once considered part of the printing craft.

The second quote is from Don Beveridge, a motivational speaker/consultant who'll be the keynote speaker at NAQP QUICK PRINT 94. Some of you will have heard him speak there by the time you read this. I heard him a couple of years ago when Sir Speedy had him—and me—as part of their Convention. He said: "Most of your customers probably look at you as someone who sells ink on paper. When you change that so they think of you as someone who sells *expertise*, then you've really got it made!"