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**Selling "Ideas": How Ideas Transform Non-Buyers into Customers**

**By Jill Konrath**

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A few months ago my friend was in the midst of web site redesign. Her son, who had just left a web design firm to start his own company, was doing the work for her. Several times she suggested that I might want talk to him.

Believe me, it was the last thing in the world I wanted to do! After just spending tons of money and time on my own site, I wasn't one bit interested in talking to Andrew. What I had was "good enough" for awhile. Sure there changes I wanted to make, but they could wait. Besides, doing business with your friend's kid is dangerous – what if he did a lousy job?

With a gracious smile, I politely declined her offer of assistance. "Maybe in a year or so," I said in my nicest, most discouraging manner. She finally dropped the subject. Needless to say, I was relieved.

Imagine my surprise when I received an e-mail from Andrew a few weeks later. I opened the message and began reading. Sure enough it started, "My mom mentioned ..."

"Poor fellow," I thought, "He must really be desperate for business."

"I took a look at your web site," the letter continued, "and I have some ideas ..."

I was surprised – selling ideas is a high level sales skill. Andrew was new at this, but he had checked out my site and spent time thinking about my business. I was downright curious too. What ideas did Andrew have for me? I had to learn more. I read on. He explained them, but being a non-tech savvy buyer, I was somewhat confused. He started to lose me; I quickly reject any sales pitch cloaked in techie terminology.

Then, what I read next blew me away!

Andrew told me he had copied several pages from my web site onto his. He had actually made the recommended changes so I could `see' and `test' what he was talking about. He gave me the URL link.

Of course, I had no choice. I had to see what he'd done to my web site. I clicked through and tried the new software. It was easy. It did what I needed it to do. I saw other definite improvements too.

I was really impressed, but not ready to do anything. Nice as the changes were, I didn't need them; I could live without them. But Andrew didn't give up. He sent an e-mail suggesting we talk about the ideas early the next week.

I stalled. "I'm busy all week," I e-mailed back. "Perhaps the following week."

He wrote back suggesting that setting up a specific time would make it easier for both of us. He gave me some options when he was available. We went back and forth like this for a few weeks, but guess

what the end result was ...

That's right. I'm working with Andrew now. I switched my web hosting company to one he suggested; he handled all the details. He's doing a couple projects for me and I know he'll do more in the future. And, I've already recommended him to several people. (If you want help with your web site, his e-mail is [andrew@andysplayground.com](mailto:andrew@andysplayground.com).)

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. Research customers prior to any contact. Be sure to let them know the homework you did. Feel free to say or write, "In preparing for our meeting, I \_\_\_\_\_." They'll be impressed; they don't hear this often.
2. Prospective buyers can't resist ideas. They have to learn more. To make yourself irresistible and invaluable to customers, become an idea generator.
3. Offer your knowledge and expertise freely. Invest time on a project before you're hired. It sets you apart from the crowd. Plus prospects can sample what it's like working with you, making a decision much easier.

## **10 Ways Focus Groups Can Propel Your Profits**

**By Larry Dotson**

A focus group is a group of employees or current customers that discuss and brainstorm new ways to improve different parts of your business.

1. They can give you new ideas on how to advertise and market your product or service to your targeted audience.
2. They can give you ideas that could help improve your current product or service. For example, you could make it smaller, faster, heavier, etc.

## Selling "Ideas": How Ideas Transform Non-Buyers into Customers

3. They can give you ideas for new products or services to develop and sell. For example, a new gift wrapping service for your products.
4. They can help you solve lingering problems with your business. For example, you could give your employees incentives to solve slow production.
5. They can give you new ideas on how to cut costs and save money. For example, you could recycle damaged or old products instead of trashing them.
6. They can find new ways to improve your current customer service policy. For example, hire extra operators so you don't have to put anyone on hold.
7. They can give you new ideas on how to get the most and best out of your employees in the less amount of time.
8. They can give you news ideas for upsell, back end and add-on products to sell. For example, you could upsell a video when selling your books.
9. They can help you find new ways to stay ahead of your competition. For example, you could give your customers free shipping.
10. They can give ideas for raising your employees morale. For example, you could hold a party, give them a holiday bonus, give them a free day, etc.

As a bonus, Bob

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