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### Thirty years, thirty lessons

To the young, thirty years sounds like an eternity. For people of my generation, I am 61, thirty years seems like the blink of an eye. This month I will celebrate my thirtieth year in the advertising business. Sometimes it seems like yesterday that I took a position in the telephone sales division of the local yellow pages. Though I had been in sales for about seven years, I had absolutely no experience or knowledge of advertising when I joined the industry. As I look back, I am amazed at what I have learned in the past three decades and I feel deeply indebted to the many people who helped me throughout my career. To celebrate this milestone, here is a list of thirty things, in no particular order, that I have learned since 1983.

1. **Advertising professionals make two sales**—Rather than just thinking about selling their customers advertising, advertising people need to think about making a sale for their advertiser. They put as much thought into creating a program that will convince the customer's customers to take action as they do in making a sale themselves.
2. **Show and sell**—Sales people are great talkers. We pride ourselves on our ability to use words to persuade customers to buy from us. Because we love words, we forget that "A picture is worth a thousand words." Using spec ads, like ads, and visual aids greatly enhances our ability to communicate the value of advertising to our clients.
3. **The whine is bitter at the pity party**—In every office there are people who love to gather together and complain about their boss, their customers, the economy and everything else under the sun. Taking part in these sessions not only wastes your time, but can negatively affect your sales performance and degrade your self confidence. It is better to walk away and use this time to do something that will help you make a sale.
4. **And then some**—Always do more than is expected of you. If a customer asks for a new ad layout, show them two or three. Thank the customer when they buy and follow up with a hand written note. If you promise to do something by the end of the week, get it to them by Wednesday. Each time you go above and beyond a customer's (and your boss's expectations) the better their opinion of you will be.
5. **W.I.I.F.T.**—This stands for "What's In It For Them." Customers are selfish; they buy advertising for their own reason. It is vital that we explicitly position anything we are trying to sell in terms of how it will help their business. Instead of saying, "our paper reaches every home in town," say, "you can let everyone in town know about your specials which will attract a lot more customers to your business."
6. **People only talk about price when they don't understand value**—No one ever walks into a Mercedes Benz showroom and talks about how they are more expensive than a Kia. Mercedes has done a good job educating customers about the value of owning their cars. The more a customer knows about the value your products offer, the less they will quibble about price.

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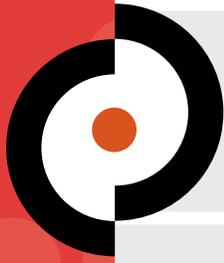


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7. **If you don't have the time to do it right, how will you find the time to do it over—**  
As a sales manager, I have investigated a lot of errors in customer's advertising. In many cases, the sales person failed to follow procedure, or to double check the ad copy. It takes far more time to resolve a customer's complaint than it does to prevent errors.
8. **Sell small, lose big—**More customers are lost because they weren't sold an aggressive program than are ever lost by overselling them. Customers who buy small programs or who don't run consistently are unlikely to see a measurable response to their ads. These are the people who will tell you, "I tried advertising once and it didn't work."
9. **Every call is a sales call—**Every interaction with a customer is a chance to learn something about their business and to tell them something about your products. Every time you're with a customer is an opportunity to advance them toward buying more advertising.
10. **You are the expert—**Don't be afraid to make recommendations to your clients. You know far more about advertising than they do and it is your professional responsibility to share your knowledge with them.
11. **The early bird gets the worm; the late bird gets an ulcer—**Putting things off until deadline adds unnecessary stress to our lives. By working well ahead of deadlines we not only eliminate stress, but we are much less likely to make mistakes.
12. **Tick tock—**I have known many successful people in my career. The one thing that these people all have in common is that they were excellent time managers. Constantly ask yourself, "Is this the best use of my time—right now?"
13. **People buy on emotion and justify the buy with facts—**Research into the human decision making process has found that emotions are the single most important factor in closing a sale. How a customer "feels" about you and your product is far more important than what the facts say.
14. **What is your brand—**You should manage your personal image the way a corporation manages its brand. How do you want people to think about you? What do they think when they see your logo, i.e. your name. Before taking any action, consider how it will affect your "brand."
15. **Failing to plan is planning to fail—**I know this is an old cliché, but clichés became clichés because they make a lot of sense. We have a limited time in front of a customer. Planning allows us to use this small window of time as effectively as possible.
16. **People do judge a book by its cover—**Be conscious of the impression you make on a customer. Dress professionally and use positive body language. Research shows that the first few seconds of the call have a big impact on the outcome of the call.

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17. **Keep your promises**—The #1 complaint customers have about sales people is the failure to follow-up. If you make a promise to a customer, be sure to honor it. If you will be delayed, notify the client and apologize to them.
18. **Questions are more powerful than statements**—The best sales people ask more than they tell. Questions keep the customer engaged and force them to think about the matter at hand. Questions foster conversation, statements allow the customer to zone out.
19. **Ruts and graves look remarkably similar**—Break your routine, take a different route, change your presentation, call on different people. Doing something different stimulates your creativity and refreshes your spirit.
20. **Simplify, simplify, simplify**—Make your presentation as simple as possible for the customer to understand. Sell only one product at a time, use graphics and simple language to make your point. If a customer can't comprehend what you are saying, they will never buy an ad from you.
21. **Be a student of business**—Set aside some time each week to enhance your skills. Read business books, magazines, and blogs. Take advantage of training opportunities. (Kudos—You're doing this one right now)
22. **Honesty is the best policy**—Don't misinform customers and don't try to hide mistakes. You'll never get away with it.
23. **Conduct post mortems**—On TV, the clue to solving a crime is often found during the autopsy. Conducting a "post mortem" of a sales call can provide clues about how you can improve your sales process. Review the call and think about what worked and what did not.
24. **Customers expect us to be creative**—Customers look to us for fresh ideas. Work with your artist to develop new looks and concepts for your customers.
25. **Be a mentor**—Teaching another person forces you to look at a subject in a different way. The best way to expand your own understanding is to explain it to another person.
26. **Argue with customers**—Contrary to popular belief, the customer is not always right. Don't be afraid to tactfully confront the customer and argue with them to do the right program. They'll thank you later.
27. **Feed your Ego**—Ego has a bad connotation in our society, but a strong ego is a necessity in sales. We need a strong self esteem to overcome the rejection inherent in selling advertising. Take time to reward yourself for a job well done and to celebrate your successes.
28. **Tell me a story**—Stories are the most effective tool you have to persuade customers. Collect success stories and testimonials and use them to lend credibility to your presentations.

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29. **Be a partner not a servant**—Our customers need us as much as we need them. Our futures are intimately tied to the future of their enterprise. If we see ourselves as partners in our customer's business, they will learn to respect our opinions and to listen to our recommendations.
30. **Pay attention**—If we view everyone we meet and every situation as a learning opportunity, we will continue to grow. When you take in a new fact or a new idea ask yourself, "How can I use this?"
31. **(See #4) The same thing only different**—I have seen a lot of changes since 1983. Coincidentally, 1983 was the year that the IBM PC XT first went on sale and a group of computer nerds launched the internet. My portfolio now includes web banners, SEO/SEM, e-mail marketing and social media programs as well as print advertising. While the modes of delivery have expanded, we are still selling the same thing as we did in the Reagan years. We are in the business of introducing people with something to sell, to the people who want to buy that particular good or service. The value of our products lies in the bridges we build between our readers and our advertisers, and we still can do that better than any other media.

While I have no intention of retiring anytime soon (I'm still having too much fun), I doubt that I'll be around to see what the industry looks like thirty years from now. I envy those of you who are just starting your careers as you will be able to help your customers in ways that we can not even imagine today. May you meet as many great people and have as many wonderful experiences as I have had in the last three decades.

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

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