

The Marketing Mosaic

Sales and marketing relies heavily on knowing and executing a lot of basics.



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WARNING: WHAT FOLLOWS will, for many, seem boring. If you lack interest in sales and marketing, or if you don't see the connection between a great sales force and increased business, then perhaps you'd be better served by skipping this column in favor of one of the technical articles in this issue of PCD&M.

A couple of months ago in this space, I talked about not giving up hope. I mentioned at the time that if North American fabricators did the right things they could not only survive, but thrive. I also promised that a future column would focus on some of those things. Here are six steps you can take to make your PCB shop successful in the months and years to come.

1. Performance, performance, performance. If your quality and on-time delivery numbers are not at 95% or higher, get them there – and right away. There are no two ways about it. The days of mediocre quality and delivery are over. The market is a tough, competitive and unforgiving place; you have to be able to sell the best product possible.

That's understood. Next come sales and marketing. Unfortunately, many board shop owners have a hard time understanding this aspect of the business. I still meet companies that lack a fully developed strategic plan or a well-staffed sales force, yet still buy equipment, thinking that such measures will make things better. Let's say it once more: if you need bookings, work on your sales effort. Nothing else will work, not new equipment, or ISO, or more technical staff. You need salespeople, a strategic plan and marketing.

2. Define your niche. What are you good at? What can you do better than anyone? What makes your company stand out? You have to be good at something. You have to be known for something. Nothing comes to mind? Develop one! If you build quickturn prototypes, that's your forte. For those plain vanilla PCB shops, it's a little trickier. But you have to find a niche.

3. Develop a strategic business plan. This is your company's story. Decide what you are going to sell and how you're going to sell it. Look at your business base and determine how to retain it and grow it. This means really knowing your customers. You have to know things like the type of product they produce, how much PCB business they have, how much of it you are getting – and how you could get more. This is all part of your customer account planning.

Develop prospecting techniques including follow-up to make sure that you are continually finding new customer opportunities. This means doing the hard and unglamorous stuff: buying directories, qualifying potential accounts, cold calling and follow-up; plain old-fashioned lead generation. I

know that everyone throws up at the thought of this, but it is a must.

4. The sales force. You need to have the best salespeople possible. And you have to support them. Regardless of whether they are direct or independent reps, you will get from them only what you put into them. You need to support them and, if they are independent reps, treat them with respect and as true partners. The more successful they are, the more successful you will be. Develop a good plan to manage, motivate and measure your salespeople. And above all, give them a great product to sell.

5. Develop a marketing plan. You can be the greatest shop in the world. You can have the best product and performance. If nobody knows about it, however, you will have no customers and no business. Develop great sales tools for your staff to use. You need a great Web site and excellent and up-to-date sales literature. You need a good customer contact plan, a permission marketing plan. You need to attend appropriate trade shows. You need to get your name into trade magazines, give seminars, host local trade and users group chapter meetings. Whatever it takes, get your name out there.

Marketing is a mosaic. No one method is guaranteed to work, but put the pieces together and the effect is a marketing plan that will return results.

6. Implementation. How many great plans end up in a bottom drawer? Your strategic business plan has to be a living document, with the whole team taking part in its creation and, most importantly, its implementation. To be effective, all your sales efforts have to be tracked and measured on a monthly basis (at least). Monitor what works – and what doesn't – and adjust the plan accordingly.

7. Sell what your customers want. It's the one big secret, the money tip. And it's that simple. The customer is always right: you have to meet all their needs. Fail and you will lose them. They want you to ship-to-stock? Do it. They want you to develop an offshore partnership on their behalf? Great! Meet or exceed your customers' needs and you will do fine, guaranteed.

This was the Cliff Notes version of selling and marketing PCBs. While most of the key factors in developing a good sales plan are laid out, to do it right takes quite a bit more detail than this space permits. Want to get more involved but aren't certain how to proceed? Call me: I'll walk you through it.

Until next time ... go sell something. **PCD&M**

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