



UpFront | Ken Smith

All's fair in love and marketing. One of David Mastovich's creative up-selling techniques [see cover story] that we particularly like involves the principle of reciprocity.

Simply put, reciprocity requires that one person repeat what another person has provided. According to Mastovich, we've all been trained from childhood to abide by this rule, or risk suffering serious social disapproval.

During Kim Wray's interview with him, Mastovich told us about a book written by Dr. Robert Cialdini of Stanford University called *Influence: Science & Practice*, in which this so-called weapon of influence was explored. As an example, Dr. Cialdini writes of Ethiopia in 1985, a time when the country was undoubtedly experiencing the greatest suffering in the world. Its economy was in ruin and then Ethiopian people were starving to death by the thousands. Yet, that same year, when a catastrophic earthquake measuring 6.5 on the Richter scale devastated Mexico City, the government of Ethiopia chose to send relief donations to Mexico. The author was understandably amazed. After a good deal of research that involved speaking with both governments, he learned that in 1935, some 50 years earlier, Mexico had sent aid to Ethiopia when it was invaded by Italy. As it turns out, the government of Ethiopia, despite the hardship the country was experiencing, felt obligated to reciprocate even though 50 years had passed.

If that example is a little too far from home, how about this: It's December 22, and you receive a Christmas card from someone whom you didn't send a card. If you're like most people, you grab a stamp and head straight for the post office. "That," says Mastovich, "is reciprocity."

What's all this got to do with marketing? Plenty. Indeed, Mastovich says one of the greatest opportunities for future influence with a customer involves reciprocity.

"Just imagine," relates Mastovich, "that a furniture salesperson senses her customer is concerned about, say, the durability of a fabric on a sofa that she is considering purchasing. The sales person says, 'you know what Mrs. Jane? I think I have some information that I can email to you that you can read at your leisure, but I have to research it after we're done here. Can I get your email address so I can send that to you?' Imagine the impact the salesperson has on the customer when she emails her with a link to some neutral bit of information about fabric protection and wearability. Nothing

that says, 'our sofa is better because,' but good information that simply assists the customer in making her purchasing decision. This might be the first step towards closing the sale because reciprocity has just kicked in. Even if the customer could buy what she wants in the next store down the street for \$83 less, she's probably going to drive up the road to purchase from the salesperson that went out of her way to really help her. That's reciprocity."

Incidentally, when the sale is consummated, Mastovich says he learned from Dr. Cialdini that it is critical not to "fumble the 'thank-you'." When the customer comes up to the salesperson and says, 'Wow, Suzanne, I want to thank you for being such a great help to me. I know my family is going to love this sofa,' the last thing Suzanne should do is blush an answer, "Oh Mrs. Jane, it was nothing, I'm here to help.' No! Instead, she should say, 'Mrs. Jane, no problem. I know, that if the situation were reversed, you would do the same for me.' And you know what? Suzanne just kicked in reciprocity once again!"

Hopefully, it won't take 50 years for the customer to repay the favor. Here's to increasing sales! ■

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