

The Myths, Lies and Misconceptions about Selling Print

By Joe Rickard

In the printing industry, there is a long list of perceptions about salespeople and selling. Many of these perceptions are completely false and can be characterized as myths, lies or misconceptions. At our last two industry workshops, we asked printers what are the most important factors that will determine success going forward. They responded that generating sales is their top priority. This requires having the right salespeople and the right marketing programs. To clear up some common misperceptions, here are my top 11 myths, misconceptions and lies about professional selling in the printing industry.

1. Myth: Great printing salespeople can sell anything to anyone.

This one is right up with “great salespeople are born.” The quality and skill of the salesperson is very important. But even great salespeople who have demonstrated success in the past will not sell if they do not have the right product, organization or sales strategy behind them. I have worked with too many printing companies that rely on salespeople to save the company.

2. Lie: You can sell without making cold calls.

Prospecting and generating new business is an endless series of phone calls, e-mails and knocking on virtual and real doors. It helps to shorten the sales cycle to get qualified leads and call on people who you already know, but great salespeople frequently call on people they do not already know. Having a well-articulated value proposition and personal and customer references makes cold calling more effective. If you cannot call on people you do not already know, sales is not for you.

3. Misconception: Providing quality, price and turnaround is all that is needed.

A large number of printers and their salespeople think providing high quality printing products, low prices and quick turnaround is enough to keep customers and stay in business. For most printers, customer satisfaction is a poor predictor of customer loyalty. Providing the right solutions, knowing you customers, and

responding to real or anticipated business needs is a much better predictor of customer loyalty. Great salespeople and great companies do this.

4. Misconception: There is a magic bullet or magic formula for successful selling.

There is no single sales process or program that will guarantee success. Successful selling has a lot more to do with how and why customers buy than any single sales process. Learning the consultative selling process, closing skills, probing questions or how to write a selling proposal is good, but will never guarantee success. Depending on what a printing company sells, their size, capability, type of customers and markets targeted will determine the sales process and strategy.

5. Lie: Professional selling and marketing are the same.

We believe professional salespeople are absolutely critical for printing companies that currently or intend to sell complex and high-value printing products and services. This fact does not mean that companies need not to have well thought through integrated marketing plans and programs. Direct selling is only one aspect of marketing. Pricing, lead generation, distribution and product offerings are among other critical components of a successful printing firm.

6. Myth: Anyone who has an outgoing personality can be a salesperson.

There is no single personality type that adequately can predict whether a salesperson will be successful. We have seen salespeople who are not social, not competitive, not athletic, not completely money-oriented and who do get high grades in school deliver outstanding sales results.

Through the years, we have not seen a personality test that correlates very well to sales success. The better predictors of success are whether the salesperson possesses the required sales skills and business knowledge to successfully do the job.

7. Myth: Traditional print salespeople cannot sell digital printing and services.

This is becoming less of a myth as more traditional print salespeople successfully transition to selling nontraditional and new printing products and related services. Though not all can or want to make the transition, we have seen enough evidence to be convinced that those salespeople who possess the right skills and knowledge can and do make the transition.

8. Lie: Direct selling will eventually be replaced by the Web.

Yes, much of consumer and commodity printing is and will continue to be sold over the Web through a variety of ways. Customized, tailored, integrated and relationship-driven printing solutions and services will continue to be sold by direct salespeople. The Internet and Web tools, such as video, business networks and Web conferencing, will support sales efforts. However, it will come down to the skill and capability of the salesperson and team.

9. Misconception: Selling printing is a numbers game.

This is only partially false. Sales people must be smart and work very hard. Carefully targeting the right accounts and being able to sell at multiple levels within an account is equally or just as important. As we mentioned in previous columns, maximizing qualified sales calls, presentations and proposals is much more critical than randomly making a lot of sales calls.

10. Myth: Every customer is a prospect for more printing sales.

Just like the old adage, "The customer is always right," not every customer is a prospect for more printing sales. This often separates the great from the good. Knowing and targeting the right accounts to invest time and energy is a big part of modern day selling.

11. Myth: Great salespeople do not make great sales managers

This is a commonly held belief. Not all great salespeople make great sales managers, but many successful sales managers were and are great salespeople. Many of the competencies and skills required to be a great sales manager including communication, confidence and developing sales strategies are also important to the success of salespeople.

To be successful in sales, individuals need to possess the correct personal traits of confidence, creativity, work ethic, communication skills and persistence. After that, they need a deep and current knowledge of their products and services, the graphic communications industry, technology and the sales and buying process as well general sales skills.

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