



AdamsonPVFSupply

BY JOAN ADAMS

No Kidding — Try Marketing

ask most PVF supply houses about their marketing plans, and you will get silence, nervous laughter or, “Marketing? Are you kidding?”

No kidding, marketing is important, even for supply houses. A simple marketing plan — with a budget, 3-month timetable and goals — will produce revenue. Market awareness can avert unpleasant surprises.

Marketing is your first contact with your customer. Advertising, the crew’s uniforms, the trucks, the Yellow Pages listing. Marketing consists of everything you do to make customers want to do business with you. Your company’s presentation determines how (and if) the customer remembers you.

Understanding your market will help you lead, not follow, as you anticipate and act on changes in the market. Nobody likes surprises — and with good market intelligence, you won’t have any.

Marketing is made up of internal and external components.

■ **Internal** — The internal component covers your company’s image, customer outreach, and promotion. Your message must be clear, forceful, and most important, consistent. Your audience is your existing and potential customers, even your suppliers and competition. Be aggressive. You need to send your company message not once, not twice, but continually.

■ **External** — The external component covers the market outside your warehouse: competitors, vendors, customers, new products/services, regulations, and technology. You can’t control them — but you can anticipate them. Understand the external and never be surprised.

Marketing consists of everything you do to make customers want to do business with you.

MARKETING IN YOUR SHOP

Marketing is important and it’s time you do something. Let’s start small and work on incorporating marketing into your business little by little.

INTERNAL MARKETING

Look at all your sales and marketing materials. What does your stationery look like? Your product sheets? Does everyone have business cards? What information is given to customers? Gather up all these materials, spread them out and take a hard look.

Dump ALL materials with old information: an old address, an incorrect phone number, a vendor or product line no longer represented, etc. Cleaning house won’t make you rich, but it will keep you from confusing and maybe even losing a customer.

Now take a look at what’s left. Is the logo the same on the stationery, business cards, product sheets, Web site, trucks? Are the colors and typefaces the same? All the information should be identical. Changes have been made along the way and now your promotional materials are a mixed bag. Pick the colors, the logo and the typeface. Make sure every time you reorder,

reprint or repaint that you use the “new consistent” look with up-to-date information. It sends a subtle but important message to the market — we are professionals.

Keep digging. What do your salespeople present to clients? Do they have a two-page brochure or an enormous package that lists every product you have in stock? Do salespeople have their “own” package of materials they like to present to clients? If so, it’s a good bet they are presenting very different messages to the market than you would like them to present.

Get consistent — all salespeople should have the following:

✓ **Two-page Brochure:** This brochure introduces the customer to your company, describes the services you offer and gives the customer the all-important information: address, phone numbers, fax number, e-mail address, contact name, emergency numbers, geography served, an overview of materials supplied, office hours, Web site address, etc. You don’t have one? Hire someone to write one for you.

✓ **Vendor/Product Sheets:** You should have one sheet that describes the broad categories of products you sell — within those categories list the vendors you represent. Additional product sheets can be made for specific product categories — steel valves, for example. Here you can list the vendors, the range of dimensions, steel specifications, the valve types and function.

✓ **The “Pitch” Sheet:** Your salespeople need some kind of document that clearly states your company’s advantage.



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This sheet tells your customers why they want to start or continue doing business with you. It should appear as a list of advantages on the left side and the benefits to the customer on the right.

EXAMPLE:

The Amazing PVF Co. Advantages

24-hour emergency delivery
\$3 million in inventory
Manage your inventory
Twice/week delivery

The Customer Benefits

Minimize downtime
No long lead times for parts
More space on-site
Regular parts delivery

You can go one more by estimating what each advantage means in time, effort and dollars. Create a third column called estimated savings, or avoided costs. Write up a list of 10 advantages. Get quotes from happy customers to fill out the rest of the sheet.

EXAMPLE:

"We had a valve go at 2 a.m. — Amazing PVF came in less than four hours with the replacement. Our guys had it installed before first shift started. We saved thousands of dollars in labor and stalled production."

Joe Thirdshift
Enormous Chemical Co.

✓ **Your Web Site:** The information in your brochure, your product sheets and your "pitch" sheet are the perfect materials for your Web site.

EXTERNAL MARKETING

Ask yourself — How well do you know the competition? The changing trends in the market? If vendor X went out of business, how badly would that hurt you?

You can't become an expert overnight — but you need to start. Your salespeople are your front line to the market and can find out what's going on. Who is offering what

services? Who competes on price? Your delivery crew goes to work sites every day. They see the other vendors' trucks. They can report what they see. Start collecting and analyzing this information.

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one — and READ them. Learn about the trends. The price of steel, copper and oil affects your market. Foreign PVF will have an impact on the market. What will it mean for you?

Jump-start your market intelligence. Hire someone to do a market study. Studies typically take about three

months and cost between \$25,000 — \$50,000. It's cheaper than hiring a marketing manager, and you will have a real good idea about what's going real fast.

To summarize:

- Promote your products, services and company with a powerful message. Keep it consistent and visible.
- Understand the PVF market and all the players. Be proactive and anticipate all surprises.

Start some marketing now — increase your revenues and reduce your risk. <<

Joan S. Adams has consulted for industrial clients for more than 15 years. She headed DITT, the consultancy arm of the French National Utility, Electricité de France, and was a managing consultant at A.T. Kearney. Later, she started Pierian, a consultancy that brings sustained and measurable success through operational excellence, customer focus, and competitive market strategy. Joan Adams speaks French and Spanish. She has worked on projects in Europe, Central America, Africa, Asia as well as North America. She has engineering degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and MIT. She also has an MBA from the Wharton School. She can be reached at adams@pierian.net.