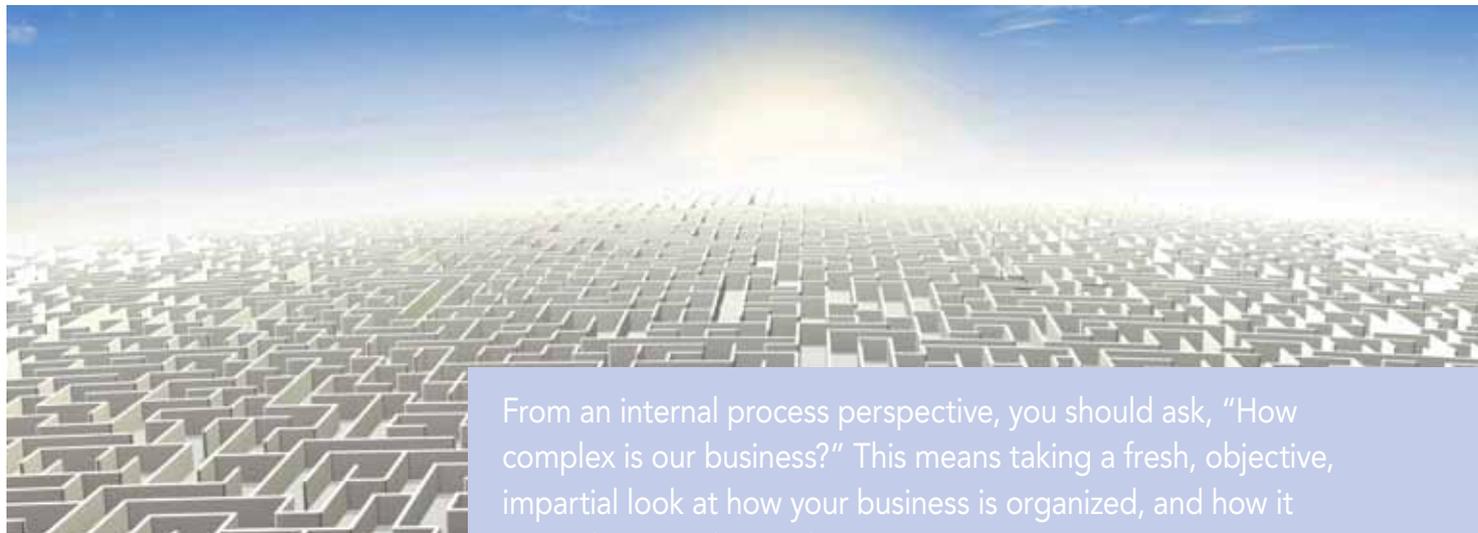


Business Selling: Why Simple & Easy Matters



From an internal process perspective, you should ask, "How complex is our business?" This means taking a fresh, objective, impartial look at how your business is organized, and how it goes about its day-to-day operations.

Think about your own business, how it appears to prospects and customers, and how it functions internally. If you are like most people in the workforce today, you constantly deal with the urgent, not the important. When you try and catch your breath for a moment, think how much better life would be without all the complications you put up with, or cause. (I know, you don't cause complexity, but everyone else does.)

So, what can we say about the state of business (and the world) these days:

- Complexity touches most aspects of our lives.
- As my British friends say, "We are 'spoiled for choice.'"
- We are not satisfied with our purchases until we consume the features we needed at the time of purchase, and if we never get to use the features, we become an ex-customer and tell about 20 others.
- We get frustrated as we try to maneuver through complex telephone trees (think wireless or cable provider) and learn that some systems will quickly direct your call to a live person if you shout or, better yet, curse.

This may seem like a description of everything you contend with every day, and, if you are tired of fighting complexity, here are two internal areas on which to focus, to simplify your world: The products and services you offer, and your internal processes and practices.

Simplify Your Services

To begin thinking about simplifying your products and services, revisit my previous SGIA Journal two-part article, "Evolving From a Product-Focused Business to a Solution Provider," in the Fourth Quarter 2010 and January/February 2011 issues. The services discussed will simplify your customers' lives, and increase your revenue. No doubt, many of you prepare multiple items for an order, warehouse them until they need to be shipped, make kits and finally ship or deliver to multiple locations, all the while coordinating delivery so all locations receive the material at the same time. You may also install the items and remove and recycle the ones being replaced. This process may be more complex for you, but is certainly easier for your customer.

Your Internal Processes & Practices

Answer this question: To whom does your customer talk with questions, changes,



Sam Klaidman, Principal Adviser, Middlesex Consulting Group

complaints and re-orders? The salesperson? His/her role is to sell, not expedite or troubleshoot. Many companies have an all-purpose, inbound service desk/call center to answer all customer calls and provide an immediate resolution to their issue, or take the baton and work through your internal processes, to then tell the customer how it was resolved. Also, they frequently use CRM (customer relationship management) software that houses all notes about all

customer and prospect interactions. With this system, anyone who talks to customers can see exactly what has transpired and never finds themselves making a sales call, while the customer is steaming about a late shipment, failure to issue credit, a quality problem or anything else that might distract the customer from doing additional business with you.

Many larger companies offer the value-added service of having dedicated project

cluding digital printers, tablets, enterprise software, GPS systems for their drivers, smartphones, etc.) and still fit them into a business model dating back to their founding. This means your employees are not getting the full benefit of your technology investment, and your customers are probably exposed to ancient business practices. Neither is good.

Collecting & Using Customer Feedback

You may not be surprised to learn how many companies do not have a formal method to capture customer feedback, analyze the results and use this information to change processes and procedures. These steps are critical, because managing a business based solely on gut feeling means you believe you know more about how your customers want to be treated than they do.

For example, when I was gaining my “formative” business experience, I learned that there were three variables to be traded-off when dealing with suppliers: Price, Quality and Delivery. I usually did a very good job of maximizing any two, but the third one was always a problem. Today, if you even have to talk about any of these, you have a major selling job. Everyone treats them as table stakes, and you had better be outstanding, or you will not even get to the proposal stage.

Another major shift in customer attitude can best be described in this way: When we were younger, we were taught the golden rule. “Do unto others as you want to be done unto.” In today’s connected world, where everyone demands instant gratification, golden rule 2.0 has replaced the original: “Do unto others as they want to be done unto.”

Impact of Mass Individualization

Doing business on the Web has one distinct advantage over bricks-and-mortar: The experience can be customized for each customer. For letterpress printing, you only need to look at Vistaprint. If you have ever been a customer (e.g., business cards), when you go to their homepage, you will, not only, see your previous purchases, but they also present all types of additional products, based on your individual design. They take this opportunity to up-sell and cross-sell, with prices shown at a discount, designed to make it difficult to pass up, a well-planned customer retention and growth scenario.

While it is unlikely that all members of SGIA will do a large percentage of their

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SGIA Webinar: Sales for Graphics Producers

Learn how to take your graphics and sign business to a new level when you attend SGIA’s free Webinar, “Sales for Graphics Producers,” on April 25, 2012. Join sales-print expert Peter Ebner, as he demonstrates how to focus on desired, vertical markets, expand opportunities to upsell through print programs and packages, and most importantly, how to close the deal. Register now at SGIA.org, Keyword: Webinar.

In the meantime, pick up his two SGIA books in the e-Store:

How to Sell Large-Format Printing to Retail
Supercharge Your Printed Wearable Sales

Members: \$34.95

Nonmembers: \$49.95

Visit SGIA.org, Keyword: eStore.



managers to only deal with the company’s largest, or most strategic, customers. These people provide peace of mind to their key accounts; the questions, problems, concerns and issues are passed to the project manager, and the customers can be confident that the issue will be promptly resolved and can expect updates regarding the status, plans and estimated closure date.

Another example can be something as simple as how your customers are invoiced. Many leading companies ask their customers, “Would you like to receive your invoice as a PDF file attached to an email, in an envelope using regular mail or by fax?” Three easy choices that will make your customer’s AP department’s lives easier, and may even get you your money sooner than usual. This step does not add any significant complexity to your internal processes. Additionally, most companies accept checks but prefer — and possibly reward — direct bank deposits.

From an internal process perspective, you should ask, “How complex is our business?” This means taking a fresh, objective, impartial look at how your business is organized, and how it goes about its day-to-day operations. An internal team, or an external consultant, can do this but whoever gets the assignment must feel there are no sacred cows. Was the last look done before you purchased your first PC, or has your organization been updated to reflect the current technology and customer expectations? You would be surprised at how many companies add technology (in-

business over the Web (except possibly for businesses like T-shirt printers, some flexible circuit manufacturers, etc.), it is critical to understand your customer's expectations (both individually and in aggregate), and how you are perceived as a supplier/partner.

Understanding Customer Expectations

Additionally, you must look at each major touch point and understand how your company is perceived, and how important it is to customer's overall satisfaction and loyalty. These touch points can include:

- Design
- Quoting
- Order Entry
- Shipping
- Packing
- Invoicing
- Delivery
- Returns Handling

It is very possible there are major customer-touching activities in some, or all, of these, and in the ones I did not list.

This early step is very important: Is this an easy initiative to start? Absolutely not, but, fortunately for everyone, you will not be the first company to begin the journey. There are many books, articles, blogs, conferences, consultants and practitioners standing ready, willing and able to assist you. In fact, I would be very surprised if there are not a large number of SGIA members already well on their own journeys.

Getting from making business easy to conduct to talking about measuring satisfaction at each touch point, and taking corrective action, has been an easy journey.

Each company initiative should only be started when you can answer this basic question: How will any change impact my customer's perception of our business and, ultimately, our overall profitability? The only way to know what the customer thinks is to ask him, understand the message and take action. But, if action makes business more complicated, then hit the reset button and start again.

Sam Klaidman is principal adviser at the Middlesex Consulting Group and specializes in helping SMB clients grow revenue and profits through value-added services, simplify their business practices and develop and implement customer satisfaction and loyalty programs.

sam@middlesexconsulting.com

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"We've chosen to focus on delivering customer experiences, simplifying customer experiences and simplifying people's lives. Technology that doesn't simplify people's lives is not a technology that resonates over a long period."

-Sanjey Jha, CEO, Motorola Mobility Holdings

"Simplicity breeds clarity"

-The late Steve Jobs, Apple

"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius — and a lot of courage — to move in the opposite direction."

"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler."

-Albert Einstein

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication."

-Leonardo da Vinci