

MARKETING FOR JOB SHOPS: IMAGE VS. REALITY

SUMMARY

The concept of machine shops held by the public, perhaps formed by “Bull o’ the Woods” cartoons and reinforced by movies and books, is simply not true to modern life. Today’s job shops are not dirty, noisy or dangerous places to work. Most modern machine shops are clean, efficient, well-organized, and equipped with machinery that is computerized, safe and quiet. Yet, the image persists. Technical schools with machine shop courses encounter it in both the potential student and in the parent.

Trade magazines serving our industry, advertising brochures, and photos used in ads often seem to support this false image because poorly lighted facilities tend to look dirty and messy. We light the machine that is the focus of the photo, but we don’t realize that the existing light in the background appears dim, as compared to the increased light on the machine. Also, old photos show people wearing dated clothing or using old-fashioned tools.

Buyers like to do business with successful, modern companies. Notice the busiest restaurants, the stores that sell the most goods, the auto dealers that move more cars, or the dentists office with the most patients. Chances are that they are the newest, cleanest, with up-to-the-minute equipment. Sure, a wise buyer might get a better deal elsewhere, but they don’t seem to care; they prefer taking their chance with the favorable image.

YOUR MESSAGE IS ALWAYS RECEIVED

Consider the position the buyer of machined parts is in when evaluating you as a new source. He knows something about the established sources and may have visited them. Information about your shop has come only through your sales calls. Evidence that your shop is a good one comes from brochures and photos or, if the buyer is serious about using your services, from phone calls he might make to your existing customers.

If your sales presentation includes no evidence, the buyer will assume that you are operating a shop that fits his “image,” which may be dirt floors and a row of greasy machines run by an overhead rope drive. If you have not sent an accurate message, your listener will imagine one. Don’t try to pretend that your shop is something it isn’t, either. Eventually the buyer will discover the truth.

An honest, accurate, and complete description of facilities and equipment is the best policy. Back your story with good photos or videotape, and provide names and phone numbers of other buyers who may have nice things to say about jobs you’ve done for them. And don’t forget that many buyers like to see people; include photos of your people at work in your shop.

THE INDUSTRY IMAGE

As each job shop improves its individual image with the public and with customers, the entire industry will be seen in an improved light. Parents of potential machinists, who have tended to steer their children toward computers or other more “attractive” industries, will perhaps shove them into machine shop courses at the local technical school. Perhaps the coming shortage of machinists won’t be so severe after all.

One of the most important changes that is now affecting the image of our industry is the revolution in quality assurance programs. Modern CNC production and inspection equipment helps provide the ability to upgrade quality; and the programs being instituted by many of the major corporations to reduce the size of their supplier base is a driving factor. These customers of ours are measuring our quality performance, delivery records, and price control programs to see which job shops will remain on their list of qualified suppliers.

Many small shops are installing quality assurance programs similar to the “Zero Defects” programs their corporate neighbors and customers are using. And they are finding that the cost of quality is quite reasonable, or even free. Elimination of rejects and rework saves enough to implement and maintain the quality program. Some small shops are even

installing personal computers with statistical quality control programs which monitor production and help prevent errors.

It is difficult for any of us in the job shop business to see what influence we might have on something as gigantic as the national metalworking industry's image. But the concepts people have of our industry were formed by equally small events; the reading of a "Bull o' the Woods" cartoon or seeing Charlie Chaplin struggle with massive machinery. Let's each do what we can to help form a more favorable image.

GET EXCITED

Enthusiasm is catching! At Remmele, some of our best accounts have come to us because one of our reps or sales managers displayed so much enthusiasm and confidence in our capabilities that the prospect was intrigued into giving us a chance. The job shop precision machining business is an exciting business; fast changing, full of surprises, risky, demanding. Get enthusiastic about it.

Convey your enthusiasm in your sales calls, your literature, your ads, your correspondence-any way you can. Let your customers and prospects know how much you believe in this business, how important it is, how much you enjoy coming to work every day. Tell them how much you like doing their job for them, and how important they are to your continued growth. Appreciate them.

Metalworking is here to stay, and America is turning around its loss of leadership in the machine tool industry by designing and building state-of-the-art machines and robot systems. The job shop business will be exciting for years to come, and will provide plenty of opportunities to make money. Let's all grow with it.

This BMA was written by Bert Casper, Vice President of Marketing for Remmele Engineering, Inc., St. Paul, Minnesota.