



Peddler or Professional?



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When your company markets your products and services, are you just giving quotes or providing presentations? In the last issue of *ID&O* I wrote about embracing and pursuing more retail sales to homeowners and businesses as a way to increase sales and profits. This would move your company more towards becoming a full service door store instead of solely a garage door contractor. As stated in the article several elements of your business would be affected including your product line, showroom, advertising and buy in from the employees. Specifically, a successful transition into retail sales requires a higher level of selling skills. To be an effective "door store", you can ill afford to just quote products and services. An effective retail sales person knows the benefits of making well planned and executed presentations. When done effectively, the payoff is big - bigger ticket sales at higher margins. This elevates the sales person from peddler to sales professional.

Quoting vs Selling

My wife and I are in the process of remodeling our home in Florida. During the process we've had much interaction with sales representatives from various trades. As you can imagine the experiences have varied, some good some not so good. I'll use a couple of these to illustrate the difference between just quoting versus selling.

We need new windows so I contacted two glass companies that were recommended by friends. The first company visited our home and spent a lot of time carefully inventorying the windows taking care to get good measurements and noting the various types needed. When we discussed replacement he asked many questions. What was our main reason for wanting to replace them? Energy conservation? Security? Aesthetics? He provided samples and color swatches along with an easy to understand brochure. After listening closely to my answers he told me that he would consider the information gathered from our visit and would get back to me in a couple of days with his proposal. We received his email in two days as promised with detailed pricing and specifications for the replacement windows needed. The second window company's representative also visited the

house but we were not there at the time. He assured me that my being there was unnecessary. He called me later that day and rattled off prices and options based on what he thought we needed. The most emphasis was on price and his lead times. He did email me a quote that had the window count and a price. No brochures, no samples. The process was more of him telling me what I didn't want versus asking me what I did want. Clearly the choice for our window contractor was an easy one.

Choosing an interior decorator is another example. This is no doubt my wife's department. The two "finalists" came highly recommended. The first decorator met my wife at the house and after exchanging pleasantries walked around the house and gave my wife her general observations of each room. She assured my wife that she knew the latest styles and designs and had done this many times before. She asked very few questions about my wife's decorating tastes and design criteria. The meeting ended with a conversation about her fee being based on the decorating items we purchased. The lady she chose to be our decorator spent a lot of time prior to meeting trying to get to know my wife a little so she could better understand her likes and dislikes when it comes to decorating a house. She asked to see photos of our previous house so she could discern the styles and colors we were used to. When it came to her compensation she wanted to be paid hourly so there would be no implied pressure to purchase items at inflated prices. Her approach to the decorating process was more collaborative than authoritative. It was easy to give her the job.

In both examples the common denominator of the two companies that got our business was listening. Retail selling requires active listening skills. Sales people tend to want to talk when sometimes they need to listen. The door business is like any other service business. We are hired to solve problems, acting as consultants as well as suppliers. As a consultant you cannot make your best recommendations without understanding your customer's needs. You cannot do that without two way communication. Assuming you know what they need without taking the time to understand their motives, desires and opinions can take you right out

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of the money. As a sales professional the customer is not only buying your product but the overall experience. That includes your knowledge, experience and your personal approach to their problem. They want to know that you are listening and will help them through the purchasing process and provide support after the purchase is made.

Quoting is quick. Selling is a process. Quoting requires only a few things like a business card with a price scrawled on the back, a brochure and maybe a hand sample of the product. Selling requires preparation and many more tools. Some of these tools include:

- Pen and paper to jot down notes while the customer is speaking.
- Laptop or tablet with a static Internet connection to help the customer visualize the product instantly using the web or electronic brochures.
- Visualization software that allows the customer to see the product on their house before they purchase.
- Color swatches, samples, brochures, warranties and specification sheets.
- Information about your company including a copy of your business license.
- List of three references in their area that have purchased similar products.
- Software that allows you to generate a proposal for signature on the spot using either a portable printer to print a hard copy or an electronic signature on your laptop or tablet.

One of the most important tools needed is your time. Effective sales presentations require a time commitment on both the part of the sales person and the customer. Before setting an appointment it is helpful to address this with the customer. Rushing through your presentation sends the signal that your customer is just the next stop of your day. Instead the customer needs to know that you will dedicate the appropriate time needed to assist them through the process.

Preparing for the Presentation

Effective presentations start with planning and preparation. Spending some time pre-qualifying your customer on the front end can give you quite an edge over your competition. Let's face it, the Internet has given customers an easy way to research what they want to buy without ever leaving their home. In many cases they can get a price quote without ever speaking to anyone. What they cannot get online is your personal expertise and consulting ability to help them make an educated decision.



Before visiting with the customer have a good idea of what product they're looking for so a few minutes of phone time will help you immensely. If they've visited manufacturers' websites, ask them which ones and which models they like so you can familiarize yourself with them prior to your meeting. Are they more interested in the product's appearance or functionality? Gather color swatches, product samples and spec sheets in order to address both of these requirements. Where do they live? It is helpful to Google their address to get an idea about the neighborhood architecture and maybe even a 3D image of their house.

Since most sales appointments in the door industry take place at the job site, your vehicle is your rolling office and showroom. Stocking it with the selling tools you need is critical. Items such as product samples, color chips, brochures, proposal forms, warranty information, photos of previous jobs are just a few of the support materials needed to provide professional sales presentations. Spend a few minutes daily taking inventory, re-stocking and properly storing these valuable selling aids.

Don't forget to prepare YOU for the sales presentation. First impressions are critical and you only get one chance at making it. People want to do business with successful and confident (not cocky) people so you must strive to look and act the part. How you dress, your demeanor and the overall way you present yourself are powerful influences on the buying decision. Unfortunately customers often have a preconceived opinion of dealing with sales people that is often not a good one. Your job is to elevate that opinion from the moment you meet with them. So take a few minutes to look over the image you will be presenting and that includes your vehicle. Just think about it this way. Who would you want to see walking up to your front door? Capture that image and plan accordingly. Finally, being mentally ready is the most important preparation you can make. No matter what kind of day you are having with all of the stresses you are feeling, a sales professional finds a way to relax and focus before ever meeting with the customer. Sometimes doing this is as simple as closing your eyes and taking a few deep breaths.

Be on time. The easiest way to blow the first impression is to be late. No matter how great your products and services are, tardiness sends the signal that you are not concerned with the customer's time which translates this way. If you're late for the sales appointment, you'll be late for the installation. Practice Lombardy Time. The famous pro football coach Vince Lombardy told his players that there was two types of time....regular people time and Lombardy time. Lombardy time meant being 10 - 15 minutes early to any meeting. This extra time padding will give you a chance to gather your thoughts about your presentation and make observations about the customer's home including architectural style, color and street appeal.

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Making the Presentation

Does this sound familiar? A customer requests a price on a new replacement garage door. The sales person pulls up in the driveway, measures the door, scribbles down a price on the back of his business card and attaches it to a brochure and hands it to you. The whole process takes less than ten minutes. As I said quoting is quick and easy. In this scenario you would expect the price to be low matching the level of service you are receiving, right? Selling takes longer. Especially when you have higher quality products that give the customer good value and provide the perfect solution to their problem. Remember, people buy solutions, not just stuff. They can buy stuff at the big box stores. Your knowledge and selling skills are part of the solution they are seeking. Selling solutions requires more time and interaction.

The selling process is a seven step process.

1. Establishing rapport
2. Qualifying the need
3. Product selection
- 4. Presentation**
5. Revealing the price
6. Overcoming objections
7. Closing the sale

While the other six steps are important, I believe it's the presentation that influences the purchasing decision most. Take our example above, how much of a presentation did that sales person make? Effective

presentations get attention and take time to do correctly.

Your sales presentation is a three part process that should be done in this order.

Sell Yourself - Spend a few minutes to summarize your qualifications and how your experience can help the customer make a successful buying decision. No need for chest beating or boasting, just a quick bio and your product and industry knowledge. Briefly discuss why you like selling door products. Your enthusiasm will build the customer's confidence in your ability to help them. Anticipate inevitable questions. If you've properly prepared for the meeting and done some research about the customer's needs you should be able to answer many of their questions on the spot which also builds trust in your ability as their sales rep. You are the face of the company and their personal consultant.



They have to be able to trust you before they can trust your company or product. The rapport you begin building in the first five minutes will set the tone for the rest of the business relationship. Be professional but also personable.

Sell Your Company -

Chances are the products you sell are of similar quality and value as the next guy's. Throw in the big box stores and door products look more and more like commodities to the consumer. We all know that isn't true but you have to convince your customer of that. Your biggest unique selling proposition is your company. Sell it before selling the product. Come up with a Top Ten List of reasons why the customer should consider doing business with you. The list should be specific to your company but could look something like this.

1. Locally owned and operated.
2. Serving the XYZ area for 20 years.
3. Fully accredited, licensed and insured.
4. 24 hour emergency service with live telephone support.
5. Customer design services.
6. Industry certified technicians.
7. Shop online 24/7 on our website.
8. Complete showroom - see products before you buy.
9. Dedicated account representative.
10. Customer Satisfaction or Money Back Guarantee.



Sell Your Product - As I said people buy holes, not drill bits. So your presentation should focus on how your company and product will provide the solution to their problem. The easiest way to do this is matching the products features and benefits to their needs. For example, let's say their attached garage faces the street and does a poor job of keeping the weather out. Your mission is to provide a product solution that addresses energy efficiency and street appeal. Do not bombard them with industry jargon or specs to demonstrate your technical prowess. It will only confuse them and makes you appear to be talking down to them. Stay focused on how they see the product. Rather than pitching the door, highlight how its features will solve their problem.

Involve the customer in the selling process by giving them something to do. If possible put the product in their hands so they can "kick the tires" and examine the product up close.

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Hand them the color swatches so they can begin thinking about which color would look best on their house. I strongly urge using technology to illustrate what the product will look like once installed. Many door manufacturers have visualization software that allows you to superimpose their doors on an uploaded photo of the customer's house. This gives you and the customer the huge advantage of seeing what the door would look like on their home prior to the purchase. It also allows an easy way to quickly show them how various styles, colors and options would look. Let them play with it. The more time they invest with you, the harder it is to choose someone else. Customers want to be in charge. The trick is for them to feel like they're using your assistance to make the purchasing decision rather than just buying what you're selling.



also a powerful way to have rapid access to a variety of information the customer needs to make an informed decision about your product or service. This sales tool allows you to use an app to make your presentation, highlight your company's website and launch a gallery of beautiful product related photos instantly. Need to use the web to answer the customer's question about your products quickly? No problem, just tap, swipe and pinch your way to the

answer using the manufacturer's website or other resource on the web.



In addition to boosting your sales presentation, using a tablet affords the ability to close the deal on the spot. There are many apps on the market that will allow you to quickly generate a proposal and allow the customer to accept it on the spot by signing your iPad with his or her finger. Now how cool is that? But, what about their copy? No problem, you just email it to them. If your company's business software allows for it, many apps tie your transaction into the main database in real time. So once you've completed the deal on site, the office knows about it instantly and can get the ball rolling towards completing the sale. Your customer will be most impressed.

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Once you're confident that a selection has been made it is time to focus on post installation support. Use the product's warranty as a selling feature. Put a copy in their hands. If your company has a labor warranty policy give them a copy of that also. If you use door tags or stickers for service, give them a copy and explain how after hours service works. This may seem basic but it goes a long way to instill customer confidence in the product you are selling them. Besides that, chances are your competitor will not take the time to do it! If your company has a customer satisfaction guarantee, give it to them in writing. Lots of sales reps boast about this policy but few will put it in writing. This is another way to set your company apart from others. By the end of your presentation you want the customer to feel that there is no down side to choosing your product. Knowing that there will be prompt service after the sale can make all the difference.

iPresentations

Previously we discussed that a sales professional uses many tools to create compelling presentations. Using an iPad or other tablet adds "cool" to your sales presentations and is



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Who's the Boss?

If you are a female sales person reading this article most likely you already know this. For you fellows out there, listen up! 85% of all home improvement purchases are either made or strongly influenced by women. So you need to understand their hot buttons. While the men are mostly concerned with functionality, women are more about form, fit and fashion. Selling doors or other home improvement products is no different than selling interior furnishings. Plan for it. You'll need lots of photos, color swatches and options. Be prepared for many questions, especially regarding customization to make your product their own design. The top five things women are looking for in their sales rep are:

1. Listening skills
2. Punctuality
3. Product knowledge
4. Flexibility
5. Eye contact

If you are meeting with a couple, make sure to include the woman in the conversation regardless of the subject matter, including tech talk. Talking past them to the man because you think she doesn't understand such things is a sure way to alienate the real decision maker in most cases. The best way to hone your skills for targeting sales to women is to practice. Make your sales presentation to a female you know that will give you honest feedback. In one practice session you may learn a lot about how to sell to women. Basic sales training tells you to direct your efforts to the decision maker. In most cases, she's it, so plan accordingly.

Summary

The title of this article is a bit of a trick question. A peddler by Webster's definition is "one who offers merchandise for sale along the street or from door to door." So is a sales professional. The difference is that the peddler sells you a product he has with him and moves on. The sales professional sells you a product and starts a relationship. The peddler is selling "stuff" while the professional sales person is selling well thought out solutions. Both have their place in the market. However, selling doors or other building products at the retail level requires a higher skill level. The profit margins are greater but the expertise required to be successful is also. In the past I have conducted a seminar called "Any Idiot Can Sell Price." This 90 minute session is designed to show how selling solely on the basis of having the low price takes very little skill. During the seminar we discuss how selling is a science that has to be learned, practiced and polished. The aim is to move from being an order taker or peddler to a professional sales person. Which one are you?



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