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Show and Sell

The problem with clichés is that we hear them so often that we take them for granted. This is unfortunate because a cliché becomes a cliché because it makes such good sense that it is repeated over and over. “A picture is worth a thousand words” is a perfect example of this phenomenon. Few things ever said make more sense than these seven words, especially for those of us in advertising sales. This statement actually originated in the advertising industry. It was first used in a 1921 Printer’s Ink magazine article about using images in advertising placed on the sides of streetcars. The author Fred R. Barnard labeled the phrase as a Chinese proverb “so that people would take it seriously.” In the eighty plus years since Mr. Barnard penned his immortal sentence the importance of using art in advertising has become well understood. We use images in our customer’s ads because of their power to clearly communicate the customer’s message quickly and clearly. This is a tool that we should also be using when we need to communicate our message quickly and clearly.

Research has found that approximately 60 to 80% of people are “visual learners.” Most people absorb information that they see much more readily than material they hear. We live in a visual culture where we are bombarded with thousands of images everyday. Considering these facts I can’t understand why so many salespeople try to get at their prospects brains through their ears instead of taking the express route through their eyes. Salespeople take great pride in their ability to talk, to persuade others with their words. Strong verbal communication skills are an important part of a salesperson’s tool kit, but to really get your message across, you need to include a visual component in your presentations. The most effective presentations integrate words and images in a way that they support one another to tell a powerful story. Here are some ideas to incorporate visuals into your sales calls.

Your Publication: This may seem elemental but you should always have a selection of your products with you whenever you talk to a client. Use them as a prop when talking about how consumers read and respond to the ads. Use them to describe the features and benefits of your publication. Keep a supply of previously published sections to use when it comes time to sell the next edition. One look at last years “Spring Home and Garden” section will give your prospects a better idea of what they are buying than an hour of description.

Like Ads: Like ads are an archive of ads that are sorted by type. I keep a file of ads from my publication sorted by business type. When I am seeing a plumber I pull out my “Plumber” file and take it with me. Most customers are very

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curious to see what their peers and competitors are doing. This is an excellent way to open a discussion about advertising. Like ads also lend credibility to your presentation, the prospect can see that similar businesses have decided to advertise with you. I also file ads by size and design so that I can show a customer “a great half page” or an “effective use of color”. This is a great way to brag a little “I did this ad for this restaurant and it attracted a lot of customers.” This not only says your publication will work for the client but so will you.

Spec ads: “Spec” is short for a speculative ad. These are layouts prepared before a customer agrees to run with you. Whenever possible I prepare a spec ad for a customer before I call on them. Ideally I can have one of our graphic artists do a finished ad for me. If time does not allow I will take an old ad or a piece of unsold spec art and alter it to show a client. I will cut out the original customer’s name and address and paste in the prospect’s information. Some times I will do a quick thumbnail sketch of an ad concept and use that as spec. This looks a little crude but it conveys a message better than words alone. I like to present spec art by pasting it into my publication. This is the advertising sales reps equivalent to the car sales persons “test drive.” I make an extra copy of the art and paste it over a similar sized ad in the current edition. I give the paper to the client and allow them to discover the ad as they page through. This helps them to visualize how a reader will encounter the ad.

Testimonials: I like to secure testimonials from my current advertisers. They are generally happy to do this. I get them to write me a short letter (actually I usually write it for them) talking about the response their program generated. I also take a photo of them. I cut and paste these together to make a sales piece. I’ve found that the photo enhances the credibility of the testimonial. People trust people who look them in the eye, even if it is only on paper. These testimonials are well worth the time it takes to collect and produce them. They are a powerful persuasive tool you can use to win over reluctant prospects.

Sales Collateral: Collateral is defined as “serving to support or corroborate.” When you offer collateral for a loan you offer it as proof you will meet your obligations. Sales collateral performs this same function, it supports your statements and offers proof that you will do what you say. If your company provides you with sales collateral use it. If your company doesn’t provide you with sales tools create your own. When people want proof they often say “I want to see it in black and white!” Anything written carries more weight than an oral statement. Put your selling points into print. A simple Word or PowerPoint document with a few photos or clip art makes your message

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more memorable and credible. If you can't close a sale on the first call or if the contact has to get approval, a "leave-behind" reminds the prospect of the benefits you offer to them.

Presentation book: I am a big believer in using a "pitch book." My presentation binder contains a printed PowerPoint presentation which lists the features and benefits offered by my company, individual pieces detailing the benefits of each of my products plus a few sample pieces of each, market research and pricing information. I seldom get to review the entire presentation with a prospect but I often refer to it when responding to objections or when making a key point. The book organizes my materials and supports my presentation. I review and update it frequently so that I know I am prepared for anything a prospect throws at me.

High Tech Tools: Many reps are starting to carry laptops with them on calls. Computers are wonderful because they can hold virtually infinite amounts of information. I may be showing my age but I still like keeping my materials on paper, at least as a back-up. Lap-tops are complicated machines and as such they can malfunction. Paper never crashes. There is also a danger that the glitz of the technology may overwhelm the sales message. I do recommend that sales people master PowerPoint which is an excellent tool when presenting to groups.

Selling advertising is a challenge, especially in today's economy. Our products are much more complex than most people would imagine. We are not just selling space, a few square inches of paper splashed with a few drops of ink; we are selling results and ideas. To do our job we need to be master communicators. We need to use all the tools in the toolbox. Learning to effectively use visual aids to support our message is crucial to our success. Using visuals saves time and ensures that we and the client are both on the same page. Simple visuals give our presentations power that far exceeds the impact of even the most eloquent words alone. To most people a picture may be worth a thousand words, but to those of us who make our livings as advertising sales people: "A picture is worth a thousand bucks!"

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