

What Clients Really Want...you may be surprised

Cliff Quicksell, MAS+

PPB - Promotional Products Business

July 2017

A few years back while speaking at Fruit of the Loom's National Sales Meeting, I had the pleasure of sharing the stage with a gentleman, whose name escapes me; however his message during our offstage conversations still resonates with me today. I recall sharing my frustrations on how difficult clients and prospects were, always looking for best price and shopping me all the time. My friend paused and said, "Cliff, what are YOU doing to change that process?" I responded, "What do you mean", He said, "Isn't it the buyers job (our client) to level the playing field? If I can buy what you have from twenty people, and everyone can get it to me in the same time frame, same quality, color, size, decoration...what else is left other than price? What have you done to 'raise the bar' so they can't put you on that same playing field?"

If you stop and think about it and put yourself in the buyer's shoes, what would you do? Imagine shopping for tires for your car, your car uses the Michelin LTX A/T 2 - 22" tires you go online and you see ten different companies within a ten mile radius from your home, every company does free mounting and balancing, all have stock, all can do it on Saturday when you're available, all have the white-wall version and all have a five year warrantee. Top price is \$297.95 per tire, the lowest price is \$226.99 each - where do you buy?

An article in B2B magazine listed the top 10 things clients are looking for in a strategic marketing partner; amazingly, price didn't even make the list. My friends, your clients in many cases, are having their compensation packages dictated by their ability or inability as it were, to show measurement in their marketing efforts, so there's the opportunity glaringly starring you in the eye. So what are the 10 things?

1. **A Strategic Thinker** - to be an excellent strategic thinker you must first know something, that knowing comes from gaining an understanding of the objectives, desires, needs and results. That level of understanding can only come from research and asking in-depth questions. Distributors and suppliers alike, for the most part, ask far too few questions. We are so bent on getting the sale that we miss the bigger picture. By squabbling over the scraps that fall from the table, we miss the feast. Being proactive and determining what your client has on the horizon for the year: trade shows, new

product launches, staff incentives, employee and client recognition. How can one do this? One excellent way is to create a media plan with your client, place all of the events the client is having for that year in your database, and have it “ping” you three months before the event, at that time, proactively call the client and set a meeting to discuss the goals and opportunity. Remember they are extremely busy, and your proactive approach helps them in their planning; which will ultimately lead to maximum success of their projects.

2. **A Clear Understanding of the Client’s Business** – Several years ago, there was a commercial on television where two men were discussing business over lunch and one said to the other; “You know, a guy came to my office today and tried to sell me a phone system”, “Yea, so?”, the friend stated. “He tried to sell me a solution, *before* he knew my problem”. Do you have a “clear understanding” of what your client’s really do, their problems and challenges? Do you ask with in-depth questions? Do you research? It’s imperative, in order to be different and ‘raise the bar’, that you know not only what your client does, but what their objectives and goals are before moving forward. This knowledge enables you to be think “strategically” (remember #1) and proactively.

My dad was a senior buyer for McGraw-Hill. I recall him telling me a story where a salesman came to his office unprepared. When I asked my father his feelings on this, he stated, “it’s not my job to educate the seller, they must come to me prepared with a basic understanding of what we do. I am willing to fill in the blanks and augment their knowledge of our company and our challenges, but I don’t have time to be the Sales101 teacher.” I will never forget that, you need to be prepared; and in an age of mediocrity, that’s a differentiator.

3. **Experience in the Client’s Industry** – having a knowledge base in the client’s industry sets you apart, think how much more marketable you would be to a current or prospective client if you had worked in their industry or had a significant background? Having a deep knowledge base in a vertical market: manufacturing, hospitality, aerospace, banking or better yet, drilling down to the level of human resources in the hospitality market, by having that deep level of understanding, you become more valuable to that client. One of my vertical markets when I owned my marketing

company was hospitality. I had an extensive background in this space, working in a wide variety of companies. My value was when I could speak to a food and beverage director, business owner, marketing or sales professional and I could not only speak their industry language, but I “understood” their challenges because I experienced them first-hand. Where is your expertise beyond the promotional products arena? That’s a GREAT place to start!

4. **Excellent Creative Work** – The reality is a pen, note pad, balloon, pencil, letter opener, water bottle, golf towel, plush toy in themselves are not creative or “new ideas” as our clients always asking us for. However, demonstrating your ability to design, create and build high-end, engaging marketing campaigns utilizing all aspects of our medium: promotional products, print collateral, packaging, theme development and unique distribution all with measurement metrics - that makes you unique, that’s creative.

I would highly recommend you begin doing this for your company first, this way you’ll be able to measure the success and effectiveness and have a great case history to share. I developed a campaign utilizing creative packaging, unique theme, that included variable data printing, a pencil and a sticky note pad that had an astounding 70% appointment rate – it’s all in the results!

It’s important to note; when you’ve created something of merit, trumpet your successes, no one else will – I promise.

5. **Ability to Think Outside the Box** – actually, melt the box!
Approaching clients with the same old mundane “stuff” is not thinking outside the box. Thinking outside the box means taking “RISKS”, while its true risk begets failure, but so what, it also produces huge potential profits, it’s worth it. Sir Ken Robinson during a TED Talk was speaking on creativity and he was making a point that when being or thinking creatively you will make the wrong call sometimes. He further stated, “I’m not saying that being wrong is the same thing as being creative, but what I am saying is if you’re not *prepared* to be wrong be wrong you’ll never come up with anything original.” Marketing is about taking risks, however think through the process to minimize the risk, in the end, take the risk!

6. **Proven Success with Clients** – as mentioned in point four, your successes must be trumpeted. As your business grows and you experience success, it is important to compile those successes; ask for referrals, get letters of recommendations and archive those in a presentation format for future clients. Post those testimonials and awards on your social media, websites, and collateral materials; I might suggest before posting any client related campaigns to secure permission.

7. **Ability to Measure R.O.O. & R.O.I.** – promotional marketing campaigns which have a built in measurement metrics, have a far greater appeal to the end-buyer. In the same B2B article it was noted that, today's marketing directors are having their compensation packages affected by their ability or inability to drive measurement. Everyone has heard the term R.O.I. Return on Investment, which is a valuable measurement, but if we were to drill down deeper, beyond R.O.I. you would get to the core as it relates to marketing, and that would be R.O.O. or Return on Objectives. When your measurement can determine the total return on objectives met, and then your programs are perceived as much more valuable. Here's an example. Your client is trying to attract a particular group to their tradeshow booth for a demo of a new piece of equipment. They have spent \$5,000.00 on marketing and their goal is to get 100 of the 500 prequalified buyers, or a 20% return. Here's the math:
 - \$5,000.00 divided by 100 = \$50.00 – if they achieved this goal the ROO would be \$50.00 per person, if the product your selling is \$25,000.00, paying \$50.00 is an easy decision, however if two people show up, then the ROO is \$2,500.00 per person, at that point you need to think a bit harder, especially if your client's average close ratio is 10%.

Remember, your job is to engage the maximum amount of qualified buyers to the booth it's the client's job to close the deals. If you look a bit deeper into the above example you will see that if your marketing campaign draws 300 of those prequalified buyers in, then the results change dramatically.

- \$5,000.00 divided by 300 = \$16.66 per person and at a 10% close ratio, the client will potentially, achieve 30 new sales. Much better show experience, equating to a loyal client.
8. **Clear Articulation of Your Vision** – what is your company's vision? Is it clear? What exactly do you do? More importantly, WHY do you do what you do? Simon Sinek in his TED Talk said; "People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do what you do." Clients want to know, they want to know so they can make a determination if you fit their culture, the way they think, if you are of like mindset. Make your vision about the client and not so much about you. Know your vision, be sure that your staff knows and can articulate that vision on their own consistently. If you have a staff, ask the question, 'why do you think we do what we do?' – You'll be surprised at how inconsistent the answers will be.
 9. **Resources to Grow with the Company** – do you have substantial capital in order to grow your business effectively, are you partnering with the VERY BEST suppliers? Suppliers that are fiscally and socially responsible and have the resources to grow. A friend of mine told me she lost a million dollar client because the client wanted her to create a corporate store, when she said she hadn't before but would research it and get the information, the client responded that 'we are not interested in someone who is going to walk through the door with us, we need a partner that has the resources and know-how to take us by the hand and "lead" us down the road' Do you have the resources? Resources go beyond just cash in the bank. Are you investing in education, staffing, technology and equipment? You'd better be.
 10. **Ability to Execute an Integrated Strategy** – developing great ideas are not enough, you MUST be able to execute. Your promotional marketing campaigns should have all the elements that make it complete, creative, innovation and measurable but without execution it's useless, it's like building a beautiful Porsche without an engine – looks great but not very functional.

To the gain the attention of your clients and prospects, your efforts must be relevant, relatable and engaging. Boomers, Gen Y and Xer's and Millennials each have a unique way of being engaged and communicated with, your job is to identify, create, engage and execute in a meaningful and relatable manner.

As you've read this article, isn't it noteworthy that clients and prospects are not concerned about price? **Price never made the list!**

Working toward mastering these characteristics will solidly plant you as a strategic partner with prospect and clients. Our industry is changing; we are much more than just products. Promotional products HAVE MADE their mark in the advertising and marketing community; but now it's time to raise the bar...again!

Now go out and get your share of it.

As always, continued good selling - CQ