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Print Product Inspiration Podcast 4:

Software Services

Hello, and welcome to the Print Inspiration Product Podcast, episode four. On this episode, we're going to talk about selling services. Specifically, we're going to talk about more software driven services. And as ever, I just want to underline that even if you feel that you are not offering these sorts of services, you will still benefit from listening to the podcast, because there are a lot of ideas that can also be applied to other situations and other products that you might be selling. But many of us are offering services like this. It may be as simple as web to print, which isn't always as simple as it sounds. It may be something along the lines of a data-driven service. It may be multi-channel marketing, but all of these are typically driven by software programs, and the print industry has been historically very bad at selling this sort of solution.

Today I want to look at how you can sell solutions because before we've been dealing with very specific products, such as brochures and leaflets and business cards, and that's a very definite thing that a customer is going to buy, and now we're looking at something very different because it's so variable. There's so many options when you start implementing a service, and often no two customers have exactly the same version of a service that a printing company offers. And because there's so much choice and so many options, it's actually much harder for the prospect and the customer to understand what is being offered. That means it's much harder for you to sell.

Before I dive into some of the things that I think will be useful to help you sell more effectively, I just want to cover three mistakes that I see many printing companies making when they're selling solutions and specifically those software-driven solutions.

The first of these is the software demonstration. I remember the first time that a company came to me and tried to sell me multi-touch marketing. Within just a couple of minutes, the laptop was out, the software was up and there was a software demonstration going on, and my eyes just glazed over. As a customer, as a buyer I don't need to understand the software. I don't need to make those decisions. That's down to you as my supplier. Yes, I'm sure you want input from me at some point, but it's down to you as a supplier to direct that input at the right time.

I was sitting there as someone who's not particularly interested in software, didn't really know what was going on, and it was all just far too complicated for me to understand. So I rapidly lost interest

and the supplier rapidly lost the sale. If they'd focused more on the headline issues, on what my problems might be and how their solutions helped overcome these issues, then we might've had a very different conversation.

Mistake number two is that often suppliers expect customers to make decisions on things that they don't understand. Again, when I look at much of the software, particularly for multi-touch solutions, but also for data-driven solutions and for web to print even, often the customer is given direct access to that software and is involved very deeply in the process planning. Usually that's not the right thing to do. Because if I'm looking at a marketing campaign using software and a whole process that's new to me, how am I able to make the right decisions? It's much better that those decisions are made for me and I'm guided down the right routes. Give me the option to disagree, particularly if I'm a particularly knowledgeable customer, but guide me down the right route. That's the second mistake.

The third and final mistake is that people are given too much choice. Some of you may have read a blog article that I wrote about a case study where people were selling jam. Now, bear with me this may not seem totally relevant to the printing industry, but I think you'll find that it is. There was a group of researchers and they were selling jam at an outdoor market. On week one, they offered 30 different jams. The store that they had was packed, everyone was having tastings and it seemed really, really busy. Week two, they just offered, I think it was 10 jams, much less to taste, much less choice, many less people having those tastings.

So you'd think it would be clear that week one would be the week where they made more sales. In actual fact, the opposite was true. When people had less choice, they found it easier to make a purchasing decision. On week one, when they had those 30 jams, lots of people were tasting, but few were buying. Week two, many less jams, less prospects, but those prospects were converting better. It's the same when we come to solution-driven services. If we tell people that they can have whatever they want, they get scared because they don't know what they want. If we offer people five, 10 different options on how to run a campaign, they get hit by decision paralysis and it's easier just not to buy anything.

Those are the three mistakes. We have to remember that we're giving people what is often a brand new concept for them. We have to make things easy if we want to turn them from prospects into customers. People find it much easier to understand products. They have a defined specification. They know what they're getting. They don't have something that seems infinitely changeable, where they have to make decisions. So if we're going to sell services and products successfully, we need to productize.

There's one company that I know that sells multi-touch solutions and they sell it very cleverly. They never talk about their software or the options available; they actually go in and sell the results straight away. One of their key markets is smaller charities. They contact the charity and they ask what kind of return on investment that charity is getting on their donor mailings. Because that's an unusual question, the charity is often happy to give that information because they're intrigued about why that's being asked and they're intrigued about, are they doing something wrong or are they at the top of the league? But typically they're not top of the league. Typically they will find that if they employed the services of this printing company, they would get much higher return on investments for their donor mailings. That's a really important thing for them.

The conversation is all about the results. When it comes onto the solution, the printing company tells their prospects that they are offering a multi-touch campaign and they'll give them a very brief, easy overview of this. And then they'll tell them that typically a charity like the one they're talking to will take a certain solution, and they offer them a pre-prepared campaign. They say, "This is what we offer and what you'll receive. We'll mail out postcards with a personalized URL, and this is how we'll follow it up." And because the charity has had no previous experience on how to run campaigns, they'll go with this. It makes the sale much easier. It makes the sale much quicker. And of course the estimating department is very pleased as well because there's a lot less work for them.

However, none of this works unless we take our lessons from previous podcasts. We should remember people don't want a software solution; they want help for their business. This printing company is not selling software; it's selling more donations from a charity's donor base. And that's approach gets results.

There was one time when they contacted a charity and they were expecting to meet with the marketing manager from that charity. They arrived at the meeting expecting to meet the marketing manager and they found that there were also three directors from the charity waiting to meet them. That's how important these sorts of results were to the charity. The director wants to get involved straight away at the first point of the conversation. Now it also helps that this printing company is very sector specific. They don't go out and sell results to any company; they sell results to specific market sectors of which smaller charities is just one, but it allows that printing company to be in the customer's shoes. They understand the charity market very well because they deal with so many customers in that marketplace.

We're often spending too much time in our own shoes rather than the customer's shoes. So we get caught up in the features and the benefits of what we sell, we imagine that everyone is going to be fascinated by our software and want to know more about it. But actually that's not the case. We need to keep the conversation in the language and around the points that the charity understands. We need to talk about return on investments. We need to talk about their results, not about our marvelous processes. So never ever let a software specialist near this type of pitch. They will almost certainly lose the prospect for you. Make sure that it's someone who understands the sector that you're talking to rather than your actual product. Naturally, they need to understand the product, but a detailed overview is all they need to know. They don't need to know how to work the software, for instance.

So if you want to go ahead and start selling along these lines, what should you be doing? Well, number one, decide on a market sector. Understand that sector better, understand the challenges that they face and understand how you solve them. Now, this is going back to the TPD principle, target audience pain and difference. And it's one of the key things that I train printing companies in, because I think this level of messaging is so important. The target audience with the printing company I was talking about was smaller charities. And their pain was nothing to do with print; it was all about how many donations they were receiving from their audience. The result that the printing company was able to give them was a higher level of donations, and that's why they were interested in talking to them.

Of course, they could have gone and tried to find a different printing company that would offer these services as well. And that's why it's important to have a difference, to make sure that people

understand why they should deal with you. But in this case, because it was such a new solution, the difference was actually the product that they were selling. But by using that TPD principle, we're able to keep things simple.

Now the next stage, once you've decided on the market sector, and once you've talked to people there, you've understood the challenges that they face and understand how you can solve them, is actually to create your products around this. What is it that you can create that has a specific specification that you can sell to people as a product rather than a service?

Step three, if possible, is to create a case study around this. Now it may be that you will have to carry on and create a campaign for your customers first so that you've got some data to share. It may be that if you're looking at something like web to print, you will implement with one customer and maybe even give them a preferential price in return for the data that they can give you on how it's helped their organization reduce costs and become more efficient. Once you have a case study that talks about these sorts of issues, that's very powerful, both in your person-to-person sales pitch, and as a piece of sales collateral.

So decide on your market sector and understand it, create your product and create your case study. Then you're able to go out and sell solutions and software solutions so much more effectively. But remember we have to keep it simple, we have to keep it away from print and we have to be in our customer's shoes. If we can succeed in those three areas, then it's much easier to make the sale.

Do come back to me with any questions on this. I'm always interested to hear what you think about what I'm saying, how it's changed your way of thinking and your way of selling. Let me know if you have any questions or challenges with it, and I'll be happy to answer them.

I will be back next week with another sales task for you. In episode five of the Print Product Inspiration Podcast, we are going to talk more about selling services, but this time we're going to focus on design and copywriting, and I've got three key points that I want to put across. It will help you launch and sell these services so much better. I look forward to seeing you on the next episode.