

Sales Strategies



by Jared Davis

Closing the Sale

One of the most difficult things about owning a framing business is that you have to be multi-skilled in so many areas. Apart from being a master craftsman, you also need to be a master salesperson at the front counter. Both are important, but the time you invest in developing your selling skills will make a bigger difference to your bottom line than improving your skills in making a shadowbox or painting a bevel. In business, there's no real point in knowing how to do anything unless you can sell it first.

Understanding How to Sell

The first step to understanding how to sell is to understand why people buy. Start by asking yourself why your customers buy from you. Why do they choose your business and your product over other alternatives?

Do you really know the answer to this? It's not the same answer for everyone, which is why you need to find out what's true for your business. Ask your best customers why they chose you and your products, and see what they say. The answer is often not what you might think. But it is important. Once you truly understand your customers' buying motives, you can use this information to promote and sell your products and services, enhancing your future sales.

Learning how to sell is a big topic, and the first aspect that people typically want to know about is how to close a sale. First, you can't start a sale with a close! In selling an emotional product like custom framing, the final close arises simply as a natural conclusion to the overall consultation process. If a sale is difficult to close, then it usually means that an important aspect of the customer's needs or experi-

ence have not been addressed properly during the consultation.

Besides understanding your customers' needs, it is vital to be in tune with their personalities and moods during design consultations. If a customer seems relaxed and desires conversation, you need to accommodate this in your consultation. Alternatively, when customers seem rushed for time, you need to reduce the consultation, focusing on the important point, or even ask if they would like you to come up with some choices that they can come back to see later.

Recognizing Buying Signals

There are other elements to consider when closing a sale. These include recognizing buying signals and overcoming objections. Buying signals are things that customers reveal when they are ready to buy. Some are obvious, such as "Okay, let's go with that," or they may be subtle, such as a physical gesture. When these are revealed, it is time to close the sale. Pushing a sale before there's a buying signal can cause indecision or even frustration in a customer. Always be aware and react appropriately to what a customer is trying to tell you. Here are some common buying signals you should be aware of:

- Subtle gestures, such as leaning forward or reaching out to touch a handbag, may indicate a readiness to buy.
- Listening plays a big part in closing a sale. It is vital to always listen to what a customer is saying. When a customer says, "Wow, I really love that!" or "That looks good to me," then it's time to close the sale. Sometimes it can even be a change in the tone of voice when they're speaking.
- If the customer starts agreeing with your ideas and suggestions, then it may be time to close the sale.

- If they ask questions like “So, how long will it take to do?” or “So, what's the best way to hang this on my wall,” then a buying decision has been made, and it is time to close.

Overcoming Objections

Don't be fearful of facing an objection. It should be viewed as an opportunity to close a sale. The most common type of objection in trying to close a sale is usually along the lines of “Okay, let me think about it.” More often than not, this is just a graceful way of saying “no” without causing offense. Other words can be, “Thanks. Can you please print me a quote” or even “I just need to speak to my husband first.”

You can relate to a buying situation where you haven't wanted to offend a salesperson by saying bluntly, “No, thanks.” However, these responses typically indicate that there is a hidden objection you haven't yet uncovered.

It can be difficult to get customers to reveal their reasons for their lack of commitment to buy, but if you can find out why, you may have a chance to save the sale. You must ask questions. If you don't, you won't save the sale. In doing so, try to avoid asking closed questions that require only a simple “Yes” or “No” response and don't always reveal the truth. Ask more open questions, such as:

- “Okay. So let's think it over now while it is still fresh in your mind. What are some of the considerations you need to know more about?”
- “Is there an aspect of this frame design that we can change to suit it more to your liking?”
- “Okay, sure. Is it the price you are concerned about, or is it something about the design that you'd like to review?”

These types of questions create an

opportunity to discover hidden objections, which provide you with a chance to help overcome them. Asking open questions may seem a bit confrontational and uncomfortable, but they are supposed to be. But they will generate an answer that will help you identify the hidden issue. And you won't make the sale if you can't identify the problem.

The most common hidden objections to closing a sale are usually one of three things:

1. Design Doubt. They're not 100 percent convinced about the design.
2. Justification. They can't justify the price.
3. Indifference of Attitude. They don't like you, your staff, or your service.

Objection 1: Design Doubt

Review the design – You always want your customers to “love” their designs. If you are missing that emotional reaction, then go back and review the designs with them, asking more questions about what they like. Where is it hanging? Who is this for? How do you want to tell this story? Remember, it's their design, not yours. So make sure it has their touch and that it also meets or exceeds their expectations.

Reassurance – If you notice signs that a customer has doubts or indecision during the consultation process, you could try offering “safety confirmations” about particular choices. Most people feel safety in numbers, and statements like, “Well, this is a safer choice, because most people prefer to go with something like this” offers reassurance that they are heading in a safe, popular direction.

Get a second opinion – Sometimes there is uncertainty about the design, which may require added reassurance. If your reassurance is not helping

when you are reviewing the designs, then you may need to get help from another staff member for a second opinion on the design.

Design Guarantee – Offering a guarantee on a particular design choice, such as “If you take it home and are not 100 percent happy with these mat options we decided on today, I'll be very happy to change them to another choice for you for free.” This helps a customer remove the uncertainty and risk in choosing the right colors. The more you can reduce the risk, the more likely you will convert them into a sale. Also offering a guarantee like this gives a customer confidence in your design skill and advice, as they know you wouldn't be happy offering such a guarantee if you weren't totally sure you were right.

Visualization Software – For the average consumer, it is always hard to imagine what a final frame design will look like. Visualization software is a great closing tool in scenarios like this because it helps give a customer a better idea of how the final masterpiece will look.

Objection 2: Justification

The most common type of price excuse is, “I don't know if I can afford it.” A sale is made when the customer feels that the custom frame is worth more to them, than the price you are asking. When it comes to price concerns, it's usually about justification, for both them and you. Customers need to justify the price to themselves, and you also need to justify your price to them!

Justification – You know that a customer can afford it. What she is really saying is, “I don't know how I can justify this without feeling guilty because I just bought a handbag and

some new shoes and maybe I'm spending too much money on myself." Providing alternative perspectives on the price will help customers avoid the feeling of buyer's remorse or guilt. For example, "Well, if you are talking about something that is going to give you at least 10 years or more of pleasure, is it really costing you as much as you think?"

Educate – Take the time to educate your customers about the differences in qualities of materials as well as about your reputation and craftsmanship. Have information resources and point of sale examples ready to show them so they can learn and quickly understand what will be right for them.

Design Ownership – During the consultation, the goal is to make sure customers feel ownership of their creations and become emotionally attached to "their" final designs. This helps justify the cost because, as the L'Oreal ad says, "Because you're worth it!"

Quoting the Price – The way you verbally deliver the price to a customer can make more difference in that customer's acceptance than the actual price itself. Quoting the price in a confident, non-hesitant manner lets a customer know that you have no doubt in the value you are asking. Looking the customer in the eye is critical when you quote a price. Also, using strategies like, "Oh, that's actually come out much better than I thought. This one is only going to cost you \$860." Avoid showing any hesitation or desperation, and almost act as if you're so busy right now that you really don't care if they want to go ahead with this or not, but that's the price—even if that's not the case.

Scaling Down the Design – Many people have a budget. You can always suggest a few components they can cut back on, such as glazing or matboards.

It is always better to start with higher value options to allow some room for scaling down later, if required. More often than not, the time invested in going through this process is considerable. This usually helps clients justify their initial designs with higher value choices and confirm their order, especially when they realize the money saved by dropping a mat is only going to save \$30 on a \$300 job.

Objection 3: Indifference of Attitude

If this is the hidden objection, it is almost impossible to get customers to reveal it, especially if they don't like you. And it is equally impossible to save the sale. But it is always possible to learn from mistakes and do better next time.

Try to avoid creating "Indifference of Attitude." Great customer service and attitude from a consultant is essential for successful, high value sales. An indifferent attitude by staff is the biggest reason for losing a sale, more than price. People buy from people they like. If they don't like you or your business, they won't trust you. And if they don't trust you, then they won't buy from you, even when you have the better product or price. Make sure you handle consultations in a respectful and polite manner, and always avoid the risk of causing offense, even minor. Don't allow any reason for people to dislike you or your business.

Avoid Pushy Sales Tactics – Customers are more resistant than ever to "old school" sales tactics, so avoid these if you want to consider making loyal, life-long customers rather than one-time sales.

Improve Your Shopping and Consulting experience – Does your shop look tired and run down? Is your

presentation lacking? Does your business compete on a professional retail level?

Be Better than Your Competitors – Sometimes you are being compared, so it is important that the customers like you, your business, and your product better than your competitors. Price is one way to compete, but there is no future in being the cheapest, so always aim to compete on design and service first.

Ultimately, issues with closing the sale are usually avoided when you focus on offering the best consultation and customer experience. You need to be sensitive to eliminate any confusion and discomfort through the process, because most customers are unfamiliar with a typical custom frame consultation. The more you can do this, the less chance there will be for indecision or the lack of commitment on the part of the customer.

Finally, no one can close every customer; so don't be discouraged when you lose a sale. You can't win them all. But by paying attention to what your customers want and to what they're telling and signaling you, you can definitely improve your odds. ■

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