

The other day I went to get something off of our combination printer/copier/scanner/fax machine and there it was on top of my printout, an incredible offer I couldn't refuse. The fax was to "all employees" from the "Travel Department". The only problem is at the bank, we don't have a "Travel Department".

The one page sheet featured the "lowest rates of the season!" Our potential vacation package included: 5 days, 4 nights in Orlando, with 2 tickets to the theme park of my choice!!! 3 days, 2 nights in Daytona Beach plus a 5 day, 4 night Bahamas cruise!! Only \$199 p.p. (which I assume stands for "per person". But the offer was only good for the "1st 50 callers only".

Then I read what I assume was to be the perk that was supposed to get me to call; "every reservation will receive 3 days and 2 nights in my choice of Puerto Vallarta, Las Vegas or Honolulu with round trip air fare included!" Space was limited, so I was to call that same day. That seemed like a lot of travel for only \$199 p.p., so I decided to take the paper home and do some investigating before I called. Yes, I realized that there was a possibility that I was not going to be one of the first 50 callers, but that was a chance I was willing to take.

When I got home, I decided not to call, just in case it was actually a hoax, but did some research on the internet instead. Like most people, my first stop was Google, where I typed in the 800 number that I was supposed to call. I clicked on the first entry and found a web site which had 15 comments, none positive. One went so far as to leave information on how to report the sender to the FCC. On the second web site, 24 people had left comments since January about receiving the same type of fax we got at the bank. Two of them were not negative, and I believe were left by the senders of the fax.

One of the comments described the fax as legitimate, but you had to sit through a pushy presentation about buying a timeshare. That got me thinking about all the different sales techniques a company could use to sell their product or service. Sending an unsolicited fax with incredible offers is certainly one way. The cost is minimal, but I suspect the return call rate is very, very low. Plus, I am sure it generates a lot more negative reactions than sales.

What I do like about this sales technique, actually the only thing I like about this sales technique, is the fact that that they are giving a sample of their product away with the hope of selling more product at a profit. I think this can be effective. Give your potential client a taste of what you can do, let them try it and find out that they cannot live without your company! I have a friend who sells machining parts to manufacturers and he runs tests for his clients all the time. He is effective and as a benefit is known as an expert in his field.

I know I will get more faxes like this one in the future, but I will ignore them. Now it will remind me of better ways to sell and will serve and also serve as a reminder to let everyone know what we can offer them. No "travel department" necessary.

Small Business Today is a bi-weekly feature written by Tom Friedman, market president of First National Bank, Ames-Ankeny.