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Are your presentations...STICKY?

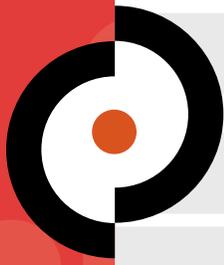
We live in an age of information and insanity. The pace of daily living is permanently stuck in high gear. We are inundated with massive quantities of information to the point that it is hard to discern what is important in the swirling flood of bits and bytes pouring out of our phones and computers. Each year our technological infrastructure is able to process more and more information. Unfortunately, our personal information processing equipment has not kept pace with our electronic toys. Our brains are hard wired to consider one bit of information at a time. To prevent this surplus of information from frying our neurons, we have learned to filter out most of the information our eyes and ears take in. Nobel winning psychologist, Herbert A. Simon, described this phenomenon in this way: “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention, and a need to allocate that attention efficiently.” Our challenge as sales people is to break through this data clutter and make sure that our presentations make it through the filters in our prospects’ brains.

Are you remarkable?

Marketing guru, Seth Godin talks about being “remarkable.” He takes this word literally, in that it means that you or your product is so unique that people “remark”, talk, about what they’ve experienced. The first sale we all make is getting a prospect to spend some of their valuable time with you. Because people, and particularly business owners, are so very busy these days, this is a scarce commodity indeed. Business people are constantly besieged by salespeople selling all manner of products and services. Many of these sales people are not very good at their jobs, choosing to “verbally vomit” on the customer instead of trying to engage them in a meaningful conversation. After a while, prospects develop a Pavlovian response to anyone who walks through their door trying to sell something. When we walk into a business we have a nanosecond to convince the business owner that we might be worth talking to.

Research has found that a sales person’s body language has a lot to do with the outcome of the sales call. I always tell my sales people that they need to “walk into the party like they’re walking on to a yacht.” A confident stride and a big smile tells the prospect, “This person looks like they may have something to say.” One of my mentors once told me “until you say something interesting you are an interruption.” We need to open the call by saying something that intrigues the customer or offers them a benefit.

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I like to use research or audit information to grab their attention. “Mr. Customer, I have some information about the local furniture market that I wanted to get your thoughts on?” In essence, you are buying their time with the information.

Always prepare an opener that talks about their favorite subject—them. Information about their industry, their competitors or their customers is always interesting to a business owner. If the customer thinks that you have some information they may use, they will decide to invest a few minutes of their valuable time. The more time you spend talking about their business, the more they will enjoy the conversation and the more inclined they will be to buy something from you.

I see what you’re saying.

Salespeople like to talk. The people who are attracted to our business love words, they are proud of their ability to persuade others using language. While words are certainly a powerful tool, we shouldn’t ignore the fact that most of the information that reaches the human brain comes through the eyes, rather than through the ears. Communications researchers have found that supporting your spoken words with visuals greatly enhances the prospect’s understanding and retention of your message. Using visuals also serves to streamline your presentations. This is “a picture is worth a thousand words” saying in action. I was with a rep who was trying to describe our coupon magazine product to a client, “It’s a small format (At this point the rep used his hands to try to show the size) magazine...its glossy...and full color.” Finally I pulled a copy of the product out of my portfolio and handed it to the customer. The rep could have gone on for an hour and not given the customer an understanding of the product as clear as he formed by holding it in his hands for thirty seconds. Each morning you should stock your car and your briefcase with examples of your products to share with customers. Holding the product in their hands makes what you are saying real.

I always encourage reps to make good use of spec ads and like ads. Whenever possible get your artist to prepare a spec ad for the customer. Work with your artist to develop a layout that clearly reflects the customer’s business. One of the most effective ways to present a spec ad is to paste it into your publication. Hand the paper to the prospect and ask them to leaf through it. I love the look on the customer’s face when they see their ad in the paper. The surprise makes the ad memorable and this helps the prospect imagine how readers will experience their ad. I always maintain a “like ad” file.

This is a collection of ads arranged by business type. When I am calling on a plumber,

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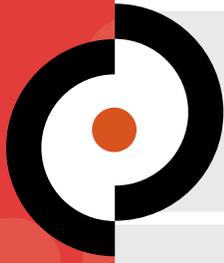
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I pull the “Contractors” folder. In my experience, prospects are always interested in seeing what competitors and similar businesses are doing. I sometimes use this file to break the ice on cold calls, when the customer says they are not interested, I say, “That’s fine, but before I go I have some ads others in your business are using. Would you like to see them?” More often than not, they do.

Some of the most powerful tools in my sales arsenal are “Visual Analogies.” This is a method for helping prospects to “get” abstract concepts like readership or market share. The value of our publications comes from their readership. Our products are essentially devices for delivering customers to our advertisers’ businesses. To help my prospects understand this, I print out a series of clipart photos, which represent our readers. I caption each photo using our audit information. For example, I would caption a picture of a young family with “Our publication reaches ‘X’ number of families with children.” I place these printouts in between the pages of our paper. When talking with the customer, I flip through the paper while discussing how he can deliver his message to “these people.” This is much more effective than just talking about the information or even showing a page from the audit. These pictures bring your paper’s readership to life for the customer.

When selling against our local daily, I talk about our unduplicated reach. My research told me that about one third of the market reads the competitor’s paper exclusively, another third only reads my paper and the final third reads both papers. I purchased three wine carafes filling one with milk chocolate kisses wrapped in silver foil and another with dark chocolate kisses in purple foil. During a call, I pull the three carafes from my bag and place them on the prospect’s desk with the empty one in the middle. Pointing to the one on the left, I explain it represents the daily’s readers. I then said the carafe on the right was our readers. Picking up both jars, I poured some from each into the middle jar explaining that this is a more accurate picture of the market, the middle jar representing the people who read both papers. I then pulled away “my paper’s” carafe and hid it behind my back. I explained to the customer that this is what he was doing by not advertising in our paper. I literally took away his candy, so he could see that he was losing a big part of his market. At the conclusion of the call, the customer agreed to give us a share of his advertising budget. This presentation was memorable for several reasons. It was completely unexpected; the customer was used to listening to a pitch or perhaps viewing a PowerPoint,

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but was not expecting a presentation with props. The presentation was also dramatic and active which kept the customer fully engaged, burning the message into the customer's brain. Finally, I gave the candy to the prospect at the end of the call, another unexpected pleasure.

By stepping out of the box and making your presentations visual you set yourself apart from the competition. I have delivered pizzas to prospects with a piece missing and a note on the box saying, "Are you missing a slice of the market?" On other occasions, I have taken a pocketful of monopoly houses into a call, setting them up on a customer's desk and taking away half to demonstrate our reach. While these methods require some creative thinking and preparation, they are effective and quite frankly fun to do.

Are you "sticky?"

We must never forget that we are not selling in a vacuum. Our prospects are constantly confronted by salespeople, many of them selling advertising. Customers have a hundred different things on their mind. To sell a customer, we break through their filter and engage their full attention. Just talking at a customer will not accomplish this, we need to step "out of the box" and get inside our customers' heads. If you make your messages "sticky," you'll find that customers will "stick" with you.

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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