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MK18 **File: MARKETING**

MARKETING FOR JOB SHOPS: A PLAN FOR MANAGERS

SUMMARY

This BMA responds to some of the questions that are asked by job shop managers who find themselves on a growth path, in need of marketing expertise they do not have, and how such managers can avoid at least some of the pitfalls that exist in this exciting business.

I CAN'T EVEN WRITE A LETTER!

One manager complained about tackling the job of writing a marketing program, "I can't even write a letter," he said, "how can I write a good marketing plan?" I suggested a list of "rules for writing" that I originally read in an interview of Malcolm R. Forbes. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT, PLUNGE RIGHT IN, WRITE LIKE YOU TALK, GIVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT, EDIT IT AND STOP. Since your marketing plan will be read and used by people who know you very well, this formula should work.

Many of us are unfamiliar with editing. Editing simply means deleting words which are not needed and arranging what's left into readable and logical form. It also means you must consider the meaning of the words you use, making sure they are the best words available to express your thought. A dictionary and a thesaurus with synonyms and antonyms is a big help.

I'M NO GOOD WITH WORDS!

Another manager told me, "I'm no good with words, how can I put a plan together?" But he spoke clearly enough for me to understand his problem, which enabled me to provide some ideas that might help him find an answer. Words are like tools; you use them to get the job done. Organize your thoughts about a marketing plan and start making lists. Discard the words (tools) that are not needed; reorganize the ones that are, and sharpen them. Talk the draft through with the people involved and take lots of notes.

Using your lists and initial draft, finalize this year's plan. Work with it for a year and then rewrite it for the next year. Nothing is lost, and much is gained by simply writing a plan based on present practice. Writing it down forces you to precisely define what you are doing. It is gratifying to see how much better each successive plan looks, and how much better it works.

THE SAME OLD STUFF

"I just don't have many new ideas, what's the use of a plan that just repeats the same old stuff ?", asked a manager of a shop with twenty employees. First of all, I told him there are nineteen other people with a special interest in helping the company grow, and they have families and friends who may also provide input. Also, most of us are more creative than we think, and creativity can be enhanced through some fairly simple and enjoyable practices.

It seems to me that we suffer not from a lack of creative ideas, but from poor memories. If we carry a notebook so we can write down our ideas when they occur to us, we will find out we have lots of ideas, some good ones, and some bad ones. Another helpful habit is to frequently ask ourselves questions. Our mind gets tired of the same old questions and starts posing answers. Brainstorming with other people is another useful method of obtaining ideas.

Even if you don't have new ideas for this first marketing plan, at least all the old ideas - which were probably pretty good or you would have gone broke already - will be in one place where you can see if you are following them. Since planning is an ongoing process, nothing is lost by writing a plan based on your present operating methods.

I DON'T HAVE TIME

"I just don't have the time to spend planning, can't I delegate this job?", is a common question. I'll be the first to admit that this is a tempting idea. Let George do it.

That won't work!

Andrew S. Grove, in "HIGH OUTPUT MANAGEMENT,"

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says that " . . . how a manager handles his own time is the single most important aspect of being a leader." Observation, conversation, reading, listening, and performing routine tasks take up much of your day. But he recommends taking time to plan and to write reports and lists. "As they are formulated and written," he says, "The author is forced to be more precise than he might be orally."

"Someone else, even a person who knows you and your job exceedingly well, cannot possibly organize your thoughts for you, precisely express them, and set the same priorities you would set yourself. At least not without so much guidance that you will wish you did the job yourself. Sure, major corporations have "planners" and "strategic planning departments," but even such groups must involve the leaders of the company quite deeply in the planning process. Then they can organize and produce the reports for them.

In any case, when you introduce a new idea in your organization, the first thing your people watch for is your own level of commitment. If you are not willing to invest your time and best effort in the planning process, they won't think it's very important and they won't give it their best effort either. Since you have decided that you do need a marketing plan for your shop, you must do the work needed to get the planning process going.

Then you must devote yourself to producing the best plan possible during the first year or two. Once the process is established, and your people see how dedication to the process will benefit them, and the format is sufficiently organized, and the timetables set, then you can take a more minor role in the planning process and production of the plan. But, if you don't get it all started, it will not be perceived as a very important task.

WHY USE MANUFACTURERS' REPRESENTATIVES?

Because our company has developed a comprehensive organization of manufacturers' representatives throughout the United States, I have often been asked why we chose to use reps and how we found them. Reps provide the least expensive sales coverage available to a small company that wishes to market over a large area. They are only paid a commission when they make a sale for you, and you share the cost of maintaining a good sales organization with the reps' other principals.

Methods of finding reps are in separate BMAs, but I will add one thought. Be meticulously careful in your selection process. Patience, persistence and determination will eventually find and get you the best rep in each territory. You'll be glad you did not settle for "second best." You can help yourself make the correct choices and decisions if you plan your actions. When planning, you should ask yourself questions such as these:

- What will this do for our customers? (Not, what will this do for us?)
- How will this add to our profits? (Not, how will this increase sales?)
- Is this what we happen to be prepared to do, or what our customer wants?
- Are we using all the help we can get from our associations, our advertising agency the trade shows we attend?
- Is our focus on value, or on price?
- Do we understand the impact of outside environments on our business, and predict future effects?
- Do we know our customer's customer, and how he uses what we make?
- Am I developing the future leadership my company needs?

There is no "magic" to developing a marketing plan and running a comprehensive marketing program. Common sense, determination, and a willingness to devote time and effort are needed. And there is a reward-your shop will be prepared for the future.

If the future involves growth, you must penetrate new markets, either new geographic markets for the same type of customer, or new customer groups not previously served.

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