



FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DESK

A Print Buyer
Perspective on
Typical Sales Calls

GIMBEL &
ASSOCIATES

Introduction

As we work with salespeople and executives at printing companies worldwide we've discovered many of them are unprepared for the customer interactions necessary to sell their services today. Most times, those services are more complex and comprehensive than in the past. Successfully communicating the benefits of your services requires a new approach.

Salespeople who fail to transition from commodity selling to consultatively presenting solutions almost always experience a string of disappointing customer encounters and lost opportunities. Often, salespeople don't know why customers stop responding to follow-up calls. Why they failed to get the business is a mystery.

The best way to find out what makes print sales calls successful is talking to the people making the purchase decisions. We wanted to find out how buyers reacted to the print salespeople visiting their offices. What were the printing companies doing right? Where could they improve? How would the buyers change the interaction if they could?

To prepare for writing this eBook, we talked to print buyers and executives on the other side of the desk - the individuals print salespeople are likely to face when they finally secure an appointment to talk about their services. The feedback we got was revealing.

Buyers told us print salespeople visiting their offices were doing it all wrong. Conversations were unfocused (or focused on the wrong topics). The buyers had a hard time understanding exactly why they should consider doing business with the printing companies that came courting.

That's a shame. It can take weeks or months to get prospective customers to agree to an appointment. After all that work to get into the room, you don't want to blow your chances with ineffective presentations!

We created this book to give print salespeople insight into the minds of the people they need to impress to sell their products and services. With this insider knowledge about print buyers, some training, discipline, and practice we are confident print salespeople can forge new relationships and sign more business.

We have divided this book into three sections: preparation, presentation, and follow-up. In each section you'll read about actual experiences print buyers had with prospective printing company partners. Hearing this from the people on the other side of the conversation is a rare and valuable opportunity. We hope you'll find the information transformative.



Preparation

THE PRINT BUYERS SAID SALESPEOPLE WERE NOT PREPARED

“None of the companies we met with seemed ready to tell us how they could help our organization achieve our business goals.”

Before showing up at a prospective customer’s office, print salespeople must have a good idea about the customer’s likely objectives and challenges. Just as important is clarity about the value their printing company provides.

We recommend salespeople ask themselves the following questions about their own companies:

Why do customers buy from our organization?

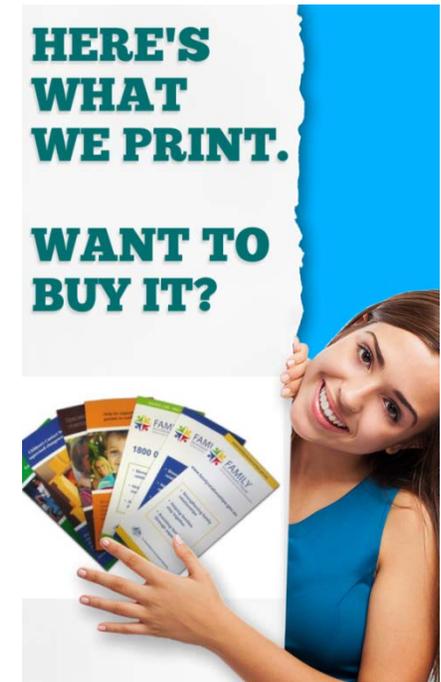
- What can we do that others cannot?
- Where are the case studies or testimonials that apply to this opportunity?
- What skills or business practices differentiate us from competitors?

What business results does our company help clients achieve?

- This goes beyond saving them money
- You must be able to articulate how your services impact your clients’ businesses

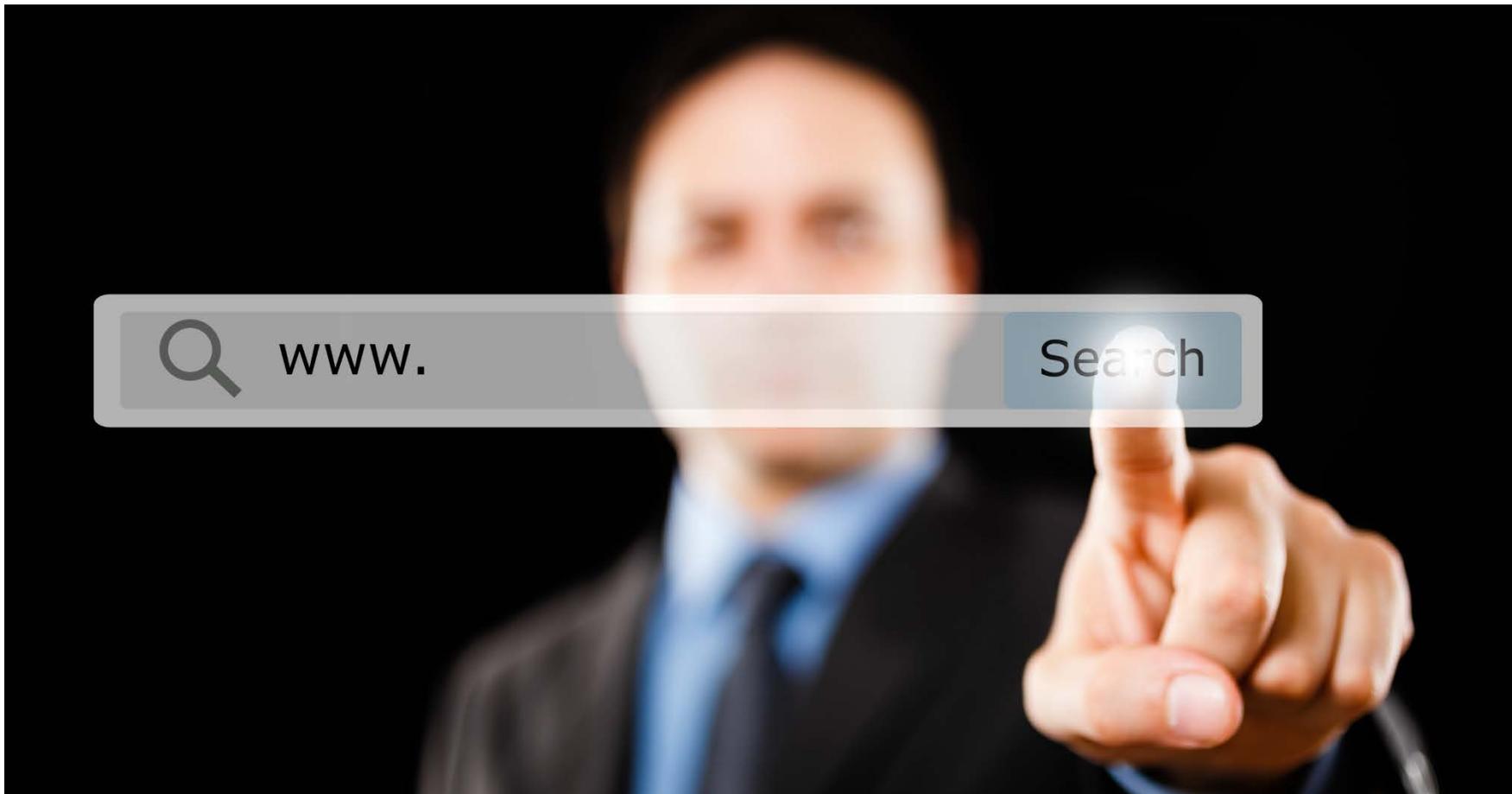
What is my objective for this sales call?

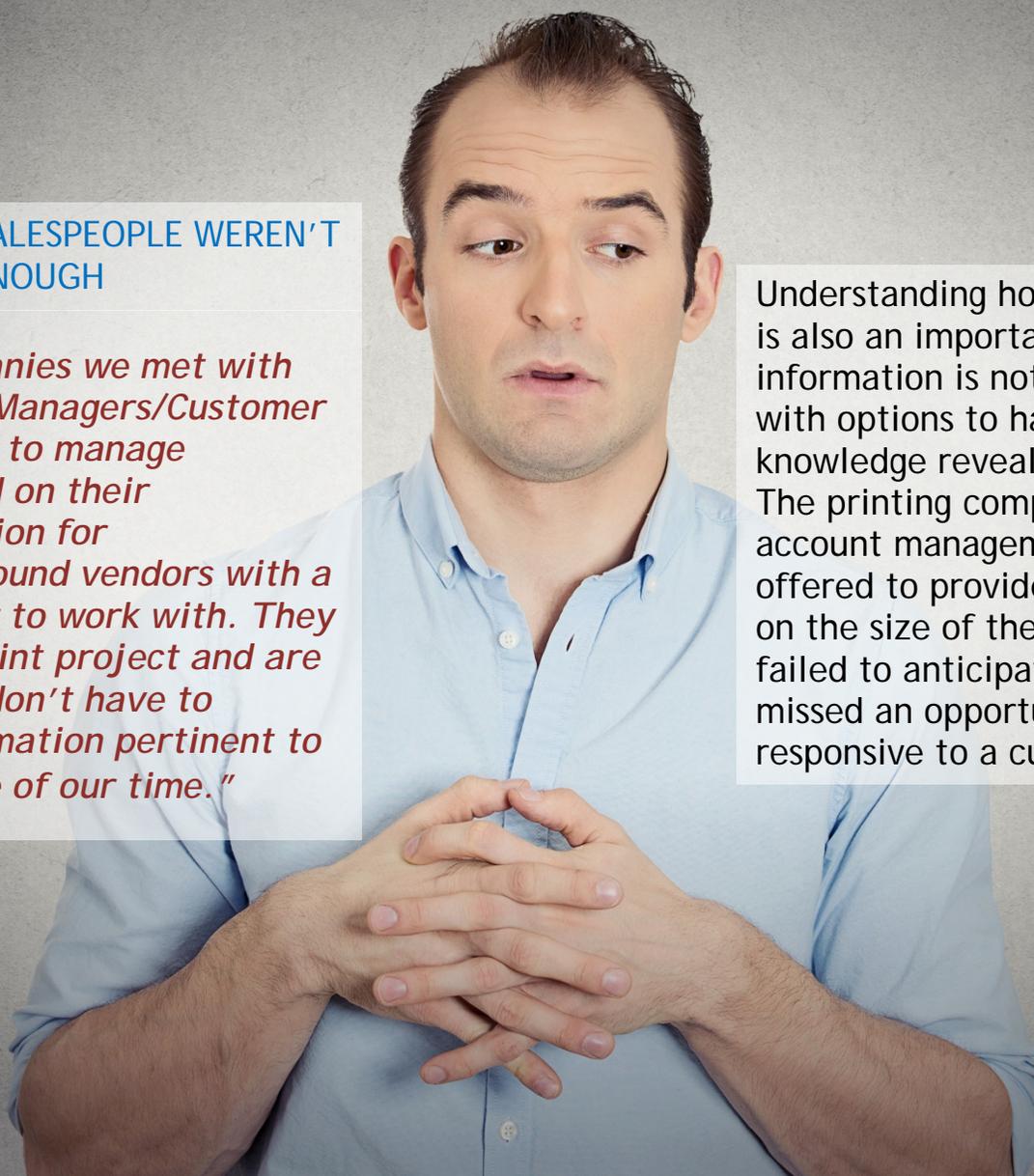
- Are you looking to replace a competitor, expand into additional departments, divisions, or renew a contract?
- Each outcome calls for different research



Google searches, LinkedIn, and business information databases can provide information about company size and growth, products, and industry trends. Use these resources to develop an appreciation for your prospective customer's business. Look for published Request for Proposals (RFP's), written articles, or press releases which can yield a great deal of information. Research the known or expected competition too.

According to comments from the buyers, salespeople who have done their homework will shine compared to their less-prepared rivals.





THE PRINT BUYERS SAID SALESPEOPLE WEREN'T FLEXIBLE ENOUGH

“Half the printing companies we met with used dedicated Account Managers/Customer Support Representatives to manage accounts. The rest relied on their salesperson and production for communication. We’ve found vendors with a dedicated AM/CSR easier to work with. They understand the entire print project and are quicker to respond. We don’t have to continually repeat information pertinent to the job, which is a waste of our time.”

Understanding how a customer likes to work is also an important part of preparation. If information is not available, be prepared with options to handle new customer knowledge revealed during the sales call. The printing companies lacking dedicated account management resources could have offered to provide such service, depending on the size of the account. Instead, they failed to anticipate such a requirement and missed an opportunity to be flexible and responsive to a customer’s preference.



~~PLAN A~~

PLAN B

THE PRINT BUYERS SAID SALESPEOPLE
HAD NO "PLAN B"

"They asked if they could use our projector to show the presentation. For some reason the slides were not working. They did have print outs of the twenty-two page presentation consisting of the company's history, clients and capabilities."

You should test your presentation materials under varying conditions and control as much as possible. Bring extra batteries for your mouse, pointer, or slide clicker. View your materials under various lighting conditions. Don't assume you can always connect to a customer's Wi-Fi for internet access.

Relying on an unknown element like the customer's projector to handle an important part of the presentation communicates lack of planning and foresight. Technical difficulties are very distracting!

SALESPeOPLE WASTED THE PRINT BUYERS TIME

“It was nice to see some of their print samples that were in line with our market; however there were some that didn’t fit our print projects.”

There’s no such thing as a one-size-fits-all sales presentation. Each one should be customized so the material is relevant to the target customer. Wasting a prospect’s time showing them samples that don’t match the applications is not only disrespectful; it indicates the salesperson did not take time to do the research that would have helped them fine-tune their presentation.



Presentation

THE PRINT BUYERS SAID SALESPEOPLE DIDN'T TREAT THEM AS INDIVIDUALS WITH UNIQUE REQUIREMENTS

"The biggest mistake they made was not asking us what our needs were or even what we were looking for in a print vendor. This made me feel like I was going to be handled like any other customer of theirs. We have specific needs in our market and in our jobs as print procurement specialists."



Print providers are in an excellent position to help their customers understand the unique benefits of print communications, how to get the greatest return from their investments in printed material, and how to integrate print and digital media to raise the effectiveness of all the channels. Focusing on how customers benefit from their services is the way to get customers thinking of a print service provider as a strategic partner rather than a vendor. According to the print buyer above, few print salespeople are taking this approach.

Salespeople must shift conversations away from production-related specifications such as print volumes, finishing, and paper stocks. Value-added discussions should be about business goals such as: customer acquisition, retention, conversion rates, upselling, lifetime customer value, regulatory compliance, and customer experience. Aligning your services with their business goals allows the customer to move forward with finalizing decisions.

Consultative salespeople must follow these steps to raise their status from print vendor to trusted customer advisor:

Engage

- Customers begin to focus their attention on ideas the salesperson has to share

Listen

- Through acknowledgement, customers feel heard and understood
- Print salespeople earn the right to suggest opportunities to address business needs

Frame

- Salespeople can articulate the key issues, goals, and customer pain points
- Customers agree to move the conversation forward

Envision

- Salespeople share ideas and customers can envision the future potential solution



THE PRINT BUYERS WERE INFLUENCED BY UNPROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR

“My colleague and I helped the salesperson put all of his samples back into this paper folder that was ripping at the seams. The VP of Business Development should have an appropriate case to carry all of his samples. This ripped paper folder looked unprofessional and disorganized. It made me think. Is this how the plant operates? Are they disorganized?”

Little things matter; and initial impressions can have lasting effects. Salespeople seeking to establish a working relationship with a new client should act professionally. That includes grooming, language, and behavior. And apparently, accessories! A nice briefcase probably wouldn't have sealed the deal in this example, but we can see how the buyer's overall impression of the printing company was damaged by the salesperson's image of disorganization.



THE SALESPEOPLE DIDN'T LISTEN

"We were very annoyed. I don't mind that we didn't get through the presentation or that they brought some samples that didn't fit our line of business. It was the constant talking that showed how little they cared about our needs. They asked none of the golden questions like What are your print needs?, What are you looking for in a print vendor?, or How can we help you?"

Listening during a sales call is far more important than talking. Unfortunately, we all love to hear the sound of our own voices. When a print salesperson spends all their time talking about themselves, a collaborative relationship is impossible. How will the buyer know the printer can provide what is needed if they never get a chance to talk about it? Print buyers are smart people with time pressures. They are looking for more than just a company that can deliver the ordered materials. Print salespeople must ask questions to find out exactly what is important to each prospective customer. Only then can they propose an appropriate solution or approach.

THE SALESPEOPLE DIDN'T ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

"At the end of the hour and a half visit, they asked us personal questions. The questions they asked were intrusive. "Where do you live?" "Do you have a long commute?" "How many kids do you have?"

The two gentlemen were nice enough, but I thought it was odd that they asked personal questions at the end of the meeting. They could have asked us about our position at the company or work experience but neither one of them did. This would have been more appropriate."

THESE SALESPEOPLE GOT THE BUSINESS

“The salesman asked, “What are your needs?” “How can we help you?” That was all we needed! We explained everything to them. They listened and responded that they understood. The Account Manager gave us examples of how they would provide customized, customer service to our account. We didn’t even open up the presentation because we were having a wonderful two sided conversation about our needs.”

Gimbel & Associates teaches sales representatives about ABCR:

A: Alignment - What is important to the customer and how does that align with what you can deliver?

B: Be a resource - Offer ideas and strategies to help your customers and prospects succeed.

C: Clarity - Be clear on the value you and your solution will deliver - monetize the value of your solution.

R: Results - Focus on measuring what is important to the clients, not the cost of the solutions. Do the clients want more leads, more customers, more upgrades, more demos, or more attendees? Then develop a way to track progress towards these goals.

Lead prospects to your solution instead of leading with your solution.



Follow-up



MINIMUM EFFORT YIELDS LACKLUSTER RESULTS

“In the days following the presentations we generally received a thank you for the meeting, it was nice to meet you email. Nothing about next steps.”

Thanking the prospect for the meeting is necessary, of course. Adding some value to show you listened to the prospect and are interested in helping them solve their problems is even better.

You’ve undoubtedly learned something about the organization or the individuals you didn’t know before the meeting. Use that information to find a relevant study or white paper to send them. Direct them to non-competing vendors or websites that offer products or services you might have discussed. Invite them to join a group on LinkedIn. Let prospects know about events or conferences that may interest them.

Recognizing connections to customers is not only a great way to keep in touch; they show you are interested in them as organizations and people, not just as a source of sales commissions.

UNFULFILLED PROMISES = NO DEAL

“When I was looking through the presentation, I noticed there wasn’t an equipment specification list showing maximum sheet sizes. So, I asked if they had one. The CEO said, “It should be in your book”. Well, that started a scurry of papers being shuffled around while they stated it should have been in there. They apologized and said they would email it to me.”

Send any follow-up information you promised during the meeting - preferably as soon as possible. In this case the salesperson seems to have failed to review the material he was bringing to the meeting. Everyone makes mistakes, but not following up on a promise, even one as innocuous as equipment specifications, makes print buyers nervous.



What We've Learned

Customers are buying more than just print. If they buy, they have agreed the print service provider will help them achieve their business goals, resolve their issues, come through for them in an emergency, and impact their end-customers. They are buying peace of mind and results from the printer, not paper and ink.

According to the print buyers we've contacted, the sales techniques from most of the print salespeople they meet are unimpressive. The buyers are looking for something more from the people who represent printing companies. Printed samples are not the most important parts of the meeting. Buyers are looking for print companies to demonstrate they will be an asset to the buyer and a resource they can trust, and in most cases they are disappointed.

From the buyer's perspective, agreeing to work with a new printing company is a risk. The print buyers want assurances their print service providers are trustworthy. If the print salespeople can't persuade the buyers their companies will provide satisfactory service and reliability during the sales call, the printing company won't get the contract.

Things that happen during the sales call greatly influence buyer decisions. Professional demeanor, preparation, relevance, and interest in the customer all play a part in the print buyer's assessment of a printing company's worthiness. Salespeople cannot overlook these details.

Clearly, walking into a prospective customer's office with armloads of print samples and a prepared pitch about your company's history and accomplishments will not, on its own, make a positive impression. Those things can be part of the conversation, but if they dominate the focus of the meeting, print buyers will probably move on to someone else. Remember the print salespeople that



made the most positive impression on our print buyers didn't even deliver their prepared presentation! The conversation about the customer's needs was much more interesting and persuasive.

Knowing now how print buyers perceive a sales meeting, would you change your approach? If you are finding success harder to achieve lately, taking a good hard look at the entire sales call process might reveal your sales force is making some of the same mistakes our contributing print buyers related.

Changing is always difficult. Helping printing companies make those changes is exactly what we do at Gimbel & Associates.

Take advantage of the free consultation offer on the next page and let us spend some time with you to talk about your sales strategy and how to improve.



About Gimbel & Associates

GEARED TO YOUR SUCCESS

We're an international management consulting firm working to ignite business growth through digital technologies. As an independent company, we offer clients customized consulting services to achieve their sales and marketing goals.

We provide consulting engagements in the following areas:

- Business development
- Sales strategy
- Sales training
- Digital implementation
- Strategic planning
- Marketing plans
- Workflow analysis
- Integrated marketing services
- Variable data
- Data analytics
- Micro Modeling
- Software deployment
- Customer workshops



With our extensive background in print production, digital, inkjet, workflow, marketing communications, training, and direct marketing, we help our clients accomplish their growth and efficiency goals.