

Creating Upselling Opportunities

by Kim and Linda Katwijk

Who hasn't heard the phrase "Would you like fries with that?" Asking every customer that question — a marketing strategy credited to Ray Kroc, former chairman of McDonald's — is one of the best-known examples of successful upselling. Making an add-on sale to a deck job can be as simple as that — just asking for it.

Upselling comes down to informing clients about options they may not know exist. And there's no reason not to do it. When you've already invested time selling and building a job, every extra dollar you make is like getting a better interest rate on a bank account — who would say no to that? Assuming you keep the same mark-up, selling a higher-dollar option simply adds to your bottom line while adding little or no extra labor on your part. Plus, in today's market, customers are not easy to find: The more you earn from each customer, the fewer you need to sell to.

The Prospective Client

I don't sell decks; I sell the lifestyle that a new deck will bring. Most clients have a general idea as to the size and shape of deck they think they need, commonly squares or rectangles abutting the house. But you should also ask questions about how they're going to use their new deck and present possibilities that stimulate their imaginations (**Figure 1**). Open-ended questions that suggest a lifestyle are best, such as "Do you see yourself cooking, dining, or entertaining out here?" and "I can see a need for shade here on hot summer



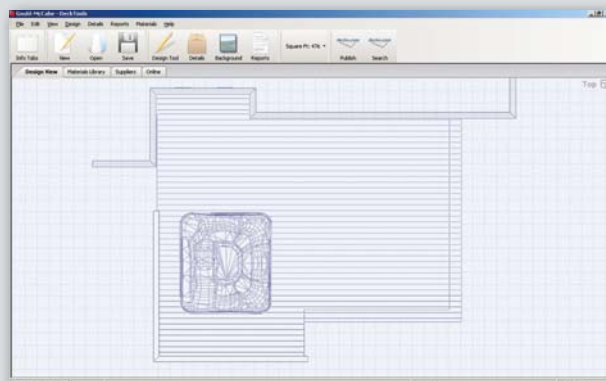
Figure 1. Add-ons such as pergolas add to your bottom line. Often, making the sale doesn't take much more than planting the idea in a customer's mind.



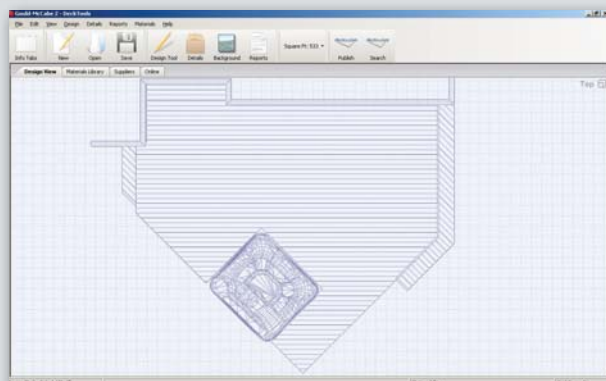
CAULISE OUTDOOR KITCHENS

Figure 2. Look for clues to your customers' budget. People who surround themselves with luxury items are likely candidates for a big-ticket upsell such as an outdoor kitchen.

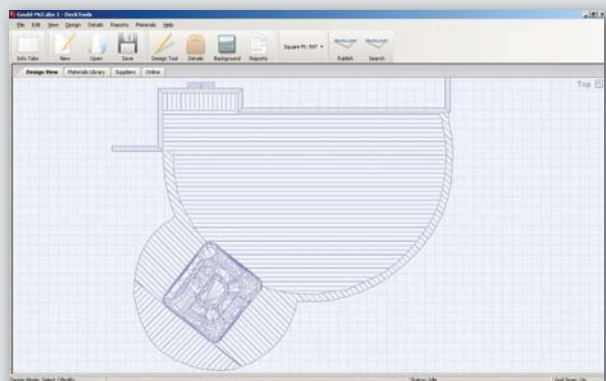
Figure 3. Offering three designs increases the odds of an upsell. If the customer's initial vision is fairly basic, that might just be because of a lack of imagination. Draw the basic version, and follow it up with two grander options. The author claims that more than half of his clients choose at least the middle option.



The plain-Jane deck as the customer first described it.



Adding angles increases interest at a modest budget uptick.



Load a deck with sexy curves, and the client just might pay the price.

days. A pergola or shade sail would go nicely here, don't you agree?" Help the client paint a picture.

Look at your clients' home and landscaping for clues to determine how extravagant to make this visual dream. For example, if they have a well-maintained yard, upscale furnishings, two high-end cars, a nice boat, a motor home, and other "toys," you can be certain they will be more open to, say, an outdoor kitchen, than would a client with fewer nice things (**Figure 2, page 1**). Fashion a dream for your clients that is within their reach. Discuss every detail of design and every accessory they might like to have. Dreaming creates desire. Desire leads to the sale.

I don't try to close the sale at the first appointment. My friend, Dan Troxel from Kansas City, told me he figures he makes one sales visit for each \$10,000 that the deck is going to cost. I looked at my own statistics, and they are pretty close to that.

After the initial visit, I go back to the office and create the first upsell opportunity. Say the clients had a rough idea of a rectangular deck. I draft that out first, then create two other, more-desirable options that also meet all the needs on their wish list (**Figure 3**). I e-mail the designs to the clients and ask them to spend a little time visualizing each of the decks.

Offering three designs creates a psychological need to rank them good, better, and best. People can't escape this inner evaluation. A significant number of clients always want the best, while others tend to select middle options. More times than not, my clients end up choosing one of the alternative designs I've suggested — and I've made the first upsell. If you're not offering three designs, you're missing a major opportunity.

The Return Appointment

Another opportunity to upsell comes when you discuss decking materials. I set an appointment to show the clients a variety of products. If they've already decided on a composite deck, I show two or three samples of composite decking I recommend. We discuss the benefits and features of each. Then I show them PVC decking, highlighting the additional benefits this higher-priced product offers. Even if clients already know what they want, you're providing them a service when you explain the benefits of the different products you offer.

Once they select decking — hopefully upsell number two — move on to fasteners. I present the typical method of face-screwing, then show them a hidden fastener system, such as Cortex, explaining the benefits and added beauty (**Figure 4, page 3**).

Many people are looking to stand out — to show their

style to their friends, family, and neighbors. One way to satisfy this need is with an inlay (**Figure 5**); most customers don't realize they are even possible unless you bring them up (*Design*, March/April 2009; deckmagazine.com).

Cross-selling is another strategy. It might not be what you're after in good economic times, but right now few of us are turning down any work. Last year, for instance, I painted nine houses. Those jobs all came about by my asking one question, "Is there anything else you need done



Figure 4. After agreeing on the shape of the deck, don't be shy about raising the possibility of material upgrades like hidden fasteners.



Figure 5. Deck inlays give customers the chance to express their individuality — and thicken your bankroll.

around your home?" Back when the economy was better, I sold 12 hot tubs one year by saying, "A hot tub would fit nicely here, don't you think?" Using transition questions like these allows you to bridge from your initial sale to upsells and cross-sells.

You should determine what questions you will ask, write them down, and practice them until they become second nature in your selling process. You might start by adding one transition question to every sales call for

the next two weeks. Then add another question to your sales process, until you build up a whole arsenal of suggestive questions that can work on a variety of potential clients.

Just as Ray Kroc more than doubled his fry sales by asking one simple question, you're sure to sell more if only you ask. ♦

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