

# INFORMER



**Community  
Papers of  
Michigan**

**September 2020**

## **The Michigan Retailers Association's Buy Nearby Weekend is Almost Here!**



**It's not too late to feature Buy Nearby pages the final week  
of this month! Buying locally is more important this year than ever!**

# Michigan Retailers Association's Annual Buy Nearby Weekend is Oct. 2-4

*Shoppers encouraged to enter photo contest, get deals at participating retailers*



Retail businesses across the state will celebrate Buy Nearby Weekend on Oct. 2-4, offering special merchandise or sales and the chance for one lucky shopper to win a \$500 gift card by posting a photo while shopping local with the #buynearbymi hashtag.

It's all part of the Michigan Retailers Association's (MRA) year-round Buy Nearby campaign that encourages shoppers to keep their money in the Mitten!

Sadly, shoppers this year won't bump into the Buy Nearby Guy mascot, the 8-foot-tall representation of a shopping bag in the shape of Michigan. The popular mascot is biding his time at his Lansing home, hoping an end to the pandemic will allow him to venture out in 2021. Typically, he visits several towns during the weekend to help spread the word about the power that consumers have when they spend their shopping dollars locally.

Michiganers typically send \$18.5 billion to out-of-state retailers, according to a 2018 economic study by Public Sector Consultants showed. But if they changed just one in 10 of their purchases to a Michigan store, our economy would get a

\$1.2 billion boost and nearly 10,600 more jobs.

"Supporting downtown stores is more important than ever during the pandemic," said MRA President and CEO Bill Hallan. "No amount of shopping online for convenience and saving a few pennies is worth looking at empty storefronts in your downtown."

As an extra incentive to buy nearby, one shopper will earn a \$500 gift card. Just take a selfie shopping at a local store or a photo of your purchase during the weekend; post it to Twitter, Facebook or Instagram using the hashtag #buynearbymi and you're automatically entered. The winner will be chosen the following week in a random drawing. (Must be 18 or older to win; be sure your post is "public"). For a complete description of contest rules, visit our photo contest page.

With 116,000 stores, Michigan's retail industry employs about 877,000 workers and pays \$21.6 billion in wages each year. That's the direct impact. Indirectly, retailers purchase goods and services, such as cleaning services, security staff, accountants and more. And their



employees spend money as well, the Public Sector Consultants study noted.

Additional information is available on the web at [buynearbymi.com](http://buynearbymi.com) and [fb.com/BuyNearbyMI](https://www.facebook.com/BuyNearbyMI).

You can also follow the campaign on Twitter @BuyNearbyMI and on Instagram @mibuynearby.



# Ad-Libs

By John Foust  
Raleigh, NC

## Advertising is a problem-solving business

When I heard the doorbell ring that Saturday afternoon, I did something I had never done before. I bought something from a door-to-door salesperson.

It was a pest control representative who was canvassing the neighborhood for new business. The logo on his bright green golf shirt matched his truck in the driveway. He introduced himself and said, "I see you have a vole problem. Have you tried anything?"

"How do you know there's a vole problem?" I asked.

"When I got out of the truck, I noticed the spongy ground next to the driveway. That's an obvious sign."

In just a few seconds, he had identified a problem. Obviously, he knew what he was doing. "You're right," I said. "We've had voles in our yard for several years. A company has been working on the problem, but that doesn't seem to be helping."

Voles are small mole-like rodents that burrow underground and feast on the bulbs and roots of plants. The ground in an infested area is spongy, because their tunnels are close to the surface. A mating pair can produce up to 100 voles in a year. In other words, if voles settle in your yard,

you'll have a lot of them in a short period of time.

That salesperson caught me at the right time to make a sale, because he was observant. He knew without a doubt that there was a problem that needed to be solved. He said his company had a special treatment which was proven to have impressive results. I agreed to let them give it a try. Within a few weeks after their first treatment, we could tell a difference. Although the treatments haven't eliminated the problem completely (can anything do that?), it has dramatically reduced the infestation.

His approach illustrated the importance of being observant. His company's customer database probably revealed information about neighborhoods with vole problems. And he looked for symptoms when he pulled into the driveway.

Although selling advertising is not quite like selling pest control services, there are a number of things to observe before approaching an advertising prospect. Here are a few examples:

1. History. What promotions has your prospect run in past years? What were the results? What lessons can be learned?

2. Time of year. Is there a prime buying season for the widgets your prospect sells? People usually don't buy lawnmowers in the winter or snowblowers in the summer.

3. News stories. Have they announced the addition of a new product line? Is there going to be a grand opening of a new location? Has there been an ownership change?

4. Ads in other media. Are they running ads in other advertising outlets? That's a clear sign that they have a marketing budget and may be open to other ideas.

5. Competitors. What products and services are currently being promoted by their competitors? They're running those ads now for a reason. Maybe you could follow their example.

Who knows? One of these ideas might ring a bell.

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John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information: [john@johnfoust.com](mailto:john@johnfoust.com)





By **Bob Berting**  
*Berting Communications*

## More Successful Ways of Getting New Business

One of the biggest waste of time for an advertising salesperson is the number of sales calls to call on and close a prospect. Over many years, there is the consistent message that 80% of sales are made after the 5th call—and in some cases, well beyond the 5th call. This effort only happens because advertising salespeople keep calling through dogged determination. When the sales manager wants to know why so many calls on a prospect, the answer many times is about building a relationship and this takes time.

More effective prospecting: Let's start off with some basic guidelines that will be helpful to know. First of all, patience is a virtue that needs attention. The prospect is usually impatient. They want to get into price and product right away which might cause the salesperson to be confused about what to say. On the other hand, the salesperson could also be impatient, thinking they have given all the benefits of their publication and the prospect isn't buying his or her presentation.

Be a trusted advisor: When prospecting, it's wise to think about thoroughly understanding the business of individual prospects. The mindset has to be helping them with the right combination of ideas and solutions that will achieve their

objectives. This means being an expert in all advertising solutions and asking the right questions.

What prospects do you call on? Think about the businesses where you speak their language. Are they a business that has the size and ability to take on more business? When you do a Google search for that business, don't just look at the first page of rankings, but look at the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th pages where those businesses need more help. Sometimes it pays to stay with the same type of business until you've sold a few of

Questions to think about: Really dig into the following questions:

*What do they sell—how do they make money?*

*Who are they selling to—what target groups?*

*What are the buying factors—what do their potential customers care about?*

More effective advanced planning: Check out their website. Make a list of things NOT on their website and prioritize them. Then do a Google search. Many times there are extremely valuable bits of information like "10 questions to ask a particular business". Some of these questions may be questions that can be answered on the prospect's website. It's all about thoroughly understanding their business or industry.

Approaching the prospect: Many times you need to ask for the person who is either the owner or a management person who can authorize an advertising program. If you leave a voice mail message, a very effective message can be "I couldn't find this on your website and I wanted to talk to you about it." If by e-mail, the subject line can have 3 quick questions, again the same reference to their website. Body copy in an e-mail is more effective in bullet format, rather than paragraphs.

Thoughts about gatekeepers: Ask for their name. Remember their name. Sometimes, you have to treat them as if they are the decision maker. In most cases, they will decide who to let in to see the actual decision maker

Saving tons of time and effort: My opinion is that the flow of actual contact calls with a prospect can many times be divided into the following sequence:

First call—Establish Credibility  
Second call—Building Trust  
Third Call--Solidifying Belief

The goal is to make cold calling much more efficient by saving more time and effort and by having a campaign or long range program solidified and closed by the 3rd call... not the first call, as you have been told by different authorities in advertising sales. You're not there to high pressure your prospects.

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Bob's newest e-book is "Smart Customer Connections For Advertising Salespeople". You can order all 4 of Bob's books on his website: [www.bobberting.com](http://www.bobberting.com). Read Bob's books and discover how his vast experience and know-how can help you achieve much more business for you and your publication. You'll greatly benefit from the wisdom of one of America's top advertising sales experts. Bob is a professional speaker, advertising sales trainer, publisher marketing consultant, and leading columnist in many national and regional newspaper trade association publications. He is the President of Berting Communications and can be reached at [bob@bobberting.com](mailto:bob@bobberting.com) or 317-849-5408.

# 2020 STATE OF NEWSPAPERS

*Comparing the health and ownership of papers to previous years*



by **Kevin Slimp**  
kevin@kevinslimp.com

It's a fascinating time in the newspaper business, especially from a research perspective. 2020 marks my fifth straight year polling newspapers in the U.S. and Canada about the overall health of the industry. I've just completed crunching the numbers from the most recent survey and will share some of the information here.

Interestingly, the number of papers in the U.S. participating in the survey increased compared to last year, with nearly 600 papers taking part this year, while just about 500 participated last year. At the same time, the number of Canadian papers participating decreased, meaning a lot more U.S. publishers participated in the 2020 survey. The number of participating papers on the West Coast was also low, compared to the rest of the country. In a nutshell, a significantly larger number of papers in all areas of the U.S., other than the West Coast, participated in the 2020 survey.

It will take more than one column to cover everything we've learned, so let me share a couple of the most interesting trends that stand out from the 2020 numbers. I'm going to stick with results from the U.S., since the number of participants from Canada were too few to be statistically significant.

First, it looks like papers in all areas of the U.S. are in similar boats. Regardless

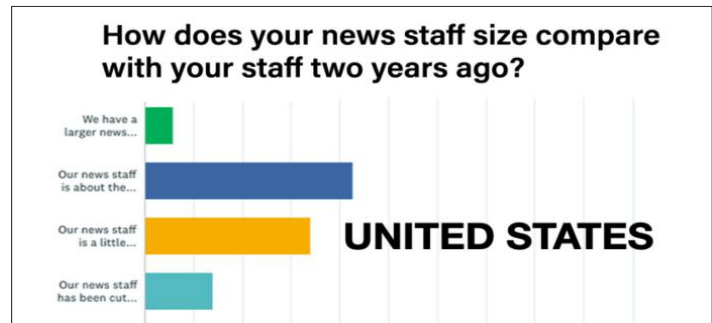
of size, ownership or other factors, papers in all areas recorded incredibly similar numbers by region.

While the Great Plains and Rocky Mountain States reported the fewest papers in "poor health" (11 percent each), the highest percentage in any region was just six points higher (Southeast: 17 percent). Very few papers in any region reported papers in "near death" health. The Southwest U.S. recorded the highest percentage of "near death" papers at 2 percent.

Overall 7.5 percent of U.S. papers report being "very healthy," compared to 8.5 percent one year ago. In 2020, 30 percent report being "relatively healthy," compared to 36 percent one year ago. "Not bad" stayed about the same, with 46 percent of U.S. papers reporting their health is "not bad" in 2020, compared to 44 percent who gave the same answer in 2019. In 2019, 10 percent of respondents noted their papers were in poor health, with 14 percent answering that way this year. "Near death" stayed the same at 1 percent.

Add all those numbers together and we find that the industry seems to be a little less healthy in 2020, but not by much. Frankly, with the COVID-19 pandemic at its height while many papers were completing their surveys, I was surprised the numbers weren't more foreboding.

Each year, I'm fascinated by the numbers relating to newspaper ownership. It feels like I'm always hearing that the newspaper business is being swallowed up by venture capital groups. And while there may be some truth to that among papers



owned by national newspaper groups, that just doesn't seem to be the case among most newspapers.

Overall, 60 percent of newspapers report being independent and locally owned. That's not much of a change from surveys going back to 2015. Small groups of one to five newspapers make up 12 percent of respondents, while mid-size groups (six to ten papers) make up 18 percent. Large regional groups account for 2 percent of papers in the survey, while national groups control 6 percent of newspapers in the U.S.

How has ownership in newspapers changed over the past two years? Not much. Here's the breakdown:

- 85%:** No change
- 8%:** Moved from one family/local owner to another family/local owner
- 3%:** Moved from one group to another group owner
- 2%:** Moved from family/local owner to group owner
- 2%:** Moved from group owner to family/local owner

The survey was very detailed, covering several aspects of the business of newspapers in 2020. A few other key findings:

Staffs have gotten smaller since 2018, with 48 percent of U.S. papers reporting having cut the size of their news

staff over the past two years, with 34 percent indicating a cut in their sales staffs.

I know it's a chicken/egg type of thing, but still it's interesting that only 6 percent of newspapers who haven't made staff cuts indicate being in poor health, compared to 14 percent of newspapers overall who answered that way.

Of papers who have not cut staff, 51 percent report being in as good as, or better, health than two years ago. Compared to papers who reduced staff size (25 percent reported being in as good or better health than two years ago), these papers were significantly healthier.

There's a definite correlation between staff retention and overall health.

From a personal perspective, there's a definite "uptick" in the air in the newspaper business lately. I'm noticing a lot more newspapers, groups and associations calling to arrange consulting and training. From where I sit, it seems like newspapers are ready to begin growing again.

I just passed my 800-word limit. In my next column, I'll cover more results from the 2020 newspaper industry survey.

Kevin Slimp can be reached at kevin@kevinslimp.com.



By Peter Wagner  
Founder and Publisher,  
*The N'West Iowa REVIEW*

**GET REAL**  
THE PRINTED PAPER IS STILL A PUBLISHERS BEST ASSET!

## Always Attempt Three Closes When Making Sales Calls

Selling newspaper and shopper advertising is more difficult today than it was just a few years ago. There's more competition online and in the traditional media. But the local market still has great potential and the possibilities for success still exist. Businesses want to advertise. They just don't know when, where, what and how. Local newspaper and shopper salespeople simply have to work smarter and harder to get their share of the business.

I have always encouraged our sales team to prepare to sell three levels of advertising every time they make an outside sales call:

First, an exciting, unique, community promotion or special section that will be offered that week only. Such an offer overcomes the "Let me think about it" objection since the promotion could be sold out and disappear at any moment.

Second, a special request for any "run of paper" or general advertising the business might be planning for that week.

And third, a low-priced "By-the-Way" quick and easy promotion that can be pitched and closed on the way out the door.

I'll clarify the process with some examples, but first I need to share a comment about the need to determine which customers might

be most interested in the week's specific promotion before hitting the street.

Too often print salespeople predetermine — before calling on a slow-to-respond or physically distant advertiser — if he or she will buy the promotion. In doing so they do a disservice to the advertiser, the publication and themselves. Rather than creating lists of customers who will NOT buy the promotion the sales representative should be brainstorming who might buy it and WHY they should.

Often that list will grow larger and more beneficial if the salesperson allows their co-workers to suggest possible prospects. Too often even the most professional salesperson develops blinders when it comes to seeing the opportunities that await us on the street.

Once the list is fairly complete — but open to additional prospects along the way — it's necessary to plan the specific approach for each prospect. One business might buy the package because it is a way to invest in the community while another will buy because he thinks the promotion will make him look good. It's necessary to understand what features will excite the buyer before starting the call so the sales call can be centered on key closing points.

But, on the other hand, it is equally important to truly believe the package will benefit the buyer. Nothing long lasting ever comes from selling an expensive program to a client that does them no good.

I always consider the week's featured promotion or special section to be my door opener. It should be something fresh, or proven, new or expected because it is respected. But whatever it is, the "feature of the week" must be something the salespeople can really get excited about.

It has to be something — a prize giveaway, coupon book, citywide sale, championship salute or whatever — that will grab the buyer's attention and give the salesperson the opportunity to share that story as well as two other attempts that call to close — or lose — the sale.

The first presentation needs to include information on how the promotion will benefit the community (every small-town business worries about a shrinking business district), how it will create new revenue for the business itself, what size ad would be best for that business, what to feature and include in the ad and that the salesperson is willing to gather and format the ad information for the advertiser. (Continued on page 7.)





## Always Attempt Three Closes... *by Peter Wagner Continued from page 6*

Smart sales professionals might also share how the theme of the message might be spun off as part of point-of-purchase advertising as well as on the paper's website or on other local media.

But win or lose that sale, the door opener leads to other chances to succeed. Once a decision is made regarding that week's promotion, the salesperson should use the close relationship moment to ask about and obtain a share of whatever advertising is already planned for the next few weeks. The selling process might include readership demographics, other advertiser success stories, combination and volume rates, advertising copy and design services available at the publication and any deadline details.

But whether ROP is bought or not, the salesperson has one more or third chance to close a sale.

On the way out the door, with the client believing the sales effort is over, the salesperson turns to the prospective buyers and says, "By the way, we're doing a salute to the (Boy Scouts, high school football team, new city recreational trails or whatever) and you can have your business listed among those at the bottom of the community support page for just \$50 or whatever the price. Most often, relieved to see the interview ending or perhaps embarrassed to having said no twice already, the client will respond with a

positive "yes."

Building a personal relationship with the client, taking time to learn all you can about the details of the advertiser's business, making every effort to provide fresh ideas and making regular service and "friendship" calls are all good ways to connect with a prospect. Calling on that client with a ready 1, 2, 3 plan is the best way to turn that relationship in to cash in the bank.

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*Peter W. Wagner is founder and publisher of the award winning N'West Iowa REVIEW and 13 additional publications. This free monthly GET REAL newsletter is written exclusively for State and National Press Associations and distributed by them to their members. [CLICK HERE](#), to get Wagner's free PAPER DOLLARS email newsletter for publishers, editors and sales managers. The two monthly email newsletters contain information completely different than found in Wagner's monthly Publisher's Auxiliary column. Wagner can be contacted by emailing [pww@iowainformation.com](mailto:pww@iowainformation.com) or calling his cell at 712-348-3550.*

I am back again with my fish... although I have made some modifications since last month. Just dig last month's article out of the trash, to compare, because I offer ...

# Fish Tales 2

## Ad Talk

with Ellen Hanrahan

To reiterate... to the right you see three ads that *A&E Charters* have placed over the years. All of them work, yet all could be just a bit better. The size of these ads is typical, a 2-column by three inch space (scaled here to 81% to fit better so they are smaller than actual size).

For the most part, I tried to keep the typeface the same, *ITC Bauhaus*, but in *Ad A* and *Ad B*, I also added *Helvetica* (too much *Bauhaus* can be overwhelming!).

*Ad C*, which was the all text version (and I really didn't say much about it, because there wasn't much to say about it last month) will be addressed a little more thoroughly this month.

The examples that I am presenting are by no means the only way to handle the content and look of the ad... we could do a number of iterations. However, I usually like to stay similar to the original approach so you can see how small changes can alter both legibility and readability.

Anyway, on to the ads: *Ad A* and *Ad B* have a similar approach... same art, pretty much the same placement.

### Ad A

Last month, there wasn't much space between the headline text and the border in *Ad A*. Your eye drifted into the border; in this ad I pulled the text closer to the middle to leave more space to keep your eye focused on the information within that border. I also made "The reels are screaming" smaller because it really doesn't even need to be in the ad. I also made the rounded corners on the ad space smaller so that visually, I could create more interior space.

Another concern for this ad was the number of size changes in the font—almost every line was different in style, weight or size, sometimes all three! This can easily create visual separation within the text itself, so I tried to be more consistent with size changes for better visual flow. There is also more white space between the pertinent information to ease in readability.

### Ad B

*Ad B* did a better job of keeping the eye within the border, but the use of the reverse strip across the top tended to separate that information a bit. I actually used the same text for the company name and contact info (some minor changes though). Changing size in every line diminishes the consistency, although similar information is grouped together for better understanding. There was a type of "net" background, which I removed from the original. Your best contrast on newsprint is black and white... adding grey can diminish that contrast.

I also used all caps for the headline in *Ad B* to show that short headlines may actually benefit from the use of all caps... especially with *ITC Bauhaus* which has unique descenders.

Some other minor changes I made in *Ad A* and *Ad B* was to move the fish graphic. It sits a

**The Big Kings are biting!**  
The reels are screaming!  
**A&E Charters**  
Port Washington  
Lake Michigan Sport Fishing  
For reservations  
**555 555 1234**  
or [www.aecharters.com](http://www.aecharters.com)  
Captain Brad Anspach

Ad A

**GET HOOKED UP!**  
THE FISH ARE BITING  
**A&E Charters**  
Port Washington  
Lake Michigan Sport Fishing  
To reserve a spot call  
**555 555 1234**  
or [www.aecharters.com](http://www.aecharters.com)  
**JUNE 4TH & 5TH**  
**NO LICENSE REQUIRED**

Ad B

Fishing season is starting.  
Make your reservations for exciting  
Lake Michigan Sport Fishing today.  
**A&E Charters**  
Port Washington, Wisconsin  
555-555-1234  
[www.aecharters.com](http://www.aecharters.com)  
June 3 & 4, 2006, no fishing license  
is required in Wisconsin

Ad C

little higher and in *Ad A* it overlaps the border, while in *Ad B* it sits inside the border. You be the judge.

I also made the fish in *Ad B* more transparent (60%) to make the text a little more dominant.

### Ad C

So that brings us to *Ad C* which was just text, (*InterstateFB*, a compressed version) which was a little difficult to read. I changed the font to my "go to" favorite, *Myriad Pro*.

I also felt that the ad needed a graphic because the target audience might overlook the ad as it was a smaller ad, and I added color to help with attention.

So consider what's being presented within the ad space but also be aware of the placement on the page—which you have no control over. Consistency, proximity and color can go a long way in helping to unify and create focus for an ad.

### Wrong artwork

While I was looking for an appropriate graphic for *Ad C*, I had a number of "fishing" vectors and illustrations to choose.

No art is better than the "wrong" art. I downloaded this graphic from *storyblocks.com* because it provided a good example. The advertiser is selling charter sport fishing experiences. The art below is fly-fishing.

Now I really don't fish, but I do know the difference between the type of fishing being advertised by *A & E Charters!*



### Final thoughts...

Sorry I made you go back to last month, but a side-by-side comparison would not have worked very well. Too many ads, not enough space, and I can get a little "wordy."

If I were to actually look at this information to create the ad, I would start from scratch, so to speak. Certainly the first item I would address is the typeface chosen for the original advertising.

The difficulty in comparing ads is how to explain what is being done, and as I said, using the original elements and explaining how to change them is more effective than if I just redid the ad... starting from scratch.

Again, just stay safe and healthy and my wish is for you all to be creating effective advertising soon!

### Stay Safe until next time...

I was an art teacher and changed to a graphic design career in the '80s. I write for *IFPA TIP*, and the *CPM INFORMER*. For info, PDFs of articles, or have ideas or comments, you can e-mail: [hanrahan.in@att.net](mailto:hanrahan.in@att.net) Ellen Hanrahan ©2020





**By Ryan Dohrn**

*President/Founder,  
Brain Swell Media LLC*

As we navigate the changes in our world right now, I think it's important to focus on the Customer Needs Assessment.

If you're in a leadership role, right now you might be saying, "No, Ryan, don't talk about not doing a CNA."

Here's my point, though. We're living in a world where people are limited in cash, limited on funds, and certainly limited on patience. For the most part, I think everybody right now is actually limited to some degree in their cognitive abilities. So how do we expect someone we're selling to actually understand what they need vs. what they want?

Think about this regarding the Customer Needs Assessment. Very often it focuses in on what an advertising customer wants, and not what they need. Think about all the questions you ask. "What's your budget?" "What are your goals?" "What keeps you up at night?" "What's the biggest business challenge for you?" "How can we help you overcome that?"

It's all focusing on what they want. They want paying customers, they want new business, they want to retain business. Want, want, want.

It really should be called the Customer Wants Assessment, right? Think through this with me before you shut down on the idea. Be open-minded. I sell every day, just like you do. I've been in sales and

# Are Customer Needs Assessments Dead?

*(Part One of a Two-Part Series)*

marketing for 30 years. I didn't stop selling to become a media sales consultant; I love the media sales business.

So this Customer Needs Assessment, where we ask them what they need—it really focuses on what somebody wants. So if we don't actually guide them toward what they need, they're going to come back to us in the coming weeks or months and say, "I didn't get any ROI." They didn't get the return on investment that they needed. And so a lot of the time they didn't get what they needed because we gave them what they wanted.

**So here's what I want you to consider in addition to the CNA: putting forth powerful recommendations.**

Let me give you some background on my thoughts here, culled from my media sales training.

There are a lot of impatient people out there right now. How many of you feel cranky right now? I feel cranky. I'm cranky about the world, I'm cranky about politics, I'm cranky about COVID. I'm just cranky. And it's difficult to deal with cranky people you're selling to. They try to tell you what they want, and you're trying to convince them what they need, so I'd like to talk to you about recommendations instead.

Were you aware that Nielsen, the TV ratings and audits company, reports that recommendations are the most trusted form of information? This is a tool we can use as media salespeople, and this is something I stress in my ad sales training. We can coach our customers on why they need something, and what they need to buy. And then we can get them to a point

where we not only fulfill their wants, but we actually get to the heart of what they need.

Harvard Business Review had a review of 600 top sales professionals, and here's what they found out: Most sales reps rely on a customer to coach them through the sales process. Now, the superstar sales reps that I work with in my media sales training, we coach the customer. We know the questions we need to ask the customer to find out what it is they truly need beyond what they want.

But still, most customers are going to struggle to identify an exact need. For example, they might say, "I need more customers." So I may say, "When you say 'customers,' can you be more specific? Tell me more. Give me some detail about that."

**So, to guide customers to a recommendation, I'm doing a great deal of comparative selling.**

Creating a comparative conversation helps you draw out ego, helps you draw out emotion, and helps you draw out logic. Sometimes in the advertising business, where I spend a lot of my time, I'll say things like, "Who do you feel does a great job of marketing here in our community or industry?" I suppose they could say, "Nobody does." But typically they give an example of somebody.

And then I'll say, "Do you want to be like them, better than them, less than them? Do you want to be competitive with them, or do you want to dominate them?" I work to determine what's the circumstance for them. (Continued on page 10.)

# Customer Needs Assessments *-Ryan Dohm, continued from page 8*

What I don't ask them is what their budget is. Because if you ask them what their budget is, they're probably going to give you a number based on their reality. Not the reality of marketing in the community where you live or the industry they serve. My next tool to guide customers to a recommendation is sharing success stories through comparative selling.

When you create a comparative conversation, you're actually comparing the customer that you have on the phone to other customers that you've had in the past that are very, very happy.

Here's an example. "Bob Jones has been advertising with me for 6 years. Do you know Bob? Every time I talk to Bob he says he loves working with us." I share what they love about me, what they love about our digital options, what they've loved about the company, what they've loved about the experience--and I can

begin to compare customers.

I use these comparative conversations so I can recommend products based on the happiness of other customers, realizing that other customers' happiness will oftentimes translate to the happiness of this new customer that I'm trying to get.

It's easy—and it's all about sharing success stories.

But sometimes we salespeople don't like to do this, and the reason we don't is because we feel like we're talking about a customer behind that customer's back. But we're not. What we're actually doing is shouting from the mountaintop how happy other customers are with us.

And if they're happy, then this new customer probably will be, too. And happiness is ultimately what we're seeking.

Now, you might get really technical about this, and you might say, "Well, Ryan, I'm not looking for happiness, what I'm looking for is making sure they have the ROI that they demand." But I am here to tell you, when push comes to shove what most people want to do is what others have done to be successful.

Just last weekend I was talking with a friend of mine. She said, "I'm having some great luck losing weight." I said, "Cool! I would love to drop 15 pounds. I think it would make me happy. What are you doing?"

And she told me about her weight management plan. So I immediately went home and looked it up online to find out how I could get involved in this.

The point is, her success story led me to make a great buying decision, for me. This is a simple buying example, but it can resonate through everything you do.

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## Census 2020 Woes Expose Deep Digital Divide and Reinforce Enduring Need for Paper Options

- Jim Haigh, Keep Me Posted North America



Census 2020 is not going well. Nor is it going as planned. This critical distinction has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which again exposes the depth and breadth of the digital divide in America. Popular narratives about the digital divide that separates our nation are too often anchored narrowly on the mere availability of broadband in a community. And now, emerging narratives about Census 2020 self-reporting issues routinely fail to look beyond the pandemic disruptions.

Long before the launch of this decade's Constitutionally mandated count of the country's resident population, planners at the Census Bureau smartly decided to embrace modern technology and create an online platform for responding to the critically important questionnaire. But then they made a giant leap of faith.

Instead of allowing every household to choose whether to participate online, by phone or by mail, the Bureau took the additional unprecedented step of deciding for them. Physical paper Census forms had been the traditional means of survey and reply, and the expectation for generations of respondents. But the Bureau made the calculation this year that 78.2% of households should want to, would be able to — and simply would just jump online to self-report crucial information. (Keep in mind: the final mail response rate was 74% in the 2010 Census.)

So nearly 8 in 10 residential addresses were not sent a paper form to complete at the launch of Census 2020 — which could have easily included directions for other options to reply. Instead, they were mailed “invitations to participate” online (or phone) — in envelopes identical in size and external message as those sent to the 21.8% who received a physical form to fill out. And then, when most of them failed to go online (or call), they were mailed reminder after reminder — to go online. Only after the fourth or fifth mailing, depending on local delivery, did the forced-

digital group finally get a paper Census. But for whatever reason, the envelope was identical to the previous mailings with with no external wording to announce that there was finally a physical survey inside, making it easier to again dismiss by those weary of the web.

From before the launch and throughout the Census 2020 campaign, the Census Bureau invested heavily — as it obviously should — to promote participation and describe the vital civic importance of response. The continuously evolving multimedia campaigns on broadcast, cable, print, online and social media shared a universal theme throughout: Reply Online!

We are now in mid-August. The means, mechanics and force used to push response online for Census 2020 has been unprecedented.

Yet, the National Internet Self-Response Rate is still barely above 50% — and time is running out.

The pandemic didn't help Census 2020 efforts. Nor did it create the digital divide. Instead, it compounded the multiple dynamics that make it so wide and deep. And it would seem now that the final Bureau plan ignored the variety of reasons why Americans so often choose not to opt-in to electronic communications when given the choice of paper — especially when they consider the correspondence to be sensitive, personal or important.

The digital divide is far more complex than not having the availability of broadband infrastructure where one lives or works. Mere availability is a significant yet separate problem from personal affordability of broadband. Which is distinct from actual adoption and practical use of the expensive, fee-for-service communications infrastructure. All of which also require additional, expensive tools including fairly new hardware and very recent software, and a place where they are available. Clearly, we have a long way to go to eliminate the challenges that will

enable everyone to more fully embrace and participate in all things digital — including Census 2020.

This is why consumer advocates including Keep Me Posted relentlessly explain to policymakers and companies that digital-only communications are not for everyone. Printed and digital options are necessary for full inclusion and broader participation in commerce and community. Collectively, we need to appreciate that so many of our neighbors report difficulties in accessing online technologies, have security concerns about online fraud, or require paper communications for practical reasons. The digital divide is not limited to older adults, low-income households without computers or broadband service, people in rural areas where unreliable internet access is common, minority populations in urban areas with theoretical availability but not affordable access, and the one in four people living with a disability of some kind that are three times more likely to say that they never go online.

The future of a vibrant, inclusive and fully counted America needs an accurate Census 2020 that is not irreparably damaged by unwavering plans and artificial deadlines. Our country cannot afford a lack of will to learn and adapt under urgent circumstances — and must take the additional steps with extended timelines to assure fully representative results. KMP urges Congress to immediately pass legislation to extend the legal deadline for Census 2020 — and implores the Census Bureau to send a paper form to all non-responsive residences in an envelope clearly marked “Final Notice: Paper Form Enclosed — Postage Paid” along with robust and safe in-person measures to count communities historically known to be a challenge to include as required by our Nation's founding document.





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