



Fishing for Sales

Marketing on a shoestring budget? Here are some inexpensive ideas.

Dan Beaulieu

Face it, you need marketing. In order to run a successful board shop, you need customers and orders. Ever heard the one about the board shop that closed because it had too many bookings? Me neither. If you have plenty of bookings, you won't go out of business. It's as simple as that.

You'll notice I used the term "marketing," not "sales." I'm sure every shop out there is performing some sort of selling, whether direct, through outside reps, or a combination of both. But, I don't think I'm going out on a limb by saying that very few shops are marketing themselves. The difference is this: Selling is fishing with a rod and reel in a boat and waiting for the fish to bite; marketing is getting the fish to jump into the boat. Marketing is an outreach effort whereby, if successful, customers will want to do business with you.

Times are tough, business is slow, maybe you are getting a bit discouraged, and there's not much money in the marketing budget (if there ever was one), but you feel you have to do something. Your backlog is half what it was this time last year, and the next few months don't look much better. What to do? Here are four proven and, yes, inexpensive marketing ideas to get business moving again. If pursued right, including proper follow-up, these ideas will bring in business.

A Web site for less than \$1,000.

Companies need Web sites. More and more purchasers are going online to look for board vendors; if they can't find you, you will lose out. Forget your out-of-work brother-in-law and your college-age niece. You can have a clean

and effective Web site with a RFQ page professionally designed and maintained for less than \$1,000. (Hosting fees will cost about \$50 a month.) Consider this a model: It does everything a PCB shop needs, and it fits the budget as well.

Sales literature for less than \$1,000.

With a good printer and the nearby office supply store, you can create a full set of literature on the cheap. The quality won't be as good as professional printing, but it will look very good, and it will suit your needs at this time. Prospects need clear and complete information. There are several software programs out there that organize these vital data into attractive data sheets. Data sheets include capabilities, facility specs, equipment in use, technology, key staff, quality, niches, references, and a customer list. The important thing is that they be clear, concise, and uniform. With a scanner (all of \$75), add photos of your facility and key personnel. Purchase some attractive cover folders, stick on your logo, put the data sheets inside, and there's your sales literature. This will work well until you can afford to hire a professional agency.

Media publicity. A great deal of free publicity is available to those willing to work for it. Publications such as

PC FAB are always looking for unique and interesting features about a shop's technology and quality and management issues. Call the editorial staff and discuss what's going on with your company. (View submission guidelines at www.pcfab.com.) Plus, reprints of articles are great to include in your literature package. Send editors press releases for their magazines and Web sites. And get involved in IPC and other organizations. Get your company's name in front of people, especially in front of customers and prospects. The more people hear, the more likely they will be to do business with you.

Direct mail and faxing. Make sure mailed materials are clear and concise and state exactly the service offered. Keep in touch with current customers with regular newsletters. Send promotional mailers to target customers. This is an excellent first step to gain new accounts, even new territories. Companies will respond to mailings, if prepared properly and offering something they want. The key: figuring out what that is. Databases are available from a number of sources, including trade magazines. (PC FAB has links on its home page to its supplier and distribution directories.)

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