**Successful Selling Depends on Both Questions and Answers**

These days, everyone is talking about consultative selling — and with good reason. Consultative selling, as the name implies, rests on a redefinition of the salesperson’s role. It relies on salespeople to build trusting relationships with customers based on listening to and understanding their needs as both entrepreneurs and advertisers in a variety of media.

Building the foundation of a consultative customer relationship begins with asking questions — and then listening carefully to the responses. Most people love to talk about themselves and their businesses, and are eager to share both their successes and their challenges. But most often, they wont’ share unless they are asked the right questions. That’s why today’s successful media sales professionals learn about customers’ businesses prior to sales calls and arrive with questions designed to uncover the businessperson’s challenges, successes, objectives and needs.

Once the foundation has been laid and the advertisers’ needs are acknowledged and understood, only then should the consultation be transformed into a search for solutions that leads to a sale. And while many of today’s topnotch ad sales reps are applying consultative sales strategies with great success, the bottom line still depends on the quality of the resources the publication can offer.

“To be successful, today’s publishers and ad reps have to sell solutions,” says Lou Ann Sornson, Regional Manager of Metro Creative Graphics, Inc. “And selling solutions requires not only deep knowledge of new media and a keen understanding of the full range of customers’ businesses and needs, but a wide range of print and digital advertising resources at the ready.”

The bottom line? Listen carefully, then be ready to offer solutions. The following are just a few examples.

* Advertisers whose goals include targeting new advertisers or capturing advertisers looking to reach specific zones might benefit from free-standing inserts rather than ROP ads.
* If a business is looking to solidify its branding through both advertising and print materials such as business cards, flyers, brochures, etc., many publications can — and should! — serve both sets of needs.
* Special sections have always been a great way to expand ad sales revenue, but having complete, ready-to-present print and/or online sections with engaging, high-quality editorial content and ad positions of varying sizes to present to existing advertisers and prospects are key to closing a sale.
* If they like what they see, advertisers with even the smallest budgets will jump at the opportunity to be associated with purveyors of complementary goods and services. Arriving at a sales call armed with actual layouts for targeted, themed, multiple-advertiser ads or themed pages with a variety of ad positions and sizes, fills a lot of needs and makes it hard for even the smallest business owners to say no.

*This article was written by Jo-Ann Johnson of Metro Creative Graphics, Inc.*