

Time On Your Hands

Last month, I wrote about some things you could do to create immediate sales volume during the summer months when business often slows down. This month, I'd like to suggest several more things for you to do when you have time on your hands. These won't bring you immediate business, but they're the kind of things that can pay dividends for a long time to come. For many printers, they are things that have fallen into the category of "if I can find the time." If summer brings a decline in business, you probably have the time right now, so put it to good use!

1. Institute a formal program to collect samples for sales use. But not just pretty ones...collect samples that reflect all of your capabilities *and* identify the highest quality companies you're doing business with now. One of the worst things you could possibly hear from a current customer is the phrase "I didn't know you could do that," because it often indicates that they've been buying "other" things from other printers—things that they might have been buying from you if they knew that you were capable of producing or providing them. And, by identifying your "high-profile" current customers through samples of the work you've done for them, you can create a subtle sense of "they're good enough for these high quality companies, they're going to be good enough for me" among your prospects.

2. Conduct a time and territory management review with each salesperson and sales manager—a self-review for the owner in either of these capacities—to ensure that time is being invested wisely in productive accounts and prospect situations. You're almost certain to find that some customers are being "over-served," taking up time that could be put to much better use...like developing new customers! You're also pretty likely to find that significant time and effort is being put into prospects who have shown absolutely no indication that they're ever going to buy from your company. In that situation, you'd be a lot better off forgetting about those prospects and choosing a new group to focus your company's sales and marketing efforts on.

3. Personally interview every employee to see who he or she knows who might have business for your company, or who might be able to influence the buying decision of a company that could have business for you. Most printers only pay lip service to the idea that a company's employees are its most important resource. Very few seem to realize that every employee is a sales resource too. If things are slow at your company right now, it's a great time to harvest this resource.

4. Take a good, hard, objective look at the physical condition and appearance of your shop or plant. Ask yourself this question: "Does this place look like the home of a top-quality printer whom any customer can trust with his or her important printing work?" That's especially true for a quick printer with a retail sales area, but it's also true for any commercial printer who brings customers or prospects onto the premises for press checks or plant tours. If your shop doesn't look the way it should, clean it up, and put procedures in place to keep it looking the way it should.

While You're At It

While you're at this, give some thought to the way you order, receive, store, and handle paper and other supplies. If there are things you can do to make it easier—and more productive—to work in your plant or shop, put those things into practice. This may not seem like a sales and marketing activity, but increasing productivity provides a lot of support to your sales and marketing efforts.

Sales and production activity may slow down in the summertime, but there's still a lot that you can do that will have a positive effect on your business down the road. Don't waste the opportunity this year to improve your future.