



Who Are They?

JUST EXACTLY WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?

Exhaustive studies have been done about this concept. Data has been collected, assembled and run through sociological Cuisinarts. Demographic profiles have been created, the ideal target customer has been identified and isolated.

And all this...for what?

I think the net result of all that research is to *eliminate* a large number of potential buyers.

Our customer does not necessarily have a fixed average profile. If we were selling CDs of music performed by head-banging garage bands, it would stand to reason that we would not market that music to 55 year-old college professors. But art and framing don't have such restrictions. *Everyone* is a customer for art and framing.

So it stands to reason that before we attempt to sell to them, we find out who our customers are.

In all of my books, I spend a lot of time and emphasis talking about 'qualifying' the customer. I talk about what I think qualifying is, what it is not, how to do it, how to recognize when you have done it, etc., etc. But qualifying the customer is a *process*, and

as such it has essential values, stages. Plateaus we reach and pass through. A lot of what leads to the decision that a customer is ‘qualified’ can be instinctual—something that good salespeople can *smell*—wafting on the wind.

But it is also a conceptual issue, too. Consider: for many years in this business, we salespeople were spoiled rotten. Those of us who came up through the ranks working for the larger, multiple-location gallery businesses (companies who put most of their galleries in high profile, tourist-oriented locations) enjoyed considerable success. We were fairly well-paid, based on the commission structure the galleries would offer, the price point of the artwork and the fact that the traffic in those types of galleries is high. And just by the sheer numbers, even lackluster salespeople made *a bunch of money*.

That is not so much the case now. It’s much more difficult to make a living selling artwork. The customer is much different.

But, the manner in which (many, not all) salespeople ‘think’ of the customer, the way the customer is *regarded*, is similar.

“Well, it’s just the customer. And you know how ‘they’ are.”

We salespeople would tend to eyeball the customer who entered the place of business, and either right then, or after a few brief words with the customer, we would attempt to discern whether they were ‘real’ or not. Whether they were a viable target. If they were ‘buyers,’ or ‘tire-kickers’. Or—and we were all looking for this guy—if we had a ‘whale’ (what Las Vegas calls a ‘high roller.’)

WHO ARE WE QUALIFYING?

Now, that activity is obviously *not about the customer*. That activity is about us—the spoiled, self-centered, predatory salespeople. I admit, I did that for many years. And I was reasonably successful with it—if you consider only the economic aspects of that word.

However, I also noticed there was some baggage that went along with that type of approach. Actually I came to see a number of essential problems

- 1) *I burned out frequently;*
- 2) *I wasn't interested in—and hence unable to make repeat sales to—very many customers;*
- 3) *I wasn't very proud or happy with the way I was performing my life's work.*

Sure, I was great at closing and 'getting people to buy', but, for what? The customer would just as often go to another gallery afterwards. But who cared? They were just tourists and another one would come along in ten minutes.

It wasn't until after a long period of exasperation, being unhappy and unfulfilled and blaming it all on the art business, that I realized my mistake: I was putting myself ahead of the customer. And the customer knew it.

Putting aside the lack of spirituality of what I've just described (and one can't, really), the short of it is this:

If everyone is a customer for art,

**then everyone who enters the gallery
is a customer.**

And *everyone* should be treated that way. The premier treatment should not be reserved for only the obvious ‘hitters’. Salespeople in the good galleries—no the *great* galleries—realize that. They know that even a person who is not ‘qualified’ may become so in the near future, or perhaps may have a friend or relative who is qualified.

HOW LONG IS THIS GOING TO TAKE?

The predictable resistance that salespeople have to qualifying is with the time it takes to do it. The new salesperson tends to become anxious about his or her initial encounter with the customer if it appears as though s/he isn’t ‘getting to the point.’ This salesperson wants to start talking about the art right away, before the customer wanders away. This often works contrary to what we want.

It takes professionalism, confidence and, most of all, *patience* to recognize that one must proceed in a linear way, placing first things first. It doesn’t do any good to attempt to ‘sell’ something to someone before you have them thoroughly qualified, even if it means not getting up to bat at all. This is a concept that is difficult for most new salespeople to grasp.

We have to *know them*. We have to know *who they are*.

And *they us*.

And we have to do that in the time allowed us, whatever that time

frame may be.

JUST WHO IS THE CUSTOMER?

Customers are at once those people we love and respect who facilitate our business and without whom we could not pay our mortgages.

They are also those people we seem to hate.

Customers Are Two Sides To The Same Coin.

I've talked a lot about the win/win philosophy in my previous books and I believe it. I believe that God would have us behave in an upright and forthright manner with our customers. I also believe that in the end, even without a belief in God, it's the best of all philosophies if for no other reason than that it promotes *ongoing future business*.



But if we're going to be good with customers, if we're going to be effective with them, it pays to know who they are. Especially, insofar as how they might behave during the sales process—which can be anything ranging from five minutes to an hour.