

## Let the Good Times Roll ... Again

A strong sales and marketing plan, coupled with persistence, is the antidote to down times.



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**AS YOU READ** this signs that business is doing better will be visible. Many experts are saying that a recovery will begin this quarter. I strongly concur. For some, business will be great; for others, it won't come fast enough. But the fact remains: those who needed PCBs in the past will need them in the future, it's just a matter of when and how many. PCBs are not going away. Indeed, they will become more and more sophisticated as

technologies such as embedded passives and chip-on-board come into their own. New market segments are evolving. The events of 9-11 caused business to drop overnight, but are now creating new market drivers. As industry analyst Walt Custer has noted, we can expect to see the following markets really come to life:

- Military electronics.
- Video and teleconferencing.
- Mobile and satellite phones.
- Computers (intelligence gathering and storage).
- Biometrics (fingerprint, retinal, voice, facial recognition, etc.).
- Smart ID cards.
- Security-enhanced Internet equipment, routers, switches, and hubs.
- Safety and surveillance.
- Public health monitors.

Of course, by last September the U.S. was already in recession. Yet this was more a market correction than anything else. Take, for example, telecommunications. Seventy percent of the world's population has yet to make a phone call. The Internet? Many dot-coms disappeared, but that owes as much to the inevitable failure of bad business plans (funeral.com? Give us a break!) as the economic times. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that the Internet is here to stay. History reminds us that there were once hundreds of car makers. Yet while that industry consolidated in suppliers, its revenue grew exponentially.

During the last up cycle, I wrote a column on how it was making some PCB companies act like jerks, reveling in their levels of business and sending packing their least-appealing customers. It was these same companies that went begging those customers to return just months later when the market hit the skids. Oops. I raise this as a reminder not to let it happen again. As I write this (in December), predictions of when the economy will come back remain that – predictions. Business is still very slow as we head into the

typically robust holiday season. I receive frantic calls from companies in need of business and seeking help. My advice: That business will start to come back in a few months. And, they should have started working on their sales and marketing months ago. Implementing a good sales strategy is a long process; great customer service is an ongoing endeavor. It means:

- Never take the customers for granted.
- Never take good salespeople for granted.
- Never refuse an order in your niche.
- Never slow down or exhaust capacity, and respect the customer and constantly look for new ways to make them happy.
- Always work hard for the customer. Be proactive in prospecting efforts, no matter how full the plant is.

In short, treat customers like gold, because of course, they are. Well-run, customer-oriented companies are surviv-

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marketing plans should have been readied months ago.**

ing the recession quite well, and to no surprise. Some have even grown. One doubled its revenues in 2001. Another made 30 percent profit from its technology. Another found a way to grow to \$60 million a year from \$20 million. What did they have in common? All were customer-oriented. All delivered products quickly and with consistent quality and performance. And – my favorite – all had very clear, concise sales and marketing plans, implemented by a strong and well-supported sales team.

Look around, I say, and reflect on how tough things are right now. Try to bottle the fear and anguish, then inhale it once the good times roll again. Think about how hard the times have been, then benefit from them. Develop a strong sales and marketing plan, implement it, and stick to it.

Until next time ... good selling.

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