

## **Chapter 1: It's Time to Put on Your Selling Shoes!**

Hi, I'm Don Sanders, and it's my pleasure to welcome you to the \$25 billion promotional products industry<sup>1</sup>! If you have attended recent shows, you'll definitely notice me—I'm the guy in the fancy, bright colored shoes. They are one of my many trademarks, but the reason I stand out goes beyond the shoes. I've discovered a formula that is the key to success in this industry, and I want to share it with you.

For more than three decades, I've sold more than \$24 million of promotional products. I've appeared in industry publications more than 250 times. I have won numerous awards, have made more than 125 speaking appearances, and been featured in more than 800 newspaper articles. I'm proud of my accomplishments, but what I'm most proud of is mentoring other distributors like you.

Before we dive into tips and strategies that will help you reach your goals, I want to give you a little background on how this crazy, fun industry began.

### **The History of the Industry**

#### **1789**

The first successful promotional products were buttons created for George Washington's presidential campaign.

#### **Early 1800s**

Wooden specialties, calendars and the Farmers' Almanac were introduced, all including advertising messages. As the years passed, more and more imprinted products began to show up in people's pockets and on desks.

#### **Late 1800s**

Jasper Meeks, a printer in Coshocton, Ohio, became the father of the industry when he started printing burlap bags with advertising messages for Cantwell Shoes. His logic was that children would use the bags to go to school and potential buyers would see Cantwell's advertising copy. Meeks soon started the Tuscarora Advertising Company, believed to be the first promotional products company.

Then, he faced a competitor, Henry D. Beach, who began printing the products that Meeks featured: caps, aprons, bags, card cases, calendars, fans and hats for horses. Both men realized the value of imprinted metal signs and began marketing them as well. Fun fact: signs they created for soft drink and beer companies are valued by collectors today.

Other printers started marketing promotional products. Demand increased substantially when Thomas Murphy and Burke Osborne of Red Oak, Iowa, began adding photographs and paintings to calendars.

**1894**

Murphy and Osborne had 94 employees, with 14 traveling salespeople selling upward of three million calendars. Murphy sold his interest to Osborne, and the company eventually moved to Newark, New Jersey. Letterpress printing sent the calendar business worldwide, and factories opened in Toronto, London and Australia.

**1904**

Suppliers joined forces when 12 promotional manufacturers aligned themselves to address issues that would help the industry expand.

**1914**

The first trade show took place, with 32 exhibitors.

**1928**

Promotional products became known as an efficient advertising medium, after 132 suppliers now worked together, to increase Sales and after World War II, things really took off.

**1966**

The membership of what is known today as Promotional Products Association International (PPAI) reached 1,211 members.

**Present Day**

Things have grown considerably since that time and according to a recent Industry Study, current product sales are now more than \$25 billion annually. There are countless distributors operating now and more than 3,000 suppliers are offering products. Today, Distributor Central offers technology services, marketing platforms and education to help cultivate success and community within the thriving industry. Numerous regional shows are held each year, several major trade shows and multiple hosted-buyer events.

Ready to get started in the industry? Looking to refresh your skills? Here's some essential information that can take your sales and profits to the next level.

<sup>1</sup>ASI 2016 Quarterly Sales Survey

## **Chapter 2: The Basics of Selling**

Thousands of people begin selling promotional products every year, and they all do so for different reasons. Some want to own a business, while others strive to control their own destiny, but most do so in order to make a living. To meet the goal you've set for yourself, be sure to get started the right way.

Many people experience problems early on because they believe there is too much to learn in a short amount of time. So much is thrown at them at once from suppliers, service providers and the like. Don't worry – the practice of selling promotional products is simple when you take the right approach. Here are some tips to help you get started.

### **Tip 1: Determine Your Strengths and Weaknesses**

Selling can be difficult, so make sure that you are well versed in its principles from the beginning. Reach out to a mentor to learn selling strategies, or obtain some sales training before you begin making calls. The skills you need to sell promotional items are no different than ones you need to sell other goods and services, so ask yourself if the selling profession is right for you.

### **Tip 2: Get an Industry Certification**

When selling promotional products, you can gain more industry knowledge when you obtain industry certification. You can earn several designations from providers, that require you to take in-person and on-line classes, that train you on important issues and techniques. Distributor Central is a leader in helping distributors learn the best practices of selling in today's market.

### **Tip 3: Present Yourself Professionally**

Help potential customers form a positive opinion of you on the spot. For instance, your business card is one constant that identifies you to the world, so make sure it's something to be proud of.

When I started my business in the early '80s, I changed my card three different times in the first five years, in an effort to stand out from competitors. My first card was printed on a very heavy card stock; followed by a rubber card; and lastly, a wooden card. By changing up the look and feel of my business card with unique shapes and materials, I was able to make a lasting first impression.

### **Tip 4: Be a Planner**

It is essential to manage your time properly and to know what you're going to do long before you do it. At the end of the day, make notes to yourself that detail what your activities will be for the next day, and lay out the next day's samples and catalogs if you're going to make outside calls.

I used to wait until the last minute to get organized until I almost lost a sale because of it. I showed up for a sales call but had forgotten a product sample the customer wanted

to see. Since I didn't have the sample, the sale was postponed until I could get one to him. I was lucky to have closed the sale at all.

I learned my lesson and changed the way I put my sales materials together. I never – and I mean *never* – go to bed until I have everything ready for the next day's calls. Sometimes, I even load the car the night before.

### **Tip 5: Attend Promotional Products Shows**

This is a great way to become familiar with the products, get to know suppliers and make personal connections, which is especially important when you're starting out. Here are just a few things to keep in mind when you begin attending these events:

#### **Make a plan.**

Before you enter the hall where the show is taking place, do a little research. Examine the show's program and note which suppliers offer the kinds of products you think are suited to your current customers. This way, you'll have beneficial conversations with the suppliers who may really help you grow your business, and you can spend more time getting to know their products instead of running from booth to booth.

#### **Shop services, too.**

Among the exhibiting suppliers at shows, you'll also find service providers who are offering solutions that will make your transition into the industry easier. Instead of spending time at your first show listening to several different service pitches, keep things simple and visit the ASI booth first. It's always located in the center of the show floor, and it's a great place to start.

#### **Find knowledgeable reps.**

Don't start conversations by talking about pricing. Instead, ask the booth representative to show you the hottest selling products and explain the target audience for each. If the rep doesn't seem knowledgeable, kindly excuse yourself and move on to another booth. Just like in any business, some suppliers are better than others, and you must spend time only with ones who are on top of their game!

### **Tip 6: Find Products**

No distributor knows everything about every product before they make their pitches. I've been in this business for 30 years, and I still learn about new products every day. Take baby steps by learning the products of a few suppliers and effectively presenting those. Don't fall into the trap of learning too much about everything without having anyone to sell to.

#### **Search for Products**

With so many products available, you need a fast, effective source to find them. Often, looking online is the fastest way to find them. There are several web-

based product search engines available, but the one I have used for years and recommend is Distributor Central. It features effective options, offers a complete array of products from thousands of suppliers, is easy to use and is suitable for any product inquiry.

All you have to do, to use Distributor Central, is sign up, unlike other search services, which require you to pay a continuous monthly or yearly fee. Joining our built-in community comes with numerous valuable benefits. For instance, you'll have access to professionally designed website templates to be used to promote your distributorship and other valuable selling tools, absolutely free!

### **Print Catalogs**

Print catalogs are still a necessity in the industry. Many people who are just starting out spend too much time trying to get a handle on the large amounts of catalogs they receive. After placing a few orders, it will seem as though every supplier in the industry ends up sending you theirs, too. The best way to keep organized and contain the clutter is to file them by categories. Select a few suppliers from each category and place those in individual folders, then file the others at the back of each category in one miscellaneous file.

### **Tip 7: Understand Price Codes & EQP**

When you purchase promotional products, it's usually the case that the bigger quantities of products you buy from suppliers, the bigger discount you'll get per item. The price code system in product catalogs will help you figure out what your price and discount will be based on what quantity you will be ordering.

There are two pricing codes: One code labels products A through I, and the other uses P through X. (Both follow the same structure, just using different letters.) Each letter is associated with a percentage. For instance, (A) means you get a 50% discount off the listed price per item. A (B) indicates a 45% discount off the listed price per item, and so on at 5% intervals. Since ordering larger quantities of items means bigger discounts, (A) will be assigned to the largest quantity. In the P through X price code system, (P) indicates the 50% discount rate.

The letters are usually found somewhere close to the pricing grids that are shown under products both in catalogs and online.

Here are the price codes and their associated discounts:

A (or P): 50%  
B (or Q): 45%  
C (or R): 40%  
D (or S): 35%  
E (or T): 30%  
F (or U): 25%

G (or V): 20%

End Quantity Pricing (EQP or last column pricing) refers to the lowest price of a promotional product. A lot of people focus too much on getting EQP. They worry that other people are getting lower prices and obsess over it, which is a waste of time. The best way to sell promo products is to focus on the sales and not the exact amount the supplier is charging. Never expect to get EQP pricing from a supplier until you've developed a solid relationship with them. That happens over time by placing orders and paying them in a timely fashion.

### **Tip 8: Diversify Your Customer Base**

Many distributors get way too comfortable when they attain most of their sales from a few large accounts. This approach works great as long as things are rosy, but the loss of just one account can turn high expectations into a disaster overnight.

Examine your customer list to make sure that there's a balance in the number of companies serviced and volumes sold. The majority of your income should come from numerous small and medium-sized accounts rather than only a few large ones. You don't want to be significantly affected financially with the loss of a large account.

### **Tip 9: Know Important Industry Players**

#### **Distributors**

As a distributor, you purchase promotional products from suppliers and sell to end-buyers. Along the way, in between the buying and selling, you add value to those products through customization and excellent customer service.

Distributors can be one individual to a large company, and you'll have to get to know your competition.

#### **Competing with Current Distributors**

It's difficult to compete head-on with established distributors. A smart approach is to start by offering products to your current customers or acquaintances. Once you obtain sufficient product and industry knowledge, you'll be able to branch out and call on larger companies.

#### **Suppliers**

Suppliers either import or manufacture blank promotional products to sell to distributors. Once a distributor places the order, the supplier often imprints the product with a logo. Suppliers can be small specialty businesses or large companies operating at high volumes. When you develop strong relationships with your suppliers, it can be the key to your success.

#### **Decorators**

This part of the promotional products supply chain is responsible for customizing apparel products for customers. The two most popular kinds of decorating methods are embroidery and screen printing. Whatever kind of decorating you need for your products, make sure you find reliable decorators whose quality of work you can trust with this extremely important part of the process.

### **Regional Associations**

These are made up of distributors, suppliers, service providers and multi-line reps that function primarily as networking groups. Most offer monthly luncheons or dinner meetings as well as yearly tabletop shows. The cost to join one of these associations runs around \$100, and they are located in all parts of the country.

### **Multi-Line Reps**

Representing products from several suppliers, multi-line reps work on commission to make calls on distributors. They are a bridge between distributors and the suppliers they represent, and they can be quite helpful in solving problems or expediting orders.

### **Promotional Products Association International (PPAI)**

This non-profit group offers different services to people in the industry. The association is made up of distributors, suppliers and service providers. It charges a fee for membership, which is based on the dollar amount of products you're selling in a calendar year. PPAI is located in Irving, Texas, and puts on a large show in Las Vegas each year.

### **Advertising Specialty Institute (ASI)**

ASI sells memberships to distributors, suppliers and service providers. They are a privately held company located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, PA and sells different products to their subscribers. ASI puts on three regional shows in Orlando, Fort Worth and Chicago. The company also runs traveling shows that visits major cities.

### **Tip 10: Listen for the Sale**

To exceed or maintain your sales objectives, you must always be listening more than you are talking. The information you glean from what prospects say is more important in creating success than anything you can ever say about yourself or products. This premise seems strange to many salespeople, and because of this, they become no more than mediocre industry sellers.

The four things that are required to produce sales are:

1. Call on qualified prospects
2. Sell creative ideas
3. Ask pertinent questions
4. Always **listen**

Most salespeople are pretty good at mastering the first three points, but they often have real difficulty when it comes to the listening part. Average salespeople talk too much, and when that behavior is combined with the act of non-listening, they never learn what prospects really need or want. Save yourself from this dilemma by following these tips.

1. **Be quiet.** You won't learn anything unless you remain silent and always remember never to break the silence first after you speak. If you do, you won't be told the information required to move the sale forward. Stay silent until other person talks.

*Action Tip:* If you have a hard time staying quiet, a good way to quell the talking urge is to look straight at the customer and count backward silently.

2. **Focus.** While waiting for prospects to provide their answers, make sure to give them your complete attention. Block out all distractions to make sure that your attention is focused on what prospects are saying at that moment.

*Action Tip:* To keep your attention on what is being said, look directly at your prospect's face and focus on their nose, ears or mouth. By doing this, you are forcing yourself to be cognizant of what you are being told.

3. **Let them know you care.** When a buyer answers questions, hang on their every word and appear sincere by nodding, smiling or making eye contact with them. Never glance away or check your cell phone when someone is talking.

*Action Tip:* To limit the number of possible distractions, put your cell on silent when making presentations.

4. **Be a repeater.** When someone says something meaningful to the sale, repeat the statement back and ask for clarification if you don't understand. This shows the buyer that you are listening and engaged.

*Action Tip:* To make sure that you are absolutely clear about everything you hear, repeat the prospect's responses back in your mind while they are being made. You will be better able to react quickly when the prospect finishes talking.

5. **Be empathetic.** When prospects say things that diminish the chances of closing a sale, such as, "Our budgets are tight right now," make sure that you appear empathetic toward the predicament. Let them know you understand, and then immediately start proposing alternate solutions. The majority of sales are made at later dates because of the information learned during the empathy stage of listening.

*Action Tip:* Think about all of the possible objections you could encounter and have responses prepared ahead of time to combat them.



6. **Ask effective follow-up questions.** Address any concerns that are preventing the sale from taking place. This act of probing is something you must master in order to clarify objections that will get prospects talking again.

*Action Tip:* When objections come up that stifle the selling process, ask this: “What do you think would be good for you?” This turns the selling burden back on the prospect and creates an opportunity for you to offer additional remedies.

The process of completing sales is made up of several variables, with the biggest one being the act of **listening**. To reach the goals you have set for yourself, always be sure that you are listening more than talking.

\* \* \*

## Effective Communication

Communicating effectively with everyone will allow you to:

- Identify good prospects
- Become more efficient
- Eliminate rejections

These are the building blocks of selling. If you master them, your sales performance will improve dramatically.

Great salespeople have one thing in common: They know what to say and when to say it! They have learned how to talk to prospects in an effective manner and are able to carry on meaningful conversations with anyone. Top sales performers don't need to read from scripts. They possess a diverse range of knowledge that enables them to exchange information in all situations. To hone your communication skills, always try to do the following.

- **Be well read on a variety of subjects.** This makes it possible for you to talk with people from any age group or income level.
- **Make eye contact and smile.** It will increase your chances for a positive response exponentially.
- **Keep gossip to a minimum, and never use profanity.** We're all so connected that you never know who might see your email messages or overhear your conversations. The easiest way to lose a sale is by talking negatively about someone to a prospect, then learning that he or she knows that person.
- **Be curious.** Start conversations by asking about a person's family is a great icebreaker. Most people love to talk about their family and pets!

- **Listen.** Refrain from interrupting too frequently.
- **Be agreeable and resist the urge to correct people.** People react negatively to a person who acts like a know-it-all or talks down to them.
- **Ask for permission, and always be polite.** When you connect with someone on the phone, ask if it's a convenient time to talk. Never launch into discussions with anyone unless you have asked if they're available, which shows them that you respect their time.
- **Ask questions.** You'll understand why people think the way they do and become a better salesperson.

As I mentioned before, the sale of promotional products is a very straightforward business. If you take the time to learn sufficient information about the products of a few solid suppliers and match them to your current customer list, you will increase your income nicely. Make sure to ease into the market slowly and without getting distracted by misinformation. By adding the sale of more of these products to your current business model, you'll expand your sales like never before. Now, it's time to learn how to market yourself.

## **Chapter 3: Branding Yourself**

You will need goals, passion, creativity and desire to stand out from other distributors in this industry. Make real money by applying self-promoting strategies that place you in a position of greatness, not mediocrity.

### **Who's Your Target Audience?**

Since there are zero limitations to calling on anyone you choose, make yourself appealing to a diverse audience. The market for imprinted products is vast, so you must be able to position yourself as someone who will be attractive from a business standpoint to anyone you call on. To do so, you have to operate like a chameleon to make the most of your efforts!

### **What's Your Brand?**

To establish a brand, you must create a logo, develop a specific "look" and conduct business in a consistent manner.

As I mentioned earlier, I make myself different by always having a unique business card instead of a paper one, like every other distributor. Over the years, I've employed:

- Wooden cards
- Rubber cards
- Mint boxes
- Credit card flash drives
- Pizza cutters
- Nail files
- Full-color lens-cleaning cloths

I've seen distributors who enjoy fishing, hunting, gardening and pets create their promotional image around those themes, with some even writing and sending newsletters on the subjects in order to create bonds with clients.

### **It's Not About Money**

Some distributors spend large sums of money creating elaborate logos, building websites and renting office space in attempts to separate their promotion efforts from those of industry newbies. A fancy logo or a stocked showroom doesn't mean someone can deliver on what he or she has promised. Just because a distributor can spend a lot doesn't mean his or her brand is complete. The most important pieces to creating a moneymaking promotion business are expertise and professional ability.

When starting out, I had limited ability to design logos and didn't possess resources to create a slick marketing piece, so I decided that my commitment to customers would build my brand. I told everyone that if I didn't return their call by the end of the day, their order would be free. The promise was an excellent talking-point, but it also became a game with customers who tried to make me break my promise. That strengthened my customer relationships. I've never been forced to provide a free order, and have become a distributor who is known to be reliable and trustworthy.

### **Promote Yourself in Person**

I hand-deliver most samples and promotion pieces by visiting on a preset schedule. By planning ahead and organizing your schedule, you can effectively make a large number of deliveries. Do so in conjunction with other calls you are making in a particular part of your territory.

For example, you could dedicate one entire day to dropping off samples of a new product. This increases your chances of bumping into one of your customers in a non-threatening way. You might see him or her in the elevator or at the water fountain. At the very least, the effort gives you the opportunity to locate your prospect's office and to deliver your literature or products personally to the right place.

### **Where I Started**

To establish myself at the beginning of my career, I focused on promoting myself to the apartment industry since I had friends who worked for companies that managed complexes. I convinced one company to let me design a residential referral program that increased their lease renewal percentage considerably. After the program was successful, I was able to sell four additional versions of the original idea. This success separated me from competitors, and I became the go-to person for anyone seeking higher lease renewal figures. Companies I didn't know started calling me. My initial branding efforts built my confidence and made it possible for me to conquer other industry segments one by one.

### **Tell Them About You**

To set yourself apart from others, always include a note when leaving behind material for a prospect or established customers. A business card alone isn't enough. On each occasion, you should write a brief description on who you are, why you are making the visit and how your items fit the prospect's needs. Using imprinted note cards is ideal, but a sticky note or other small piece of paper will work; however, never allow the lack of elaborate promo materials to keep you from leaving a note. What matters is that your message reaches the prospect and they learn something about you.

Sample Note:

My name is Joe Lopez. I left my catalog today for your review. I've never called on your company before, but I wanted to share some ideas that could help your sales department increase orders. Would it be possible to set a time for me to visit? I will follow up with you at the end of the week. Thank you so much for your time!

Sincerely,  
Joe

### **Quality Over Quantity**

Using an organized system of deliveries will take more time than mailing to your desired audience. I can't argue with that. Many people will feel that you will achieve better sales results by mailing in mass amounts. They will point out that when mailing 100 pieces of literature, you are effectively covering more ground in less time compared to the time it takes to hand-deliver 25 pieces. That is a four-to-one greater ratio of distribution.

But how do you want your company to be represented? Would you rather be scattershot with your efforts or hit the target? Which approaches do you really feel will yield the highest percentage of results? Try delivering your next round of literature in person and see for yourself. You will not be disappointed!

### **Be Memorable**

Overall, you must make yourself stand out from your competitors for people to remember you. Here is how one distributor set himself apart from the competition:

"My name is Tom Davis, and I want you to know that there is more to promoting yourself than just passing out catalogs! I own a distributorship located in the Midwest. Many of my customers are retail dealers who sell to farmers and ranchers. My selling area is spread out over a wide geographic area. Most of the time I am able to visit each account no more than two times a year. When I began my career, I made a point to meet each one of my prospects personally. And so did my competitors! Many times I had to wait to see prospects because they had one of my competitors in their office. Since I knew that I might not get back to see a particular prospect as frequently as needed, I decided I had to be creative!

"I called a friend of mine who is a professional photographer. I wanted to schedule a sitting so she could take a photo of me. I told her I wanted 500 prints made of the most flattering picture she could take of me! My goal was to leave this photo at each one of my stops. I also planned to mail it with catalogs or samples each time they were requested. I wanted every one of my prospects to have at least one of these photos so they would remember me when I was not in their office. I wanted them to feel that I was making a personal call even when I was not there physically.

"After I started my photo giveaway, it seemed that my phone never stopped ringing. Apparently, I was the first salesperson to leave behind a 4" x 6" glossy photo in addition to promotional products sales materials. The strategy even separated me from salespeople who had pictures on their business cards! The end result was that my customers and prospects felt like they knew me because my photo hung around their office. The next year's photo included my wife and kids. Now my prospects and customers feel like they're part of our family!"

Always make the marketing portion of your efforts one of your most important daily activities. The combination of great service and creative marketing efforts make it possible for you to achieve success in this industry.

## **Chapter 4: Get Clients Through Prospecting & Marketing**

I've been selling promo items for more than 30 years, and sometimes I think I've seen it all, but every day I learn something new. From experience, I know how rewarding and exciting my job is, but I understand how challenging it is as well. I've produced \$25 million of sales at high profit margins for my company over the years, and here's my realistic take on what you need to do to succeed in this highly competitive industry.

### **Cold Calls**

Definition: Develop clients from unknown sources

Benefit: Increase customer base

Approach: Organize a plan and never deviate

Obstacles: Extreme tenacity is necessary

Cold calling is an arduous method to employ when building a distributorship. In spite of this, thousands of people have become successful due to their efforts of placing large numbers of calls and not being intimidated.

To make this type of business creation work, you must possess a terrific personality, be witty and be able to think on your feet. The best way to start out is by visiting local companies and explaining what you offer, and then asking if you can assist them in their marketing efforts. This relaxed, soft-sell approach is superior to high-pressure efforts, yielding better results than barging into places and stating that you offer thousands of items at cheaper prices.

Cold calling on the phone works only after you've made hundreds of calls. Here, too, you must be able to think quickly, have a significant telephone presence and be able to respond rapidly. I am not suggesting that you shy away from cold calling, since numerous distributorships have begun this way. But if you do use this method, you must be tenacious and not quickly cowed. Don't be afraid of objections.

Here are the steps to help you combat objections and close more sales:

#### **1. Limit Product Choices**

Instead of offering a dozen product variations, provide three options and then determine if you are headed in the right direction. By limiting choices, you'll limit objections. When I offer three varieties in my approach, prospects end up buying one of them 90% of the time.

#### **2. Impress Buyers**

Chances are that potential buyers are already purchasing from your competitors. To remain competitive, use testimonials. Ask your current clients for comments referencing your work, and show them to everyone working with your

competitors. I keep more than 20 letters touting my work on hand and provide them when necessary.

### **3. Deliver on Time**

A common problem that stifles salespeople is when they take on rush orders and are not able to deliver them on time. To fulfill rush orders, you need to build strong supplier relationships. That includes paying invoices on time and meeting with suppliers in person (especially at shows). I have strong relationships in place with at least 20 suppliers who are happy to process rush orders in one- to four-day periods.

### **4. Negotiate Prices**

You don't want to set based on price, but there are cases in which prospects have budgetary restraints. When someone asks for better pricing, ask him or her how much they think is fair. They are usually more than willing to let you know what they want to pay. Never arbitrarily lower prices without first knowing what the customer is willing to spend. Tell prospects if they pay in advance, you'll offer a more favorable deal.

### **5. Keep Long-Term Customers**

When people change jobs, you may lose the account. To avoid this, stay in touch with former clients and ask if they know who took their place. Reach out to the new buyer and schedule a meeting. When you meet, take the time to point out your previous work for the company and ask to continue the relationship. Through maintaining relationships with former customers, I've been able to keep old customers and gain new ones.

### **6. Handle Radio Silence the Right Way**

It can be frustrating when a prospect doesn't get back to you – especially if you have called and mailed samples several times. Select a time when you know they are not available and leave a message along these lines:

Joe, it's Don Sanders. I'm sorry for being a pest. Since you have not gotten back to me, I believe that you may have moved on regarding the placement of an order. I promise not to bother you again, but if you ever need something, I would love to help you with those products.

About 40% of the time my prospects return calls and apologize for not doing so earlier, and they eventually place orders.

## **Networking**

Definition: Create prospects by using social and personal contacts

Benefit: More relaxed method of prospecting

Approach: Match personality and interest to like-minded people

Obstacles: Must be organized

To grow your business, start creating bonds with individuals you meet during social interactions, especially in casual settings. This form of prospecting is the most effective, and these relationships tend to last for long periods of time. Clients from networking events are buying from you based on friendship and trust instead of price. Below are a few suggestions of where you can get started:

**1. Friends and Neighbors**

I ask friends and neighbors for referrals, and my largest customers have resulted from those efforts. When I started my business in 1982, my best friend's girlfriend happened to be the marketing director for a fledgling French bakery. I ended up selling that company more than \$900,000 worth of products in 11 years as they grew from a single location to more than 75 bakeries nationwide. In another instance, a college friend of mine introduced me to the purchasing manager of a major corporation, and I sold her more than \$1 million worth of products during a 13-year period.

**2. Existing Customers**

I had a client who abandoned his career to go to law school. While at school, he sold for me part-time to make extra money. After a few weeks, he met the personnel director for a large retail chain at school and sold her several orders. Upon graduation, he gave me this account and I sold them more than \$3 million worth of products over a 10-year period.

**3. Chambers of Commerce**

Several times during my career I have rejuvenated my business by joining a Chamber of Commerce and attending their activities. Through one Chamber of Commerce, I sold orders to more than 50 new customers and most become repeat buyers. The key to recruiting new business through a Chamber is to qualify people, as soon as you meet them.

**4. Volunteer Opportunities**

When you put yourself in positions to meet like-minded people, you dramatically increase your chances of reaching new clients. The most new business I ever earned resulted from volunteering with a local historical society. I sold the organization many orders and also met 11 new customers, with four of them turning into high-volume accounts.

**5. Alumni Groups**

In my case, I belong to the Frog Club, which supports Texas Christian University athletics. During football season, I attend weekly luncheons as a means to pick up new clients. By going to places and meeting fellow enthusiasts, you are given the chance to expand your customer base.

**6. Political Campaigns**

With the political season happening annually, I pick candidates when they



announce their intentions and start working for them. By doing this, I'm able to come in contact with those who share my political philosophy. I've taken many accounts away from competitors as a result of meeting new people while working on campaigns. Elections give you a chance to meet people who think just like you do!

### **Attending Networking Functions**

A benefit that local Chambers provide to members is an opportunity to attend several networking events each month. Here are a few tips so you can get the most out of these functions:

- Attend on a regular basis.
- Spend your time with potential buyers and not continual talkers.
- Meet as many people as possible, find out their profession and ask how you might help them.
- Follow up with your network connections immediately after the event and schedule a meeting within 2-3 days.
- Approach new contacts casually. Say you were in the area and wanted to continue the first meeting's conversation. If they are unavailable, leave your card and a note, and get in touch with them by phone and email the next day.

By repeating this process after networking opportunities, you will generate a steady stream of prospects. Never forget to ask pertinent questions at the time of introduction, and always follow up in a timely manner.

### **Social Media Marketing**

Definition: Creating connections by using online services

Benefit: Discover customers not found by traditional means

Approach: Develop online presence to attract like-minded individuals

Obstacles: Communications must be worded correctly

Social media marketing affords you the opportunity to connect with large numbers of people quickly and efficiently. Some distributors consider shared interest marketing to be a fad, while others believe it is the key to success. It is my opinion that creating online connections is a significant step in building bonds to develop business relationships that last forever.

Keep these thoughts in mind when dealing with social media marketing:

#### **1. Brand Recognition**

Social media allows you to promote your brand. It's easier for prospects to learn more about you, and you also become more recognizable to existing customers. Plus, significant numbers of people will likely make an effort to comment on your

services or products. When more people discuss you, your brand becomes more prevalent to everyone.

## **2. Increase Brand Loyalty**

According to numerous reports, brands that frequently engage on social media enjoy higher rates of customer loyalty.

## **3. Higher Conversion Rates**

Social media leads to higher conversion rates because it enhances the personal touch of selling. Brands are more humanized with social interaction. Individuals like doing business with people, not companies.

## **4. More Chances to React**

Every communication posted on social media platforms becomes an opportunity to create an order. When you post something on social media, individuals can post reactions and share your post, further encouraging discussions and increasing the likelihood of a sale.

## **5. Increased Traffic**

Without the use of social media, your inbound web traffic is limited only to people currently familiar with your brand. Every social media profile you add creates more paths to your site. Additional content added to sites generates inbound traffic, which produces leads and conversions.

When other distributors are using social media and you aren't, you fall behind the pack when the selling race begins. You must prevent competitors from taking business away by creating an effective online presence today.

## **Referrals**

Definition: Business created by past performance

Benefit: Effective way to increase order flow

Approach: Consistent service and innovative product recommendations

Obstacles: Requires high levels of performance and years of experience

Colleagues, associates and friends are sources of referrals. Over the years, I have derived more than 25% of new business from referrals. The ability to receive referrals on a consistent basis is an excellent way to grow your business. When sales come from outside recommendations, someone else started the sales cycle on your behalf. If a neutral party touts your work, he or she clearly trusts your abilities.

The first step is to make sure you are referable and that you deliver products and services in a manner that exceeds client expectations. If you aren't meeting customer demands, you will not be able to generate referrals. Always go above and beyond the call of duty. Give customers a reason to recommend you.

Once you know you can deliver, the next step is to design a referral program.

### **Create Your Own Referral Program**

1. Exchange referrals with like-minded service providers you completely trust.
2. Recognize and thank referral sources with phone calls, emails and by sending handwritten notes (the best approach). Always express appreciation.
3. Include a "Referrals Always Appreciated" tagline in your email signature, on your business card and with all written communications. Add a link to a form on your website and under your email signature for your clients to submit a referral.
4. Use social media.
  - Include social media icons and links in your email newsletter so readers can easily share content.
  - Keep your social media profiles updated and include a link to your profile in online communications.
  - When generating traffic, reach out to visitors and followers and request referrals. On Twitter, ask for a retweet.
  - Be helpful in forums. Post insightful comments that validate your expertise.
5. Make sure that clients know everything you offer so they are able to refer all your services within their professional and personal network.
6. Inspire confidence in your referral sources by letting them know that most of your business comes from repeat customers.
7. Offer a guarantee.
8. Treat everyone like a partner. When you pay suppliers on time, they will back you and help you in tight situations. Let customers know you view them as strategic allies, and find out if they feel the same about you.
9. Offer free products in exchange for new business created.
10. *GIVE* a referral. It's the best way to get one in return.

By employing the tips shown above, you are putting yourself in the position to receive that kind of call several times per week!

### **Testimonials**

Definition: Validation of prior customer services

Benefit: Reinforces image of expertise

Approach: Allows clients to assist in selling process  
Obstacles: Requires tenacity and high self-esteem

The most efficient way to let anyone know they should do business with you is to show them tangible evidence. You can do this by sharing quotes from existing customers who are happy with your service. Prospects then know that you're reliable.

Ask clients exactly what they think about your service. When you receive positive feedback, ask for permission to use them to share with prospects. Most clients will be more than happy to allow you to repeat their comments in any manner you choose. If the feedback is negative, you have the opportunity to take the actions necessary to correct mistakes. Either way, the practice of obtaining testimonials will allow you to tout your professionalism or correct errors!

Below are just a few of the testimonials I've received over the years:

"Don provides us with great service, and his ideas are the best!"  
– Kay McCarthy, Bombay Company

"When we need rush orders done, we count on Don Sanders Marketing to make them happen!"  
– Mike Harrison, Mike Harrison Real Estate Company

"The ideas that Don brings us are spot-on for our customers and the occasion!"  
– Liza Orchard, Idea Orchard

"Don Sanders has provided us with great service for more than 13 years!"  
– Randy Stone, Harris Methodist Health System

"Quality products and great service are what Don provides!"  
– Karen Lovell, Baylor Homecare

### **Easiest Ways to Get Testimonials**

1. Always exceed client expectations.
2. Communicate with customers frequently.
3. Ask clients if they are pleased with your services.
4. Always correct mistakes in a timely manner.
5. Never make excuses.

### **Direct Mail**

Definition: Increase sales by using mass mailings  
Benefit: Cover large industry segments  
Approach: Must employ creative mailers  
Obstacles: Need to update mailing lists constantly

Direct mail is a terrific way to increase business in today's market. At one time, there were many distributor mailings, and most of them were not very creative. Today, very few dealers are using direct mail and instead opt for email marketing. Since the use of direct mail has diminished and fewer distributors use it, mailing a prospect today will actually make you stand out.

### **What Happened to Me**

Several years ago, more than 35% of my sales came from "The Dallas Times Herald." Then, I picked up a copy of the paper with the headline, "Herald Sold to the Morning News – This is Our Last Issue." It cost me one-third of my business and made me realize that I must expand my customer base. I designed a bounce-back card that offered a gift to recipients who mailed the card back.

To start the mailing program, I hired college students to call companies to find out the name of their marketing director. I did this based on industry segments, such as trucking firms, funeral homes, architects, attorneys, etc. After the students secured the names, they were entered into a database and I mailed the return cards on a set schedule. When anyone sent one back, I made a personal visit in order to drop off the gift and explain the benefits of doing business with me.

Fortunately, the card program worked, and during its first year of implementation, I acquired enough customers to replace the volume lost when my large customer was bought out.

## **Chapter 5: How to Use Technology**

Technology helps you communicate with groups of people instantaneously. When selling, it's not only imperative that you take advantage of the benefits of staying connected, but you have to make sure it doesn't make you less engaged. When you're mentally distracted, you won't pick up on all of your customers' needs, and you'll miss potential sales opportunities.

### **Email, Social Media & Texts**

One benefit of email specifically is that it lends itself to follow up communications. If someone doesn't respond, send another message asking if he or she received the initial email. Every time I send a second message, I always receive several replies stating that they had received the first one, and they appreciate my follow-up. Those replies serve as additional touches to my marketing plan.

These are easy ways to use email to help build your customer relationships.

#### **1. Send Newsletters**

Concise newsletters with product images should be a part of your marketing repertoire, and you should send them to customers on a regular basis. Create a generic template that can be customized to meet the needs of different clients.

My last newsletter was aimed at hospitals that buy products to reward volunteers. I included images of water bottle infusers that hold bits of fruit, mint leaves or tea bags. The day after I sent the newsletter, I closed three orders for water bottles. One customer purchased 150 bottles and reordered within five days! I made these sales without ever having to leave the office.

#### **2. Create Deadlines for Customers**

Use email as a closing tool by letting customers know that lead-time is growing short and they need to place orders. Example: "I just talked to the cap supplier and they need three weeks lead time to get your caps done. Can I come by tomorrow to finalize your order?"

#### **3. Work at Any Hour**

You can send product suggestions and quotes to people any time. On Saturday and some Sundays I email customers so they can have information available to them when they arrive in the office on Monday morning.

#### **4. Send Supplier Orders**

I place all supplier orders by email so I can keep my orders organized in account files on the site. All I have to do is create files for my customers, and pertinent information is only a click away.

#### **5. Send Paperless Invoices**

I send invoices to clients in the mail as well as digitally. This increases cash flow because customers can click on a button included on the invoice and pay me automatically.

## Rules to Live By

There's no better way to increase your inventory of contacts than by sending emails and using social media. To increase your success, follow this set of rules.

- **Be accurate.** When talking with anyone, each message you send is a direct reflection of you. To portray yourself as professional, check all your messages to make sure they do not include misspellings or grammatical errors. Since you never know where messages might end up, always make sure that everything you send features subjects you are not afraid to share with the world.
- **Say it fast.** Most people only focus on the first few lines of emails, so make sure to place your call-to-action early in the body of your message. Don't make the mistake of only including buying signals at the conclusion of messages.
- **Wait a few minutes.** Take some time before replying to any message you receive. What you end up sending will likely be different than what your initial response was going to be.
- **Keep it neutral.** Avoid language or symbols that could upset others. Many people post religious quotes or political opinions, and there is no place for that in the business world. You may be convinced that your opinions are correct, but many of the people you send message to don't share your agendas – trust me. If you want to change people's minds regarding social matters, the sales profession is probably not for you.
- **Copy with care.** Never waste people's time by sending carbon copies (CC) or blind carbon copies (BCC) to everyone you know. If you bombard people with forwards that don't concern them, it's more than likely that they don't want to receive them.
- **Use small attachments.** Don't overload people's computers and email servers by including large images and attachments. You never know how fast someone else's connection might be, so you don't know how long it will take for them to open the entire message. Also, some email clients will bounce an email that has an attachment over a certain size. Attach small files only, drop the images in Dropbox or share them online.
- **Don't ramble.** If you are a blogger or post on Facebook, never talk so much about yourself that you bore clients and prospects. Networking sites are for networking.

- **Don't overdo it.** If you choose to communicate using Twitter, don't tweet constantly. Don't send them so frequently that your followers dread seeing you show up in their feed. Always monitor your tweets so people actually look forward to receiving them.

Doing business with technology is no different than other forms of selling. The purpose is to move deals along and close sales, but one thing email can't do is tell when customers are sending you the oh-so-subtle signs that they're ready to buy. That's something only *you* can determine.

## **Voicemails**

In some instances, voicemails work better than emails. Email is fast and usually the best way to close sales, but if one party fails to respond in a timely manner, it can make for arduous selling cycles. Decisions that take days over email can often be handled in a few minutes by leaving effective voicemails.

Regardless of how successful you think your initial conversation went, you'll never be guaranteed that anyone will call you back. The fact that prospects and customers don't return calls is a huge problem for salespeople, and it can be draining. Thousands of hours are wasted every year by people waiting for others to call them back. To save you from that experience, I'm going to share my advice on how to leave voicemails that compel customers to respond.

- **Put yourself in your prospect's shoes.** Everyone, including you and me, receives messages on a daily basis, so you are no different than those attempting to leave messages for you. Do you ever wonder why telephone solicitors never want to leave their information when they cannot speak with the person they are trying to reach? It's because they know that no one will ever call them back. Think of this when you leave messages.
- **Make statements.** The way to get people to pay attention to your messages is by giving them a reason to do so. When voice messaging anyone, never just leave your name and number or say:

"Kate, please give me a call back."

Messages such as those are nothing but time-wasters. Whatever messages you choose to leave, make sure that they are always loaded with statements or facts, like these:

"Nancy, I wanted to give you a call to make sure you received my email."

"Bob, I would like to talk about your cap order. The factory is running behind, and I need to send artwork, so they don't miss your due date."



- **Tell customers they're special.** Customers do business with people who value their business, so never miss opportunities to tell customers they matter to you. No gimmicks or tricks needed. Simply remind people that they are important to you all the time. On set schedules, call your customers and leave messages telling them how much you appreciate their business. Don't try to sell anything – just say how much you appreciate them and their business. If you do this frequently, they're more likely to call back when you really need them to.
- **Keep customers in the know.** When customers have open orders, leave status messages for them to show their business is your priority. Never be in the position of your customers having to ask you what's going on with their order. These messages also open up the opportunity for you to ask customers for more business. A good example would be:

“Roberto, I checked on your shirt order and it is scheduled to ship next Thursday. I know that you haven't ordered caps in a while; do you need to place an order for them, too?”

Customers will respect your work ethic and be more motivated to return your calls when you keep them updated.

- **Please help me.** I have always been a proponent of asking prospects and customers for help. Even when I am out making personal calls, I always ask those I meet if they can help me. Most people are honored that you have asked them for help, so when you leave phone messages, do the same. When a sale is going slowly, leave your prospect a message like this:

“Jacob, I know you've been thinking about ordering some coasters. Would it be possible if we got the order going today?”

- **Set deadlines.** Make sure to include expiration dates along with information you leave in voicemails and emails. By creating a sense of urgency, you will receive a much greater percentage of callbacks. Example:

“Tina, remember the pen order we talked about a couple of weeks ago? I talked to the factory today and that product is almost out of stock. Since I don't want you to miss out, could you please let me know today by 5 p.m. if you still need them? I can place the order for you ASAP.”

There are hundreds of other deadline statements that can be added to messages that will move people along.

- **Stay in control.** The desire to be in control of situations is a basic human feeling. The choice of who gets called back and who doesn't is a method of control. Some people don't call others back because they want to appear more important

than they really are. To increase chances of callbacks, let people know that your time is valuable by putting timeframes inside your messages. Example:

“Marcus, I wanted to get back to you. Please give me a call by tomorrow afternoon if you can, because I don’t want to miss your call.”

Also offer options of how people can contact you by email, fax or text.

- **Follow up.** Many salespeople don’t have a follow up plan in place, but you need one. Focus on consistently following up with phone calls and emails. If you meet a prospect on Tuesday, call them back within two days. Never wait to call back later than that or you will lose them. It doesn't matter how good your messages are if you don’t leave them in a timely manner. In today’s fast-paced world, people will forget you in an instant if you don’t stay after them.

No matter how many phone calls you make, none of them will matter unless you use effective communications along with them. Make the above suggestions part of your everyday selling routine to make sure that you’re not just waiting by the telephone—and to get your customers to call *you* back.

## **Be Careful**

Successful selling hinges on many factors. Some are so subtle that you can miss them if you’re not paying close attention. While cell phones and computers can automate some processes, they can’t replace the thought process.

Don’t take phone calls or check email when making sales presentations. I know when I’m in the company of someone and they interrupt the conversation to take a call, it makes me feel as though that person would rather be somewhere else than with me. You wouldn’t want your custom to feel that way – plus, you could end up losing the sale, as one distributor told me. He recounted a time when he was at *ASI Show Dallas*, talking with a wearables supplier:

“Things started out well. I really liked what he was showing me, but minutes into our conversation, his phone rang. Instead of ignoring the call, he held his index finger up and said to me, ‘Just give me a minute.’ After waiting three minutes, I turned and walked away. I hope that call was worthwhile to him, because he lost my sale, and my wearables volume is substantial. I would never think about buying from someone who ignored me for that amount of time.”

Be sure to give clients your undivided attention so you can pick up on cues your competitors are too busy to notice. Also, avoid looking at email when you’re talking to a customer on the phone, because that will make it impossible for you to concentrate on the conversation. To close more sales, make conversations a priority.



## Chapter 6: Pricing

### Sell at High Prices!

Do you dream of making 50% profit on the orders that you sell? It's challenging, but if you approach the process correctly, it can become an everyday occurrence.

Because most people set the profitability bar too low for themselves, they're never able to make big margins consistently (like some distributors do all of the time). To create a high-profit plan for yourself, you need to mesh the correct contact mix with attractive product lines that people will pay more for.

The biggest mistake that many distributors make is thinking they have to offer cheaper prices than everyone else to sell anything. Once they sell only on price, they never stop, and as a result, they never see big profits. Here are some keys to making big money.

#### 1. Never sell the world.

Make yourself an expert on a few items, and avoid claiming to be the place for all things for everybody. There's no way to know about every product and sell them all the right way.

*Action Tip:* Never include a phrase like this on your business card: "We offer thousands of promotional products for all your needs."

#### 2. Find prospects interested in service over price.

Stay away from people who are entirely price-conscious. Never be ashamed to tell someone that you specialize in high-quality products and excellent service, which means you can't serve them based on price alone. If you waste time on buyers who foster the best-price attitude, you'll never see high margins.

*Action Tip:* When someone asks me for a bid, I say that I don't do that. Then I provide the phone number of one of my competitors and suggest they call them. I'd rather my competitor waste his time trying to satisfy low-profit customers. This doesn't mean that I don't give prospects prices. I do; I just avoid bidding wars.

#### 3. Sell unique products.

People who sell low-profit items do so because they don't make a consistent effort to learn about new products. They sell mundane items that are sold by so many people that they lose their profit potential quickly. Make big margins by offering original products and selling things your competitors don't know about. A great way to find these products is by attending shows and watching your in-box on a frequent basis.

*Action Tip:* When you attend trade shows, start exploring the exhibit hall in the back. That's where I find the completely new products that most people never see because they focus only on suppliers that they already know. High margins come from going where competitors never know to go.

#### **4. Choose to sell high-end products.**

High margins are usually made with the sale of more expensive items, often one of a kind, such as high-end gifts and awards. People interested in these items tend not to be as price-conscious.

Distributors often tell me they don't sell awards because they don't get calls for them. I argue they won't get calls because they don't offer them. Many publications claim that the sale of awards usually offers a 50% rate of return, and in many instances, a 75% margin when sold on a totally custom basis.

##### *Action Tip:*

To overcome my fear of selling this product line, I took the time to learn all the particulars necessary in order to show the category the right way. Once you learn how to sell awards, you'll find they are as easy to sell as any other product line.

#### **5. Provide samples for your customers.**

Product samples imprinted with a customer's logo will help you close a sale. If you have time, you can get a physical sample created. If you're looking for a quick turnaround time, virtual samples are the way to go.

If you develop personal relationships with your suppliers, they'll be happy to provide virtual samples to you at no charge. You can also create virtual samples on Distributor Central, where you can save an unlimited amount of virtual samples in your customer folder. Another option is to use ESP Websites™, a branded online marketplace, and add your client's logo to thousands of products at one time. Your client can then shop and purchase those products from you.

One of my best clients asked me to provide him with several tech products as giveaways. I sent him four, and he couldn't decide which one to choose. The due date was close, so I created a virtual sample with his logo on it and told him that this would be the product I would buy. Minutes later, he emailed back and asked me to create a virtual of a different product, which I did. He immediately ordered 2,000. Even though he didn't buy the item I had initially suggested, the virtual sample caused him to act!

##### *Action Tip:*

When I create a physical sample for a customer, I'll drop it off with a note that describes the product's benefits. A few hours later, I'll call and leave a message asking the customer to confirm that he or she received the samples.

#### **6. Don't pass savings on to your customers.**

Many suppliers run specials on their products all the time. Too many sales people mistakenly pass the savings on to their customers instead of pocketing the added profits. When anything goes on sale, show the product at the list price and avoid the temptation to use the special price to close the sale. You can

increase margins on orders by more than 60% by selling products that are on special from suppliers.

*Action Tip:*

People always want to know how I get away with selling orders even though I don't pass along special pricing to my customers. In more than 30 years, not a single customer has claimed that I failed to pass a special price along to them. I treat them well, so they don't need to go elsewhere for pricing. By taking care of your customers and providing them with good ideas and excellent service, you'll make extra margins because your clients aren't shopping around.

Many people think that the art of making real money (high profits) on orders is an impossible task. Separate yourself from the pack by selling unique items to customers who are willing to pay higher prices for service and the creativity you offer. You can make high margins consistently as long as you take the proper steps and focus on quality and service.

### **Catalog Prices**

Suggested catalog price is included for a reason: Those prices are what you should present to customers. Whenever I leave catalogs with anyone or email product images that include pricing, I never mention the selling price. I expect buyers to understand that the price included is what I expect to receive in return for my efforts. Questions regarding pricing do arise, but I never arbitrarily lower them in order to close sales.

### **Should I Bid?**

I never bid on orders because I prefer to sell to clients who value my service. Don't fall for bidding traps that are created by filling out and submitting arduous forms. When I started, I thought it would be wonderful to sell large orders even though I made low margins on them. After filling out many bidding forms and not securing a single order, I decided that the time invested was not worth the return. This does not mean that I don't provide customers with prices; what it means is that I shy away from sales that require bid situations. Instead of spending time trying to determine what to bid, I invest the time in searching for customers who are willing to pay full price.

### **Never Show the Price**

On most product inquires, I never include pricing along with product images. Since I know to qualify buyers by finding out the quantity needed and the requested price point at the outset, I am not required to include pricing. Using those facts, I'm able to suggest products that fit the purpose of their promotion to a tee. I also limit the number of choices I provide, which is never more than three (as I had mentioned earlier).

### **Last-Ditch Pricing**

On occasion, I do go lower than catalog pricing. When asked to give better prices, I ask when the client intends to pay for the order. If the client gives me a credit card to cover the order up front, I'm willing to sell for a lower price. After this discussion, the issue of lower pricing tends not to be as important.

### **Charging for Freight**

Many distributors obsess over the question of freight charges. They can't decide if they should bill the customer for freight or somehow work that cost into the selling price. I keep it simple: I let the supplier use their preferred carrier and then bill the amount the supplier charges me on a separate line of the invoice. I also don't spend time shopping around for freight quotes.

### **Lines of Credit**

When starting out, do not expect suppliers to extend open credit terms. I have done this a long time and have an excellent credit rating, but sometimes I must place orders with suppliers I haven't worked with before. They usually require pre-payment since I haven't established a relationship with them yet. I provide a credit card since my number one goal is to get the order out the door.

### **Developing Trust**

After some time, when you have placed several orders with suppliers, ask them for terms. If you have a good credit, then the chances of that happening are excellent. If you have less-than-stellar credit, never try to bully a supplier into selling to you without a deposit in place. Just like you expect clients to pay you, suppliers expect to be paid in a timely manner.

The way you operate your business is entirely up to you, but never short yourself by becoming a price-based seller. Instead, demonstrate to clients that you are confident and expect to make an appropriate return for your efforts!

## Chapter 7: Specialty Product Segments

So far, I've given you a lot of information about how to sell and how to stand out. One thing I've already recommended is to specialize in high-quality products. Here are a few examples of niche products and how you can appeal to quality-seeking customers.

### Green Products

Several years ago, green products rose to popularity in the promotional products industry, and they remain in demand today. To sell more of these products, there are a few things you need to know.

#### Three Categories of Eco-Friendly Products

Knowing these terms helps you better determine your customer's needs and desires when he or she requests eco-friendly alternatives to traditional items.

**Recycled** – Made from:

- *Pre-consumer waste* – Material from the manufacturing process that is recycled back through the same manufacturing process.
- *Post-consumer or industrial waste* – Materials that are discarded by households or businesses and are then collected and processed for other uses.

**Biodegradable** – Products that have the ability to break down safely and relatively quickly by biological means. They pose no toxic threat when disposed of through conventional waste systems.

**Recyclable Plastic** – These products are indicated with a triangular symbol (indicating that they are 100% recyclable) and a number:

- 2 – Products made of high-density polyethylene or HDPE
- 4 – Indicates low-density polyethylene or LDPE
- 5 – Represents polypropylene plastic or PP

#### Popular Cost-Effective Green Products

You can sell these to almost anyone.

##### Magnets

Many magnet companies are producing their 20-, 30- and 50-mil magnets from 50% post-industrial recycled magnet material. In addition to being fully compliant with all federal and state product safety regulations, the words "50% RECYCLED" and "MADE IN USA" are printed on the back of each magnet, which means you can receive full credit with your customers.



### **Pens and Pencils**

Suppliers are now producing pens in which everything but the spring and refill is made from 100% compostable and biodegradable starch. There are also pencils made from a PLA material, which is enviro-friendly and renewable, and is produced entirely from plants. Other pencils are being made from 75% recycled newspaper and 25% new paper and recycled denim, catalogs and currency.

### **Labels**

Almost everyone uses roll and shipping labels or label stickers on a daily basis. These cost-effective paper products are now being imprinted on 100% post-consumer waste on uncoated white paper and feature recycling-compatible adhesive. Roll labels are offered in common and special shapes.

### **Plastic Bags**

A small percentage of plastic bags are recycled in the U.S. and the rest will remain in the environment for centuries. Entire communities have attempted to ban non-eco-friendly plastic bags. To address this problem, industry suppliers produce several different types of biodegradable bags and even one made, from plastic removed from the oceans. Other plastic bags being produced, will degrade in landfills 80 times faster than ones that were made several years ago.

There are thousands of green products now available in the promotional products industry. Take the time to research a handful of them so you can educate current customers, attract new ones and increase your sales.

### **Made in the USA**

For years, many of us didn't think about where products were made. With the recent issues revealed by problems associated with the enforcement of California's Proposition 65 and other associated legislation, I decided to start selling more products manufactured in this country. I would rather be safe than sorry.

For instance, just last year there were problems with promotional products made abroad containing dangerous levels of lead. Thanks to U.S. regulations, I feel more comfortable selling American-made products for safety, quality and ethical reasons.

To protect yourself and your customers, start asking these questions:

#### **How was it made?**

It's difficult to know if safety standards were met during the manufacturing of imported products. American companies must adhere to strict manufacturing guidelines imposed by government agencies before products can leave their plants. The result is a higher quality product, although often at a higher price.

*What I do:* When I pitch American products, I point out that the quality justifies the higher sales price, and that going with a higher quality product will reflect better on their image. To illustrate this point, I always tell people my cheap coffee

mug story: I had lost a sale to a competitor because their mug was cheaper than mine. This was great for the customer – until the cheaper mugs' handles started coming off.

### **Is it in stock?**

Over the years, it has become more commonplace for customers to place orders at the last minute, making rush service a popular demand. For USA-made products, suppliers tend to have more stock on hand, making it easier for them to fulfill rush orders.

To make sure orders are delivered promptly, one supplier buys his entire blank product stock from American injection molders. He can estimate delivery lead times accurately and has stock on hand so deliveries are made on time.

*What I do:* When people call for rush orders, I show them products from certain suppliers who I have long-term relationships with. By doing this, I'm able to control the situation and make sure my customers are getting products on time and from a reputable source.

### **Can I make more money on custom-made products?**

Yes, because you'll have less competition. By selling custom orders and one-of-a-kind products, you can create your own product line and increase margins. You'll become the go-to person for certain products.

*What I do:* I combine two different USA-made products to create one completely new one. One way I do this is by using imprinted lunch pails and then filling them with imprinted butter mints. This makes me the only source for this particular item, and these items are all American-made!

### **Does it come in several colors?**

Many imports are produced in fewer colors, limiting their appeal. Even though I'm not a big proponent of providing too many choices, if a client needs and asks for options, it's nice that I can sell products that come in different styles and colors.

*What I do:* Over the years I've sold promo items to many youth camps that use them as giveaways for their participants. One particular cheerleading camp bought American-made lanyards from me in multiple colors, and they use the different colored lanyards to differentiate different age groups.

### **Who can solve my problem?**

Sometimes orders go bad no matter what you do. When they do, limit the pain your customer feels by providing them with quick, straightforward answers. American-made goods are usually made and decorated at the same place, so suppliers who offer them are able to provide solutions faster than with products made overseas.

For example, one supplier I use has made pencils in America for many years. He's told me he can solve problems quickly. He knows what's taken place with his products from the time they go to order entry until they are shipped out the door, and it gives him a leg up in handling problems.

*What I do:* As soon as I hear anything negative about one of my orders, I contact the customer at once. I've found that by handling the situation immediately, my customer is easier to work with when it comes to providing the solution. And when I can offer a solution faster because the manufacturer is in the USA, it's even better.

### **How do I find suppliers carrying American-made products?**

Several industry publications include American-made product sections and suppliers who produce American products, proudly display signs in their booths to let you know. If you're not sure where something is produced, all you have to do is ask. I find that suppliers featuring American products are very enthusiastic to tell you about what they offer!

You can also look online for answers. Numerous industry product sourcing websites allow you to search for American-made products. For instance, ESP allows you to filter your search specifically for items made in the USA. You'll be surprised at how many you'll have to choose from in every product category.

When you have the choice between showing your customer a product that was made in the USA or one made elsewhere, proudly offer the American-made version. You will feel more self-assured in recommending its quality and safety, and you'll also have the chance to make a higher profit margin.

## **Chapter 8: Manage Supplier Relationships**

There are more than 3,000 suppliers, and it's impossible to deal with all of them. It's more important to start out with a few and to focus on building relationships and trust. The bonds that you build with suppliers are just as important as the ones you create with customers – if not more so. Even if you have many clients to sell, you'll never be able to if you haven't learned how to deal with suppliers!

Even with my long industry history, I have placed orders with no more than 400 different suppliers. In many cases, I have only entered a couple of orders with several of them. I deal with a core group of 30 suppliers who I place all of my order with regularly. When I can't find products I need from them, I contact one of 50 backup suppliers I maintain relationships with, and that's about it. If I get requests for items these suppliers don't have, I use ESP to find those products.

### **Where to Find Good Suppliers**

I prefer to meet anyone I deal with in person, including suppliers, so I make it a point to attend shows, where I am able to meet them face-to-face. In times when shows are not around the corner, I study supplier information found on Distributor Central, in order to determine which suppliers to place orders with. Phone calls made to supplier owners is a great way, to get to know him or her personally.

### **Respect Suppliers**

To move sales to high levels, you must earn the respect of suppliers and make them understand that you're a professional. Never make the mistake of thinking that you're doing them a favor by selling their products. Many new people, even though they have sold only a few orders, approach suppliers at shows and make demands such as free product, shorter lead times or special pricing. Trust me, most suppliers already have a good book of business, and the last thing they want to deal with is a demanding new person who has sold very little. Talk to suppliers in a respectful manner, and let them know that you will be grateful to sell their products.

### **Let's Talk About Paying**

The most important thing to remember is to pay your invoices on time! I usually make high margins, around 60% on rush orders, and in order to do so, I must have the cooperation of suppliers to complete orders quickly. Because I pay on time, suppliers usually honor my fast order requests, and that gives me the chance to make very nice profits. If you are a slow payer or if you cause order problems frequently, suppliers will not go the extra mile for you.

### **Take Advantage of Self-Promotions**

Many suppliers frequently offer distributor self-promotions, so take advantage of them as much as you can. For example, I recently ordered 100 pizza cutters imprinted with my information for a flat fee of \$75. Not only did I sell three orders of the cutters after presenting them to prospects, but I also booked several additional orders by using the pizza cutters to promote my brand.

**Write the Order Correctly**

Have a plan in place for proper order entry. Always make sure that you include your ASI number, the product ordered, quantity and all pertinent information on every order. Don't expect suppliers to be mind readers. An incomplete order stalls the process, and due dates will be missed or extended.

**Communicate Properly**

When suppliers contact you with questions regarding orders, reply to them immediately and make sure you have the necessary info at your fingertips. Never put these requests off, because if you do, suppliers will think that you are not a serious buyer.

**Always Be Honest**

Even with limited funds, there's always something more you can do to promote yourself. Many suppliers are happy to provide samples to you for promoting yourself as long as you promise to show their products and then follow through. The best way to find these opportunities is to talk with suppliers at *ASI Shows* and be honest with them. When you have their trust, they will go out of their way to help you. Just don't make the mistake of ordering samples and then letting them rot on the shelf.

## Chapter 9: Manage Customer Relationships

### Know Your Customers

Almost everyone knows that eighty percent of business comes from just twenty percent of customers. It's easier to sell orders to people you already have relationships with. When you're consistently able to identify a person's needs and then satisfy them, you will sell orders faster. Distributors who keep solid client relationships in place are the ones who book the most orders. Creating loyal buyers is essential to long-term success. Forward-thinking distributors always look for new business, but they also realize they must spend time on nurturing existing accounts.

There are many different types of customers who will need you to work with their particular styles and tendencies. Listen for some key phrases and keep these suggestions in mind in order to deliver what your customers need:

#### **“Show me quality.”**

These buyers want everything they buy to be top-of-the-line, and they're willing to pay for that privilege. Distributors who frequently find these customers are always pocketing higher profits.

*What I do:* I make sure I am extremely well versed in product knowledge to handle quality-oriented customers. They know what they are looking for, and you must be able to find it for them consistently!

#### **“Think for me.”**

These prospects are open-minded and must be told what to buy. Be wary of some of them – you don't want your ideas farmed out to your competitors.

*What I do:* I make sure that the ideas I provide are to people who sincerely are interested and not just after a bid. Take steps to qualify their intentions beforehand.

#### **“I need it tomorrow.”**

For some customers, last-minute orders are the only ones they know how to place. If you are efficient and have the cast-iron stomach needed to handle last-minute demands, you can always find prospects looking for your services. The real advantage to conducting rush order business is that profits associated with these orders are high!

*What I do:* You must be very alert when handling these types of customers. If you are going to specialize in rush orders, then you must realize that they will either make or break you.

#### **“Counsel and entertain me.”**

Nothing creates consistent buyers more than forming close personal bonds with them. When someone considers you a friend, they will allow you to charge them

more, and they will place more orders with you. If you want to keep the competition away from your customers, building relationships based on trust will do the trick.

*What I do:* I know that forming friendships with clients is a necessity, but I do so cautiously. You must be careful when specializing in personal relationship selling. If you don't get close enough, it won't work; if you get too close, it can backfire.

### **Consistency Is Key**

There are many ways to make your services attractive to new customers, but the thing that always works is being reliable. Distributors who know how to perform are able to manage their relationships simply through their actions. There's no formal training in order to perform consistently; you either do it or you don't. To be known as someone who always performs, follow these key points:

**Spoil your customers.** Take care of them. Make regular mailings as well as personal calls on a set schedule. Instead of providing them with the same products they can get elsewhere, provide a variety of materials that no one else offers. Let everyone know that you are the go-to person when it comes to promotional products.

*What I do:* I bring customers things that have nothing to do with this industry. If I know a customer who likes history, I'll drop off historical books or magazines. If I know they like to travel, I mail copies of travel magazines.

**Develop reliable calling habits.** Always plan ahead. Make certain parts of the week special by calling on certain customers on specific days. Start days off by calling on the same customer on set mornings, then fill your day in with calls as you head back to your office.

*What I did:* For 12 years, I made it a point to visit my largest customer every Tuesday morning. By doing so, I was able to meet with my client, or if she was not available, I would leave pertinent information for her that would initiate the next sale. It became well known that I would be at this customer's office nearly every Tuesday morning. On many days when my customer was unavailable, there would be purchase orders left in my name at the front desk.

**Timing is paramount.** You must do everything you can to make sure that every order you sell is correct and shipped on time. The perfect time to obtain a new customer is to call on someone who has just been burned by a competitor.

*What I do:* On every one of my orders, I write the in-hands date on a large dry-erase board that hangs on my office wall. By keeping the shipping requirements visible for rush orders, I know when I must call suppliers to check on the status.

**Keep yourself current.** People get bored with the same things. No matter how long you have been calling on someone, always try new approaches in your presentations. Never bring the same ideas to someone twice, and update everything you're doing from time to time.

*What I do:* Every couple of years I change the look of my printed materials. By doing so, I make my customers think I'm always moving forward.

**Send virtual samples regularly.** Make the effort to create virtual samples frequently and send them to prospects and customers on a regular basis. They cost nothing to create, and it gives you another reason to let current and potential customers know they're important to you.

*What I do:* I have refined my sales approach to the point that after I have a relationship in place with clients, I am able close eighty percent of sales with them by emailing virtual samples.

The greatest benefit of employing proper relations management techniques is that you will create strong business relationships, which will increase the number of orders you receive. Veteran salespeople know that success is not achieved by selling one order at a time, but by selling large numbers of them to several loyal clients!

### **Create Lifetime Customers**

Salespeople become successful distributors by optimizing the return on every prospect they encounter and by knowing how to get new customers to place orders with them forever. You can create long-lasting buyers by following these guidelines:

**1. Never Sell on Price.**

Sellers who book orders based on price are never able to create longtime customers because they only are able to write orders. Big-time buyers will not hang with cheapies because somewhere down the line they won't be able to deliver what they promise.

**2. Appeal to the Masses.** There are many products suitable for all buyers, and you need to find them and determine how they meet the marketing goals of your customers. An example of one such item is Opper Fiber® cleaning cloths. They are used to clean glasses, phones and tablets.

**3. Be Personable.** Most orders are placed because the client likes the person they're buying from. Ask customers what they like and have them elaborate about their children, pets, where they travel and other personal details. It's easier to sell to someone who feels a personal connection with you. Plus, you'll gain insight into their personalities and be able to anticipate what they'll want to buy in the future.



4. **Never Make Excuses.** No matter what, some orders go bad. When this happens, never run from the problem. Instead, correct the mistake and make things right. Tell the customer the truth and ask them for forgiveness.
5. **Keep It New.** Always show clients new ideas instead of new products. By showing creative ways to package items and suggesting how to make them more attractive to target audiences, your clients will never want to deal with anyone else.
6. **Personalize.** Nothing creates customers faster than personalized samples. Most suppliers are happy to provide spec and virtual samples as long as you assure them that you will follow up after you present them.
7. **Keep a Schedule.** Employ a follow-up plan in which you make contact with clients at least every three weeks, because constant contact trains them to buy from you. Here are a few ways to do that:
  - Leave voicemails, mail samples or visit.
  - Include flyers of new products with invoices.
  - Send holiday cards. No matter what the holidays may be, use the dates as opportunities to contact customers.
8. **Rush It Along.** Become a rush order specialist and process quick orders efficiently. Pricing is not often an obstacle, since people who need products by certain dates are worried about delivery and not lower prices.
9. **Thank Customers.** After sending an invoice, tell buyers in your own words how much you appreciate their business. Handwritten notes are the most genuine way to thank people.
10. **Be Nice to Competitors.** It pays to be the bigger person, and it shows your competitors and potential clients alike that you're confident in your abilities.
11. **Be Reliable.** Show prospects and customers that you value them by always doing what you promise.

To reach the next level, you must take the steps required to develop faithful buyers. This is not something that happens overnight. It's a slow, consistent process that shows people you are sincere, reliable and creative. Those are the traits that repeat buyers are looking for!

### **Turn Prospects into Customers**

Successful distributors sell more orders because they know how to make clients focus on buying from them! The fastest ways to make that happen is to examine the methods you employ in getting customers to pay attention to you. You will increase sales by

mastering the skills that cause customers to forget about other things and concentrate only on your efforts. Below are some key points make that happen.

**Looker or buyer? Know the difference.** The ability to do this quickly is essential to maximizing the time you spend looking for new customers. When supposed prospects send you subtle messages that reveal they are not real buyers, you must recognize that fact right away. One indication that a prospect is not a serious buyer is a response like this: "I have a lot going on right now and I'll have to deal with this later. Call me in a couple of weeks." This is a prime example of a non-interested person who will probably never order in the future.

*Action Step:* When someone gives you the "I'm really busy" response, be polite and tell him or her that you understand and that if he or she ever needs anything to give you a call. Move on and invest your time in finding better prospects.

**Less is more.** Many customers buy from a distributor because they need help deciding what products they need to buy. For most customers, offering too many choices only confuses them. With this type of customer, less is always more, and it makes them focus on the business at hand.

*Action Step:* When anyone requests a large amount of samples after looking at catalogs, don't go overboard and order them all. Keep initial product samplings to two to three pieces during the first part of the sale. Tell prospects that you want to show them a few samples first to make sure you're going in the right direction before you order more.

**Control what you sell.** Make it a point to refrain from sending prospects to websites in search of products, including your own. You don't want to sell products that offer low commissions and cause you to make insufficient returns. It's far better for you to control product selections and to guide customers toward things you're knowledgeable about.

*Action Step:* Since you'll always have to do some business online, limit the number of product images you send at one time. In my business, I never include pricing with images until I know exactly what the customer wants. Once you know you have a serious buyer, you can send more detailed information.

**Getting the order.** When a client is ready to give you an order, obtain the sales commitment, gather as much pertinent info as you can and move them along in the process as quickly as possible. If you've asked the right questions along the way, you already will know the essentials, such as drop ship locations, quantities needed and the timing of delivery. The best way to keep unforeseen situations to a minimum is to ask questions during the selling process and to keep a mental and written checklist of the answers. This helps everyone stay focused and keeps things going smoothly.

*Action Step:* Before making presentations to new prospects, visit their website and learn as much as you can about them. By gathering information beforehand, such as the number of store locations, names of decision-makers, etc., you will be better prepared for your meeting, and the potential sales will go more smoothly.

**After the sale: creating future orders.** Sometimes the hardest part of a sale comes *after* the order is sold. To create future orders and show customers the value of the products you've sold, always encourage them to use the items for their intended purpose. If products are not dispensed in a timely manner, your customer will never know the true value of the items. Besides, the sooner they use up the product, the sooner they will buy again.

*Action Tip:* Ask customers if they would like you to help distribute their products at events. An extra person to help them out is usually appreciated, and it frees up their staff to do other tasks at the event. Helping customers with their promotions also makes your bond with them even stronger.

## Chapter 10: How to Handle Challenges

Stressful situations are bound to come up in your daily activities as a distributor. The circumstances that cause stress can pop up at a moment's notice, which makes them difficult to handle. The best way to keep stress in check is to limit the possibility of it ever occurring. To keep your success level high and your stress level low, there are a number of things you can do to minimize problems.

### **Deal with the Best Suppliers**

There are more than 3,000 suppliers exhibiting at shows or offering products online. Make sure you are only working with top-notch suppliers to lessen the chance for problems to arise! You want suppliers who can process error-free orders quickly.

*Action Step:* When attending trade shows, interview suppliers the same way you would new employees. Ask them how their products fit into the marketplace, what their delivery schedules are and how effective their customer service is.

### **Handle Mistakes**

When it comes to mistakes, be honest. Some mistakes are unavoidable, and good suppliers will gladly take the steps to make them right. To make sure you are not the cause of mistakes, take the steps and care necessary to submit orders correctly. Whenever there are snafus, I always contact the client immediately and let them know what happened. Most of the time, quick action on my part defuses the situation and I have the opportunity to work out a solution.

Always remember: never run from mistakes. Taking action quickly and handling errors has created stronger bonds with my clients. People respect honesty and often reward others for being straightforward with them.

*Action Step:* Write up orders and put them aside. After a short time, proof them to make sure everything is correct. When you place an order, always ask for pre-production proofs to be sent to you by fax or email. Never take any chances.

### **Set Customer Service Expectations**

If you've never done business with a supplier before, then you don't know what their customer service policies might be. Sometimes distributors don't find out until it's too late that the company they placed an order with doesn't return correspondence as quickly as expected, or doesn't prepare imprint proofs as they should. It's hard enough to close sales, and if you're not on the same page as your supplier, it can complicate things even more.

*Action Step:* Place orders with dependable companies you know you can trust. You want to deal with customers *and* suppliers who are more focused on service than price. Make sure the suppliers you work with share your values so you're always happy with their service and you always know what to expect.

### **Customers Who Don't Pay on Time**

An order is never sold until it's paid for, so it's essential that you deal with people who pay in a timely fashion. The main problem with not getting paid is that it affects every aspect of your business. It curtails your cash flow, and the frustration of being ignored can rub off on everything you do.

*Action Step:* Employ a strict payment policy and stick to it. If new customers refuse to give you a deposit or provide you with credit references, be prepared to walk away from the order. That's better than never getting paid.

### **Salespeople Who Leave**

Salespeople come and go. If they find success, they may leave to start their own company. While it's the nature of the business, you may become stressed knowing someone who once worked for you has become your competitor.

Never overreact when one of your salespeople moves on to start their own distributorship. It happens all the time. Just be happy for that person. Talented salespeople can't be held down, and when someone leaves, do the best you can to hold that book of business. If you can't, don't worry about the situation.

*Action Step:* Refrain from hiring salespeople too quickly in an effort to expand your business. There are many things you can do to streamline your processes and allow yourself additional selling time. Get your distributorship firing on all cylinders first, and hire cautiously if you need to.

### **When Stress Happens**

No matter what steps you take to remain stress-free, some stressful situations will take place in your selling life at some point. Employ these steps to turn bad situations into opportunities to learn and grow your business:

#### **1. Find out what they want to do.**

Ask the client what resolution would be best from his or her point of view. This defuses the situation and reveals a possible solution. Quick action always makes for better outcomes in the long run.

#### **2. Don't be defensive.**

Refrain from lashing out in a hostile manner, because the only thing that does is make you feel worse about the situation. Always take your customer's side, even if you know they were at fault. Say you understand how he or she feels, and provide assurance that you're working toward a resolution that is suitable for both parties. When you empathize with customers, they're more likely to see your point of view.

I tell my clients that no matter whose fault it was, I'm going to fix it. The fact that I employ this policy always builds goodwill and makes me stand out in the eyes of my customers.

**3. Control the situation.**

Losing control of any situation can cause stress. Stay in control by learning all the pertinent facts of the situation, and you'll be better able to solve problems and keep stress in check.

To operate your business effectively and to make sure that you're able to enjoy your profession, make every effort to keep stressful occurrences from happening in the first place. When unavoidable problems come up, take the necessary steps to solve problems quickly. By doing so, your career in sales will not only be more profitable, but more enjoyable, too.

## **Chapter 11: Four Profitable Markets**

To be successful, you must have the ability to determine which markets are best to call on now and in the future. I want to focus on four markets you should be thinking about today.

### **Market 1: Real Estate**

**Current Status:** Nearly always good! Realtors and commercial listing agents have sufficient funds available to spend on marketing.

**Opportunity:** Contact realtors and tell them that you can help them acquire additional listings by working with them to design an effective mailing program. By implementing a targeted mailing plan that features a compelling promotional item, they can acquire more listings and find interested buyers.

**Marketing Plan:** Show realtors eco-friendly seed cards that they can mail to residents in their work area. Seed cards include a removable insert that's embedded with wildflower seeds. The recipient can soak the insert in water overnight, plant it in soil and watch a beautiful plant grow. Everyone loves these cards, and they draw positive attention among sellers who want to list their homes. Plus, they're more unique than magnets, key tags and mugs that customers have seen a hundred times before.

**My Experience:** All the realtors who purchased seed cards from me saw increases in quality listings, not to mention several buyers for their current properties.

Other product suggestions:

- Reflective products that promote child safety
- Useful kitchen items like hot pads and cutting boards

### **Market 2: Non-profits**

**Current Status:** Non-profits are always in need of donations and volunteers.

**Opportunity:** Most agencies are good at running capital campaigns, but they tend to come up short with smaller fundraising ideas. Help them accomplish both goals.

**Marketing Plan:** Show them T-shirts and caps they can give to people in return for donations. I sell these products in quantities of 250 pieces for \$5 to non-profits, who in turn give them to donors in return for contributions of \$20.

**My Experience:** The best way to establish relationships with non-profits is to become a volunteer. I have sold many orders to the charities I volunteered for as well as the other volunteers who own their own business.

Other products suggestions clients can sell during charity walks:

- Water bottles
- Bags

- Sweatshirts

Or to thank volunteers:

- Custom die-cast, color-filled lapel pins

### **Market 3: Construction**

Current Status: Contractors are increasingly interested in safety programs.

Opportunity: All construction companies want to decrease the amount of money they pay their insurance carrier for workmen's compensation insurance. Selling safety programs builds long-term customer relationships and leads to numerous repeat orders!

Marketing Plan: Approach personnel managers at construction companies and describe how handing out promotional items to employees like shirts, caps, coolers and jackets will increase their desire to avoid accidents.

My Experience: In one safety program I sold, the customer paid \$55,000 in a year's time for wearables and coolers they gave to personnel as rewards for working accident-free during two-week pay periods. These employees were so motivated that accidents reported to the insurance company decreased 60% by year's end. The insurance carrier refunded the client \$255,000. After deducting my fee, the company netted a yearly savings of \$200,000.

With this track record and a copy of the customer's refund check, I visited 10 other large contractors and sold four other safety programs, ranging from \$35,000 to \$70,000.

### **Market 4: Banks**

Current Status: The number of smaller banks is growing, and most are locally owned, which makes it much easier to sell them than medium to large institutions.

Opportunity: Banks need promotions in order to increase their number of depositors, write more loans and sell retirement planning services to consumers.

Marketing Plan: Suggest giving puzzle pieces drive-thru window customers. These pieces will encourage them to visit the lobby and find out if their piece fits a master puzzle. If it does, they win a prize or a free savings bond.

My Experience: A recent order that I sold to a bank was inspired by their desire to increase awareness for branch locations. The client holds tailgate parties during TCU football games, and they wanted to give away an item to their guests that they would enjoy and then take home. One of my competitors showed them rally towels, which they were about to purchase until I showed them my pick: popcorn megaphones.

The bank preferred the megaphones to the towels because they were available in TCU purple, and they could be imprinted with the school's logo as well as their own. I knew the megaphones were a big success because they were all gone in just three hours.



The item created exposure the bank needed, and the next week they were inundated with calls from people wanting a megaphone of their own.

Other product suggestions:

- Lip balm
- Anti-Microbial pens
- Lunch sacks
- Nail files – double-sided imprinting; great cost per impression!

To stay in front of competitors, you have to stay current with buying markets. That means you must be able to determine who the current buyers are and what markets to pursue next!

## Chapter 12: Final Thoughts

You are probably entering the promo world for the opportunity to make a lot of money, and that certainly can happen. This is your chance to meet people from all over the world, create lifelong colleagues and keep those connections forever. Through attending shows, you'll travel to great places, learn about a new industry and develop a new passion. If you're working for yourself, you'll experience the excitement of being your own boss. If employed by a large distributor, you'll learn amazing lessons from others. It will be what you make of it: this is one of the few professions where the more you put into it, the more you get out of it—which you'll see immediately. Hard work *actually* pays.

You must love what you do. Being in sales has many challenges and is not for everyone, and that's something you can really take pride in. It's hard work, but the satisfaction you get out of it is something you'll never find in any other line of work, so get started today!

## **New Distributor FAQ**

### **How do I find good suppliers?**

Start by checking them out on Distributor Central and attending trade shows. You can also ask peers who they buy from and find out which suppliers garner the most industry awards.

### **How do I compete with established distributors?**

It's extremely difficult to compete head-on with long-established distributors, so don't try to do so right away. Instead, concentrate on calling on people you know, such as friends and smaller entities. Once you establish yourself, you can take on the big boys.

### **Do I need to work for a large distributor to compete?**

No. Some people don't believe they can be successful unless they offer the bells and whistles that large companies offer, but that's not true. Working for a large firm will not guarantee you a place in the industry. What will get you going is focusing on the basics: personality, tenacity, creativity and honesty.

### **How do I build a credit rating?**

Frequency and reliability. Never demand that suppliers extend credit to you if you have never placed an order with them. Start by placing orders with them over a period of time. Pay the orders in full with a credit card initially, and after that, ask them to allow you to charge half up front and put the balance on the back end.

### **Can I work from home?**

Yes. Since I've been in the industry, I have sold more than \$25 million worth of products from a home-based business. Having a showroom is good for some people, but never feel that you can't be successful if you have a home office!

There are thousands of people who operate successful distributorships out of their homes. Nearly all of them say it's convenient and profitable. If you decide to work from your home, the most important thing is discipline. To maintain a home-based enterprise, you must keep things in order – both from organizational and mental standpoints.

### **How do I get new customers?**

Network, network, network! By attending Chamber of Commerce mixers, ribbon cuttings and other weekly community events, I constantly meet new people and promote my business. I mail out a quarterly bounce-back card offering a nice gift to businesses in my area and I personally visit each person who mails it back. But they don't get the gift unless they are willing to see me!

### **Is finding new customers easy?**

Not at all. Remember, the art of prospecting and selling requires a great deal of both persistence and patience. Hang in there and refine your skills. Finding new customers will get easier and closing sales will become routine over time.