
Retailing

Business Case



Basics

By Kathy Witt

Business case customers come in all shapes and sizes, with all types of schedules — *and* they want their business cases to reflect who they are, what they need and how they travel and conduct said business, and live up to the demands of their schedules.

The executive heavy hitter may need something with a little boardroom flash — think the business brief version of a Rolex. This exec may travel extensively for out-of-town meetings, racking up frequent flyer and stay points faster than you can say, “Can I book you in business class,” or may fast track his or her schedule, traveling out and back in a day for meetings and for dinners.

The upwardly mobile middle-manager may not travel as often, but for this cubicle wrangler, travels are longer in duration, possibly overseas, and just as intense, not to mention exhausting.

The newly minted college grad, while not jetting off to company or clients, may still be traveling, commuting via subway, public transit or bicycle. Regardless, this corporate newbie is in transition — from dorm life to life on the job interview circuit or at his or her first grown up position.

How does the sales associate just starting out in the business sell to match customer needs with available real-world goods?

By never making assumptions and by always being an active listener.



Basic Selling 101

Jeff Izenon of Specialty Luggage in Pittsburgh says the retailing process should begin by asking questions and then listening to discern what the customer needs — in terms of what they want and need.

“We’d find out if the executive heavy hitter goes to a lot of out-of-town meetings and, if so, we would start with one of our better bags — a Tumi or a Jack Georges, for instance. We wouldn’t pre-judge them because they’re wearing tennis shoes.”

Besides Tumi and Jack Georges, Specialty Luggage’s main brands include Hartmann, Briggs & Riley, Victorinox and Delsey. Before the “big reveal,” however, Specialty Luggage sales associates are trained to ask questions and listen. It’s a simple but effective technique, so much so that

Izenon has been told that the company should package its sales training.

“We’re not doing anything different than anybody else,” he says. “We just reinforce it. We try and teach active listening to our sales team: ‘How often do you travel? Carry on or check? Air travel or car travel? What are your organizational needs? Nylon or leather? Do you want a brown bag or black bag?’ I wouldn’t show the customer a black bag if he answered brown. ‘Are you going to carry a computer? Wheels or no wheels?’ What we’re doing is taking inventory and shrinking down the possibilities to make the choice easier and less confusing.”

“We consider it Basic Selling 101. How can you sell something without knowing what the customer wants?”

Playing “50 questions”

As each question reduces the pool of possible choices, sales associates get a step closer to helping customers figure out what they want or need — and needs, Izenon stresses, are part of the want.

“We call this process ‘50 questions.’ Every time you ask a question you should eliminate 50 percent of your inventory.”

All Specialty Luggage sales associates are trained in this methodology. All store managers have successfully completed the Travel Goods Specialist Certificate Program, which trains sales associates to be knowledgeable about different types of travelers and what products and information will meet their needs. All have found the program to be beneficial.

Izenon looks for personable people to put on the floor, but also those who are trainable. Associates

Continued on page 30



Anatomy of a Business Case Sale

Using the college grad that has landed his or her first job as an example, Leslee Richards of Liebers Luggage in Albuquerque, NM, demonstrates how a specific customer type and a retailer can mutually achieve their buying and selling goals.

He may be in his new job just long enough to have nearly forgotten the trauma of midterms and finals and to have arrived at an understanding of his needs or she may have changed jobs and realized that she will now be carrying a computer or a load of books or making presentations. In either case, the corporate newbie will begin shopping for his or her needs and wants.

“When customers come in, it is important to help them understand how the various features can be utilized to solve their specific problems,” says Richards.

As an example, she cites someone whose job requires carrying large catalogues but who doesn’t want the boxiness of a catalogue case. This customer might be shown a computer overnighter. For someone who needs and wants flexibility, Richards would show them a case with removable computer brief or removable wheels.

“With women, we’ll talk about lightness, the ability to go over a shoulder and hold handbag contents. Customers who use public transportation might want a bag that is big enough to carry shoes in a shoe sack away from their papers. If they walk or bike, they may want an extra long shoulder strap that can go across the chest.”

And, in true add-on know-how, the associates of Liebers Luggage would show letter pads, business card cases, sacks/kits for wires that can be used in the business case and other accessories.

“In the case of a job interviewee, we would recommend something simple to hold a few papers (resumés) or even a letter pad initially — nothing too fancy. For a new lawyer, a brief bag is the go-to category, even for women. Real estate agents like cases that hold the extra long forms they carry. Contractors and engineers like attachés.”

Knowing The Customer

Richards notes there are a few elements that figure into Albuquerque customer types and, by extension, retail sales. They don’t have a lot of bike commuter customers who need business cases, so few messenger bags are sold. The business climate tends toward conservative, so bright colors are an exception rather than the rule, although the color red does have its spot on the shelves.

With these factors in mind, Liebers Luggage sales associates still ask lots of questions of their customers in order to match customer needs and wants with available real-world goods:

- ▶ What kind of documents and how many do you need to carry?

Continued on page 30



Continued from page 29

- ▶ Do you carry a computer? How big is it? Do you have peripherals you need to carry?
- ▶ What do you do with the contents of your bag: Do you need to make presentations, carry hand-outs, carry clothing, demonstrate equipment, protect valuables?
- ▶ What image are you trying to project, if any?
- ▶ Do you travel with your case? How often? Do your needs change when you travel? How?

Richards points out that luggage manufacturers, from International Leather (ILI) to Hartmann to Tumi have letter pads. Millennium/Andrew Phillips has some interesting leather envelopes and folders that are designed to hold only papers — but notes that headhunters recommend that the interviewee bring something to take notes on. She gives Briggs & Riley's Verb collection high marks for its lightweight, fresh looking panache for commuters, younger workers and job hunters.

"I think one of the most beautiful briefbags is the Bosca Partners Brief in Correspondence leather. For something more classic, check out Jack Georges Platinum. The Jack Georges Milano collection is a lovely choice for women in a conservative office."

For excellent, quality business cases with room for long papers, large computers, peripherals and overnight travel, Johnston & Murphy, Korchmar, Briggs & Riley and Tumi are among specialty store brands found at Liebers Luggage. In attachés, Richards calls Hartmann the quintessential in leather and Zero Halliburton in classic aluminum, adding that Kenneth Cole also has both leather and metal versions that are great looking choices as well.

For customers going for a wheeled case, Richards likes the McKlein series with the removable wheels, calling them good looking and well priced.

"Briggs' Baseline is smartly designed, durable and good looking and High Sierra's wheeled computer briefs are great for teachers and grad students; they are durable, reasonably priced and big." ■

Continued from page 29

aren't left to their own devices but are coached in the art of sales and given the skills they need to be successful.

"Some companies just throw them in the door. We train our salespeople. We teach them competency from the get-go," Izenson says. "Customers expect you to be competent."

Regardless of customer type, the selling process is the same and the training remains ongoing. "If someone comes in looking for something to carry on a job interview, our sales team isn't going to short-sell them in terms of their ability to buy. They're going to show the best and let the customer tell them it's too expensive."

Izenson views the corporate exec and the college grad as extremely different customer types who may buy the same bag because of their wants and needs. It may seem highly unlikely, but it can and does happen in the retail world. And the savvy sales associate knows to stay out the way and let (human) nature take its course.

"We train our sales associates to never talk about themselves and never to give their opinions; those are irrelevant. But they should always attempt an add-on with every sale. That's a non-negotiable aspect of working here in sales."

Add-ons add up

A customer who comes in for a business case and reveals, during the sales Q&A, that he's traveling to Europe, is opening the door to more purchases.

"Our sales team will attempt an add-on; it's gold for us — but it also helps the customer. The guy going to Europe? You go through a check list: passport holder, plug set, converter, cordless curling iron. The add-ons help the consumer and the store. You're really helping someone find a solution," notes Randy MacKenzie of San Francisco-based Edwards Luggage.

A male customer may be carrying a case for his computer and a case for his files and is looking for a solution, that is, a single case that will encompass the functions of both. You might show him a business case on wheels that can also step up to the demands of his overnight business trips. In this scenario, add-on possibilities might include an Eagle Creek Pack-It® system to slip inside the case and a small piece for toiletries.

"You're giving people a new way of looking at things," says MacKenzie. "I never approach a customer with an attitude of 'what else can I sell you?' Your strength is that you approach sales from a position that it's going to be really helpful for the customer — not just another sale in your pocket."

By the same token, when MacKenzie is showing a first-timer a briefcase, she will usually show a coordinating letter pad as well, possibly a business card holder, too.

"Sometimes when you're talking to people, you realize they came in for one thing and go out with something else because they didn't know it existed. My job is to come up with the best solution. When I'm helping with business cases, I'm asking questions: 'Are you traveling with your business case? What are you using now for a carry-on bag? Is it in good shape?'"

MacKenzie will show carry-ons and notes that, whether you sell one that day or not, you've planted the seed.

"In our stores, it's all about the experience," says Izenson. "Customers should come in and have an enjoyable experience and then they'll be an advocate for the store."

MacKenzie agrees: "In the end, I always ask the customer to come back and let me know how the item worked out for them and some do come back. To me, this adds more strength to making the sale.

"Your genuine interest in helping the customer leads to a sale and makes you a much more believable person. So much of great sales is personal relationships — and smaller specialty stores give salespeople an opportunity to connect with customers." ■