



By Eve Asbury

Print Buyers Look for Good Reps

Ed. Note: The advertising, publishing, and printer vendor supply chain is built, sometimes tenuously, on relationships. As with most relationships, important messages are sometimes left unsaid. To get a clearer view of the relationships between graphic arts buyers and sellers—and to put those unsaid messages on the table—we've enlisted the help of veteran print production professional Eve Asbury. Each month, Eve will interview a different member of the graphic arts community, and to ensure that they give their truest views on the industry today, all of her subjects will be interviewed under conditions of anonymity. This column will appear the third week of each month.

Our first Invisible Inker is a senior advertising executive who produces a wide range of materials such as print advertising, direct mail, out of home, annual reports, and collateral. With 19 years in the business, she has a wealth of experience working with vendors and suppliers across the United States. She has a deeply ingrained work ethic, and though she is a tough negotiator, vendors want to work with her because she knows her business and makes their lives as easy as possible.

She says her biggest challenge as a purchaser is getting, "the best buy for the dollar using the best technology."

"With so much available technology," she adds, "I have to make sure I use the best vendor for the job, and that includes ensuring they have the right equipment for the job." The era of price-cutting, in some ways, makes her job more difficult, as she has to provide more justification for choosing the vendors she wants to use.

"Right now," she says, "the vendors are all trying to undercut each other, and even though one vendor is the cheapest, they might not be the best. I have to explain to my client why I don't want to go with the cheapest bid—that I don't have a history with the vendor, that we haven't been through their workflows, and that I don't know if they have the appropriate equipment redundancy."

Even when she's made sure she's picked the absolute best supplier available, she still knows something unfortunate is bound to happen. Being a good print provider is not just about great performance, it's about how to handle poor performance.

This buyer sets a firm standard for suppliers to meet when things go wrong. "If it's a client error," she says, "I ask that we fix the problem together at a reasonable cost, and ensure they not penalize the client with the schedule."

"If the vendor makes an error," she adds, "I ask that they fix the job at no extra cost and assist in making whatever compromises need to be made while minimizing the client's exposure."

Botched job or not, many buyers get their worst impression not from the ink on paper, but from their account representative. Shoddy service might just be

more damaging to the relationship than the occasional bad print job.

For this buyer in particular, the nightmare supplier experience isn't about a print job, it is about personnel.

It's when the salesperson "disappears from the account in the middle of a job," she says. "Either they have handed the account over to someone junior or they have gone on a vacation. Why didn't they tell me before I assigned them the job?"

This month's interviewee says she places work "to a large degree, based on the salesperson." Prices, she notes, are common and equipment lists are similar—so similar, in fact, that the salesperson is often the differentiator.

The good news for vendors? With a good rep, she says, pricing is negotiable. As far as getting a foot in the door, perhaps people who claim they can't get a word in with buyers are neglecting to call this particular industry veteran. She takes calls, but callers better know their stuff.

"I talk to everyone that calls me," she says, "and I welcome everyone to show me what services they have. To become our vendor they have to have an experienced salesperson. This isn't about age. It's about knowing their craft, their equipment capabilities, having a competitive price list, and being in the right location."

Showing, Not Telling

It's also about being long on knowledge and short on sales pitching. "When salespeople call on the phone they shouldn't just launch into a long-winded sales pitch—they should be respectful of the person's time," she points out. "They should call me, tell me who they are, and ask when will I have a free minute to discuss their services." Sounds simple, doesn't it? "You'd be amazed that nobody does this," she adds.

If the phone call goes well, "What I usually do is ask for samples and the

equipment list," she says. "If I find something in the package that interests me, when they call back at the appointed time, I invite them to come in. What I look for is 'new' technology, samples that are out of the norm, or just a good story to tell."

They say a picture tells a thousand words. In the case of print samples, reps should be prepared to have a few more of their own to add.

"What separates a salesperson from a good salesperson is one who can tell me information about the job: how many pieces were produced, what stock was used, what presses they were printed on, method of personalization, ballpark prices, and so on. Too often salespeople just pull samples and present to potential clients with no knowledge of what went into the project. That's a waste of my time."

Let's say the salesperson has come in, presented the samples effectively, and made a pitch without taking too much time. The salesperson leaves with something to quote. What fears are going through this buyer's mind?

First and foremost is who is going to be responsible for the work. "If they are there to sell the company's services and then hand over my account to an internal team, then I do not want to work with that company," she says. "I work with individuals, not equipment lists. I need to know that someone understands my project implicitly and is watching out for our best interests."

The Time Factor

Getting a quote back in a hurry is also in this buyer's best interests. Moreover, it can be a predictor of the printing company's ability to make deadlines.

"If I ask for a bid, I expect the bid to be back in two to three days," she says. "Too often I receive the bid five days later. This is just the bid. What happens

when I assign them work?"

Can print buyers get ridiculously low prices? Sure. But is that what they are after? Perhaps not.

Is it easy to take advantage of vendors? "Sure it is," she replies. "It's easy to beat them down on price and to take advantage of them on competitive bidding. But if you do, you'll find that your relationship will be a short-term one. I want them to be paid fairly for services rendered, as I want to build a relationship, in which case we both need to be fair."

It takes communication to build a relationship. Buyers want to know what's happening on a job. Suppliers, according to this buyer, have to be willing to call in with updates.

"On occasions when I can't get to the phone," she says, "I expect the vendor to call and let me know where we are in the production schedule on a daily basis—especially if we have slipped in the schedule."

Good suppliers are also into changing, into adding new and better technologies. Just because a printer has a technology, it isn't always useful. "Many [vendors] steer me to the technology they have in-house that best suits them, not necessarily the right technology for the job," the buyer says.

According to this buyer, if a company is buying from a restricted list of vendors they like, there's a real chance of missing the better candidates. "Most of my vendors," she notes, "are adding equipment to assist them in staying competitive. If you've closed your door to all but a few select vendors you won't see this, but if you're talking to a variety of vendors then you can see those who are working hard ensuring they're ahead of the game and advancing new technologies, thus keeping you one step ahead." PN

Eve Asbury is executive vice president and director of print and digital production for Saatchi & Saatchi in New York.

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Getting Comfortable: How To Overcome Your Call Reluctance

By Bill Gager

Would you rather walk through a raging fire than make a cold call? As a salesperson or manager, if you even hesitated with your response to that question, then you may be suffering from call reluctance. That's okay—you're not alone. In fact, nearly 90 percent of salespeople experience some level of call reluctance.

The number one reason people fail at the sales profession is that—due to call reluctance—they don't initiate enough sales to be successful. Most salespeople prefer to wait until the customer initiates a sales discussion, rather than bring the topic up on their own. This challenge exists in all fields including the printing and graphic arts industry, where even the most experienced sales professionals are relied upon to expand existing customer relationships.

A huge number of causes for call reluctance exist, but the main reason is simply discomfort. Either you feel uncomfortable with the possibility of rejection, or you don't know what to say or do to initiate the sales conversation. Regardless of the root, you can overcome your call reluctance and feel more comfortable approaching customers and prospects when you use the following six steps:

Confront Your Feelings

Recognize, acknowledge, and express your negative feelings. Many salespeople don't like making new business approaches to customers and prospects. These feelings are natural, but they don't have to hinder your success. In fact, research has shown that a salesperson's attitude toward cold calling has little effect on their prospecting effectiveness, as long as they don't let these negative feelings stop them.

Recognizing your negative feelings and expressing how you feel about making sales approaches to a friend or colleague can actually help overcome call reluctance. Simply through expressing how you feel, you can release the paralyzing energy of your negative feelings and be more comfortable initiating sales situations. So talk about your call reluctance with someone you trust, release all your negative feelings, and you'll find that this alone will make you perform much better.

How Much Is Enough?

Determine the necessary levels of contact. The next step in overcoming call reluctance requires you to look at how your discomfort affects your success. To meet the goals that you set for yourself, and the goals your company places on you in terms of new accounts and growth of existing accounts, you must figure out how many new sales you need to get. For example, to meet your goals, you may need to make 10 sales per week. Next, subtract the number of new sales that will come to you either through advertising, referrals, or existing accounts. Maybe five new sales seek you out, without any effort on your part. So 10 minus five means

you need to initiate five new sales per week to be successful.

Behave Yourself

Set goals. Now that you know how many sales you must initiate, you must set behavioral goals for yourself by looking at what you're currently doing. Do you need to initiate five sales per week to meet your goals, but currently aren't initiating any? If you decide you're going to stretch yourself for five calls in the first week, you're setting yourself up for failure, because the behavior change is too drastic. Instead, set a reasonable stretch goal. If you're initiating zero new sales now, anything greater than zero is reasonable.

Suppose you set your goal for this week at one new sales call. After you reach that goal, you can set it one higher at two. The key is to set goals you know you can make, and build your confidence until you become more comfortable.

Also, your goal must be behavior based, rather than time based. If you say you'll spend two hours prospecting this week, then you'll never do it. Human beings are extremely talented at putting off the things they don't want to do. No matter how disciplined you are, you'll never find the time for the things that you don't enjoy.

Ready, Aim, Fire

Pick targets. Once you have set your goal for contacts, you must determine who you want to target. When you're just starting to overcome your call reluctance, you must pick the low-hanging fruit—typically your current customers. With these people, you've already accomplished the hardest part of the sales process, which is to get people to buy from you the first time. Don't start looking for new customers until you've completely exhausted the new

business opportunities with the ones you already have. Plus, at this stage in overcoming call reluctance, you want to recondition yourself and build your confidence through small successes.

Blueprint for Success

Devise a plan. Part of the reason salespeople feel uncomfortable with initiating new business is that they don't know what to say or what to do to win people over. After targeting specific prospects for your sales efforts, you must plan how to approach them.

Research has shown that a salesperson's attitude toward cold calling has little effect on their prospecting effectiveness, as long as they don't let these negative feelings stop them.

Your plan must be very specific in what you will say and what you will do to win their business, and then you must practice it until it feels natural.

Your approach plan should also be easy to memorize and duplicate, so you can use it over and over again and make it your own. The more detailed

you are in your plan and the more you practice your approach, the more conversational it will be and the more comfortable you will feel delivering it.

Grab the Bull by the Horns

Overcoming your call reluctance will not be easy; it takes work and commitment to make behavioral changes. One of the greatest ways to make something you find uncomfortable feel more comfortable is to get out and do it. If you don't start making calls and initiating sales discussions, you'll never overcome your fear. You must hold yourself accountable for the goals you set.

By communicating your goals to a colleague, you can ensure greater follow-through. Make yourself accountable for results by telling someone about the behavioral goal you've set for yourself, and then plan for follow-up discussions to make sure you stay on track. Plus, by sharing your goals with someone, you take the goals out of your head and make them real.

Call reluctance is a common problem, but with commitment and practice anyone can overcome it. By recognizing your discomfort and expressing your negative thoughts, you can release your paralyzing feelings and focus on the process of improving yourself and your sales. By setting attainable goals according to the necessary level of contacts you must make to be successful, you can develop an action plan that yields positive results. By choosing easy targets at first, then planning your approach, you'll feel more comfortable with initiating sales discussions. Through implementation and practice, you'll overcome your call reluctance one successful sale at a time. **PN**

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