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## **BIZ TIPS 101: IT SOUNDS GOOD, BUT IS IT REALLY?**

How many times have you purchased a product only to find out that it would not actually live up to what the advertiser claimed? My watches take lickings, but normally stop shortly after their warranties expire, my colognes never drive my woman wild, my toothpaste does not whiten my teeth, and no matter how much I spend, my computer software programs fight like cats and dogs despite their claims of compatibility with each other. Perhaps they need marriage counseling, but I'm not a shrink. The point is salespeople, a.k.a. advertisers, need to watch what they claim about their product's capabilities. I don't like being ripped off any better than the next guy, and that's exactly what false advertising is – a rip-off.

Sometimes a salesperson makes untruthful claims without even realizing he or she is doing so. Not knowing the product's specifications, not understanding the full extent of the product's capabilities, and not being willing to learn pertinent details that would help avoid misunderstandings about the product are a few ways salespeople drop the ball on buyers. Instead of doing their homework, or admitting to a lack of knowledge, many salespeople fall into the trap of stretching product capabilities. A little fib here, a little beefing up there – it'll all come out in the wash, right? Wrong. Customers never forget products that test their satisfaction, nor the salespeople that foisted off the inferior wares. Moreover, why should they? Products that do not perform according to advertised specifications are money-wasters. Hit someone in the pocketbook hard enough for the wrong reasons and you lose them as a customer; therefore, it behooves a salesperson to know his or her product and be truthful about functionality.

Have you ever seen the TV commercial about the vacuum cleaner that can suck a bowling ball out of the closet? I've been selling vacuums for thirty years, and I can safely say that no upright commercial vacuum can meet that challenge, not even the one in the ad. You may be saying that the machine doesn't have to do what it claims, that the advertisement is simply a joke to gain attention. Taking someone's money for a hyped-up product is no joke, friends.

All jokes aside, the proper way to handle advertising is to simply tell the truth, or better yet, show the truth. A demonstration of performance is the best way to avoid over-

selling a product. That's why the car should be driven before the purchase. That's why a magazine should be perused at the rack. That's why food samples should be tasted at the cookery booth. Proven details about quality and service are the foundations of good advertising.

However, it is not the advertiser's responsibility to insure a customer asks all the right questions or takes advantage of a demonstration, only that the answers are available and the demonstration offered is completely above board – without exaggeration. An advertiser doesn't have to bring up something negative about a product, only answer truthfully if a negative is inquired of. Handling of negative product traits with satisfactory explanations can sometimes turn objections into approvals. Let customers determine what questions need to be asked; answer questions with truthfulness coming from knowledge.

I once heard an excellent example of turning a negative feature into a positive given by the famous salesperson, Tom Hopkins. He described a house next to a railroad track that would not sell. The real estate agent knew about this huge objection, of course. Two agents before her had failed to sell the house because of its proximity to the tracks. With a little ingenuity, she sold the house anyway. Instead of trying to ignore the negative feature, she touted it. She built a fire in the fireplace, turned on the TV with the volume set to a moderate level, baked some cookies in the oven to fill the air with an enticing smell, and made sure the drapes were open to let light into the home. She knew the train came at 10:30 AM and 5:20 PM each day, so she made appointments to show the home five minutes before the train's arrival only. The prospective buyers would come in to a cozy setting, and while viewing the home, the train would pass by. If the prospects even noticed the train and asked about it, she pointed out the train's schedule and noted that most people worked during those hours and would not be at home anyway. The *home* sold quickly while the "house by the tracks" did not. It came with fresh cookies too!

Rather than take a chance on disappointing a customer over goods that don't live up to their advertised claims, why not simply tell the truth? Most salespeople want to keep customers for the long run; customers are too hard to come by to let them go over something as stupid as false advertising. Remember also that untruth has a way of biting at the heels – an unhappy customer tells someone else, who in turn tells someone else, et cetera, until all of a sudden, that salesperson's name is mud. Unfortunately, a salesperson's reputation affects that of his or her employer as well. It is in the best interests of the employer to train salespeople not to stretch the truth about products; furthermore, not to engage in false advertising themselves. Never disappoint a customer over product capabilities by falsely pumping up features. After all, I wish my cologne would drive my woman wild, but alas, it doesn't!