

How To Make *Selling* And *Marketing* Work Together

Many quick printers tell me that they're talking a more aggressive approach to "selling" their products and services these days. Others are telling me that they still rely primarily on "marketing" to bring in new business. From the way these two terms are typically used in this industry, it sounds like a significant number of quick printers think that "selling" and "marketing" represent two separate approaches to doing business. I think it's important to understand that sales and marketing are not meant to be two separate activities. From my experience, you get the best results when you get your selling and marketing efforts working together.

Marketing Defined

Before we discuss some of the ways in which you do that, let's spend a moment understanding what "marketing" really means. To some quick printers—perhaps some of the less successful ones—"sales" and "marketing" are thought to be two words that mean essentially the same thing. That's not at all true. In fact, by a strict definition, "selling" is just one component of the overall business discipline called "marketing."

An older version of the Random House Dictionary defines marketing as "the total of activities by which title or possession of goods from seller to buyer is effected." A more contemporary definition might be this one: "Marketing is the broad business discipline that connects people or organizations with products or services they require or desire."

By either definition, what's important to understand is that marketing is a broad discipline, with a number of component disciplines as it's parts: including market research, product development, advertising and promotion, selling, and fulfillment and delivery. Another important understanding is that the marketing *cycle* starts with an identification of need, and only ends when that need is completely satisfied.

In Printing Terms

Let's look at that statement in printing terms: a basic need exists in the current marketplace for paper-based business communications. Quick printers satisfy a portion of that need by putting ink or toner on paper to form the words and graphic images that result in the communication of ideas. A quick printer's customers typically use the printing to sell their own products, services, or philosophies.

A progressive quick printer might initiate a market research project, with a goal of uncovering some new wrinkle on need. He or she might learn that current customers would consider it a benefit if the quick printer could also handle the mailing of materials being printed...creating more of a "single-source" situation for the customer. If the quick printer decided to try to meet that need, a number of product development activities would ensue, such as researching and buying the right equipment, determining pricing, and developing an operational plan.

As product development nears completion, it would be time to start advertising and perhaps promoting the new product. That might take the form of a brochure to describe the new service; a press release to the local newspaper and any business publications serving that printer's market; maybe even an open house to generate interest in the new capability.

In conjunction with these activities, the sales force (inside and/or outside) begins the process of direct discussion—selling—of the new "product" with customers and prospects. The salespeople feed back information on the product's reception in the marketplace, perhaps leading to some refinement of the original approach. At some point, (hopefully sooner rather than later) orders are placed, and the company must fulfill and deliver this new wrinkle on customer need.

Existing Products

The purpose of this example is to provide you with an overview, and some understanding of the marketing cycle. But it's equally important to understand that the principles and concepts of marketing aren't limited to new products and services. In fact, it's probably true that most quick printers today view the main challenge to their businesses in terms of increasing revenues and profits through the sale of more of their existing products. The three main components of that challenge are: (1) gaining new customers, (2) selling more of existing products to existing customers, and (3) selling it all at higher prices.

How do you make all of your marketing activities work together to meet those challenges? As a first step, let's separate those marketing activities into two categories: *direct selling activities* and *support/influence activities*.

Direct selling activities should be a fairly straightforward concept. What we're talking about is the printing salesperson's traditional job description: engaging in the face-to-face effort to convince customers and/or prospects

to buy. Now here's the key point of this entire article: the whole idea behind making *marketing* and *selling* work together is simply to make it easier for that salesperson to succeed!

Support And Influence

When you get down to the absolute basics, a salesperson needs two things in order to build business. He or she needs people to talk to, and something to say to them. And it's not enough in the competitive 90's to simply have a line of patter laced with printing jargon and product knowledge. The salesperson needs something important to say, and that means something that will be viewed as important by the customer or prospect.

Market research is one of the support/influence activities that can provide both leads and lead-ins for your salespeople. Market research can identify good prospects, and it can tell you what they will consider as important reasons for taking the time for some discussion about doing business with your company.

The basic tool of market research is the interview. When your goal is to interview a number of people, you might call it a survey. You can survey or interview people in person, by mail, or by fax or telephone. In fact, you can combine all three, and that might be the best approach to a typical quick printing company's sales-building challenge.

Three Lists

Start your research by creating three lists: a list of your primary customers, the ones who give you a big chunk of their business; a list of your smaller, second and third level customers; and a list of raw prospects who have never bought from you. The prospect list might be something you buy commercially, but it should be as focused as possible in terms of the right combination of business type, company size, number of employees, or whatever other qualification criteria you use to identify "good" prospects.

Go out and do the interviews with your primary customers in person. (You should always avoid treating your best and most important customers impersonally...in any way!) Structure these interviews to explore one basic question: Why do you buy from us?

With your second and third level customers, the value of your time becomes more of a factor. Do as many interviews in person as time permits, and use the telephone or fax for the rest. With this category of customer, you want to explore two questions: Why do you buy from us? And what would make you buy more from us?

To the prospect list, send a survey form through the mail. Design that form to explore these questions: What are the most important factors in your dealings and relationships with your printers? And are they giving you what you want?

Hot Buttons

The sum of this research can tell you what "hot buttons" you've pushed to get business from your current customers. It stands to reason that pushing these same buttons with raw prospects will satisfy the criteria of having something important to say...at least with some of them. The information gained from asking second and third level customers what would make them buy more from you adds to your understanding of what a broader segment of the market sees as important.

Here you have a product development decision to make. These lower level customers are telling you that they find you lacking in some way, either in terms of products or service or even company or individual attitudes. Remember, part of your overall challenge is to gain more business from existing customers. You should be able to do that by addressing the "objections" they've had to doing more business with you. And if you make whatever changes are called for, your salesforce is positioned to go back and say "you said this, so we did this. Now can we have more of your business?"

Qualified Leads

You're likely to get a wide range of response from the raw prospects surveyed by mail, not so much in terms of the number of responses coming back, but in terms of what these individuals are looking for and getting from their printers. You're likely to see everything from low prices to Rembrandt-level quality identified as the key factors in the buying decision.

What you're looking for are people whose expectations match your strengths...people who tell you that they're impressed by the same factors your current customers tell you that you are giving to them. And especially, you're looking for people in that category who also tell you that they're not being completely satisfied by their current printers.

Those people are "qualified" leads for your salesforce...people to talk to who have indicated that they'll be receptive to what your salesperson has to say. If the salesperson is capable of getting your company's message across, the chances of developing a customer are pretty good.

And by the way, if selling at higher prices is part of your overall marketing goal, please understand that you can't make that happen by marketing to people who have identified low price as one of the most important factors in their buying decision. Look for people who buy on the basis of value. They're the ones who will be willing to pay your price if you convince them that you're capable of meeting the rest of their needs.

Consistent Message

You continue to make "marketing" and "selling" work together by making your company message consistent across the board. If your customers tell you that they buy from you because you have a lot of equipment, then that's the message you *advertise* and *promote*. But if that's not what they tell you, why would you waste time, money, and perhaps other resources by producing a fancy equipment list and making that the focus of your sales presentations?

A "capabilities" brochure or presentation piece is a good idea for almost any company, but it's especially so for a quick printing company. For any printing company, that brochure is a marketing tool that communicates your company message as an example of your product.

But again, consistency! If you're predominantly a two-color printer, don't focus a brochure—or even a collection of samples—on four-color work. And if your customers tell you that they buy from you because your customer service people are the best they've ever dealt with, wouldn't it be a better idea to have those customer service people pictured on the front cover of the brochure, rather than to feature a picture of your building or one of your press operators at work?

Take your marketing message from reality—from what your customers tell you are your strengths and their needs in the marketplace—and then be consistent. Yes, you may have to build strengths to meet some of the needs of your "undersold" customers. The basic premise is still the same, though, to do more of what works!

Recognition And Reception

You may not have the resources—or the inclination—to put a research-driven process like this in place. There are still plenty of opportunities for you to benefit from getting your sales and marketing efforts functioning together. One of those is to use *advertising* to build recognition—and to begin paving the way for a cordial reception—in advance of your salespeople's efforts in the field.

Advertising can do two things for you in this regard. It can convey your company message and image, and it can encourage prospects to identify themselves to you! The important thing for you to understand is that it can't necessarily do both of these things at once.

If you have an active salesforce that is willing to beat the bushes and capable of turning up leads, image advertising might be all that you require. The biggest quick printer in an area might run ads in the business publications that say just that. The goal of this sort of advertising would be to make the quick printing company a "household name" that is immediately recognized when the salesperson calls to ask a new prospect for an appointment.

If your salesperson functions better when given leads, you'd be better off to design an ad with a lead-generating response device built in. That might be postcard to be returned, that essentially invites the prospect to say: "I'm interested enough in what I see in this advertisement (or direct mail piece) to want to talk more with you. Please call me to take the next step."

Summary

"Selling" and "marketing" are not the same thing, but you'll sell more when you get your selling and marketing efforts working together.

Think of marketing as the "front end" of the selling process. The research component of marketing can tell you a lot about what you should be selling—at least about which aspects of your overall proposition you should be focusing your selling/convincing efforts on—and it can help you identify the people who are most likely to buy from you...and most likely to be profitable customers! The advertising component of marketing can then build recognition, and even get people to invite you to take the next step in selling.

Think of marketing as the "back end" of the selling process, too. Good marketing materials can anchor a sales presentation, and support and reinforce all of the things that the salesperson will say while face-to-face with a customer or prospect.

The best idea of all might be to think of marketing as an entire collection of support/influence activities...which, when applied consistently, can make it much, much easier to sell.