

What's In A Name?

There's been a fair amount of talk this year about changing the name of the quick printing industry. John Stewart raised the question—and then reported on some of the answers he'd received—in the June and September issues of *Quick Printing*. I'd like to use my space in *QP* this month to offer my own comments on this subject.

Different Perspective

First of all, I want to remind everyone that I've never actually been a quick printer. My sales, marketing and management experience comes primarily from the "big press" side of the printing industry...business forms, commercial printing, and some time spent with a manufacturer of graphic arts equipment and supplies. I think that's important, because it has always provided me with a different perspective than so many of you who have grown up with this industry.

From that perspective, I've never felt that there was as serious a stigma to being a quick printer as so many of you seem to feel. Sure, I've known people who believed that you could only bring certain kinds of projects to a quick printer...that if you needed "real" printing, you had to go to a "real" printer. But I've also known many people who find the "quick" part very important, and the capabilities of a typical quick printer to meet at least some part of their overall printing needs.

The truth of the matter is that quick printing—or whatever you want to call it—is a niche market. Another truth is that no single printing company has ever been able to address the entire printing market, even an industry giant like R.R. Donnelly. So the best strategy for any printer is to pick a niche and learn how to excel at that niche, and that's what the most successful quick printers have done.

Changing Niche

The niche has changed over the years. It's changing rapidly right now, and I think you have to agree that change will come even more rapidly over the next several years. And that certainly means that quick printers will have to change in order to continue to excel at their niche. But does it mean that it's a good idea to try to change the name of the niche?

I think it's a much better idea to sell the concept of a "new" quick printer than it is to attempt to launch an entire new industry. Or to say that another way, I think it's a better idea to work toward changing the buying public's definition of a quick printer than it is to risk confusing your customers with a completely new classification. Either way, the word "sell" is the operative word. Because the best way to change the way people think of quick printers is to get out there and talk to them.

The potential for confusion, by the way, is very real. I'll give you an example of what can happen when you confuse your customers. Back in the early 80's—the dawn of the PC Era—I was working for a division of Moore Business Forms which sold stock forms products through the office supply industry. We were introducing stock computer paper into that channel of distribution. (Remember stock computer paper? Blank or green-bar continuous forms?)

The confusion developed when we tried to introduce our products as "stock computer forms." That's what we called the products internally, so we figured we'd just teach the market our terminology. The only problem was that the people who used the product already had a name for it. They just called it computer paper, and since that's not what we called it, they didn't realize that's what we were selling!

One of the suggestions I've heard for a new name for the quick printing niche is "business imaging services." The rationale behind the suggestion is that the term "imaging" covers traditional offset printing, photocopying, and all of the new digital imaging technologies as well. From the state-of-the-art quick printer's internal perspective, that may sound like a good idea. But the most important question is whether your customers will understand what you're selling! Will they go someplace else if all they need is "printing"?

Another Question

Now here's another question. Do you—as an individual quick printer—really care about how the market views the "typical" quick printer? If I were you, I wouldn't. I'd only care how they perceive my printing company, and if I was concerned about any stigma, I would do everything I could to show that I'm more than whatever they might perceive a "typical" quick printer to be.

Again, we come back to selling. The bottom line is that you can call your company anything you want to if you do an effective job of "positioning" yourself in the marketplace. Positioning means communicating what you sell, and

why people should buy it from you. Advertising and other marketing activities can all be part of positioning your company, but by far the best opportunity for a quick printer to change the perception of the marketplace is to go out and sell the idea face-to-face...to current customers and to prospects too.

I'd go out to spread this message: *"When we first started out in business, we were this, this, and this. We were equipped to handle a certain category of printing and copying work, and we emphasized very fast turnaround. Now, as our business has grown and developed—and customer needs have changed—we have become this, this, and this. Our capabilities are much broader...but we still specialize in very fast turnaround."*

Individual Name Changes

I don't think quick printers should worry about changing the name of the industry...or of NAQP or *Quick Printing* magazine. But that doesn't mean that I wouldn't encourage an individual quick printer to change the name of his or her company. In fact, one of my consulting clients recently asked me what I thought about changing the name of his company. Over the last few years, he has grown into something in that gray area between quick printer and small commercial shop. His current name—the one he started with more than ten years ago—contains one of the many variations of the quick/speedy theme, and he's been wondering if the name might be discouraging customers with "larger" printing needs from doing business with him.

I told him that I felt he could reposition his company effectively with his current name, but I also told him that I couldn't see any reason *not* to change the name if he felt it would make a difference...as long as he followed certain guidelines and took maximum advantage of the promotional opportunity he'd be creating.

The first guideline was that I didn't want him to get too eclectic, so we put together a list of possible new names that included references to his family name, the city and county he operated in, the first letters of the three words in his company's old name, and a few miscellaneous things—some that we just liked the sound of—all followed by the phrase *Printing & Graphics*. The name he chose was one of those miscellaneous ones that just sounded good.

Communicating And Capitalizing

The next guideline was to communicate his new name to his old customers. He obviously didn't want to confuse *them*, because that could cost him business! I encouraged my client to send out a personal letter to each customer, telling people *what* he did and *why*. I also made him commit to going out on personal visits to his most important customers.

The final consideration was to capitalize on the promotional opportunity that this name change provided, especially considering that his whole purpose was to make his company sound more attractive to a group of people who weren't buying from him before. We designed several new direct mail pieces, sent out press releases to all the appropriate media, scheduled an open house, and ordered some ad specialty items with the new name and logo on them. (That's something else to consider...if you're going to change your name, give some thought to creating a striking, attention-getting logo to go with it! The graphic image of a company in the graphics business is extremely important!) All in all, the name change provided the focus for a six-month long marketing campaign.

Has the name change brought him any new business? It's hard to say. At least, it's hard to say if the name change was the critical factor. What we can say with assurance is that six months of aggressive marketing brought in several substantial new customers. So sales are up, and he likes his new company name. That's a pretty good combination!

A Good Idea For You?

Quite a number of companies—large and small—have changed their names over the last few years, sometimes for no other reason than to *create* a promotional opportunity. But is it a good idea for you?

I say a name change is an idea worth considering if you meet one or more of the following criteria: (1) Your name says something about your company that you really don't want to project to the marketplace; (2) Your name no longer adequately reflects the focus or capabilities of your company; (3) You bought a company from somebody else, and now you want *your* name over the door; or (4) You *need* a promotional opportunity...something to build some excitement around.

If you make the change, though, do it right!