

MARKETING FOR JOB SHOPS: HIGH TECH MARKETS

SUMMARY

John Nalsbitt, in his best-seller "Megatrends," points out that America is restructuring, moving into high technology. He defines high technology equipment as being computer based. His theory of parallel development says that high tech equipment must be accepted, even embraced, by humans or it won't work. The human response, he says is "high touch," and he calls this the high tech/high touch revolution.

Richard Young of Digital Equipment Corp. feels that high tech is leading edge technology that continues to change and become more intricate and involved. Heart transplants may not have a computer as an integral part, but they could not be accomplished without computers. Word processors, brain scanners, and modern banks simply cannot operate for a moment without the base computer. And, as we are increasingly becoming aware, neither can a boring mill, lathe, or EDM machine.

The equipment in our shops is computer based, and is constantly changing and becoming more intricate. The job shop business in America today is a high tech business. It will be even more high tech in the future.

Our markets are also becoming more and more high tech. As more of our customers install CAD CAM systems, as more part drawings are produced by computers, as more machine tools are designed with computer controls, the demand for high tech service by high tech customers will inevitably turn this into a high tech industry. Metal cutting machinery has become manufacturing systems. Castings are becoming "near net shapes." Even the cuffing tools, designed on computers, with microscopic coatings on computer-formulated metals, are high tech.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

The "high touch" component of Naisbitt's formula comes from the machinist of today, who does, indeed, embrace the high tech machine tools he operates. "Megatrends" discusses the shortage of hightech workers in the nuclear industry where plants are shut down because competent operators are unavailable, and talks about incompetent workers in the automobile repair business. Perhaps the machining industry is not mentioned because our workers are, indeed, accepting the trend.

Job shop managers must become more involved in the technical educational institutions in their areas, must help develop appropriate curricula, must encourage good instructors to continue teaching, must provide training in their own plants, must encourage more continuing education programs for employees, and must do other things to help provide for the high tech future of the business. We can also help to create a new image for our industry, a high tech image.

People like to do business with people like themselves. They like to buy from people they would have as friends even if no business were being conducted. They like to deal with

companies they consider to be equal or even better than their own. If our customers are becoming more and more high tech, and they are, then we must do what we can to convince them that we are also high tech. We must present a high tech image. And we must be convinced that this image is true.

THE HIGH TECH IMAGE

Perhaps no company has done a better job of presenting a high tech image over a long period time than IBM. Copying some of the things they do would not be such a bad idea. Notice the IBM field representatives, with their white shirt-stripped tie-pinstripe suit image. Notice the IBM buildings, with their controlled access, no pictures on the walls, clean and simple offices, and efficient people. Notice the IBM products, with their clean, sharp lines, non-controversial colors, and understandable operations manuals. Notice the literature they produce, with lots of white space, large type-faces, plenty of class.

Most people don't really know what it is that makes one company or industry "hightech" and another not. But most people would agree that IBM is, and always was, high tech.

And they buy plenty of IBM products. The companies in the job shop industry must do the right things to cause an image change.

Clean and neat facilities will help. So will modern, computer controlled equipment. Offices that are neatly furnished, and kept clean and well organized will help. People who look and act professional, who dress for business, who communicate clearly and efficiently will present the right high tech face to the market.

But, most of our customers and prospects never visit our plant, never see our equipment or our people. The things that make an impression on them about our industry or our company are the ads in trade magazines, brochures that come in the mail, and quotations for parts they want to buy. These are our image formers. And most of them don't exactly reek of high tech.

Finding and using a good, creative ad agency to produce outstanding ads and sales brochures is a tough job, but it can be done, Tell them that you want them to make your ads and brochures look like they are representative of a high tech company. Perhaps you can find some brochures from other companies, maybe in the computer industry or the medical equipment industry, that present the image you want. Ask your agency to duplicate the feeling, while presenting your company.

They'll come up with ideas for photos that tell the story you need to tell, but do it in a creative, clean, sparkling way - a high tech way. They'll write copy that is factual and exact, but

that expresses things in terms that are associated with high tech industry. Brochures may be more costly in order to provide white space and to arrange things more artistically, but they'll get more readers and will give you more personal satisfaction. You'll be proud of them.

Doing something about your quotation forms, letters, and other types of correspondence with your customers and prospects will be a little harder. Your people may need to attend a business correspondence class at a local college, and you may have to invest in a word-processor and some newly designed and printed quote forms. You may have to review letters for a few months, until your people get into the swing of things. But, it will all be worthwhile.

Designing modern manufacturing systems and robotic work cells and using computer-based systems is high tech. Some of the newer machining centers, even though they lack flashy display screens, are very high tech in their capabilities. They are used to making parts that can only be designed on CAD systems. Our market is becoming more and more a high tech market. We can, and we must, present the job shop industry-and our individual companies-as high tech. Those of us who do this best will find survival and growth somewhat easier.

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