



Don't Spend More. Just Buy Better!

This essay touches on six principles of buying better without spending more:

1 – Remember always, the typical salesperson is likely to be a sprinter. But you, as a nonprofit executive, must be a long-distance runner. You and your vendor have different stakes in a transaction – and different approaches to it.

You must focus on building brand identity, protecting mission credibility and sustaining long-term constituent relationships. Many or most salespeople will focus on short term sales quotas. One key to buying better is to never lose sight of the differences between your values and objectives and those of your vendor.

2 – Choose a vendor who will recognize and protect your unique interests as a nonprofit client.

Most vendors sell primarily to corporations whose values, budgets and marketing policies are different from those of the typical nonprofit. That means you shouldn't deal with a vendor just because he or she is conveniently located or calls on you at the office or takes you to lunch. Look for an appropriate match. Set out to find the vendor who can fit with your organization's mission and values – and is willing to learn about you.

3 – Then train the vendor you selected. A good vendor will be a trainable vendor. And a trained vendor will have greater incentive to help you buy better.

Remember – your own performance plays a big role. Being a nonprofit doesn't necessarily make you a good client. You need to be clear about your expectations and decisive when required. Never fail to pay your invoice in full and on-time. Don't send your vendor off on fire drills. Respect your vendor's expertise, time and investment in the relationship. Remember that every phone conversation, every sample, every change to an order consumes the vendor's resources. By

offering the vendor a level of reliability equal to the reliability you expect of him or her.

4 – To buy better you should reflect on your own experience as an end-user of logo-products.

Ever wash your car with the T-shirt you stopped wearing because the imprint had faded? ...ever been annoyed by the jammed zipper on an otherwise satisfactory portfolio with a neat embossed logo-patch? ...ever have a cool little travel alarm go flaky and cause you to miss a meeting? ...ever throw away an imprinted pen because it oozed ink or because it too quickly ran dry? ...ever stick the windbreaker, with a logo of a favorite organization, in the back of your closet because it was too flimsy to wear with pride or comfort?

When you think of your own experience with product or imprint misfires, you are reflecting on the likely impact of low-ball prices. That's a great reality check.

5 – To buy better you should determine what kind of results you and your colleagues want the product to produce for your organization.

Unfortunately, most organizations focus more on cost than consequence. You should select and buy products to achieve specific results – to have certain impacts on certain publics.

Define those objectives. Make them measurable. Be sure your boss agrees with them. Then work with your vendor to identify products that have a reasonably good chance, or perhaps even a proven track record, of achieving those results.

This approach will help you avoid the mistake made by beginners and unsophisticated buyers. Those folks often select a product for the organization because they like it for themselves. Buy for yourself what you want for yourself – and buy for your organization what will produce the results your organization needs. That is a mark of professional wisdom.

6 – When you place an order, remember you're paying for more than products. You're also committing to pre-production expenses, freight cost and possibly the cost of packaging and distributing the product.

It is surprising how often people fail to anticipate these costs. Don't make that mistake. Be

sure to ask your vendor for preproduction and estimated freight costs before you issue the purchase order. And figure out your product packaging and distribution mechanism – and its cost – before you commit to the purchase. Don't allow poor planning to delay distribution to your contributors.

RECAP: Don't spend more. Just buy *better!* Remember these six principles:

- You and your promotional products vendor have different values and goals. To think otherwise is risky.
- Nevertheless, you CAN find a vendor who will protect your interests.
- To buy better you must educate that vendor about your reality.
- Even then you must be guided by your own disappointment when you were the end-user of sub-standard logo products.
- Despite the excitement of product selection, always remember to target your choices against specific results you want to achieve.
- Finally, don't forget that your costs go beyond the product itself: be sure to factor in production and pre-production expenses, the price of samples and inbound freight and distribution cost, packaging, postage and similar costs.



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