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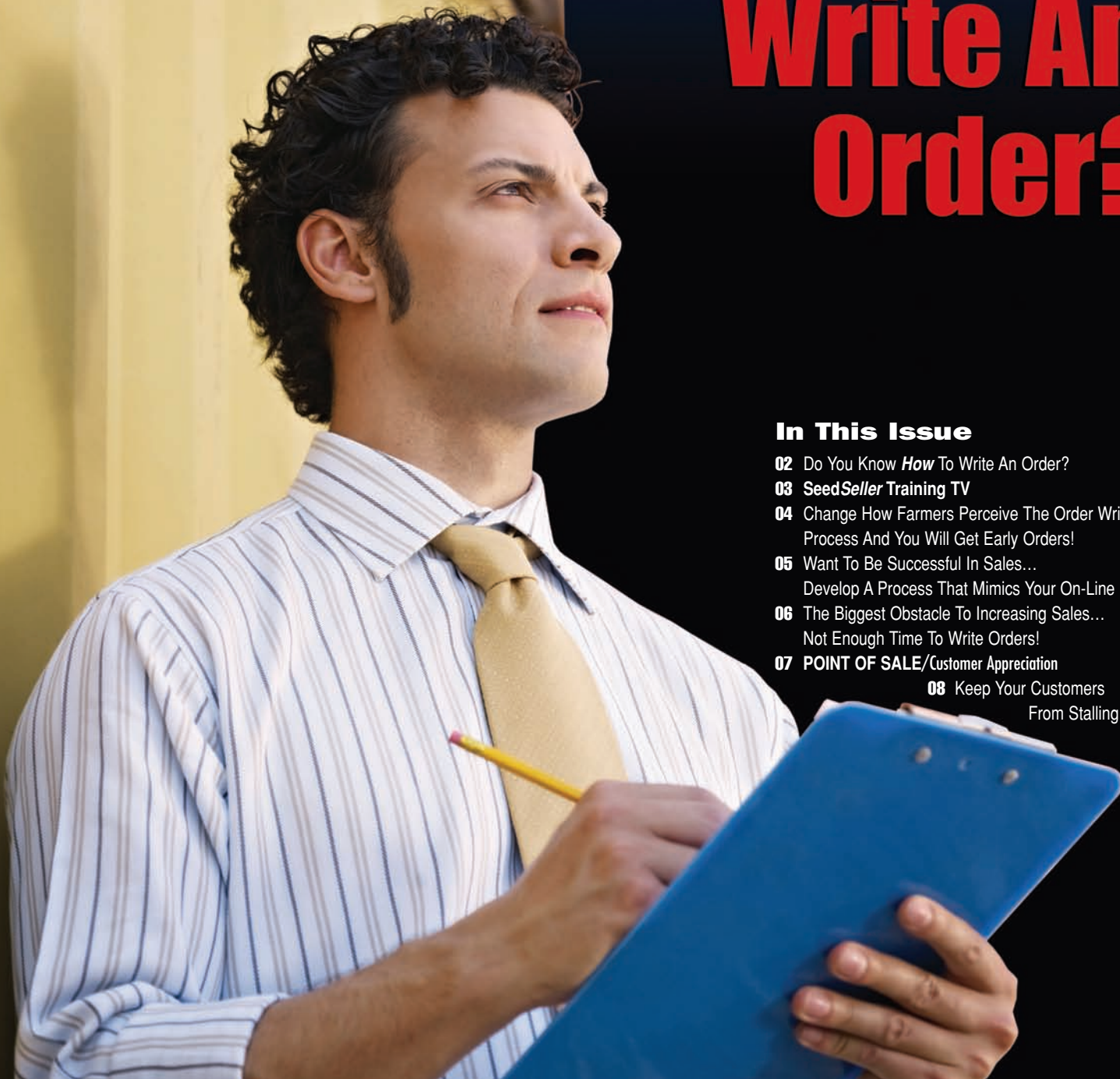
SeedSeller

TRAINING JOURNAL V7 | N6

Do You Know How To Write An Order?

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Do You Know How To Write An Order?



Do you know how to write an order? The majority of people who read this publication are in sales, but here I am asking if you know how to write orders. Sounds like a dumb question, doesn't it? Well, it's not. Most seed sellers really have no idea how to write an order. It doesn't matter how many thousands of them they've written in the past, or how much seed they may have sold, so many don't know how to do it. In fact, they not only *don't* know how, they fail miserably at it. If you are still reading this after those brash statements, then it is likely that you are going to be part of the future in this business, so read on.

How many of you have trouble getting growers to place orders early or at least on *your* time schedule? How many of you have growers who want to wait to see what the crop does and how each of their varieties perform before they place an order? How many of you have growers, due to a change of heart or an opportunity to get a better deal, cancel orders you already wrote with them? How many of you have intolerable levels of seed returns because farmers like to *over order* in years when the availability of elite varieties are perceived to be in short supply? Perhaps they take a deal from your competitor but don't tell you about it until after planting is over and you end up with a "surprise" in the form of haulback. How many of you are asked to sell leftover inventory of varieties you didn't even want to sell last year because growers didn't want them then either?

If you have or have had any of the problems listed above, you do not understand how to write a seed order because if you did, those problems would cease to exist. Worst of

Personally, I think it is time to revamp the whole process, which means it is time for sales people to learn how to write orders.

all, if sales reps don't understand how to write orders, growers certainly have no way of knowing how to do it either. Farmers learn virtually everything they know about the seed business from their seed reps. As I have said many times, "If you want to know what you *are not* teaching or what you *are* teaching, look at your students." If they are not doing what you want them to do, you are either teaching the wrong things or not teaching them the right ones.

Five misconceptions about writing orders.

Sales people have five misconceptions about writing seed orders. First, they believe that it's the farmer's decision as to when to create his order. Wrong. They don't know *when* they need to put this most important business plan (the cropping plan) into motion because they don't understand the real need and the positive impact of planning early. Second, they believe it's the buyer who decides which varieties to include in the plan. Wrong again. The seed marketplace is changing and has gotten so complicated that growers cannot keep up. The only way a farmer can decide what to buy next year is by looking at last year's results and that is absolutely the wrong way to go about it.

Ask for the order if you expect to get one.

The third misconception is that reps must always ask for the order if they expect to get one. The old acronym AFTO (ask for the order) has long been obsolete, but most sales people still follow it because it continues to be taught in schools and in sales books. Asking for the order in this highly competitive 21st century marketplace will result in a "no" from the potential new buyer at least 80% of the time and a "no" from a current buyer (not customer) at least 50% of the time. Recall, a customer is someone who buys more than 51% of his needs from you. Until he buys at that level, he is actually your competitor because he is on *their* side—buying more from them than he's buying from you! The farmers need to be *led* into order development by using what I call the

logical close. The benefits of buying from you, products and price aside, should be so clear that **you** creating and writing the order becomes the next logical step. This results in 90%+ acceptance of a cropping plan when it is presented. I never *ask* for an order. I simply *tell* growers that once we reach a particular step in our decision making process, I will present them with a cropping plan, complete with the varieties that I recommend for each of the target fields. Growers love it when you take that kind of control and make decisions for them since they know they are not qualified.

Sales people don't understand or believe in the order writing process.

The fourth misconception sales people have about writing orders is that they don't understand the order writing process well enough themselves, or believe in it deeply enough, to lead the process. Historically, there have only been two times to write a farmer's order—too early or too late. Today, sales reps can (*and should*) write orders with growers **anytime they want**—you need to take the grower where he doesn't even know he needs to go. The goal is always write orders, with both prospects and customers, within days of your company finalizing their production plan for the following year. 100% of what you sell needs to be based on that production plan, despite the potential for weather or harvest to alter your plan.

Timing is everything.

Last, but certainly not least, the fifth misconception sales people have about writing orders involves timing. Placing the seed order should never be based on when **he** wants to write it, but rather on when your **company** needs to have it written. Order placement is the most important aspect in running a seed business. It affects every facet of every seed business. **Nothing** happens until an order is placed with the company. It doesn't matter what processes are in place, how many people you have on staff or how much equipment you own and operate. Picture your business without orders over long periods of the year and you will see a business where nothing significant takes place throughout that time. And what **is** taking place at that time is most often happening because orders were placed late so all employees are doing is chasing customers around trying to play catch-up. Every department and every business process

within each of those departments depends on an order to function. Decisions on new product releases, decisions on which varieties to process, in what order and in what quantities, decisions concerning bagging reports, shipping, returns, accounts receivable, accounts payable, marketing programs and more, are all affected by **when** the sales order comes into the office. Everyone in the business depends on the order being written and the earlier the order is written, the earlier all of those important decisions can be made.

When writing seed orders, timing is everything. Timing is the most important factor in the order writing process. For seed companies to operate at peak efficiency, the seed order must be written as closely as possible to when the annual production plan is finalized in the spring. That closes the gap between sales people selling growers what they think they want and selling what we need to sell them based on

the production plan. Plus, very few if any farmers have a specific time frame in mind as to when they want to have next year's seed order finalized. Most of them are still caught up in the Ag Cycle, doing the same things they have always done when they have always done them. Unfortunately, too many farmers have been taught that they can wait until they're ready to order, instead of doing it when the sales rep wants and needs the order.

Until companies decide to get their growers out of the Ag Cycle and start writing orders on their own company schedules instead of the grower's schedules, they will continue to fight all of the same old problems seed companies have been battling for years. Personally, I think it is time to revamp the whole process, which means it is time for sales people to learn how to write orders.

SeedSeller Training TV

is the only online video channel dedicated to selling seed.

Each month, new webisodes are uploaded so sales reps across the globe can watch 2-3 minute training segments on how they can improve their sales and provide more value to their current customers and future prospects in agriculture.

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Training Blog



Rod Osthus

Change How Farmers Perceive The Order Writing Process And You Will Get Early Orders!

When was the last time your customers ordered seed earlier because of an opportunity to get a bigger discount on that order? In fact, when was the last time your customers ordered and *actually paid* for their seed earlier than ever before in exchange for the opportunity to get additional discounts? You might be able to name a few people, but seed industry data shows us that the average seed ordering time continues to shift to even later in the year and average order sizes, for both new and current customers, continue to stay flat or decline. This means old tactics are no longer working. It also means that sales reps are struggling even more to bring on new customers since they are still relying on tactics that do not work.

First of all, in this marketplace there is no such thing as an early order, *only various degrees of late orders*. The new sales season starts the minute planters roll, as does the next crop-planning season. Every day that passes once planters roll, the farther behind he gets, the more bushels it costs him by delaying that decision.

Instead of trying to get farmers to order earlier, we need to change how they view the most important part of their business plan—

the cropping plan. Once they understand how a cropping plan is different from an order, they will see the greater benefit it brings and stop worrying about ordering earlier. Instead, they will only think about *planning earlier*, resulting in not losing precious bushels along the way from delaying decisions. The following are things we need to do to change how modern day growers view the seed ordering process.

Growers need to know that unlike an order, cropping plans:

1. Are the No. 1 mechanism used to help ensure maximum returns from every acre because planning is purposeful and calculated in controlling variables.
2. Are the most important decision making tool he has because they address all of his cropping decisions.
3. Include many more important decisions than just an order and they require more time to develop.
4. Address the variables that affect the performance of varieties, not just the varieties themselves.
5. Are based largely on information growers do not have access to but need us to know because it helps make the ordering decisions.
6. Are *not* based on the performance of varieties from the previous year's plan, but orders often are. Each year, cropping plans change as variables change.
7. Create a "real order" and not a booking, as its basis lies in the solid planning of each variety having a selected purpose.
8. Allow all other business segments, such as marketing, contracting, hedging, tillage, input purchases and so on, to move forward in a more calculated manner because the cropping plan is a complete business plan for each particular field.
9. Enhance field performance because the information going into the cropping plan has been more carefully thought out.
10. Will *not* be changed by the grower without first consulting the rep who developed it.



The New Sales Season Begins...NOW

Do you want to blow a lot of sales opportunities really quickly? Get in front of a crowd of prospects and give them a really poor sales presentation. Sounds like a no-brainer, but it happens more often than you think. No manager would knowingly allow any of his sales people to stand in front of 21st century growers and give an unprofessional, unprepared, unpracticed sales presentation that destroys perceptions. Or would they? It actually happens all the time.

If you want to see a professional, well-written, well-practiced sales presentation, go to most company websites. Much thought and preparation is put into the online story. They may not have the best “sales pants,” which we

There are so many opportunities to increase sales, but you only get one opportunity to make a great first impression.

want our presentations to have, but in most cases they are pretty nicely polished. If they aren't done well then the company *is*, in fact, turning large numbers of people off. The point here, is that most companies spend more time and money developing and keeping their website up-to-date than they do training their field sales force how to sell. Granted, websites can reach a lot more people, but they cannot write orders. Seed companies have never been able to live off the sales that come their way through online ordering. Modern-day, serious farmers consider seed their most significant

purchase and they are not going to shop and order it online.

Still, face-to-face selling on the countryside needs to convey the same high-level of professionalism displayed on the company's website. The online presentation should be of high caliber, generate excitement and convey value and the face-to-face sales call itself should reflect the same. In fact, you should not be able to distinguish between the two messages since they both communicate the exact same meaning to the reader and the listener. Both the online sales message and the face-to-face message must be so similar and so dynamic that no decline in perception occurs when a prospect or customer goes from one to the other.

Compare your online sales approach to those being delivered by your field sales force and see how they compare. Role-play them both, with emotion, and see which one sells the most value and turns the prospect's head more quickly. There are many opportunities to increase sales, but you only get one opportunity to make a great first impression. Do it well and you will be left with plenty more opportunities to screw things up.



Want To Be Successful In Sales...
**Develop A Process
That Mimics Your
On-Line
Presentation**



Our industry needs to wake up and understand that success comes from increased productivity, resulting from dividing big jobs into smaller jobs and assigning a specialist to perform each one of those small jobs.

Since I started in this business 39 years ago, it has gotten more and more complicated. We've gone from writing orders for just one variety and a seed size or two, all the way to developing cropping plans that include numerous technology integrated varieties, refuge products, seed sizes, accompanied by all of the documents, permission slips and registration forms required—before we ever put the seed in the soil—all of that essential to complete one sale with one grower. With all of these things taking place at the point-of-sale, no one seems to recognize the huge problem that it's created. The sales process has been lengthened to an unreasonable and unmanageable period of time. The increased amount of time and effort it takes to complete a sale

nowadays is totally out of whack with reality. There is just too much of a load placed on *one person* to consummate an order. The reason nothing has been done to-date to help seed sellers out of this jam is because everyone seems to believe that the rep is the only one who can get it done. Well, that's hogwash. Let's look at the damage that occurs when we try to run a business without assisting our modern day order writers with *specialists*.

The key to success in any business is dividing the labor load by deciding who does what best and who is most efficient at getting any one job done. The more personnel a business has doing what they do best, the more money the business makes. Efficiency goes way up. The problem is our industry is notorious for believing in multi-tasking—the ability for one person to handle many different jobs. For years, we considered that efficiency and in many cases it was. I believe this all stems from being raised on a farm where we all *had* to learn to do anything and everything—from carpenter to mechanic and from crop producer to veterinarian. It seemed to make sense to increase efficiency by having one person responsible, or at least available, to do many different jobs.

Well, today this concept is smothering every company and every sales rep who is trying to grow a seed business. Our industry needs to wake up and understand that success comes from increased productivity, resulting from dividing big jobs into

smaller jobs and assigning a specialist to perform each one of those small jobs. There is no bigger, more important job than writing an order for the business. That job has gotten excessively large for one person to handle. In fact, we need to over-specialize in many areas of the order writing and customer management process so we can get where we really want to go. Since all we need to do is find someone to do a specific task, finding the right people and training them is less of a problem. Not only will we get more done, more efficiently, the quality of work will go up and the number of orders we can write in a year will triple. That means lowered over-all costs and huge increases in market share and revenue.

Do you want to revive your company's sales or the sales in your territory? Do you want sales increases you haven't been able to realize in years? Begin by *mapping* the entire seed sales process and see how complicated it has become. List every task that involves processing, confirming, communicating and securing an order. Decide what can be done by someone other than the sales rep. *Think about it.* How much extra time would field sellers have to spend selling and managing customer relationships if two or three other people, specializing in a specific task, took those tasks away from the sales rep? You would find sales, profits, efficiency and, most of all, customer satisfaction growing geometrically. In the old days, that kind of division of labor was considered extra, unneeded overhead and expense. Today, it is considered smart management and a key path to increased revenue.



The Biggest Obstacle To Increasing Sales...

Not Enough Time To Write Orders!



Customer Appreciation



It is almost that time of year, the crop is in (hopefully) and coming up nicely (hopefully) and thoughts start to turn towards appreciation.

Customer appreciation, that is. Most companies hold some sort of customer appreciation event in the summer as things slow down, but customer appreciation events can be held at anytime of the year. My company, for instance, held a small event in conjunction to a major industry conference that came up in June. So I thought for this article I'll mention a couple of suggestions for holding a successful customer appreciation event.

Budget.

First and foremost, you should have some idea of a budget. People can go way overboard if you let them, so it is a great idea to have some sort of idea as to how much money you want to spend beforehand. The budget will dictate everything about the event including location, theme, amount and type of food and beverages, decorations, freebies and prizes. Once you have a figure in mind, it is also easier to determine where to spend the money for greatest impact. This is also the trickiest part to figure out—where do you spend your money?

Location.

The place to start is determining your customers. Who are you going to invite and

how many do you think will show up? Are you going to invite spouses or significant others? Are there going to be both men and women in attendance? This all matters because the number and type of guests will dictate the type and size of the venue. It is really easy and cheap to have it at your place of business. Perhaps, if you want to avoid the hassle of getting your own place up to snuff, or you feel that you don't have a good enough place, or that it isn't central enough, there are many places you can rent and I don't just mean the local VFW hall either. Try looking at a local pub, bed and breakfast place, restaurant or golf course. Many of these places would fall over themselves for a guaranteed income for one night.

Menu.

Once you have determined the location then the next thing is food and drink. Is it going to be free? What sort of meal is it going to be? Again, creativity counts! Let's face it, we have all had our fair share of rubber chicken and badly cooked steak, so why not something else? Is it going to be a meal or will just munchies do? Is there going to be a bar? An open bar? This all comes back to budget, but food and drink will reflect the most about you and will also be the thing that people will remember the most. If you have champagne dreams but a beer budget then there are some things you can do to cut back, which won't have negative ramifications on you and your event. One way is to have a bartender or server. It is worth the extra bit of money, food or favor to have someone whose job it is to see that everything is served properly so you don't have to worry. They will cut down on spillage and waste better than anyone else because that is their job. They will make sure that the beer cans are served open (forces people to only order one or two and not extra) and that there is no wastage with the keg. This applies to food as well. If you are serving

something like fried chicken, it is well worth it to have someone serving it. People can always come back for seconds or thirds, but get them started with a reasonable portion to make sure everyone gets some.

Entertainment.

You don't have to go all out when it comes to entertainment either, but you should have something. The reason you do is because this is an appreciation and people like to be entertained and it also keeps them busy so they are not just standing around eating and drinking. It is pretty reasonable to rent some old fashion pinball or video games and there are places that are in that business that will bring them out and set them up. You can have contests, car rallies, or scavenger hunts—all related to your business. It gets people engaged and entertained and it also gives you a talking point for the rest of the year. It may also be interesting for you to talk to a local talent agency (yes, they are everywhere) to see what is available and at what cost. You tell them what you are looking for, what kind of crowd you have and it is somewhat surprising what's out there and for a reasonable price. Sometimes it is a gamble to bring in a comedian, but if you lay out the ground rules beforehand, they usually try to work with you.

In conclusion, I will give you an example of one of the best customer appreciation events I ever attended. It was an annual event held every summer in one of the business's machine sheds. It was called the "Dog and Suds Night." The menu? You guessed it—hot dogs, bratwursts, hamburgers, homemade beans and macaroni salad, potato chips and homemade dessert. The tables were picnic tables, the beer and pop was cold and the music was performed by a local band. People loved it. It was done by invitation so that made them feel special. It was a beer budget done well. It is possible to have a great time on a budget as long as the message of the appreciation you feel for your customer comes through.



Keep Your Customer From Stalling

Anytime a prospect or customer says he is not ready to begin his cropping plan you will hear things like:

- ▼ "I don't know what I'm going to do yet."
- ▼ "I'm going to wait to see what the market does."
- ▼ "I'm going to wait to see what my input costs are before I decide which crops to plant."

Never allow the selling process to stall or stop. There is just a single valid reason growers have for not ordering early. The only legitimate explanation for being put off is you have not succeeded in raising his perceptions and your relationship with him to a level high enough to have him follow you. The only way a grower will follow you is if you have made sure that those perceptions of you, your company and your products are sufficiently elevated. At that stage of progress, the relationship has been created and the farmer will follow you and do what you ask him to do, including commencing the development of his cropping plan.

The key to raising perceptions and building that relationship is spending more time with your grower. The more time you spend with him, the more he gets to know you and the faster the buying will get underway. Give every grower who hesitates to start the cropping plan process these four options. If they won't take the first, go on to the next, until they accept one

of them. Almost every grower will want to take at least one.

Grower says:

"I don't know what I am going to do yet, I am going to wait until I see what input costs do."

You say:

"Oh, that's no problem, you can decide anytime you want. By the way..."

- *I'm taking two of your friends, John and Bill, to our headquarters on Thursday for a tour to show them some of the new things we are working on, then we're going to stop on the way home and have a nice steak. It will be a great time. Why don't you come with us?*
- *Fred's got a great field that is planted at 39,000—it's some experimenting that we are doing. Have you been in it? I would love to get your opinion on high populations. Let's go take a quick look at it.*
- *I know you have done some great things raising corn. I would love to see some of your fields. Would you consider taking a few minutes and showing me some of them?*
- *I have invited the President of our company to spend a couple days with me. We will be in this area both Wednesday morning and Thursday morning. Would it be ok if we stopped by so he could meet you? Which day would work best?"*

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