

Marketing B2B

I don't think I can overstate the importance of this step, though it may not be what you think. A sales manager once told me that to survive in sales I needed to master the art of marketing B2B - not business-to-business, but belly-to-belly (ie. in person). I had to learn how to listen and be a consultative salesperson and that if people liked me, they would buy from me so long as I offered exceptional service at a fair and reasonable price. That is the core of our mission statement today.

Most small businesses rely heavily on the owner to generate and maintain sales and we have a vested interest in doing just that. I had illusions when I bought the business that I would be a full-time outside salesperson and would grow sales by 10 percent annually but the reality was that I did not have and could not afford to hire someone that could run my business while I focused on sales. Sales became just another hat I wore, and while it remained critically important for me to own the relationship with the client, I did not have much time to do it.

In my case, doing deliveries became the easiest way to meet my customers and to this day, many people do not realize that it is the owner delivering their completed project. The benefit of doing deliveries for me was that over time I established a relationship, built a picture of their business, asked questions and discussed their requirements and understood other steps in their printing process. More importantly, I determined how the products I provided fit into their process and how I might add value to help them communicate more effectively or lower their overall costs.

I thank Stephen Covey for the fifth habit in his *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: "Seek First to Understand." This principle helped me understand that my customers are not buying print; the printed product is just a carrier for

their message. They buy my products to help their customers identify what they sell and encourage them to give it priority over all the other suppliers of the same product. My customers buy from me

Check out this link explaining the **5th Habit**:

<https://www.stephencovey.com/7habits/7habits-habit5.php>

Marketing B2B

because I help them control their quality, inventory and waste to lower their fixed costs.

This premise became the core of my “elevator speech,” what I tell customers when I meet them to explain what it is that my business can offer them.

My “elevator speech”:

My wife and I own a small business that helps local companies communicate with their customers via print and other media. We offer a wide range of products at a fair and reasonable price with exceptional service.

Compare that to the less personal, less effective: “*My wife and I own a Kwik Kopy Design and Print Centre where we print things like business cards, posters and stationary.*”

One advantage of being a small business is the ability to be flexible and introduce new products and services at a much faster rate than large companies. I believe that to grow your business, it is important to expand away from your core competencies along related business lines or ancillary services. Knowing what products or services to invest in requires you as a business owner to be belly-to-belly with your customer, otherwise business decisions become reactions to what competitors are doing around you.

Marketing B2B

Our essential business model hasn't changed in 25 years - we still reproduce customer originals on short timelines - but we also offer online ordering, e-mail marketing, variable data services with mailing and fulfillment. In your business, the widgets might be different but the premise is that people do business with people they like and if you can provide a product or service that your existing customer has a need for, the likelihood is better than average they will buy it from you.

So my three keys to B2B marketing can be summed up like this:

- seek, first, to understand what else you can do for your customer;
- differentiate your offering from those of your competitor; and,
- master your elevator speech. Once you've done that, spend as much time as you can belly-to-belly with your customer and own the relationship.