

Samples That Sell

I think it's a fair statement that just about every printing salesperson on this planet uses samples as part of his or her selling efforts. I often ask the salespeople who attend my seminars what they're trying to prove with those samples. The first answer I'm usually given is "quality," which leads me to remind my audience that they *hand-pick* those samples. Once you think about that, it's not very reasonable to expect that the people viewing your samples aren't aware of it too.

As everyone with experience in printing knows, beautiful hand-picked samples provide no guarantee of a company's day-to-day quality. Not every job that comes off the presses is perfect, and some fall pretty far short. Printing buyers know that too. And with that understanding, you shouldn't wonder why the approach of tossing beautiful, hand-picked samples of your work on people's desks and telling them, "Look at our quality!" isn't really working very well in the highly competitive printing market of the 90's.

What Samples Can Do

Samples of your work can't demonstrate quality all by themselves. They can do a couple of other important things, though. As a start, they can demonstrate your capabilities—all of the various printed products you're capable of providing to each of your customers.

As the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. A sample can work that way too, in heading off the comment: "I didn't know you could do that!" When you hear those words from a customer, you are probably hearing about lost opportunities. What you're often hearing is that they'd have been giving you orders for that certain printed product if they'd known you were capable of providing it for them. If you'd made that point earlier, you'd have benefited from the business!

Samples can get your capabilities across right from the prospect stage, and continuing to show samples to your existing customers on an ongoing basis has several benefits. It will remind them of your capabilities; it will help you to demonstrate new capabilities as you grow; and it will serve the function of providing your customers with new ideas for their own possible use.

Evidence

Here's something else you may never have thought of: Every piece of paper that has ever gone through your shop is a piece of evidence that proves that a particular company trusts you with their printing. The "name-dropping" potential of your samples can be very important. Many printing companies list their important customers in some manner as part of their marketing efforts, but again, a picture is worth a thousand words. The visual proof provided by an actual sample is much more powerful than the name on a list.

The bottom line on samples as a sales and marketing tool is this: Pick out samples which demonstrate the breadth of your capabilities, and which also represent the customers you're most proud of doing business. Don't expect those samples to demonstrate quality all by themselves. The people you're trying to sell to know better than that, and you should too.

Sell Quality Control

Now, there is a way to use samples to demonstrate quality, but it requires an additional step. That step is to document your quality control procedures, and create another sales and marketing tool to go along with the samples.

What I have in mind is a simple document, perhaps a single 8½" X 11" sheet. In clear, concise language, it should list *in order* the steps you take to produce quality work. This exercise will provide you with a very powerful marketing tool.

Once this project is completed, you'll be positioned to go before prospects and say something like this: *"I know that you know that I hand-picked these samples. And I know that you know that beautiful hand-picked samples are no guarantee of the day-to-day quality of any printing company. But here's how we guarantee that every job we print for you will look every bit as good as these hand-picked samples."* With that, you place your quality control procedures document in the hands of the prospect or customer.

I think you'll agree, that will have more impact than the typical quick/digital/small commercial printer's attempt to demonstrate quality through the samples alone. And I hope you'll see the larger role that samples can play in your selling efforts.