

## Sales Has Changed; Have You?

### Education Sessions Focus on Sales Philosophy, Technique

By Dennis Coyle

Nearly every aspect of the reprographics industry is changing. Whether it's technology or your customer base, it's changing. And sales is no different.

The IRgA hosted several sales-focused education sessions at the 2008 Annual Convention & Trade Show in Las Vegas. Two sessions in particular captured the current state of sales in the repro industry — “Sales Management: Getting to First Base with Solution Selling” with Rick Farrell, Tangent Knowledge Systems, Chicago, Ill.; Pat Gremillion, A&E-The Graphics Complex, Houston, Texas; and Kip Young, Kal-Blue Reprographics, Kalamazoo, Mich.; and “Solution Selling: Is it for Everyone?” with Farrell.

The three speakers agreed on several fronts but none more than transactional selling is becoming archaic and ineffective. All prefer consultative selling — also called solution selling — or at least a healthy combination of the two approaches.

“Customers are looking for help in many ways including being more productive” says Young. “To be successful one must be viewed as a resource.”

Farrell admits transactional selling can make money but at a very high cost.

“Ten years ago, customers could afford to buy from people they like,” Farrell says. “Transactional salespeople were able to prosper. But in today's marketplace, the remaining differentiator a company has with its competition is its ability to know its customer's business better than the competition.

“In order to prosper and get to the next level, [salespeople] have to sell more consultatively,” he adds. “Salespeople can succeed at a very mediocre level by selling transactionally. But the road will be bumpy, frustrating and fraught with high burnout and high turnover.”

### Characteristics of a Consultative Salesperson

The days of being price driven and company/product centric are nearly over. Salespeople have to put the needs of their customers ahead of their short-term goals. Building a strong relationship is critical. Salespeople have to understand their customers' businesses and then help their customers improve their businesses based on their needs.

Consultative salespeople also need to be willing to listen to their customers.

“They allow the customer — through thought-provoking questions — to self-discover reasons for changing independent of the salesperson's agenda,” Farrell says. “They become a neutral, non-bias advisor to the company and sell with the customer's best interests in mind. They allow the customer the freedom to give a yes or no answer at the end of the meeting.”

### Changing Your Sales Culture

Transitioning from a transactional to consultative sales does not and cannot happen over night. Farrell says it takes at least one and a half years to two years to fully transition.

Change is slow and can often times be painful. Owners must be willing to change and fully support the initiative. They need to provide the time and resources to help the staff. Demanding the staff change their sales approach will fail. However, if you give them the tools to change and the necessary time to learn, it can happen. Training — whether it's inside or outside training — is critical.

Unfortunately, not everyone will be willing to change. Owners must support everyone but if an employee is not willing to embrace consultative sales, then staffing adjustments could be necessary.

It's clear that the transition will not be easy but owners should not expect poor results early on.



Rick Farrell and other IRgA speakers help explain the differences between transactional sales and consultative sales.

“Owners should not expect a drop in sales,” Farrell says, “but they should expect drop in their pipelines of deals that are truly qualified. This can be frightening to owners. There will be less (stuff) that clogs the pipeline of deals that are not real.”

### Selling in a Down Market

Although the current market is tough, you can still get an edge. And it is possible without slashing the prices of your products and services.

“If (salespeople) are willing to put their customers' needs ahead of their needs, customers will follow,” Young says. “My experts will tell you that the time to get aggressive and gain market share is in a down economy.”

Young also recommends using a rifle approach as opposed to a shotgun approach during a difficult market.

“You must concentrate on your abilities and not go out after things that are just there,” he says. “In a down economy, you must zero in on the opportunities that are real and not waste time and resources chasing opportunities that may never happen.”

The presenters talked about several other aspects of sales. If you were not able to attend these sales sessions or any other session during the IRgA Annual Convention, audio copies of each presentation are available for purchase at the IRgA Web site — [www.IRgA.com](http://www.IRgA.com). ●