

MARKETING FOR JOB SHOPS: PLANNING FOR SALES

SUMMARY

Planning, providing for change, training, leadership, and tough jobs like negotiating terms and conditions of sale with customers - all these subjects are related to the marketing task. However, the major function related to marketing is SALES, so this BMA will begin a discussion of sales programs for job shops.

Webster defines "selling" several ways, ranging from "to cheat or dupe" to "to establish faith, confidence or belief in" and including "to exchange services for money." Since the job shop industry is made up of small businesses, generally privately owned and owner operated, and generally quite dependent upon a few good customers for continued survival, we can limit our discussion to those types of selling that tend to establish excellent long-term relationships.

To make a part, one first needs a blueprint or a plan. Then one proceeds in an orderly fashion to make the rough shape (cut-off material, cast it, etc.), select the proper tools, machine the part, measure it, and de-burr or clean it up for use. To make a sale, or to establish a new customer, one follows a similar procedure. The first step is not, like the infamous side-show barker, to start "selling" the first person who happens to get in front of you. Instead, the first step is to make a plan.

Part of your sales planning is already done if you have developed a marketing plan and performed market studies and analysis, and if you have set goals that properly define your target markets. You may have already established sales targets by geographic area, or even by company name. That's a good start on a plan, because a complete sales plan includes all of these things.

YOUR "UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION"

Sales managers sometimes find it helpful to define their "unique selling proposition" (USP) early in the planning process. This is, simply, the one characteristic of your shop that sets you apart from your competitors. Consider only your own direct competition here, not the entire universe of job shops. For one shop, this may be precision cylindrical grinding capability; for another it may be welding capability; or large mills; or 5-axis equipment; or MIL-1 quality systems.

This idea of identifying something unique, a "USP" is used commonly by marketers of goods and services. Apple Computers makes a big deal of their "mouse" and Marlboro sold lots of cigarettes because of the box they were packed in. Rock bands make themselves unique by dressing weirdly or by smashing the piano as part of the act. Arizona sells its warm dry climate while Minnesota sells its well-educated and highly dedicated workforce. Politicians depend on a big smile, or bushy eyebrows, or a gravelly voice.

Decide what it is you can offer that cannot easily be matched by others. In your particular market-place, and find something about that feature that makes it attractive to the

customers you wish to serve. Select your targets and build your selling plan with that idea in mind. Design your literature so that this "USP" is obvious to the casual reader, and build it into your sales presentation. Sometimes this technique results in identification of a market "niche" that you can occupy and defend from competitors.

Having selected your target markets as part of your basic sales plan, you must now identify what they need from you, why you can provide it better, where you must go to get your message across, when you will make the calls, and how each visit will build on the last to achieve your goal. Just as the print of the part you make has lines and dimensions and specs on it so that all aspects of the plan are recorded, so you must record data about your sales target as part of your selling plan. You need documentation. Make provisions for it as part of the plan.

EXPERIENCE

We've all heard of the "born salesman," and it does seem that certain people have superior selling skills which others lack. Yet, we know that almost anyone can develop successful techniques and can apply them, when needed, to sell goods or

services. One way to discover what sort of people are considered to have superior selling skills is to ask buyers. "Marketing Magazine" did that with industrial buyers, asking them to rate qualities of sales people who had called on them over a long period.

Glibness, story-telling, and good looks had no impact on buyers. What they looked for was a person who could earn and keep the buyer's respect. How does one earn respect from an industrial buyer? Interestingly, the first hurdle to overcome is to just be liked as a person; to be a person the buyer would associate with even if no business were transacted. This points up the need for maturity, understanding, listening skills, common sense, ambition and the other human qualities that you look for in a friend.

In other words, the first thing to sell - before one can sell the company or the product or service - is yourself. Next, the buyers who were interviewed looked for the level of knowledge about the product or service being sold and an understanding of the buyer's problems. After selling yourself, sell

your knowledge about the job shop machining business and your understanding of machining practices and manufacturing. What the buyers look for is the type of knowledge needed to do the job itself.

Understanding the buyer's problems means knowing his business, his markets, his competition, his needs. It means doing your homework and preparing for each visit, personalizing each presentation. If all a salesperson does is leave literature and ask for an order, the buyer would rather not spend the time. The preferred salesperson is well liked, has the needed knowledge, and has prepared for the visit by arranging the knowledge in such a way that the buyer can see the advantage of doing business with this seller's company.

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