

You can TEXT and TWITTER and PING and POKE. You can LINK IN, DIGG, post to walls, start a thread. Use iPhones and iTouches to get your i-apps. Blackberries make Crackberries. Sure it's a new 24-7, plugged-in, digital age out there. And for sure it's gotta change the selling game, right?

**NO**, says Dave Fellman. By all means make friends on Facebook, and connect on LinkedIn, but if you want to win at sales, the words you have to know are PROSPECT and FOLLOW-UP

# The smart SALES GUIDE

The ABCs of selling for the modern marketplace still focus on fundamentals more than flash

by DAVID M. FELLMAN

**THE GUYS I** play basketball with call me “Old School.” I think that has more to do with my age than my playing style, but I consider it a compliment nonetheless. And the fact of the matter is that my game is a lot more fundamentals than flash.

An attendee at a recent seminar called me a dinosaur. “I came here looking to find some new ideas,” he said. “You didn’t teach me anything about selling comprehensive printing solutions at the C-Level in the digital arena, just the same old ‘prospect-and-follow-up-and-ask-good-questions’ crap I’ve been hearing from my boss. Dinosaurs are extinct, man, and you’re not helping me any by telling me to sell like one.”

In case you’re interested, this guy was sent to my seminar because he’s averaging about \$5,000 per month after a year and a half on the job. Personally, I think he’s a whole lot closer to being extinct than I am.



**\* I don't care how much flash you put in your presentation. It'll be worthless if they don't actually buy the kind of printing you sell**

#### PROSPECT AND FOLLOW UP

There's nothing more fundamental than prospecting and follow-up, but we don't see enough of it from quick/digital/small commercial printing sales reps. Beyond that, most of the prospecting and follow-up we see is not being done very well. Another attendee at the same seminar told me that she's waiting until the first of the year when the new Chamber of Commerce Directory comes out to begin a new round of prospecting efforts. "I don't know where else to look for prospects," she said. "How about up and down the streets of your city and the surrounding towns?" I asked.

At the end of the first day of the seminar, after hearing me describe a process by which she could walk into buildings and speak with gatekeepers and walk out with the name of a decision-maker and a decision on whether a company was worth pursuing—and a follow-up plan for the "keepers"—she said: "That makes so much sense! Now I don't have to make cold calls to the same list everyone else is probably calling. I get a name, I send my introductory letter, then I call to follow up

on the letter and ask for an appointment. If I walk into even 20 places each week and decide that 10 of them are worth following up on, and I get one or two of those to agree to meet with me, I'm going to have a real prospect pipeline and I'm going to get some business out of it!" I couldn't have said it better myself.

#### ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

I went out on a first appointment sales call with a young sales rep last week, and he made his standard presentation—his "spiel" as he referred to it—and then we pretty much left. "How did I do?" he asked me as we walked out of the building.

"Well, that depends on what you were trying to accomplish," I told him. "Were you hoping to educate your prospect or trying to educate yourself?"

"Why would I need to educate myself?" he asked. "I know what we do."

"Sure," I said. "But do you know what he needs? Or more importantly, what he wants from a printing company and might not be getting from the printer he's buying from now?"

I'm a very strong believer in a three-part definition of a "fully qualified" prospect. The first part is that they buy exactly the kind of printing you're best equipped to sell. The second part is that they buy enough of it to make them worth pursuing. The third part—and ultimately the most important part—is that they have some interest in buying from you. Don't ever forget that every significant prospect is someone else's customer right now. With very few exceptions, every business or organization has purchased printing before, and even if it's a new business or organization, the people who work in it have probably had dealings with other printing sales reps and printing companies.

If all you're doing is making a spiel, you're talking but not qualifying. And I don't care how much flash you put in your presentation, it'll be worthless if they don't actually buy the kind of printing you sell, and even more worthless if you can't give them a good reason to stop buying from the other guys and start buying from you. "We do digital printing" is not a good reason to change printers. "Thanks for answering my questions and telling me about those problems you've been having and giving me the opportunity to tell you about a possible solution" is a much better strategy.

And while I'm on the subject of making a spiel, I always want to smack any sales rep who uses that word. It's a derogatory term for what should be a highly professional endeavor. It's bad enough that the most of the general public holds the sales profession in such low regard. I hate it when sales reps perpetuate the stereotype with words or actions or attitudes.

#### NO JARGONAUTS NEED APPLY

Another fundamentals vs. flash issue is salespeople who speak fluent jargon, or who seek to impress potential clients with big words—often misused—when smaller words would make for more effective communication. Last month I made four sales calls with a sales rep who used the word "facilitate" so many times during the first call that I consciously counted the number of times he used it on the next three—16 times! At one point, he said: "I want to facilitate a dynamic process of making it productive for you to order all of your image-dependent printing from me."

Here's what I think he meant: "I think I can make your life a little easier—at least the part where you're involved with printing and printers—and I hope that will earn

## COVERFEATURE

me a large share of your business...especially the jobs that have to be done right the first time!"

Which one of those statements makes the most sense—or has the most appeal—to you? Do you sometimes wonder what the sales reps who call on you are actually trying to say? How many times in the last six months have you heard some variation of: "Our (digital workflow/document handling/paper ordering/production tracking/employee benefits) solution will foster an improved business model and enable greater profitability." Does that make you want to buy it, or call for help?

### SOCIAL MEDIA

Another printing sales rep e-mailed me recently with a question: "What do you think about Facebook and LinkedIn and Twitter?" Here's my answer: "I think they're a great way to waste a lot of time." Don't get me wrong, I think some social media—Facebook and LinkedIn in particular—have a great deal of potential as sell-

ing tools. I worry, though, that most sales reps will spend 20 minutes socializing for every minute they spend selling in their attempt to use these tools, and that's only OK if it's all being done after hours.

You can do three proactive things with Facebook and/or LinkedIn. First, you can look up people you've already identified and targeted as prospects, to see if you have any friends or connections who might be able to help you to get to whatever the next step in that particular relationship might be. Second, using LinkedIn, you can search for companies or organizations that you're interested in, then search on people who work for those companies or organizations, and then look to see if you have any connections to any of them. Third, using either Facebook or LinkedIn, you can just follow the pathways from person to person to see what looks interesting—and I hope you see the potential for lost/wasted time in that sort of "prospecting!"

You can also do one reactive thing with Facebook and LinkedIn, setting up and maintaining your own page or profile so

friends on Facebook. All them asked me to join their networks (as have hundreds of other people, some of whom I don't know at all). Perhaps 10 of those people could get me to call you. Social media networking is a tool, not a golden pill.

### THE NEW GENERATION

Having said all of that, is it possible that the new generation of printing buyers and printing sellers will get more value from social networking than I see right now? Yes, it's possible and probably even likely. If you're an "old school" seller, though—or a new generation seller dealing with "old school" buyers—you still need a strategy that will work for you today. I think that means integrating the new into the old, but not abandoning the old.

One of the most common complaints I hear from "old school" sales reps is that email has changed the selling dynamic, eliminating a lot of the opportunity for face-to-face communication. That's probably true, but if you go back far enough, the telephone did exactly the same thing all the way back in the 19th Century. And interestingly, at the same time I hear sales reps complaining about this, they're out trying to sell online ordering capabilities which will make the buying process even more impersonal.

The solution to this problem has two parts. First, stop thinking in terms of a physical meeting to discuss every order. Instead, think in terms of meeting at regular intervals to satisfy your desire for face-to-face interaction. That could mean getting together every month or perhaps every quarter, with an agenda that covers the past (satisfaction issues) and the future (potential growth issues) rather than just the present. Second, work at improving your e-mail communication skills. That might mean typing skills, or grammar skills, or both, but all of that stuff is learnable. In fact, most community colleges offer classes on business writing skills. And if you're too lazy to learn what we used to call touch typing, you can buy voice recognition software that will turn your spoken words into text.

### THE NEW ECONOMY

Here's another common complaint. People aren't spending money on printing like they used to. That's true, and they probably never will again. This is an issue that goes beyond the recession we've been in, and it represents a fundamental shift in the way we communicate. The internet provides both sellers and buyers

✳ I think some social media have a great deal of potential as selling tools. I worry, though, that most sales reps will spend 20 minutes socializing for every minute they spend selling



that people can find their way to you and learn about you. That could certainly result in some inquiries, but remember that we have a name for 95% of all printing sales reps who count on inquiries for all of their new business. We call them underachievers. (If you're one of the 5% who is already selling at high volume and your established network provides you with an adequate flow of inquiries, please understand that I'm not talking about you. If you're one of the 95% who should be doing a lot more prospecting, please don't spend the majority of your social media time on your own page or profile!)

Two final thoughts on social media networking; First of all, as with all networking, the most important part is the working part. Proactive will almost certainly make you more money than reactive. Second, don't be surprised to find out that many of the connections you'll find are either insignificant or out of date. I have 27 connections on LinkedIn and 22

with a much more direct and cost-efficient connection. It doesn't reach everyone yet—and there's still a significant “old-school” preference for printed matter—but the trend will continue toward less print and more internet.

How do you deal with that? In the short term, you do it by prospecting more aggressively to make sure you get a maximum share of a shrinking market. In the longer term, you position yourself to be more of a marketing resource than a printing resource. Traditional marketers have always had the challenge of drawing customers into their stores, and print has always played a large part in that. Internet marketers have the challenge of drawing buyers to their websites, and printers can still play an important role in meeting both of those challenges. It won't necessarily be print though, but rather the kind of ancillary marketing services that most progressive printers are now trying to get into.

**\* If I were you, I'd be focused right now on learning everything I could about databases and demographics**

The real opportunity lies in the fact that most marketers aren't very good marketers—certainly not at the small business level where most quick/digital/small commercial printers operate. Think of it this way. Printing has always been one of the marketing services. The future for printers is to expand into additional services, like design (and not just graphic design, but real marketing program design), mailing and fulfillment, and database development and management. The last of those might be the real key to the future. The printing industry has very powerful personalization capabilities right now, but they're highly database-dependent in terms of maximizing that power. If I were you. I'd be focused right now on learning everything I could about databases and demographics.

#### BOTTOM LINE

The printing industry has changed pretty dramatically in recent years. Some of that is the result of new printing technology, and some of it because the demands of the marketplace have changed. Through all of it, though, the

fundamentals of selling have not changed. Yes, you have new tools and some new selling challenges, but it's still about prospecting and follow-up and needs analysis and suggesting and providing an improvement on the buyer's status quo. The salesperson who asks the best questions is most likely to find real opportunity, and in turn most likely to present the best solutions to whatever problems his/her prospects may be having, now and in the future.

So I vote for more “old school” and less jargon and more prospecting and better

questions and more professionalism and less emphasis on finding new sales paradigms and other non-existent shortcuts. And less excuses, while we're at it, but that's a topic for another day. **S**

*Dave Fellman is the president of David Fellman & Associates, Cary, NC, a sales and marketing consulting firm serving numerous segments of the graphic arts industry. Contact Dave by phone at 919-363-4068; or by e-mail at [dmf@davefellman.com](mailto:dmf@davefellman.com). Visit his website at [www.davefellman.com](http://www.davefellman.com).*

