

Demand For Print

In 1987, I was the Vice President of Sales at a company called Spectra Graphics. I took my sales team to a seminar presented by Dick Gorelick, the printing industry's leading sales consultant at that time. (And maybe all-time!) The one thing I still remember clearly about that seminar was Dick talking about "creating demand for print."

I remember thinking, "We don't have to create demand, there's plenty of it." And there was, in 1987.

That subject came up again when I ran into Phil Kotula at an industry trade show. Phil owns a Minuteman Press franchise in Golden Valley, MN, which he opened that same year. And he told me that he and his sales team are very much focused on creating demand right now.

"So much print has gone away," he said. "We've had to do two things to grow the business. First, we've added services, and really changed our focus from 'print provider' to Marketing Services Provider. Second, we've helped our customers to see how print can help them grow their businesses."

Success Stories

Phil told me about several recent projects. One was a membership campaign for a country club. "It started with a very general conversation about their business. We learned that they had plenty of golfers, but lots of capacity in their fitness center. We ultimately proposed a direct mail campaign, targeted at the demographics that apply to an upscale gym. We walked them through the ROI calculations and that sold them on the concept. Then we designed the mail piece and sourced the list. The goal was 90 new fitness members, and we actually exceeded that, and that led to similar campaigns for golf and tennis."

The key point, according to Phil, was that marketing expertise sold print. "You can't just go in saying 'we can help you with direct mail.' You have to show them how direct mail can help them. Or large format, or a better website, or any other marketing media or strategy."

Making The Transition

"It's been a long process," Phil said, referring to the transition from print provider to MSP. "We really started with design, beefing up our capability and learning how to sell it." When I asked what he meant by that, Phil explained, "Most printers sell design like printers, not like ad agencies. We started doing what the agencies do. We don't just send over PDF proofs, we send out our designs on storyboards, and we have absolutely seen that printing comes along with that approach to design." Phil also noted that, while he still sells basic layout/design at \$95 per hour, he sells "high end" design for considerably more.

The next stages involved mailing services and large format. "We added new services one at a time, always accompanying them with training, especially for the sales team. We've brought in experts in web design, SEO, mailing lists and databases. I want my salespeople to be knowledgeable about what they're selling, and confident."

Marketing Support

Phil's own marketing supports the direction of the company. All of his collateral, both printed and online, features the tagline "Marketing Support – Print Experienced." Beyond that, he has invested heavily in establishing his company's expertise in the marketplace, presenting seminars for customers on topics ranging from search engine optimization to how to build a marketing plan. A recent seminar focused completely on non-profits and featured a well-known expert on fundraising.

"You have to go out and tell your story. That's why we've done the seminars. It's all about building expertise and sharing it."

It's also about helping customers to reach their own goals. "Marketing is common sense," Phil says, "but it's not common practice. Our position is, let us be the practice. Let us be the people who will help you to do the things that will grow your business."