



# TOP 10 MISTAKES Printing Industry Salespeople Make

A better title for this post might be, "Top 10 (I Didn't Know That Was a Mistake) Mistakes (That Were 100% Preventable, You Know) Salespeople Make with (Future Ex) Customers," but the editors felt the font would be too small to be readable, so ...

First, let's go over the low-lying fruit, the biggest mistake that printing industry salespeople make. One that is universally acknowledged and any Google-capable columnist could come up with:

## 1. Taking a customer for granted,

This mistake is easily No.1 It tops the charts with every "Why do you switch vendors?" customer survey taken since the day the Earth cooled.

**Solution:** Keep dating your customers even after they've said, "I do." The ground beneath your feet is far from solid. The more comfortable you feel regarding an account, the more vulnerable you are as a salesperson.

## 2. Arriving late for appointments,

No, this is not charming. It's a character flaw that speaks to your character. Yes, it's that serious. This habit tells your client that you do not respect his/her time. It runs counter to your claims of great customer service.

**Solution:** Allow extra time. Check the traffic report before you leave, even/especially in the middle of the day when you wouldn't think there would be a backup — but the state decided that today would be the day to send a bunch of yellow jackets out to the highway to stand around and lean on shovels and look down into a hole for a few hours. If you are going to be late, phone ahead.

## 3. Under-dressing for the occasion,

The world is becoming less formal. From the pews to the putting green, it has become acceptable to dress down. Gone are the suits and ties, the dresses and spiffy shoes. Less is expected wardrobe-wise in the workplace. So, why is it a mistake, then, for you to follow the trend and believe that Casual Friday means that you can dress casually on Fridays? Because it's a missed opportunity.

**Solution:** This is a chance for you to differentiate yourself, to stand out from the crowd, simply by addressing one level up from where you are now. Take a look at your personal budget and reassign some money to the "Clothing" column.

## 4. Assuming that clients and prospects are in agreement with your definition of the word, "Printer".

Let's say you are calling on a prospect, speaking to them for the first time. You give your elevator pitch and they shoot back, "We already have a printer." Or what about with an existing account one who utters those words to your competition when they call? In either case, they are

defining the word "printer" by their own standards. They might think that it means photocopying, like Kinko's. Or they might think it's just business cards and envelopes that you are capable of, and nothing else.

**Solution:** In either case, make certain that the other party is aware that yes, you can produce those things, but you can also provide signage and Web design and labels and packaging and ...

**5. Doing more talking than listening,** real communication happens when people feel safe. Write that one down and stick it on your wall. And not just safe, but heard. Have you ever lost an account or failed in your attempt to attain new business, and had no idea why? One possibility is that the customer/prospect did not like your communication style. You got defensive when challenged, instead of listening and accepting a different point of view. When you walked out of a client visit, you left the customer feeling ... well, they really can't define it. They just know that they feel, "less than."

**Solution:** Do whatever you have to do to become a better listener and a more open recipient to an opinion that does not line up with your own.

**6. Ignoring the "little guy" and focusing only on the "decision makers",**

Where do you think tomorrow's director of purchasing or VP of marketing comes from? You probably pass them every day during customer visits. They sit in their cubicles, taking classes at night and gaining experience while keeping their eye on the job sites, waiting for their turn. Ignore them at your own peril.

**Solution:** Do you want to eliminate prospecting from your life? You can eliminate the need to cold call if you just follow this one piece of advice: Never leave an existing account without having met one new person.

**7. Missing buying signals during a presentation,**

Through diligence and pleasant persistency, and after weeks upon weeks upon months of effort, you finally land an opportunity with a coveted and highly sought-after prospect. You spend hours gathering information for your slides so that when you sit down in front of the "powers-that-be," you can knock it out of the park. As you get started, the client asks, "Do you do wide-format printing?" and you respond, "Yes, I'll get to that later."

**Solution:** Always be closing. Don't ever stop looking for opportunities or hints/clues that the customer is ready to purchase on their time frame, not yours.

**8. Learning only the specs of the job, not the story behind it,**

A client hands you something to quote, but your questions only focus on things like ink, paper and quantities. You are neglecting something far more important: How it is used. Give a customer a great quote and you save them a nickel. Give the customer a great idea and you save them a dollar.

**Solution:** Ask open-ended questions that get to the usage of the document so that you can quote what they have and what they might need. Oh, and guess which one is more profitable for you?

**9. Forgetting to care about their business, industry, threats and future,**

When an existing customer calls you right now, do they say, A) "I need to get a price" or B) "I need your help with a project"? The rep who answers A might enjoy a customer relationship that includes a wide variety of items sold, but they will lose that account on price. The rep who answers B is seen as a resource to the company and their future is far more secure because of their demonstration of print knowledge and customer knowledge.

**Solution:** Study your top customers as if there is a final exam coming up. Because you know what? There is.

**10. Forgetting to tell the customer how great of a sales rep you are,**

Despite years of service, you've just found out that a "Don't they know all that I've done for them?" customer is gone. No, they don't know what you've done because you have

not told them. Forgetting to remind a client about the value you bring to them is like holding onto a check and never depositing it in the Bank of Goodwill.

**Solution:** Each time you do something well, each "Hey Rocky, watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat" quick delivery you turn around, each time you are praised by the customer, send them an email of thanks for the opportunity to demonstrate the kind of service that you provide.

Then, when some bean-counter decides to save a few nickels by quoting out the print to other potential providers, your "account champions" will be there to speak on your behalf and save the account from wandering.

*By Bill Farquharson*

