



# The Raphael Report

**Observations on marketing,  
advertising, sales and  
promotions  
by Murray Raphael,  
Chairman, Raphael Marketing**

**August 2002**

**Number 39**

---

## Close vs Close

*“The sale merely consummates the courtship at which point the marriage begins. How good the marriage is depends on how well the seller manages the relationship. Will there be continued or expanded business or troubles and divorce?”*

*- Theodore Levitt, Harvard Business Review*

There’s a scene in David Mamet’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play, “Glengarry Glen Ross,” where Alec Baldwin, as a sales motivator, gives a chalkboard talk to a group of real estate salesmen on the techniques of making a sale.

He prints the letters “A-B-C” on a blackboard and tells the sales force the letters stand for “Always Be Closing.”

His point: No amount of training will make you successful if you don’t know how to close a sale.

OK – we’d be first in line to agree the object of selling is to get the order. But why does it have to be . . . “the close?”

Webster’s Dictionary says the word as used in the above example is a verb pronounced “kloz.”

The first definition says it means, “to bar passage.”

The second definition says, “to deny access to.”

The third definition is “to suspend or stop operations.”

The fourth definition: “to bring to an end.”

To follow these definitions defeats your primary value in selling: the lifetime value of the customer.

Can’t have that if you close the door and walk away after making the sale.

You don’t “close” the sale. You “open” relationships.

Here’s why: A sold customer is expensive to replace.

“I can’t think of another investment which returns so high a yield,” said Stanley Marcus of the famed Neiman-Marcus specialty store. “The increase in customer retention isn’t something you buy. It’s something you achieve.”

Isn’t the end of a first sale really the “beginning” of the NEXT sale?

(Answer: Yes.)

The most important customer of tomorrow is the customer of today. By knowing your customers’ changing needs, tastes and desires, you place yourself in the position of solving their problems on a continuing basis.

The more involved the customer becomes with you and your business, the more he or she

will remain a steady customer and also recruit new customers as well.

But does this conflict really matter? Is it true as the writer Fernando de Rojas wrote in his play, “La Celestina” in the early 1500s, “When one door closes, fortune will usually open another?” Perhaps. It’s the “usually” that worries us.

But, on the other hand . . .

What if the letter “C” in the “Always Be Closing” credo was changed to “concerned” or “caring” or “compassionate?”

Perhaps the better reason to use these substitute words is because of the OTHER “close” – an adjective that’s pronounced “klos.”

Here’s what the dictionary says this “close” means:

- Restricted to a privileged class
- Being near in time, space, degree or effect

Edna St. Vincent Millay said it well: “I cannot hold thee close enough.”

Isn’t that your real goal: to make your customer feel “close” to you? Make them perceive this emotion the moment they come into your store. They understand, if only subconsciously, that there’s a special relationship between the two of you. As if they came to visit you in your home and you said, “Draw your chair up close.”

A recent report in the McKinsey Quarterly Newsletter echoed this philosophy saying, “There are three basic customer attitudes: emotive, inertial and deliberative. And the emotive customers are the most loyal.”

They pointed out these customers “rarely reassess purchasing decisions” because of their confidence in you and your business.

There was a survey taken on what customers gave as their reasons-for-buying any product or merchandise. Price came in fifth. The number one reason given by most was “confidence.” The customers must have confidence where they shop. Confidence in the personnel. Confidence that if there is any problem they’ll be taken care of.

Quality came in second, selection third, service fourth and price...last. If you think this doesn’t make sense, consider this scenario: You buy a product because it is the lowest price. You return the merchandise because you are dissatisfied with the performance. The attitude of the store’s staff is, “Sorry. You paid for it. It’s yours.” Is “lowest price” enough of a reason to return and buy again?

What all this means: a “close” emotive relationship with the customer has them spend more, rarely leave for a competitor and (most important) tell others to shop with you.

It is no longer enough to make the sale. It’s important, but not enough.

It is no longer enough to follow through. It’s important, but not enough.

It is no longer enough to remind the customer you’re still doing business at the same stand with new and improved products. It’s important, but not enough.

It is no longer enough to sell the product and the values that surround the purchase. It’s important, but not enough.

It is all of these – and more.

There is no “kloz” (an ending).

There is only a “klos” (a beginning).

