



THE BENCHMARK

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What affluent prospects buy

Not so long ago I spent some valuable time with the purchaser of a \$1 million landscape. I was seeking a better understanding of what an affluent prospect thinks when considering a purchase. The purchaser graciously provided some great insights on selling to clients like himself.

As we walked together through the yard and his 15,000-sq.-ft. home, he tried to convince me that he was just a regular guy, like the rest of us. But of course he wasn't. He could easily afford a \$1 million landscape. But it became clear that what he wouldn't tolerate was, of all things, unpleasantness.

Value vs. price

It didn't take long to realize that a customer who spends \$100,000 on a landscape does not buy the same as one spending \$10,000. These two clients live in different universes. They approach buying decisions with different mindsets.

In the May 2011 issue of *Landscape Management*, my column, "Selling small jobs", offered a process for selling smaller jobs. Price and speed are critical for these sales. Price and speed are important, but not as much for well-to-do prospects.

Almost certainly, most rich prospects will try to get the best price they can. They're used to negotiating and most are pretty good at it. That's one of the reasons they have money. But, typically, they'll spend what's necessary to get what they want. Pushing your price button is their way of testing you. Your experience. Your confidence.

The rich person's biggest annoyance is the **construction mistakes** that **create havoc** on their properties.

They want competence

That's because, in the end, it's competence they seek, and usually not the lowest price. That's why, instead of giving them price concessions, the skilled salesperson gives them reasons to buy based on value. The salesperson emphasizes his or her firm's design and installation experience/expertise and what that means in terms of the entire project.

Most high-income customers want value and hate surprises and slip-ups. Highest on the surprise list are cost overruns. Customers associate shocking unplanned expenses with incompetence. Most view incompetence as unacceptable. When they've been promised competence, that's exactly what they expect.

Surprises most often result from weak designs that don't anticipate problems inherent in any construction job. Strong designs anticipate and precisely incorporate common problems into the price.

But the rich client's biggest annoyance (unpleasantness) is the construction mistakes that create havoc on their properties. The causes of 90% of these mess-ups result from poor lead-time planning and project management. Most clients, affluent or otherwise, want you invisible and gone.

So what does that mean to your sales process?

Obviously, these clients want to hear about and need to be convinced of the ways your strong production management system eliminates these mistakes. They're looking for competence combined with confidence at point of sale.

Of course, you will have to talk price with the well-heeled prospect as you would with any potential client. But you might want to add language similar to what this successful salesperson used on a real-life prospect: "I suggest that you consider the stress a weak design and poor production process will cause you and your wife. I've seen it a hundred times. The real question here is not price, but the kind of experience and end result you want to have."

He made the sale.