Beefing up your sales

Try a little upselling and you won't be disappointed

by Phil Sasso

I remember visiting a local grocery store as a kid with my grandmother. The shelves were dusty, the fruit bruised and the canned goods overpriced. The only real draw was the butcher shop. This butcher had some of the best cuts of meat in town — and he was one of the best upsellers I've ever seen.

My grandmother would run in for "a few things" and need my help carrying everything she bought. I think there is something to be learned from a good upselling technique.

I understand that as a mobile tool distributor your job selling tools is nothing like selling cuts of meat. Your product is much more sophisticated. Your prices are obviously higher. And your customers are probably a lot more jaded. But the basic concept of upselling is the same whether you sell smoked ham or smoke machines.

Upsell, don't oversell

Upselling is basically helping a customer buy the highest quality or quantity of product to meet his wants and needs. Don't get me wrong. Upselling is not about pushing a customer into buying a lot of extra stuff he doesn't want or can't afford. There's a fine line between upselling and overselling. Upselling will create more satisfied customers. Overselling will create resentment.
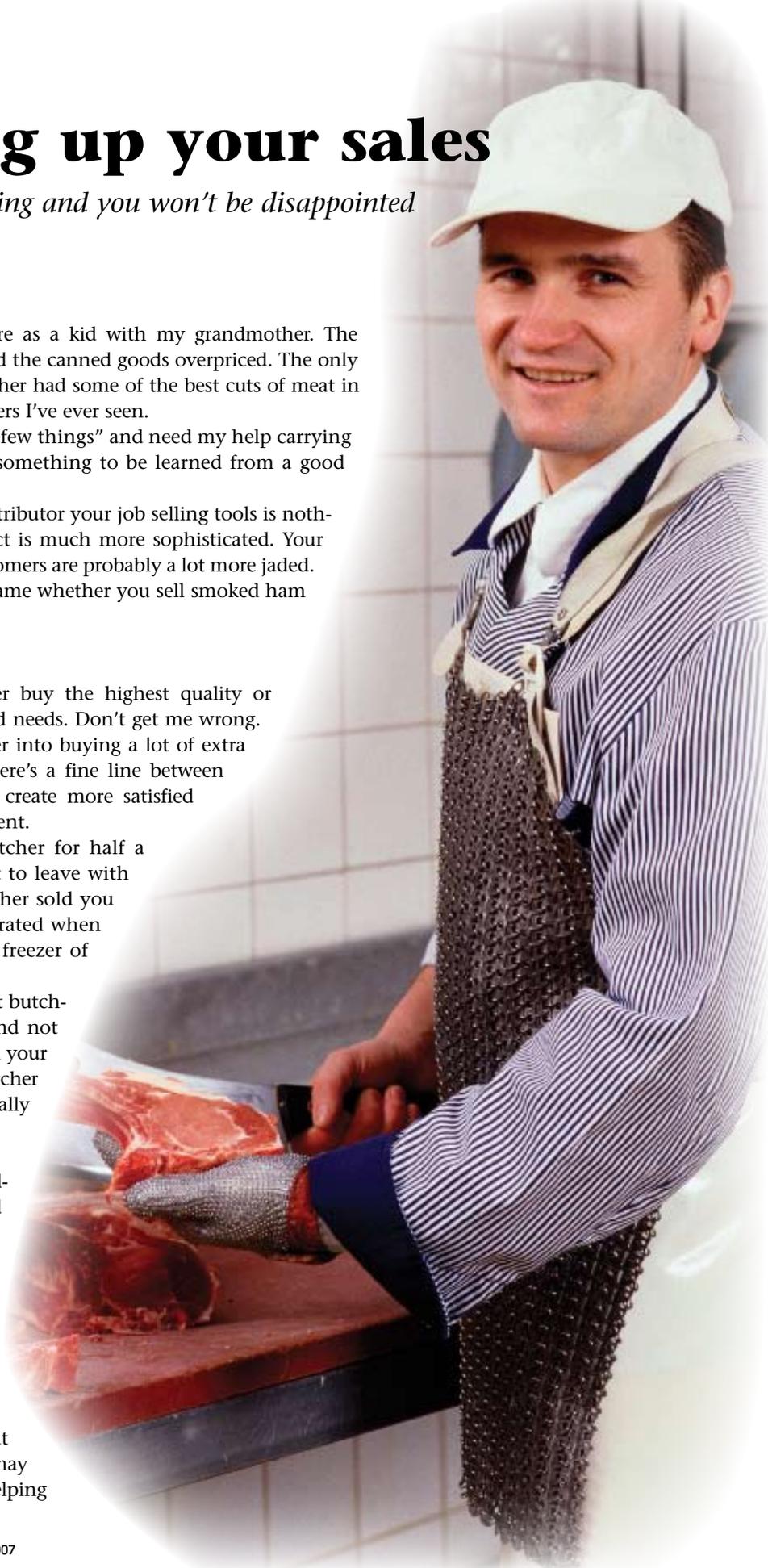
For instance, when you go to a butcher for half a pound of ground round, you don't want to leave with a side of beef. And if some cunning butcher sold you a side of beef, you might get pretty frustrated when you got home and couldn't fit it in the freezer of your side-by-side refrigerator.

You'd probably get a little mad at that butcher. You'd likely feel taken advantage of and not return to that butcher. You might even tell your friends how you feel this particular butcher pushed you into buying more than you really wanted or needed.

That's overselling.

When I say upselling, I mean upgrading a customer from a pound of ground beef at $2.99 per pound to a pound of ground sirloin at $4.59 per pound. Sirloin is a better cut of meat. It's less fatty and better for your customer. I call that a "quality upgrade".

Or, let's say your customer is having a big cookout. He may not want a more expensive cut of meat. But he may be seriously under-calculating how much meat he'll need to feed all of his guests. He may need three pounds — or six pounds. Helping

him determine how much to buy to meet his need is a "quantity upgrade."

You'll notice in both examples it's about helping the customer. It's not about putting more money in your pocket. That may be the result, but it's not the purpose.

Know more, sell more

The key to being a good upseller is asking good questions to determine the level of your customers needs. The better you know the customer's situation, the better you'll be at uncovering upselling opportunities.

Most customers will appreciate your attempt to provide him with a complete solution for his needs. Some would be disappointed with a lesser product and are more than willing to pay extra for more features, higher quality, or accessories.

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A while back I was the victim of underselling: The exhaust pipe on my van broke. So, I stopped at an auto parts store for a patch to buy time until I could get to a muffler shop. I told the sales clerk I wanted a cheap patch. He handed me a package and rang up my order. When I crawled under my van at home, I realized the kit didn't include a hangar. As I struggled to tie up my exhaust pipe with stovepipe wire, I began to resent the clerk for not asking me more questions and selling me more stuff. Yes, I really wanted to be upsold.

Ask and ye shall upsell

Asking a lot of helpful questions is not very likely to offend your customer. It shows your thoroughness in helping your customer determine his needs and anticipating future uses for the tool or equipment you're selling him.

Questioning your customer about how he plans to use the tool can help you determine the quality of product and accessories that will best serve his needs.

In fact, it was that simple questioning technique that the butcher my grandmother frequented would use. A seemingly innocent question like, "Having folks over for Memorial Day?," would turn into an upselling opportunity.

But remember, not every customer wants to be upsold. Some customers know exactly what they want, and they may resent you trying to push more on them than they want. So, instead of trying to upsell this customer, think of yourself as helping him "upbuy."

After you've asked enough questions to determine your customer's wants and needs, simply show him the next step up in quality or quantity that seems appropriate. Then explain the benefits and let him decide if he wants to "upbuy." Once he has all the information he needs to make an informed decision, the ball is in his court. You've done your best to help him.

As you can see, upselling can be a true win-win proposition. Your customer will feel confident you've present him with the most complete solution for his needs. And you'll have the opportunity to add an incremental increase to your overall bottom line.

So, no matter how you slice it, upselling is a good way to beef-up your business.

Phil Sasso is the president of Sasso Marketing, an aftermarket advertising and public relations agency. Sasso is also a speaker, a trainer and a consultant. And he enjoys grilling steaks better than burgers. Sign up for his free marketing tips