

# You CAN Sell More!

By Lola Faufau

Is it really possible to increase sales in 2009? I have asked print sales expert Dave Fellman to respond to questions PIM members have asked about selling print.

Dave Fellman is the author of "Sell More Printing!" and "The Sales Clinic" column in *Quick Printing* magazine. His articles on sales and sales management topics have appeared in *PIA Management Portfolio* and other industry publications.

**GN:** In today's economic environment, what are the new value points print buyers are looking for?

**DF:** I don't think there are really new value points. What I think we're seeing is a decrease in the number of buyers looking for added value. That's especially true when the printing is being ordered by the purchasing function as opposed to the marketing function. A purchasing agent's job is to contribute to profit by spending as little as possible. A marketing manager's job is to contribute to profit by increasing revenue. When people start thinking about survival rather than profit, though, the whole system gets fouled up, and we've seen a lot of that recently.

**GN:** Is it all about price now?

**DF:** It probably is with most of the purchasing types, and it probably is with a significant percentage of the marketing types. But you can't blame all of that on the economy, or on print buyers, because the truth is that it's all about price for most printing salespeople! The percentage of printing salespeople who can really sell value has always been small. I think lots of salespeople would argue with that, but most owners — and most buyers! — would agree. Remember that printers set the prices, and every

time someone goes lower, someone else goes lower still! It's a buyer's market, and the people who can sell value are now in a position where the price differential is pretty extreme.

**GN:** Do you feel this period we are in will cause the print community to re-invent themselves?

**DF:** I hope so. We've been talking for a long time about making the transition from print provider to true marketing partner, which means bringing products, service and expertise that goes beyond print into other media. In the final analysis, though, I think individual companies will make the transition — some already have! — but most of the industry will cling to the old ways.

**GN:** Will print survive as a marketing conduit or is it bound for commoditization?

**DF:** I think print still has at least a few years left as a marketing medium, but it's easy to see why marketers want to move away from it. Their perception is that it will cost less to put all of their marketing collateral online, and that's probably true in the most primitive sense — in other words, just putting all of the information from a brochure or catalog or any other document online in static form. The real opportunity with the Internet, though, is interactivity, and there's a cost attached to taking full advantage of it.

Fortunately, there are still people who want to read from hard copy, and as long as that continues, print will still have a role. I'm concerned, though, because while I'm one of those people, my daughter doesn't

seem to be, and there's a whole rising generation that's a lot more used to reading off computer screens than my generation is.

**GN:** Will print lose all value other than the cost of ink and paper?

**DF:** To some buyers, it already has. The printing industry has to remember, though, that those buyers are wrong! Everything we print has a purpose; in other words, a role to play in the buyer's business. That might be a promotional role, helping them to sell whatever it is that they sell, or it might be an operational role, contributing something to the day-to-day running of their business. Either way, the information that the printing communicates is important, and communicating it better or more effectively has a value.

It's also important to remember that we're in a down cycle all across the economy, and as we've discussed, that's putting a lot of people in survival mode. When the cycle reverses — and we have to expect that it will! — it should be easier to sell value again.

**GN:** Will Direct Mail survive the post office and their new costing and manufacturing guidelines?

**DF:** Absolutely. Remember, the USPS doesn't want to lose the volume that direct mail provides. They're just trying to make it efficient and borderline-profitable. If marketers adjust to meet the postal guidelines, all this will smooth out pretty quickly.

Now, direct mail volume is still going to diminish as marketers transition more of their strategy to the Internet, but that's really a separate issue.



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**GN:** Changing the subject a little, how do you pick up the customers of a printer that has gone out of business?

**DF:** The best way is to have a proactive presence with those customers before the printer-in-place goes out of business. If you're already calling on them, the transition can be pretty painless for all concerned. Most salespeople don't do enough prospecting, though, so they don't have the kind of relationships that lead to an "automatic" decision.

Those salespeople still may get reactive opportunities, though, and what I mean by that is when the "orphaned" customer initiates contact, often to request a quote. The key to success then is to recognize that you're not just being asked for pricing; you're being given the opportunity to make a case for why your printing company is their best choice as a new supplier. I'm talking about a major effort here, not just a quote but a proposal based on a thorough evaluation of the buyer's needs and wants.

Here's something else to think about, though. Do you really want to "pick up" the customers who put that other printer out of business? Some printing buyers are like serial killers; they have no interest in value, only in price. Yes, I would want to pick up the good customers, but it's critical to do that needs and wants analysis to make sure you know whether they're good customers or bad customers, and to be sure that you can sell to them profitably.

**GN:** What is the first thing you need to do when your largest customer goes away? Are there steps you can recommend to bring them back?

**DF:** That depends on what you mean by "goes away." If they go out of business, or transition all of their printing to CDs or DVDs or the Internet, there may not be anything that you can do. If they go with a competitor, a lot depends on whether they left for lower prices, or whether

they left because you let them down in terms of quality and/or service.

If it was quality or service, you have to convince them that the problems were only an anomaly; that you have solid quality control and service procedures in place but somehow something fell through the cracks. You have to communicate what you learned from the experience, and how you will use that knowledge to ensure that whatever happened will never happen again — and even with all of that, you may not get a second chance.

If it was pricing, the best strategy is to acknowledge that they're doing something they feel they have to do, to reduce costs, or maybe even to survive, and you recognize that if they can get satisfactory quality and service at a lower price — a price that you can't match, or are unwilling to match — then they'll have made the right decision and you'll be out of luck. "If you can't get that level of quality and service, though" I would say, "I want you to know that you're not burning any bridges here. You're doing what you feel you have to do, but we will welcome you back with open arms if it turns out that the guys with the really low prices can't meet your needs." In other words, if you can't or won't match the price, you can try to position yourself to regain the business if the other printer fails.

Here's something else to think about. Your best overall strategy has two parts; first, to protect yourself against customer loss, and with your largest customers, you do that by providing a level of quality and service that really does reflect value. Second, you need prospects in your pipeline who are somewhere past the first stages of a process of thinking about buying from you. Having serious prospects in your pipeline is a no-lose proposition — the worst case scenario is that they're there to replace lost customers, and the best case scenario is that you gain new customers faster than you lose

the old ones. That's pretty simple stuff, and it makes you wonder why so many printing salespeople and printing companies get caught with nothing in the pipeline.

"Sell More Printing" is available to PIM members at a discount price. To purchase call Dave Fellman at 800.325.9634.

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