

IDEAS

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THE TECH BEAT | BY JAMES HARDING

AVOID RETAIL PROFANITY

When I was a kid, my dad used to put a small drop of liquid hand soap on my tongue as a punishment for saying something offensive. Sometimes my lack of respect or formality when referring to either of my parents would earn me a five-minute “mouth cleansing.” Sadly, too many retail sales professionals could use a little soap on their tongues as well, but not for the words they use on purpose. Here are five unintentional swear words I hear far too often in music retailing.

GUYS

Unless you're speaking to a group of teenage males, you will want to avoid using words like “guys,” “dude,” “man” or “bro.” These informal terms can come across as disrespectful — especially to older clients or to people you're meeting for the first time. Recently, one of my newer coworkers discovered this firsthand when he nearly lost a \$6,000 sale because the elderly woman in question objected to being referred to as one of “you guys.” Be mindful that some people are sensitive about social formality. Always refer to your



Eliminate these words from your sales vocabulary — now

clients as “Mr.” or “Mrs. So-and-so” unless they correct you.

CHEAP

When I began my retail career, I habitually used the word “cheap.” Phrases like: “This is our cheapest option” or “if you're looking for something cheaper” were staples in my sales pitch.

Finally, my boss helped me realize that “affordable” is the retail opposite of “expensive.” In my attempts to offer items that better suited my clients' budgets,

I was unintentionally disparaging some of my products by using a word that denotes low-quality construction. I was also unintentionally shaming someone who couldn't afford the more expensive products we carried.

NO

If you've ever worked at a big-box store, you know the horror of having to tell a customer “no.” Luckily, in independent retail, we have a lot more flexibility than those poor big-box folks who are completely bound by “company policy.” Nobody wants to hear the word “no,” so instead, find ways you can offer alternatives that show you and your company truly care.

Instead of lowering price, offer a less expensive product. Instead of saying “no” to a return, offer a discount on a new item.

SALESPERSON

Never let anyone call you a “salesperson.” Find another title — any other title. “Salesperson” represents decades of predatory immorality from used car dealerships, door-to-door retailers and countless smooth-talkers the world over. The minute your client begins to think of you as a “salesper-

son,” you've lost their business. Approach them as a “customer service specialist” or “marketing support team member.”

FREE

There really is no such thing as free and people know it. When you tell clients that something is free — whether its tickets to your next in-store concert or an accessory you're including with the instrument they are purchasing — they assume that you either got it free or you are charging them for it somewhere else. Free has no value to anyone. Instead, offer to personally pay for an accessory item as a “thank you” for buying from you, or assign a ticket price, but offer to provide a select number of VIP tickets to your clients at your company's expense. This feels much classier and far more compelling.

Whether you're writing copy for a YouTube video, your Facebook page or you're thinking about what to say during a sale, eliminate these “swear” words from your retail vocabulary before they leave a sour taste in your customer's mouth. **MI**

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