

MARKETING FOR JOB SHOPS: USING THE RIGHT TOOLS

SUMMARY

Marketing programs are usually written and followed so that favorable results may be obtained two to five years in the future. Sales activities, on the other hand, usually secure more immediate results. In a job shop with a limited number of people to do all the work, one must keep a marketing plan in perspective, monitor progress toward the goals outlined in the plan, and still accomplish the daily tasks associated with running the shop. Therefore, it is important to use time effectively.

A creative machinist can frequently perform miracles of workmanship by rigging tooling and fixtures to do a job on a lathe that might be better done on a mill. This is also true in marketing. You can do jobs yourself that would be more efficiently done by others, but the jobs probably won't be done as well unless an inordinate amount of time is spent on them. Use "consultants" properly and they will save you time and money. They will also do a better job.

Even the largest corporations use outside help for many tasks, and your small business can certainly follow that lead when it makes sense. But you must know how to use outside experts to get the kind of help you need. How does one select the right tasks to assign to outsiders? And how do you know the right experts when you see them?

ADVERTISING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Two jobs that are well suited for outside "consultants" are advertising and public relations. Since job shops are usually small businesses, at least when they start their first marketing program, they frequently think that a good ad or PR agency won't be interested in handling their account. The truth is, agencies come in all sizes. The one-man ad agency is not terribly rare, and many agencies are made up of a couple of creative people and a sales representative. If your shop is small, start with the smaller agencies. You can always find a bigger one when you are ready to do so.

Most metropolitan areas have someone who publishes a list of local advertising and public relations firms. "ADWEEK" and other magazines devoted to advertising publish national listings, but those agencies are usually the big ones. In Minnesota, "Corporate Report" publishes an annual listing of agencies. Your local chamber of commerce can provide a list, and many cities have an Ad Club or a chapter of the Business/Professional Advertising Association. The yellow pages can also get you started on your search, but don't judge an agency by the size of its listing.

Phone several agencies and talk with the person who handles industrial accounts specializing in business-to-business communications. Select a few with accounts you know are somewhat associated with the machining industry, so you

don't have to teach the agency people about your business. Invite them to visit you and bring samples of their work. Walk through your shop with them, and let them give you a sales pitch. Even if you don't hire them, you may pick up a few good ideas.

Try to select the agency that will give your small account sufficient time and talent to do a good job. Meet the creative team (writer and art director) who will be assigned to your account, and decide if you can communicate well with them. Talk to the person who will manage your account (the account executive) about how billings will be handled. With a job shop, chances are the agency will want to charge an hourly fee for specific services rendered because not enough advertising will be placed to make the account profitable for the agency under other arrangements. Get the details of the cost structure straight before you hire your agency.

It makes sense to pay an hourly fee for services rendered, but make sure your monthly statement lists each job done, and the charge for each. You can also ask for estimates for specific jobs, just as you bid on jobs for your customers, so that you will know approximately how much a brochure or a new ad will cost before you agree to do them. Most agencies require their people to keep track of all the time they spend on a particular job, so billing you for their time is easy. They will also pass along copies of invoices for services they must purchase, like printing or photography, and will rebate publication discounts to you.

TRUST THEM

You should understand the financial aspects of the client/agency relationship, but this is less important than the personal and creative relationship. You are hiring an agency because they are experts in a field where you are a neophyte. Make sure you select an agency with people you trust, and then let them do their job. As David Ogilvy says in *CONFESIONS OF AN ADVERTISING MAN*, "Why keep a dog and bark yourself?"

Job shop advertising, PR releases, and brochures usually include technical information. If you have picked the right people to do your job, they will be capable of learning the technical aspects of the job shop business. Help them learn. When you get a new machine tool that is significantly different from anything you've had before, show it to them. Tell them what it can do, and let them come up with ideas about marketing it. If they don't show an interest in such things, you've got the wrong agency.

Remember that it is your responsibility to provide direction to the people at your agency. They must know what your objectives are and what you want them to do to help achieve these goals. Also remember that they deserve to make a profit on your account. An honest and open relationship with your agency people results in good ads and brochures that will make money for the agency and create sales opportunities for you.

If you think that your time is valuable, wait until you start paying your agency for the time spent talking with you about your business problems! Remember that you are paying them

by the hour, so use your time and theirs efficiently. Most objectives can be transmitted in writing more effectively than talking them over. But you must also spend time with them, preferably in your shop, where they can absorb something about your business while talking.

IMPROVE THROUGH FEEDBACK

The agency needs feedback from you, let them know about inquiries that result from the ads they place. Tell them your feelings concerning the ads and brochures they've produced and what your customers say about the work they have done for you. Feedback will help them do a better job, and that benefits you.

In addition to the regular conversations about existing programs, schedule an annual meeting to convey your ideas for the upcoming year and to provide them with guidelines about what you'll need from them. Encourage a free flow of ideas during this meeting. You can tighten up the program to fit your budgets later. Allow your ad agency to make mistakes, just as you allow your own people to do so. Otherwise, you'll get a conventional advertising program, and that sort of program won't help you sell.

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