

The Keys to the Castle

If you've got grand designs on success in publishing, these keys should help open some doors

BY CARL LANDAU

Most every magazine advertising salesman who's achieved a moderate amount of success has visions of becoming the next William Randolph Hearst. There's nothing wrong with those high aspirations, but first a salesman needs to sit down and evaluate his (or her; we're using "salesman" simply for consistency-Ed.) strengths and weaknesses. I've developed a checklist of key ingredients for becoming a top magazine advertising salesman.

Persistence: The average sale to a new client takes five to six sales contacts (a telephone call, personal call, and/or letter are each considered a sales contact). It takes persistence to continue contacting a prospect without successfully selling an advertisement. Most salesmen give up after two or three attempts. The good ones hang in there until they make the sale. Even an experienced salesman never knows for sure which prospect is going to be the one that actually buys some space.

Marketing Consultant: A salesman shouldn't be content with selling advertising to a client. If this is the approach you take, clients will recognize it as one-dimensional, and may avoid

your calls. You should think of yourself more as a marketing consultant. Obviously, you should make any suggestions in a professional, non-threatening way.

For example, if you feel your client's advertisement has a weak headline you should suggest an alternative. Or perhaps you can help devise a better way for your client to track sales leads. Or, if you spot some market information that relates to a client's product you can send a copy to him or her. By performing these marketing tasks, you'll gain your clients' trust. They'll see you as someone sincerely interested in their company, rather than just a person selling ads.

Upbeat: No matter what your personal frame of mind is for the day, you must always be upbeat with clients. If your voice is dragging and your enthusiasm level is low, your chances of selling an ad are next to nothing. Obviously it isn't easy to be Mr. or Ms. Sunshine after being rejected ten times on the phone.

If you find yourself in a situation like that, the best thing to do is take a five-minute break to catch up on paperwork or have a friendly conversation with a colleague. You could also call a

favorite client and pass along some of that information you thought he'd be interested in. Taking a productive break should give you a more positive attitude, without putting you behind schedule.

Knowledge: You need to know every fact about your magazine: who reads it, market trends, reader service information, and knowledge of articles published. You must know this information inside-out and upside-down. You never know what tidbit of information will help close a sale. Of course, you must have all this information about your competitors as well, because at some point you'll need to cite a particular fact that points out a competitor's weakness.

A top-notch magazine salesperson also knows how all departments of the magazine work: circulation, production and editorial, for starters. By being aware of the procedures and activities of the various departments, you'll become a better publishing person. Ultimately, you'll sell more pages.

For example, you should know how many direct mail pieces the circulation department is sending out for its next subscriber effort. Or what the subscriber renewal

rate is for this year. Or what the procedure is for the people interested in writing an article.

You also need to be aware of the proper procedures and terminology used in the production department. Do your clients need to send a Chromalin with their four-color advertisement? It's important to have a respect and an understanding for what people in other departments do.

Chameleon: Strange as it may seem, the best salesman becomes a chameleon for each different sales situation and buyer. For example, if a company sells Widgets and is interested in reaching the "Y" segment of your audience, you should emphasize your "Y" demographics, and mention that you have covered Widgets editorially in past issues.

I'm *not* advocating lying about your magazine's audience. However, you *should* emphasize research information that interests your particular advertiser. By the way, if a potential advertiser's product isn't appropriate for your publication, tell him immediately. Otherwise, you're wasting both your time and his.

In the same way, each advertiser has a different approach. You deal with one advertiser who is dry and humorless, and your next call may be to "Mr. Personality." The first just wants the facts and the second wants to have a lively discussion about his chinchilla collection. You'll need to adapt your approach (within reason, of course) to meet the personality and needs of each advertiser.

Tough Ego: Unfortunately, we work in a profession in which we're rejected most of the time. Even the best salesman will only

make an actual sale maybe 20% of the time. How do you handle this rejection? First, don't take it personally. The buyer isn't rejecting you, he's simply making a business decision (over which you often have little or no control). Don't dwell on the rejection; shrug it off as best you can and focus on your successes.

Aggressiveness: Most salesmen aren't aggressive enough. They accept a "reason" why a potential advertiser won't or can't place space and move on to the next prospect. Turn that attitude around. Remember, you're providing a valuable vehicle to advertisers. Ultimately, they'll profit by advertising in your publication. They're not doing you a favor by advertising in your magazine. If you believe in your magazine, there are practically no legitimate reasons why an advertiser with an appropriate product shouldn't advertise with you.

Organization: Lack of organization is the single biggest downfall for salesmen. Most salesmen are so caught up in the selling part of their jobs that they don't take the time to organize themselves properly. For example, when you're involved in telemarketing, don't spend half of your valuable sales time flipping through client prospect files trying to find contact names, phone numbers, and notes about your previous conversations.

Put together a complete call sheet with all the information you need about the clients you'll be calling, the afternoon before your sales calls. If all the information is neatly organized on one or two pages, you'll save a lot of time the next day and you'll be able to spend more time selling. What

system you use will depend on you and your company. However, an important first step is to keep a file for each issue, so you can put a lead into the appropriate month you need to call the prospect or client. A good database of prospects and clients is also a must.

Big Picture: It takes about six months to reap the benefits of your hard work. It is an extremely rare situation when you hear of an advertiser, call him up, and have him place an advertisement in the next available issue. The harsh reality is that it takes hard work and countless sales calls to convince an advertiser to place his business in your publication. Most often, you've been pounding away on an advertiser for four to six months, or longer, before you receive his business. The top magazine salesmen don't concern themselves with the one or two ads they may not get that particular month. What they concern themselves with is the long-term relationship they've established with their advertisers.

You should use these keys as a barometer for your development. To become one of the very best magazine advertising salesmen, you need to possess all the skills described. Once you can feel that you've acquired them all, start working on the plans for your own Hearst Castle!

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