

Carl Davidson is director of Sales and Management Solutions, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in sales and management video training, recruiting and live seminars exclusively for the water equipment industry. A free demonstration video and list of products and topics is available at 800.941.0068. Send comments on this article to him at reactions@carldavidson.com; www.carldavidson.com.

Carl Davidson



By Carl Davidson

I recently returned from a cruise to the Caribbean where I learned a lot about selling water equipment by watching the art auctions that are held on cruise ships. As I watched, I realized that selling art has a lot of parallels with successfully selling water equipment. I know this seems strange at first, but let's take a look at how water salespeople face similar situations and challenges.

How Can We Get Leads for Art?

Imagine trying to find leads for artwork, especially that \$8,000 Matisse or that \$24,000 Picasso. Advertisements in the newspaper won't work and radio is out. This is when a smart salesperson thinking outside the box decided to sell art on cruise ships. On each ship (and there are a lot of them), there are about 2,000 people "trapped" there to sell art to.

There are opportunities like this in our business. Some of my clients attend charity events, like golf tournaments, to give out cold water at a tee. As they chat with the golfers waiting to tee off, they offer a \$120 professional water test to thank the players for participating. On an average day at a golf tournament, a salesperson can easily get 10 to 20 appointments, and the cost to the dealership is very low.

Think outside the old "door-knocking" mindset and go where people gather to give them something of interest. If someone can sell artwork on ships, where can you set appointments for water equipment demonstrations?

But Nobody Needs Art

You would be surprised how much art is sold on cruise ships. I watched as people filed into the auction and bidding began. It struck me that no one actually needs art. Art, after all, does not pay for itself. I then realized how many of us restrict our sales by telling ourselves that only people with troubled water will buy our equipment. Many of us eliminate the entire municipal market because we think they do not need equipment.

The next time you decide people do not have a need for the equipment you sell, remember the salespeople

who sell art—a product "no one needs and never pays for itself." If they can sell \$8,000 worth of art to cruise ship passengers, you can sell equipment to almost every homeowner.

They Just Are Not Interested

I watched on the ship as these sales masters took totally uninterested people and raised their interest until they were ready to buy. They used a variety of techniques that don't directly apply to us, such as a lot of free champagne. The principles they used, however, relate directly to our industry.

These salespeople sent flyers to the cabins that attracted cruisers to their events. The events gave away art if you guessed the value of a work of Picasso. They gave away art just for attending the auction. They gave interesting educational sessions similar to a great demo that involves items like the black light and the tap water taste test. They sold the sizzle and were not hung up on how the paint was made or how the artist used the brush. They did not sell technical data. They were extremely enthused and presented each piece of art as if it were a masterpiece.

Your equipment will sell if you use some of these techniques instead of presenting technical demonstrations that focus on how things work rather than the joy they will bring us.

But You Can Buy Art at Wal-Mart

If you think you have competition from big-box stores, just imagine selling art. It does nothing and no one really knows what it is worth. You can buy an original painting for thousands of dollars, a print of the same painting for hundreds and a poster of the same work

at a big-box store for \$19.95. What is even worse, you can go online and find a Picasso painting worth millions of dollars and print it on your own laser printer for free.

How do these masters of sales sell art with this kind of price pressure? They do it by stressing the value of the original. Imagine if we had the courage to do the same by stressing our service, our warranties and our benefits when we sell.

The art salespeople did not focus on price or competition, they focused on uniqueness, investment value and pleasure. Our equipment delivers all of these things. Are these the things you sell or are you stuck on soap savings, valves and other values you can easily compare to your competitors or big-box stores?

Many water dealers may think the approaches that art salespeople use will never work in our industry. Some of us would never buy art so we assume no one else would either; however, as I sat at the auction sipping my free champagne and observing the proceedings from a sales manager's point of view, I watched about 100 people—not too different from your customers—bid hundreds and even thousands of dollars on art. These were ordinary people—working families, retired teachers—not tycoons. They are the same folks we sell to every day.

Could these modern sales techniques sell water equipment? Can making each demo an event and being excited about the value we bring to customers really work? Could focusing on value rather than price help us sell? I know it can. I saw it work as an undercover water salesperson at the art auction. Give some of these techniques a try and see how they work for you. *wqp*



How art auction techniques can improve your business

LearnMore! For more information related to this article, visit the web at www.wqpmag.com/lm.cfm/wq050806

For more information on this subject, write in 1016 on the reader service card.