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Link & Learn Hits a Milestone

After I submitted last month's Link & Learn column to Janelle and Jeanne at the Wisconsin Community Papers, I realized that it was the 100th column I had written for PaperChain. I thought back to the afternoon a little over eight years ago when my boss called me into his office and told me he had Scott Patterson on the speakerphone. We had gotten to know Scott when he was the CEO of Trinity Holdings in Pittsburgh, the parent company of the PennySaver. Scott had promoted me from the PennySaver's call center manager to the company's training director. Scott asked me if I would help PaperChain out by writing a "couple of columns" on selling advertising in free and community papers. Somehow those few columns morphed into a hundred columns, well over 150,000 words in the PaperChain archives and a lot of weekends in the office toiling at my keyboard.

While writing the Link & Learn pieces has required a lot of work and a significant investment of time, this assignment has been a very positive experience for me. The act of writing forces one to organize their thoughts, so this monthly exercise has helped me to sharpen my skills. This has helped me in my job as trainer for the PennySaver and in the work I do for the Leadership Institute and as an independent trainer. I also find a great deal of satisfaction when someone at a conference tells me how Link & Learn has helped them in their career or to train their staff. I felt like I have been able to repay a small part of the debt I owe to the industry that has been very good to me for the past three decades. To start off the next one hundred Link & Learn columns I decided to take a look back at some of the key themes we've addressed in the first eight plus years of this feature.

I wrote my first Link & Learn piece in 2006. So much has happened in the last eight years it is hard to remember what it was like before the "great recession" and the media prematurely declared print as dead and gone. Link & Learn came along at a time when the industry was facing unprecedented challenges. To survive and thrive in this environment; salespeople must prove the relevance and value of our products to our customers on every call.

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We've tried to give you the information you need to make a good case for your products. One of the most popular Link & Learn columns of all time was titled, "When the going gets tough...the tough advertise." Since then we've covered "Selling in the New Economy," on dealing with the post recession economy and a number of columns on proving the value of print advertising. We've also talked about selling against various types of competitors. A number of columns such as, "How much does an empty table cost?," have looked at advertising from the buyer's viewpoint. The goal of all these columns is to help you demonstrate the value of advertising in free and community publications.

A good definition of sales is "communicating value of one's products and/or services to potential purchasers." Many Link & Learn columns have dealt with ways to improve your communications skills. We've done columns dealing with everything from reading body language to the effective use of e-mail. A column titled "Storyselling" reviewed the importance of using narrative descriptions on a call and "Drawing to a close" demonstrated how using simple graphics can help buyers visualize the benefits of advertising. We received a lot of feedback on "S.P.I.C.E. up your sales," and on "Are your presentations STICKY." SPICE was based on research into the specific techniques that "Supersuaders," people who are inordinately persuasive, use to convince others to see things their way. "STICKY" listed a number of things sales people can do to make their message memorable to prospects. "Do the write thing," looked at ways to improve written communications with clients.

While many Link & Learn columns would benefit sales professionals from virtually any industry, the pieces on copywriting and ad design are pertinent only to advertising. Creating effective ads, ads that generate business for our clients, is increasingly important in the hyper-competitive market we face today. We covered writing strong attention grabbing headlines and the basic elements of good ad design. One column described how to uncover a customer's "USP." A USP is the client's "Unique Selling Proposition," the one thing that sets them apart from their competitors and gives them a competitive edge. Another piece talked about using the

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A.I.D.A. formula. This is a blueprint for creating an ad that grabs a reader and clearly communicates the advertiser's message to them. A.I.D.A. is an acronym for "Attention," "Information," "Desire," and "Action." This describes the way an effective ad functions, it grabs the attention of the reader, informs them about what the advertiser has to offer, offers them something to increase their desire for the advertiser's offering and then inspires the reader to take action. Another column discussed using "advertorials," paid content about a customer's business, to drive readership and produce results for the featured advertiser's business.

Many Link & Learn columns have dealt with management issues, both in the leadership sense and about self management. A series of columns discussed Stephen R. Covey's "Seven Habits" and how they relate to our industry. Covey's book offers a well thought out plan for managing one's life and one's career. This series of columns described how to use each of Covey's seven points to become a better salesperson and/or sales manager. In my opinion, one of the things that separate successful people from their less successful coworkers is good time management skills. We've covered this issue in several Link & Learns. We discussed the "Lakein Question." This is taken from Alan Lakein's classic book "How to get control of your time and your life." Lakein suggests we continually ask ourselves, "Is this the best use of my time right now?" Lakein's book was just one of many valuable volumes mentioned or reviewed in the last eight years. The goal of Link & Learn is to help our readers become better sales people and better managers. This is an ambitious goal to achieve in 1,500 to 1,800 words per month. This is why we have always tried to provide our readers with the titles of books and other resources they can use to pursue the information on their own.

Other subjects we have covered in the last eight years include sales techniques, answering objections, online advertising and selling on value rather than price. We've covered sales planning, telephone sales, training and maintaining a positive attitude. The range of subjects we've covered is indicative of the wide range of skills and the knowledge that our frontline sales people need to know to sell in today's market. Perhaps the biggest

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challenge in preparing this column is coming up with a new subject every month. Some of the best received columns I've written covered a subject suggested by a Link & Learn reader. I have had people approach me at conferences or who sent me, or Janelle Anderson, an e-mail saying, "Why don't you do a Link & Learn about ...?" Our goal is to provide content that is useful and relevant to frontline sales people and sales managers. No one knows your needs better than you do. If you have a subject that you would like to see covered in Link & Learn, let us know. If you have any feedback, good or bad, that you would like to share, again let us know. Speaking of feedback, we've received a lot of very positive feedback on the Link & Learn archive. Every Link & Learn article is available in PDF form on PaperChain.org. Simply click on the Link & Learn button at the top of the page, you'll find nine pages of articles listed by title. In addition to this archive, the PaperChain site has a lot of valuable information including some great "Link & Earn" ideas.

Going forward we will continue to bring you information that will help you to achieve your goals and help your customers. In my thirty years in this industry, I have had many great mentors and teachers. I've worked with many people who are living examples of what it takes to be a success in business and in life. I see Link & Learn as a way to "Pay it forward," and share the lessons I have learned with my friends and colleagues. I'd like to thank everyone in the PaperChain organization for giving me this opportunity and for all that they do for our industry. I'd also like to thank everyone who has told me that they enjoy Link & Learn. With all the challenges facing our industry we need to heed Benjamin Franklin's advice to the Continental Congress, "We must all hang together or we will most assuredly hang separately." Link & Learn is one way we can "hang together" to keep our industry growing.

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

Link & Learn is brought to you every month as part of PaperChain's[®] mission to provide educational material to the free paper publishers. **If you have an issue you would like to see covered please email janderson@wisad.com, put "Link & Learn" in subject line.** Be sure to check out www.paperchain.org for past issues, electronic ready promotional ads and much more to help you remain competitive.

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