

Media sales 101

Harry Herber's list of do's and don'ts for sales people.

A SENSE OF HUMOUR. THAT'S perhaps the very first thing anyone who works in media should have. When your day involves, on the one hand, pressure from the sales director to sell at least a couple of million at a close-to-zero discount; and on the other, a media agency that wants a 50-percent discount on a R100,000 campaign over 12 months, you'd better be able to smile.

Let's assume that any good sales person (brand custodian, sales manager, champ, executive, team leader, or whichever new titles have been invented) knows:

- Their product;
- Their competitor's product;
- How media planning is done;
- The target market of the product they are enticing;
- The historical spend pattern; and
- Whether their medium is really suited to the product they are wooing.

This is the absolute minimum requirement – the nuts and bolts; the housekeeping. Once armed with the above – and if fortunate enough to get an appointment this fiscal with the oh-so-busy media executive – there are a few do's and don'ts to keep in mind.

The responses I received from strategists at The MediaShop when asked what their biggest gripes about sales people were, provide some clues:

- Don't act like a postman. On Fridays a swarm of media owners descend on the agency to hand out "this week's" publication. I see

about four or five every week who spend 11 seconds on average in my office. (This is the time it takes to say, "Howzit, sorry to bother you...", walk to my desk, drop said publication, and scamper out).

- Do build relationships. Introduce yourself. Stay visible.
- Don't practise avoidance therapy. It's incredible how many sales people call at lunchtime. And no one in the agency is fooled: We know you log it as a sales call, even though you made no sale nor called on anyone. Don't arrive at 16:45 either. We know that we are the pit stop between you and the pub and, as with all pit stops, it's the quicker the better as far as you are concerned.
- Don't think "no" means: "Okay, please go ahead and phone the client because he is unaware of the fact that we've had this conversation. By the way, please offer him less 50 percent on the rate you quoted me."

But perhaps the two most illuminating thoughts from the strategists were:

- Do you remember the old saying: "What you don't know can't hurt you"? True, but it can make you look bloody stupid!
- The trick to successful salesmanship lies in the individual's ability to read the person sitting on the other side of the desk. Know what the hot buttons are, and have the ability to put yourself in their chair.



If you could, you would know he is thinking along these lines: As a media planner, I have to be able to evaluate and comment on anything from the media inflation at the SABC to Talk Radio 702's growing audience figures; the cost of sky typing; how a change in editorship will affect the profile of the *Cape Times*; the quality of Dolby sound in the movie houses in the Western Cape; and the availability of super billboard sites on the road to Polokwane. I have to know the cost of a DPS in all the major papers and magazines; know how many ratings R485,000 will buy, find the time to read *Business Day* every morning, and defend decisions such as not to go into another arbitrary survey about how to save the environment in a community newspaper for the previously disadvantaged living on the outskirts of Colesberg!

And then the sales guy gets peeved when the planner doesn't phone the client immediately or hasn't convinced the client to use his new tattoo medium, which is "taking the world by storm".

Finally, remember that I have the following in my "present cupboard" at home: 11 of those things you're supposed to carry wine in (I don't drink wine); nine golf umbrellas (I don't play golf); six braai tong sets (I seldom braai); three hammocks (I have no trees from which to hang them); eight tog bags (I have an old one – the only one I ever use – for gym); 73 mugs; 16 LPs and a thing I'm told is for taking stones out of horseshoes.

If only I had a horse... 🐎