



The Most Overlooked Step in Book Selling

By Brian Jud

Negotiating a large-quantity sale can be a rewarding process. If you do a good job describing how your content can help prospects solve business problems, they sign on the dotted line and become customers. However, the euphoria of knowing you will soon receive tens of thousands of dollars could blind you to the job that still needs to be done.

Your objective is not to simply get the order, but to make sure that the sale is implemented flawlessly through the timely delivery of your books. Competent post-sale service makes for a satisfying experience, leading to future orders and recurring revenue. Yet this step is often given cursory attention as the publisher moves on to the next prospect.

Getting the first order is more difficult than securing repeat orders from the same buyer. Once your customers trust you, they are more likely to continue working with you. A mutually profitable, long-term relationship is more likely to happen if you shepherd the order through to its completion. Cement that bond by growing and protecting your connection with each customer.

Grow your relationship

If you properly oversee the complete order process, and the promotional campaign meets expectations, your customers will appreciate their decision to work with you. You will have proven that you are a true consultant, working with them to reach their goals -- not just a vendor selling books. Now they have the confidence in you to expand the relationship through new orders. Here are some ways to grow your business with each customer.

- Conduct a post-campaign evaluation. Did it go as well as predicted? If not, why not and what can be done differently next time?
- Look to the future together. What campaigns are in the planning stages? They will probably not use the same book again, so propose other titles in your product line as the next promotional items.
- Recommend that your customer hire you or the author as their spokesperson to carry your message personally to their employees and/or other target segments.
- Ask for referrals. Are there other divisions within the company, suppliers or customers that your contact knows who could use your books as promotional items? Will your customer serve as a reference?

Protect your business with each customer

Customers can be capricious entities, seeking profitable relationships with suppliers who treat them right. If you do not take care of them they may choose a competitive book for their next promotional campaign. Things will go wrong, but you can minimize the negative impact by recognizing and rectifying them quickly. Here are some signs of potential problems.

- Persistent problems with the order. Print runs can be delayed. Pages could be missing or printed improperly. A truck-drivers' strike could prevent an on-time delivery. Troubling issues will

occur that are beyond your control. Minimize their negative impact by telling your buyer about problems as early as possible and recommending alternative actions.

- Decrease in purchases. Your buyer may have placed a blanket order for planned deliveries. If the schedule is changed or delayed it could be a warning that something is amiss. Discuss it with your corporate counterpart.
- Repeated comments of competitors' merits. If you hear comments like, "I wish we had checked out that other book more carefully," there could be a problem brewing. Ask questions and get them to explain why. Invariably, the real discontent will surface and you can deal with it.
- Increase in complaints. A grievance can be positive, if its airing leads to its resolution. If the frequency of complaints increases, it could lead to the demise of your relationship.
- Decrease in rapport. If emails and voice-mail messages go unheeded, a negative situation may be the culprit. Schedule a personal meeting with your buyer to clear the air and uncover the hidden objections. Once you know what the real problem is you can more effectively rectify it. Un-addressed problems have a way of intensifying. Nip negative issues in the bud as soon as you can.
- Replacement personnel. If your contact is removed from the process – through promotion, transfer or other reason – quickly meet with the replacement person. Review the decision process with him/her so that he/she knows, understands and buys into each relevant piece of the promotional program. Work on a new relationship that will lead to the repeat orders.

Large-quantity sales to corporate buyers are much different from retail sales. Signing the agreement is just one step in the process, and the order is not complete until your books are delivered on time and as promised. Then you begin working on the next order by building your relationships and eliminating problems. Prove yourself as a competent professional interested in helping them solve their business problems. It may be a time-consuming process, but the rewards can be enormous.

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