

We're Happy With Our Current Printer

How many times have you heard this one in your prospecting: “We’re happy with our current printer!” From what I hear, this is about the most common initial objection being faced by printing salespeople today.

So what do you do when you hear it? It seems to me that most salespeople try some variation on the theme of “Please consider me as a backup, if there’s ever anything they can’t do for you, or if they ever let you down.” Let me tell you what’s wrong with that strategy!

Bottom Rung

The first problem with the “please consider me as a backup” strategy is that many printing buyers already have a second supplier—and sometimes a third, fourth and fifth! That’s especially true of the “big fish” who buy a lot of printing. I know a printing buyer who deals regularly with three quick/small commercial printing companies and occasionally with two others. Beyond that, he told me, he has 10-12 more salespeople calling on him regularly, and he likes a couple of them well enough to want to give them a try—but there’s only so much business to go around! The next salesperson who asks him to be considered as a backup is *at best* going to take a spot on the bottom rung of a pretty tall ladder.

Now, that’s not to say that it’s not possible to move up that ladder, and to eventually join the stable of printers who are getting some business from a “big fish” like this. But I hope you’ll agree that it’s likely to be a long-term challenge. I’ve written before that there’s not a lot of “instant gratification” in printing sales—and while it’s perfectly OK for every printing salesperson to have a few of these long-term challenges on his or her prospect list, convincing them to buy from you sooner rather than later is a much more desirable outcome.

The second problem with the “please consider me as a backup” strategy is that it’s just plain wimpy, and great salespeople don’t wimp out when they’re faced with a predictable objection like this one. Even the greatest of salespeople don’t always win in a situation like this, but they always have something in mind to employ as a challenge.

Your Challenge

The word *challenge* has two parts to play in this discussion. Using it as a noun, your challenge is to convince your prospect that while he/she may have *good* with the current supplier, what you offer is *better*. Using it as a verb, you accomplish that by challenging the prospect’s statement. And the best way to make that challenge—without alienating your prospect—is to use humor to make your point.

“Who is this printer you’re so happy with?” you might ask. And when the name is provided, you might say “Oh yes, they’re very good. In fact, they’re probably the *second best* printing company in our entire area.” Nine times out of ten in my experience, the next thing you’ll hear from your prospect is a little giggle, indicating that they get the joke.

Then you go for the close! “Seriously, we both know that they’re a very good printing company, but should you ignore the possibility that my company is even better?”

Again, even the greatest of salespeople run into obstacles and objections that they can’t overcome, and I’m not suggesting that this strategy will work for you every time. I am suggesting that it gives you something to work with, though, and promising that sometimes it will take you past the initial objection into more serious discussion.

It boils down to this. If you accept the statement that they’re happy with their current printer, you might as well write off the prospect and go looking for your next new customer someplace else. If you can keep the conversation going, though, you may very well be able to convince them that you *are* better.

Better How?

The real key to making this strategy work for you is to understand that *better* only helps you if what you’re better at is important to your prospect. Remember that both quality and service are highly subjective. If they think they’re happy with the quality and service they’re getting, you might have a hard time convincing them that *better* is meaningful—especially if you want to charge them more for a higher level of quality and/or service than what they’re paying now.

Great salespeople don’t simply offer promises of *better* quality or service, they first steer the conversation toward the identification of a desire, or better still, a *need* for better quality or service. Great salespeople also know that very often the first objection voiced by a prospect is only a smokescreen, indicating that they’re not sure they want to go into their issues of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with another salesperson.

Please remember something else I've written before, that very often your real competition is not the printer they've been buying from, it's simply the *status quo*—their level of comfort with the way they've been doing things. Human nature seems to point most people into sticking with what's good rather than seeking out something better. Why? Because it's hard enough to find *good* in many cases, and it takes time and effort to find *better*! Beyond that, most people have been promised *better* before, and then disappointed. We've all heard the expression "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." *That's* often what you're competing against, and "please consider me as a backup" doesn't do much to improve your competitive position.

How Happy?

Many of my sales coaching clients have been successful in extending their conversations with "happy" prospects, simply on the strength of the challenge strategy I mentioned earlier. "If you'll indulge me for a minute," they'll say, "just how happy are you with XXX Printing's quality? On a scale of one to ten, where would you rate them?" If the answer is high—say 9 or 10—the next question is "Are they always that good? Always that consistent?" If the answer to those questions is yes, about all you can say is "well, we're that good too"—and unfortunately, that probably doesn't provide enough incentive for your prospect to make a change. If the rating is a little lower, though—say 8 or below—you're in a much better position. "An 8 out of 10 grade is good," you could then say, "but I don't think you could really call it great. If I can give you 9 or maybe even 9-point-something out of 10, wouldn't that be a better situation for you?"

The whole idea here is to shake the prospect's perception that what he/she has is as good as it gets. This strategy applies to both quality and service, and many of my sales coaching clients are even extending it into questions about the general ease-of-doing-business with the current supplier, and their ability or willingness to suggest new and/or innovative ways of doing things.

As noted, this strategy doesn't always work, but I hope you'll agree that it's worth trying, and that it's a much better—much stronger!—strategy than asking meekly to be considered as a backup.