

Effective Sales Letters Can Help You To Stand Out In The Crowd

I had an interesting conversation with a client recently. He told me that he misses “the old days”...which he defined as the days when people spoke to each other on the telephone. “It’s all faxes, and voice mail, and E-Mail now,” he said. “Nobody seems to have the time to talk on the phone anymore.”

I thought that was an interesting comment. Perhaps all the more interesting because I remember a similar conversation with my grandmother some years ago. Her lament was that nobody seemed to be willing to take the time to write letters any more. “It’s too easy to pick up the phone and dial,” she said. “We’ll all forget how to write!”

I don’t know about you, but I honestly can’t remember that last time I got a personal letter in the mail. I know it’s been a long time since I sent one! My friends and my family don’t write either, they call or send faxes or E-Mail.

So the only letters I get in the mail are business letters, and the majority of those are trying to sell me something. They are what so many people—including many quick printers, I’m sure—refer to as “junk mail.”

But you know what? Every once in a while, one of those letters starts a process—or keeps one going—that actually results in me buying something. Or to say that another way, every once in a while, this particular element in some company’s overall marketing strategy succeeds in its purpose with me.

Under-Utilized Tool

In my experience, “sales letters” are an under-utilized tool in most quick printing companies’ marketing strategy. When used properly, “sales letters” fall into the category of *direct marketing*. In fact, it’s hard to imagine anything more direct than a letter written to a busy decisionmaker, telling him—or her—why it’s worthwhile to take the next step in the buying/selling process with you and your company.

Realistic printing marketers accept the fact that it takes time to build a relationship with a buyer. First you have to get the buyer’s attention. Then you have to get the first appointment, or at least the first opportunity for high-quality, face-to-face discussion. Then you have to get the first order. And then, you have to turn a first-time buyer into a real customer. The typical printing salesperson may appreciate all of those individual challenges, but I don’t see very many who go about addressing them in any organized or structured way. And I don’t see very many printing salespeople—or printing companies—using all of the tools in their marketing toolbox to accomplish these important challenges.

Letters Can...

In a recent article in *Quick Printing*, I wrote that ad specialties could do a lot to “freshen” a printing salesperson’s approach. A letter can provide the same break from what can become an oppressive series of “Have You Got Anything For Me To Quote On Today?” phone calls. But let’s face it, a typical quick printing salesperson is not a skilled letter writer. (It’s possible that my grandmother was right. As a society, we’re forgetting how to write...not just *to do it*, but *how to do it!*)

That’s why letter writing may have to be more of a marketing function for many printing companies, meaning that one person with writing skill be given the assignment to write “standard” letters that can be used by any member of the sales staff. That person might be an employee—if you’re lucky enough to have someone with the necessary writing skills in your company—or it might have to be an outsider. But I don’t see that as being a real problem. There are plenty of “free-lance” writers around, many of whom specialize in writing sales and marketing letters.

What should a printing sales letter say? That depends on exactly which part of the selling challenge a particular salesperson—and client—are involved in. There’s a time and place for an introductory letter; a thank-you-for-seeing-me letter; a this-is-why-you-should-buy-from-us letter; a this-is-what-else-you-should-buy-from-us letter; and a thank-you-for-your-business letter...just to name a few.

Three Benefits

Those letters can accomplish three things. First, a well-thought-out and well-written letter will tell the reader exactly what you want him—or her—to know. That’s especially important for the less-experienced salesperson, who might stammer and stutter a little bit when trying to get important points across in a face-to-face situation. The second benefit is that simply working with a good letter—crafted by an experienced salesperson and/or a writing professional—will help that inexperienced salesperson to understand what to say and how to say it in face-to-face situations.

The third benefit is perhaps the most important of all. In a world where most salespeople choose the route that's easiest for them, the one who writes will stand out in the crowd among the ten or twenty who simply call on the phone.