

Selling the Coffee

Scott Bidwell

On a recent vacation, I was up early and out the door in search of an iced coffee to jumpstart the day. With no Starbucks in sight, I happened upon a little local joint called the “The Grind.” With surfboards hanging from the ceiling, above colorful, comfy chairs perfect for hours of relaxing, you could tell this was a place that didn’t take itself too seriously. One thing they did take seriously was their coffee and doing it in their own unique way.

“How much different can you make an iced coffee?” you ask. Granted, you can find as many different ways to prepare an iced coffee as the records industry has found to price storage, but The Grind iced coffee is TRULY an iced coffee – all the way down to their coffee cubes. Yes, I said coffee cubes. You see, the owners of this unique coffee house don’t use ice cubes to cool the coffee. The Grind actually freezes little cubes of coffee that they use like ice cubes so that my iced coffee was flavorful and refreshing from the first sip to the last. Ingenious! Not only was it a great cup of java, the fact that I was ONLY paying for coffee, rather than lots of frozen water, made me feel like I was getting much more value for the money. Let’s face it, we’ve all felt buyer’s remorse after plunking down our five plus dollars for “designer” coffees. And as if the local feel of this friendly little spot didn’t make me want to linger longer, they also offered free Wi-Fi – jackpot! Suffice to say, I was back the next morning and the next (with laptop in tow) to feed my caffeine addiction with another cup of “truly ingenious” iced coffee.

In the highly competitive coffee house market, the owners of The Grind seem to understand that they aren’t just selling coffee. They have created a haven where customers can enjoy their coffee (and a muffin, all-natural yogurt or even a sandwich if you like), read the magazines, books, or daily newspapers that are available at no charge for your reading pleasure, catch up on email or surf the web (again, no charge). With a menu that includes natural fruit smoothies and exotic teas, it isn’t just the java juice lovers who find their way through the front door. With all these offerings, it’s no surprise that The Grind has become a destination spot in its market.

How do you sell your “coffee?” When approaching a new prospect, do you talk about the number of boxes they have and how large your facility is? Do you talk about particle size from your shredder, or how thick your vault door is? Don’t get me wrong, this information is good to share, but in my opinion it’s not what gets the prospect’s attention. It certainly isn’t why a potential new customer will carve time out of his or her busy schedule to talk with you one-on-one.

A customer seeking information management services is typically seeking to create order out of chaos and improve resource management. Resources typically include time, people and dollars. As for the rest of it... They already have the expectation that you will provide the basics, or standards, of heightened security, fire protection and compliance – and rightly so.

Know What You're Selling

When you get right down to it, your business is not too dissimilar from that of the coffee shop. In its most simplistic form, The Grind sells coffee. Likewise, you sell shelf space if you are a records center, slots if you are a media vault, or confidential shredding if you are a destruction company. If you take The Grind's approach, however, you recognize that you're selling much more. The owners of The Grind understood that, to attract and keep customers in their highly competitive coffee house market, they had to combine great service with unique offerings. In essence, they elevated the simple task of getting the morning coffee into an enjoyable and memorable experience. This is not unlike you selling your *services*. The business of storing, managing and destroying your customers' information assets is really a service-based business rather than a commodity-based business. When positioning your sales message, keep in mind that your potential new customer will best respond to a message that describes how your company will ensure accuracy and access, while providing the highest degree of security and compliance of their important information assets. In other words, it isn't that you *will provide* security and so forth. They want to know *how* you accomplish this and *what this means to their business*.

Shhhh...Just Listen

Too often, salespeople launch into the sales pitch, citing statistics, testimonials and all the reasons a prospect should do business with their company instead of listening to what the prospect is seeking to accomplish. What are their challenges or pains? What have they done thus far to address these challenges and what will make them feel like they have achieved success in tackling these issues? Why are they interested in doing business with your company – or any company like yours that provides similar services? By understanding your prospects' needs and issues first, you will be in a better position to return with a much more meaningful solution and hopefully, add a new company to your growing list of clients.

Be Specific

A potential new customer wants to know specifically what your company does differently from other companies in the market and why that should matter to them. Provide detailed information about how your company conducts its business and how that will help them deal with their pains. Share information about the software you use and its specific features that will enable them to better manage their information assets. Provide detail on what systems you already have in place in an effort to make them feel confident that their paper, media or destruction materials are being professionally managed.

Invest in Technology

While it's often tempting to take a little bit from here and a little bit from there to cobble together technology-based solutions, these often fall short of your requirements and your customers' expectations in terms of effectiveness and ease-of-use. Do your research to find the best solution to streamline business processes – not only internally, but externally as well. Simple exercises such as search and query functions should work effortlessly, indexing and conducting an inventory of assets should be easily accomplished. When

demonstrating your “technological edge,” let the customer try it out first-hand so they can experience for themselves the value you can bring to their business.

So while your business may not be selling coffee, it is very similar to The Grind in that you have to 1. Present an inviting exterior (i.e. message); 2. Show what makes your company unique; 3. Provide value in your service; and 4. Make me want to stay.

By taking these four steps and implementing the strategies outlined in this article, you’re sure to increase your sales success. As for me, I’m back from vacation, but more than once, you’ll find me thinking about that little jewel of a java spot that reminded me how there are always new ways to do the same old things – with wonderful results. More cubes please!

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