



## Advice to B-to-B Publishers: Don't Lose Personal Sales Touch

### Face-to-Face Meetings Keep From Turning Your Media Business Into a Commodity Business

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Is the art of selling becoming too technical and impersonal? Are we in danger of relying on sales leads generated deep in cyberspace without any firsthand understanding of what our prospects really want? Has personal selling become a relic of the golden days of commerce? Do relationships and access to the key buyers mean much anymore?

With apologies to the New York Times' Stuart Elliott, I'm asking a lot of questions for someone not from Brooklyn. What got me going was an article in BtoB magazine about marketers bypassing trade papers for their own websites. The business press seems to be playing into their hands, because publishers are concentrating on digital formats designed to generate leads marketers can contact directly.

But one technology-media executive quoted in BtoB was concerned that the focus on leads is turning business media into a commodity business. Instead of providing access to their responsive and involved audiences, publishers now find themselves being paid on a per-lead basis.

What could be more impersonal and antiseptic? Don't marketers want to learn how great business papers help their advertisers build great brands?

Bill Kupper is a guy who thinks publications still need to tell their story in a very personal and compelling way. The business of selling, Bill believes, is all about "access."

Bill retired in 2007 as president of BusinessWeek Group. He's been ad sales director for Life, international ad director for Time, Detroit sales manager for Sports Illustrated (and currently a board member of Turnstile Publishing Co., a personal venture of mine which publishes Golfweek; an art business magazine; and several community newspapers).

Here's his philosophy: Nothing replaces the face-to-face sales call -- not text messages, e-mail, voicemail or video conferencing. "Meeting your top client decision-maker face-to-face in their office is the only way you'll win."

You'll get to know if the key guy is a dog owner, parent, sports fan, artist, scholar -- just by looking around his/her office.

When he was publisher of Time Inc.'s Health magazine, the sales staff identified 25 key client decision-makers they could not "access." The Health sales team launched a "sneaker attack," sending the 25 clients one running shoe with the offer to provide the other if the client allowed the sales people 15 minutes to pitch. Bill says 23 of the 25 gave them the time, and the team came away with significant new business.

When Bill was publisher of BusinessWeek, the publication held a conference designed to attract hundreds of top CEOs and other senior executives. One sponsor walked up to him at the finish and let him know that she and her team had made only one connection at the conference. "I expected her to ask for a refund – but she went on to say that access to that one client was worth all the tea in China for her company!"

Another time, a sales rep for SI in Detroit sent a dozen red roses to each administrative assistant of his top ten customers every Valentine's Day. For the remaining months of every year, Bill says, the rep had complete access to his top clients and gained considerable market share over his competition.

Who knows how many blockbuster ideas Bill and his team presented to their customers because they got in the door? Keeping it simple gets you to the goal line faster, he says, and that's why the full title of his journal (from whence this is taken) is: "As you ramble through life, brother, whatever your goal, keep your eye upon the doughnut and not upon the hole."\*

\*From the back of the menu of the Mayflower Coffee Shop, 1952, White Plains, N.Y.