

The Marketing Marketplace

One of my ongoing themes has been that the *purpose* of the printing is the most important consideration for many printing buyers. That's especially true when the purpose of the printing is to sell—or support the sale of—a company's own products. It's been my experience that the majority of print jobs handled by many printing companies fall into this category. In other words, much of the printing being purchased today is part of someone's marketing efforts.

Now, regardless of its purpose, much of that printing is actually purchased by purchasing agents, many of whom have very little knowledge of either printing or marketing. Their job is generally perceived as getting the best deal on the specs they've been given.

Sometimes, though, the marketing-oriented printing is actually purchased by people in the marketing departments. Most of my own success in printing sales came with organizations in which that was the case.

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I'm sure that the largest part of the reason for my success with marketing organizations was that I'm a marketing-type myself. I think it's fair to say that I speak the same language as the people I was selling to. So let me give you a couple of hints about selling into the "marketing marketplace."

First of all, marketing people tend to see themselves as part of a team. I've written a few times about the various sub-disciplines that are all part of the parent discipline called marketing: such things as product development, market research, advertising and promotion, packaging, pricing, and direct sales. The best of the marketing managers and executives I've worked with would consider themselves to be the leader of their team, but they clearly understand that there are a lot of parts to the typical marketing puzzle.

What all that means to a printer is that you should try to position yourself as part of the team. Bring your experience and willingness to work with a client to the table, not a "prima-donna-printer" attitude that says "you decide what you want, and we'll put the ink on the paper."

Low Price/Low Quality

Talking about low prices may be music to a purchasing agent's ear, but it can have exactly the opposite effect on a marketing specialist. Think about this: marketing people are concerned every day with selling their own products and services at higher prices than their competitors. A marketer of "premium" products or services is likely to view his or her "low price competitors" with scorn. They understand the value of their products, and why their products are worth more than those of their competitors. So sell them on the value of your products and services. Don't sell yourself short!

If you do have the ability to offer lower prices than your competitors—because of lower overhead or greater productivity, or whatever the reason may be—a subtle difference in the way you present that can have a dramatic effect. Instead of talking about low prices, talk about stretching the marketer's budget.

To give you an idea of how a typical marketing department works, let me tell you about my own experience as a marketing manager with Moore Business Forms a number of years ago. Toward the end of each year, I was expected to put together a comprehensive marketing plan for my areas of responsibility. I had to tell my boss what sales figures I expected; what marketing programs I was planning to do to make those sales figures happen; and how much all of that was going to cost.

My boss would then attack the bottom part of my marketing plan with his red pen, cutting back on the budget I was asking for, but not cutting back on the sales volume I was projecting. So the bottom line was that I had to produce that sales volume with less money to spend on making it happen.

If you as a printer then came to me and said, "Well, that's no problem, we have the lowest prices in town," I think I'd be more frightened than excited. Because the printing has to help me sell my products and services, and if low prices equal low quality—which is a reasonable fear, isn't it, especially considering what we've just said about marketing people and their understanding of value—your cheap printing might hinder my sales efforts, not help them. The less money a marketer has to spend on marketing programs, the more critical it is that his or her printing performs!

Lucrative Market Niche

The “marketing marketplace” can be a very lucrative market niche for a printer. I would personally rather do business with three or four value-oriented marketing departments than twenty or thirty price-oriented purchasing departments.

Your success in selling to this market niche—like my own success—is likely to have a lot to do with speaking the same language. I think you’ll find that it’s not a completely foreign language!