

You Only Have Two Ways To Grow

One of the themes that I've been preaching since I first started writing for this magazine is that a quick printer only has two ways to grow. One is to gain new customers. The other is to sell more to your existing customers. The overwhelming opinion of the printers I talk to is that the second one of these is easier than the first.

That raises the issue of what else you're going to sell to these people, and again, I see two possibilities. You can seek to sell them more of what you're currently selling them. Or you can seek to find new products to add to your "stock in trade."

Which approach is best? Actually, it doesn't have to be an either/or situation. You can do both, and I think that's the best approach...to seek to broaden both your *account penetration* and your *overall product proposition*.

Account Penetration

I think you should treat it as a basic rule of thumb that more than one person buys printing in most companies, and certainly in all companies of a certain size. What size am I talking about? Companies that are large enough that they have defined functional departments, like marketing, public relations, administration, or human resources. The chances are very good that each of these departments has its own printed projects, and they may or may not be purchased under the control of a central purchasing department.

So what account penetration means in this case is to contact the key people in *each* of these departments within any company where you're doing business with one or more departments already. One way to do that is simply to "prospect" your way around in the company, but a better way is probably to ask your current contact(s) for introductions to anyone else in the organization who buys printing at any time.

If you have truly good relationships with these people, they'll probably be glad to help you. That's been the case many times during my own selling career. Not every time though, or at least not immediately. I once asked a relatively new customer for this sort of introduction, and her response really surprised me.

"I don't want to do that," she said. "You're doing really good work for me, and I don't want to share you with anyone else who might take up your time. That might keep you from being able to take such good care of me."

I was surprised, but I was far from speechless. And what I said was that I counted on the help of customers like her *for whom I was doing good work* to help me continue to build my business. She said that she'd never thought of it like that before, and she ultimately came around.

Basic But...

I know that what I've just described is a very basic concept. You don't have to be a genius to see the possibilities in asking your current customers for referrals, both within their organizations and outside of them.

But answer me this, if it's such a basic concept, how come so few of the quick printers I talk with have taken even the most basic steps to penetrate so many of their existing accounts? It's not that you don't want to grow, is it?

I've been asking attendees at my seminars recently to tell me who they feel is their greatest competition. A surprising (at first) number have been saying "It's probably me. I know what I'm supposed to be doing, but for some reason, I'm not doing it." If you fall into that category with regard to account penetration, I hope that reading this today might be just enough stimulus to get you back on the right track.

Broadened Proposition

Beyond selling more of a current product mix to existing customers, a quick printer today has many opportunities to broaden the basic product proposition. That can mean anything from adding equipment to allow the production of new products, to brokering products and services that you've never sold before.

By the way, when I use the word *products* in this sense, I mean it to encompass things you might refer to as either products or services. The fact that you sell it is what makes it a product, not the consideration of whether it is produced in solid form. By that definition, services like graphic design, desktop publishing, and mailing services are classified as *products* for a quick printer.

And as for the pros and cons of brokering, if you've been reading my articles regularly, you know how I feel about that subject. Brokering provides you with the opportunity to expand your product proposition almost without limits. I'm not saying that I think you should start brokering things that have nothing to do with your business, but I

sincerely believe that you're missing the boat if a fear or an attitude about brokering would cause you to reject many reasonable and logical additions to your product line.

Hot Products

What are the hot products for inclusion in your product proposition? Several of them are "old standards," like business forms and short-run four-color work. I'd include color copies on the list, and the advanced capabilities of on-demand publishing systems like Docutech and Lionheart are major product opportunities. (Major is probably an appropriate word. I'm not sure I'd be ready just yet to make the major investment that this technology requires, even though I think it's an inescapable conclusion that this technology is a big part of the future of quick printing.)

I've thought for a long time that mailing services make a natural product extension for quick printers, and it's been very interesting recently watch the interest in this product grow. I think a lot of credit for that goes to the enthusiastic efforts of Nancy DeDiemar and Patrick Jones of Helen's Printing Place in Upland, CA, who head up the new mailing services users group within NAQP.

On one hand, mailing services provide a standalone profit center. There are hundreds—probably thousands—of little mailshops across the country doing profitable business serving an established need in the marketplace. I think it's been proven in the same marketplace that a printer with the ability to handle basic mailing projects can actually draw in printing work that he or she wouldn't otherwise get.

Year Of The T-Shirt

I wrote an article about imprinted T-shirts after coming back from the NAQP Convention last year, and if anything, I'm even more positive right now about the opportunities that image transfer from color copier output provides. I still know very few printers who are really happy with current sales and profit generated by their color copiers.

There were half-a-dozen vendors at the recent printing industry trade shows in Philadelphia and Southern California selling image transfer products or systems. I was especially impressed with what I saw from a company called Forever USA. The materials and processes are getting simpler and less costly, and the market opportunity is definitely there. This is a product area that anyone with a color copier should be looking at.

A Nice Fit

In fact, there's a nice fit between color copiers and image transfer products and another trio of products I really like—Essepac's innovative Presentation Folders and Laser-Kit and the imprintable 3-ring binder they call the Boss. All of these products can be printed in-house on standard quick printing equipment. The Presentation Folder is a two-piece construction. You buy it blank from any number of suppliers, run the face-piece through a press or copier—color or black/white—and then attach it to the back-piece by means of an adhesive line that is already on the paper. Both parts are pre-folded and pre-scored. The Laser-Kit presentation folder can actually run through a 8 1/2" wide laser printer.

The Boss also comes together from a face-piece and a back-piece, but it actually fastens together with plastic rings inside to create an open-and-closeable binder. Its face-piece won't run through a color copier, but it will run through some of the advanced black/white copiers. If your customers want color, it can be put on with a press, or else it's a simple matter to create full-color binders very cost-effectively in small quantities using the color copier image transfer process.

Need To Sell

Now these aren't necessarily products that will sell themselves. It's likely to take some sales effort on your part to maximize the opportunity that they provide. But to my mind, that's a fair trade. You work a little bit at selling products like these and they'll put money in your pocket.

Do your customers really want to buy more than just basic printing from you? It's a valid question. Like the old song goes, I think the answer is that "Some Do, Some Don't, Some Will, Some Won't." I also think that you'll never know—and profit from that knowledge—unless you try. If any product enables you to cover a greater portion of your current customers' overall business communications needs, I think you should consider it.

I know many quick printers who see nothing but problems in the kind of "product-aggressiveness" I suggest. But here's something I'd like you to think about. Many top companies—many astute and successful companies—are highly aggressive about adding new products. Look at a company like Rubbermaid, which is always near the top of any list of the most admired companies in the US.

Rubbermaid adds products constantly. It seems like every time I walk through the Rubbermaid section in a store, I see things I've never seen before. They add products that are related by usage to other products they sell, new or improved kitchen or bathroom products for example. They also add products—even whole product lines—when they simply decide that they can make something interesting as a result of their technology or manufacturing process.

I think, though, that at the core of their product-aggressive strategy is a central thought. And that thought is that the world is full of people who already love Rubbermaid, or at least it's products. What a Rubbermaid does by adding more products to their overall product proposition is to give those people who love them *more ways to show it*. You can do that too.