

If Sales are Slow, Try Slower Selling

Investing extra time can pay off



By Scott D. O'Neill

We've all had great days when we present our garage door, the client likes it, and orders then and there. Here in California, that used to happen a lot back before the economy hit the wall in 2007.

Then, people often bought garage doors with monies they got from refinancing. Now that homes are back to 2002 pricing levels, sales of new doors and operators don't come so easily.

Less Selling, More Advising

In this economy, I'm learning to do less selling and more advising. Two days ago, for example, a woman named Candice called wanting a keyless entry system for her 20-year-old discontinued Stanley operator.

Back when I was in my twenties, I was bullet-fast with quick solutions for customers. In a good economy, that green, youthful vigor was often successful, but it sometimes backfired.

At that time, I would've told Candice to buy a new garage door operator, period. She would have objected at first, as any smart customer should do. After all, she only needed a keyless entry. And I would tell her in rapid-fire delivery the many logical reasons why she should replace it.

But the beauty and benefit of aging gracefully is that we ease into a better, more comfortable way of being. Boy, does it work! And in a depressed economy, it's definitely a smarter way to go.

Time Invested, Not Wasted

I spent about 10 full minutes asking about the model and vintage of her operator, educating her about problems with older operators, and inquiring about her needs. I learned that her garage is detached and is often used for storage.

She didn't need the keyless; it was a mere convenience. As Candice explained, "It would be nice to have since my garage is in my backyard."

After we had invested 10 minutes of listening and exchanging information, she stopped me to acknowledge how much she appreciated my approach. "You know, you're actually not the first call I made on this," she remarked. "I called two other companies who just wanted me to buy a new door."

Manners Over Banners

Even though she had only briefly described her circumstances to them, one salesperson flat-out

told her that she needed a new door, too. She felt like she was being pushed. The current tough economy only added to her caution and resistance.

It reminded me that customers sometimes care more about *how* you sell than *what* you sell. The banner on your products is sometimes not as important as the manner of your process.

Winning the Upsell

Realizing that her operator is no longer made, we did some number crunching. She decided to buy a new operator with the keyless entry!

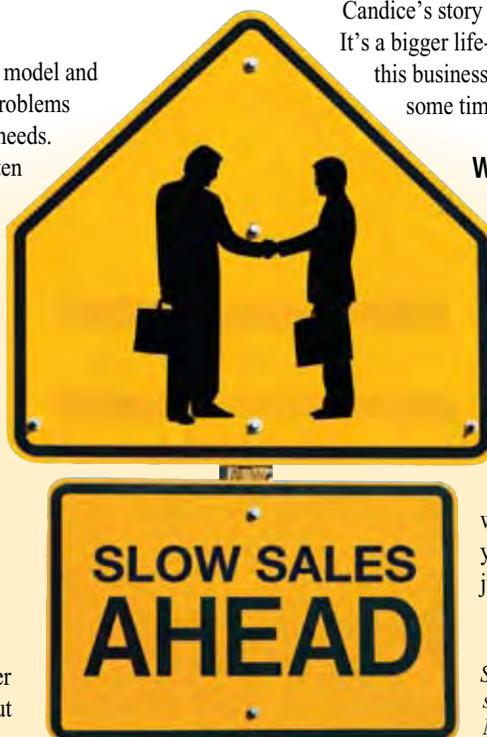
I then asked her about the condition of her door. I learned she might need new rollers for smoother rolling function. When our technician arrived to do the work, he sold her those rollers as well as a few replacement hinges since her old ones were worn.

The door ended up running much more smoothly with the repairs and parts, and the new operator performed better and quieter. She was ecstatic about the outcome. She told me, "This door and new operator sound better than when the door was new! Thank you so much!"

A Win-Win

So, the client saved money, and, with the healthy service profit margins, we did well. We also were able to perform quickly for her, resulting in more work for our crews during slow months.

Candice's story is not just a lesson about the changing times. It's a bigger life-lesson for all of us. As my dad taught me in this business, "You get what you give." Give the customer some time and consideration, and it will pay off.



Word Gets Around

One of our largest and most loyal clients stayed with us for years because of this kind of thinking. The president of the company still reminds me on occasion, "You guys still take the time to talk it through, even if you won't actually sell me that part now. You aren't just looking to bag the next sale. And that's why I'll always use and recommend your company."

Today I got a call from his neighbor, who said it succinctly: "Frank said he's used you guys for years. Don't even talk about price; just come out and sell me a new custom door."

Done and done! ■

Scott O'Neill has been in the garage door business since 1986 and a sales manager since 1992 at Madden Door, Martinez, Calif.