



# PRINT SELLING PITFALLS

## And What To Do About Them

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A Soyang guide to the most common errors in selling print services, and how to avoid them.



# INTRODUCTION

Good print deserves a market. It's there to make an impact. To grab the attention and support business growth. Good print is worth buying. It's in the selling where things can sometimes go awry.

This eBook is for those new to the print sector and established businesses looking for new ideas to sell their expertise. It should help you avoid common pitfalls, target prospects more successfully, and engage in more fruitful conversations with new and existing clients.

We hope it helps you sell your print services more successfully.

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## Pitfall 1

# NOT DEFINING OR KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

“Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don’t know which half.” You’ve no doubt heard that quote, attributed to 19th century US merchant John Wanamaker, many times before. We’re using it now because it highlights a point that’s as important now as it was in the 1880s. Effective print selling (and selling in general) has to be about more than shouting to the world in general and hoping somebody listens. At least, it does if you’re not to waste 50% (or more) of your ad spend and effort.

Put simply, if you’re going to sell printing, you’ll increase your chances of success by clearly defining your target audience. Conversely, the broader and less well defined your audience, the less likely you are to connect with any part of it.



## How do you define your audience?

### Consider the following questions:

#### WHERE DOES YOUR EXPERTISE LIE?

You may offer a wide range of print services, but which ones are you most experienced in delivering? And for which are you best able to add value?

#### WHO ARE YOUR BEST CUSTOMERS?

Clearly there’s a financial element here — there’s little point selecting a target audience that offers little opportunity for profit. But the best customers are also the ones that are dependable, are good to work with, or who bring projects of scale or interest.

#### WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THESE CUSTOMERS?

What has experience told you about the issues your preferred customers face and the pressures they work under? From their perspective, what does a good print partner look like? In what ways do/could you help these clients?

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**Act now:** Write down your answers to the above questions to identify your top 2 or 3 client



## Pitfall 2

# NOT MATCHING YOUR OFFERING TO TARGET AUDIENCE NEEDS

With your target audience defined and their needs understood, you'll now need to develop a strategy for talking to each segment (that is, audience group).

You won't use a single sales message in precisely the same way for each segment because each will have different needs. Even if their needs are similar, how you talk to the segment may vary.

*Isn't this going to take more time, money and effort than a blanket approach to print sales? Yes, but the returns from the approach will be far greater than the generic approach.*

To refine your targeting, ask yourself the following questions:

- ♦ What are the main concerns each customer segment encounters when buying print?
- ♦ How can you help address those issues? Remember, this may not be a simple matter of offering a product or service. It could be your expertise, your experience or capability that prove the critical factor.

Next, you'll need to decide how to get your message across to your target segments. This could be via:

- ♦ An email campaign tailored to each segment
- ♦ A print brochure for each segment or (more cost-effectively) variable inserts that enables you to construct a brochure tailored to individual needs
- ♦ A series of website landing pages tailored to each customer segment
- ♦ Blog posts, social media and paid ads (Google Ads, for example) that target segments individually
- ♦ A sales team primed to approach conversations with prospects in certain markets in specific ways

More likely, you'll employ a combination of the above strategies, adjusting things as you go depending on results (see Not measuring below).

**Act now:** Identify the key concerns of your customer segments, and the ways in which you can address those concerns. Then ensure your answers form part of every marketing channel.



### Pitfall 3

## SOUNDING LIKE EVERYONE ELSE

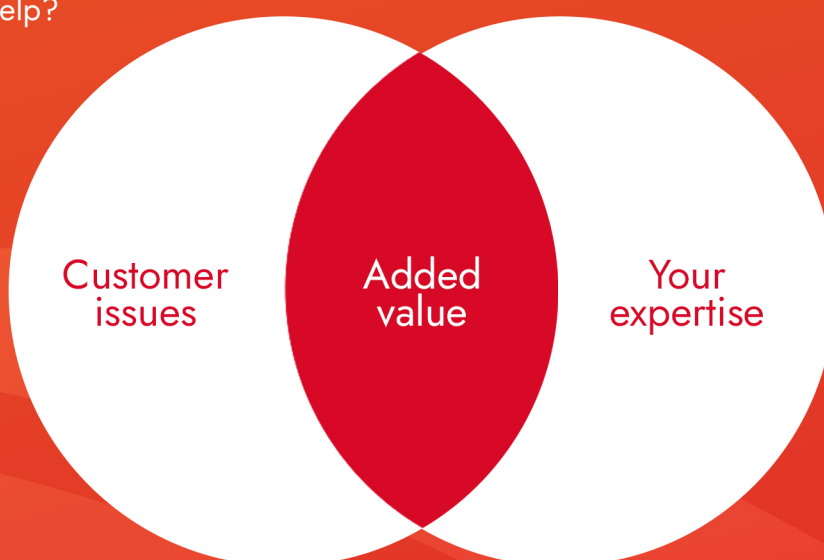
Of course price matters. So do deadlines and print quality. But if every printer targets their customer segments with these messages then they'll sound exactly like everyone else, which defeats the object of segmenting the audience in the first place.

So put issues of quality, price and time to one side, unless your prices, quality or ability to meet a deadline are so exceptional that they really do warrant being the core of your print sales message. We'll return to price in Pitfall 5 below.

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**Act now:** Look again at the questions we explored in Pitfalls 1 & 2:

- ♦ What are the issues your prospects face once you have removed price, quality etc from the equation?
- ♦ How can you help?



Where the two intersect — that is, where your expertise enables you to help address prospects' issues — is a natural starting point for a print sales message that is unique to you and which adds value to potential customers.

In the following pitfalls, we'll explore what some of these strategies might be.



#### Pitfall 4

## IT'S ALL ABOUT PRINTING

It isn't.

Printers print. It's what we do. Put us in a room with other printers and we may talk print textiles or eco-solvents until the cows come home. But generally speaking, customers don't care about such things.

They nod politely when you say you can print on air mesh textile, but they get enthusiastic when you tell them that means they can place their brand on a flag, promotional tent or hoarding cover, and perhaps even add a QR code so customers can connect immediately. Then, when they see it at scale and in vibrant colour, they begin to see the possibilities for their own business.

The key when selling your print services is to understand that you're not really selling print at all. You're selling impact, convenience, ideas and solutions – the benefits of print, not the features.

Exactly which ideas and solutions are the right ones for your customer? We're back to the questions we explored earlier about understanding your prospects. When you do, you'll be able to sell your printing by selling what they really want.

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**Act now:** For each target segment, identify the benefits of what you offer.

## Pitfall 5

# IT'S ALL ABOUT PRICE

It isn't. But if you approach print sales conversations from a price perspective, guess what? You'll end up making the sale (or not) based on price — usually the lowest possible one.

Sales conversations that begin with...

- ♦ We've got a special offer on...
- ♦ Let me see if I can beat your current price
- ♦ Our latest product is 30% cheaper than our last one

...are inevitably going to drive prices down.

Yes, customers care about price. But it's not all they care about. What's more, if you can convince them that you have answers to other print problems they've been tussling with, they're far less likely to care that your price isn't rock bottom. Paying a little more may even encourage them to value your service a little more too.

### How do you shift the conversation away from price?

Don't start the conversation by talking about price!

Instead, create a value-led conversation. Value is not the same thing as price, and it may represent something slightly different for each prospect or customer segment. At its heart, however, is the idea that you can add value to the customer's business in some way.

We've already considered the fact that every print seller will talk in terms of price, quality and speed. So ask yourself how else you can add value. That may be by:

- ♦ Offering sustainability credentials your client can shout about to their clients
- ♦ Making their processes more efficient
- ♦ Offering expertise in a certain type of print. Ours, for example, is the ability to offer print at any scale for any surface
- ♦ Being a trusted source of print advice

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**Act now:** Work out how you add value to each customer segment and develop a customer proposition based on that.



## Pitfall 7

# IGNORING THE POTENTIAL OF PARTNERSHIP

Competitors. They're 'the opposition' and business is a straight 'fight' between you and them. Except it isn't.

No printer can do it all. Form relationships with a few likeminded print businesses that offer complementary services to yours, and suddenly you're able to offer new and existing clients a greater pool of print services. That reduces the risk they'll feel a need to look elsewhere. But it also prevents you from needing to fund the introduction of products and services you rarely get asked for anyway.

In return, your collaborators can send work your way and between you you can cross-sell, upsell, run complementary promotions and even tender for projects that, individually, you may never have the scale to take on.

Yes, it takes trust and the relationship may not last forever because individual business goals may change, but so-called 'coopetition' can be an effective way to drive print sales, as [this study](#) demonstrates.



**Act now:** Identify a potential collaborator or two and consider the ways in which you may cooperate for mutual benefit. Before making any approach, ensure you can demonstrate a win-win for all parties. It may help smooth initial conversations if you have a pending project on which you could both work.

## Pitfall 8

# NOT RETAINING CUSTOMERS

According to **Harvard Business Review** and depending on which study you read, it's anywhere from 5 to 25 times more expensive to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing one.

It makes sense, then, to pay (at least) as much attention to the customers you already have as you do to finding new ones.

Every print business has something of a starting advantage in this respect. Customers want a printer they trust. They would, generally speaking, rather stick with what and who they know rather than going to the hassle of looking elsewhere. When they do look elsewhere, it's usually because they feel their hand has been forced.

According to one **US analyst**, the top three reasons for customer 'churn' are:

- ♦ Bad customer service
- ♦ Not enough value
- ♦ Poor quality communications

All the above are entirely within your control. The simple act of staying in touch (in a genuine and personal way rather than a blanket email) can have a simple but significant effect. Even more powerful is building relationships between your printers and your clients, making them an indispensable part of your customers' teams for all print advice.

It takes a little effort and drive, but retaining customers requires little more than continually doing what you do well, and not being passive about the relationship.

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**Act now:** Set yourself (or your printers or customer service team) a target to call three customers each week. There doesn't need to be a sales agenda. Just touch base and ask if there's anything they need help with.

## Pitfall 9

# NOT USING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

If you've been in business for a while you'll already have some core client relationships that really matter to you. But have you ever stopped to consider that those clients almost certainly know other businesses who could benefit from your printing products and services?

Tapping into that network requires one simple act: the ask.

It's very easy to fall into the trap of believing that, if your clients really valued what you do, they would recommend you regularly. This isn't the case. "You'll worry less about what people think about you when you realize how seldom they do," said Olin Miller (although Mark Twain often gets the credit). We can extend this witticism to business. Your clients may value what you do enormously, but unless the specific topic arises while in conversation with one of their contacts, they're unlikely to act as your champion without a bit of a nudge.

With a nudge, however, you'll be amazed how easy it is to get people who already appreciate you to share that appreciation with others. It could be via an introductory email. It may be via LinkedIn. They may even be willing to bring you in next time they have a meeting with the contact.

But if you never ask, you'll receive only a fraction of the recommends and referrals that could otherwise come your way.

**NB** It's also worth noting that a referral immediately circumvents issues of trust, capability and, to some extent, price. When a prospect already knows how good you are, the conversion process is usually much swifter and simpler.

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**Act now:** Set yourself a target to ask for three referrals each week (and then ensure you hit your target).



## Pitfall 10

# NOT MEASURING

In any walk of life it makes sense to devote greater attention to activities which deliver results and spend less time (or stop all together) unproductive activities. This is most certainly true of selling print.

Suppose, for example, that having followed this guide, you have identified four core markets on which to concentrate. Over the following months your efforts bear fruit. But on review you discover that, while three of your markets are delivering quality print projects at a scale that makes the time, effort and marketing outlay well worthwhile, one of your markets is only producing low value sales.

You'd never know this unless you measured it.

It's certainly true that you can measure too much. It's easy to get lost in data. But some measurement is essential. So step one in measuring the effect of your print selling is to understand which measures really matter. Depending on where your marketing efforts are centred (online or physical) you might choose measures including total sales value per client, costs per acquisition or cost per click, customer type and retention rates and the product or services being sold.

The specific measurements may vary, but the aim is to understand:

- ♦ Who's buying
- ♦ What they're buying
- ♦ How much they're spending
- ♦ How much you're spending to attract them
- ♦ Which marketing routes are effective

Step two in measuring the effect of your print selling is to use the data to inform your next actions. Has one specific product proved particularly successful? Would it make sense to focus more on marketing that product more widely? Are you offering a product that no-one's buying? Is that because of a problem with the product, the way you're selling it, or simply a case of wrong product, wrong market?

By using the data to inform your actions, you refine your products, marketing approach, prices and preferred customer segments to ensure you spend more of your time having productive conversations with people who are serious about buying.

### Act now:

- ♦ Set up a system to measure the effectiveness of your print selling.
- ♦ Use the data to adapt and evolve your strategy.



# ABOUT SOYANG

Soyang Europe is a leading manufacturer and distributor of digital printable media and surface coverings for the signage, design, marketing, construction and decor sectors.

Our head office and 70,000 square foot distribution centre in Accrington, Lancashire holds stock in excess of 1.5 million square metres of premium European and American manufactured products.

We have a variety of innovative substrates produced by our high end Far Eastern partners that are all available for delivery on a next day service. This is our commitment to help customers keep... Every Surface Covered.

To talk to us about your next print project, please call  
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