

How To Get More Customers

By Fred Lebow

One of the biggest challenges embroiderers face, especially newcomers, is how to find customers. What I have observed from my decades of being in this industry is that having a niche market is the best thing that an embroiderer can do. Good examples include horse shows, dog shows, car shows, etc. People love their animals and will pay almost anything for embroidered items with their names and photos. Quite a few embroiderers buy portable machines to take to these types of shows.

The Brother PR620 embroidery machine is self threading and at 82 lbs is quite portable. It also has an integrated control panel with lettering and editing software.

Neo Plus, distributed by Hirsch, has a very large sewing field. The Melco Amaya and the Happy Voyager also are fine portable machines as well as the Barudan Elite. (I do not mean to exclude others.) With this type of portable machine, embroiderers can sew names and other things onsite at the show.

In terms of attracting a corporate niche, you must be flexible enough to deal with individual customers, their needs and turnaround times. This leads to the next marker of success for an embroiderer, which is good, competent, and timely customer service.

Focus On Quality, Not Quantity

One of the most important ingredients to success is quality! Someone will always come in with lower pricing. If you lose a customer but maintain your quality standards, they will probably come back to you. Strive for the highest quality embroidery that you can possibly do.

Another thought to keep in mind is that good digitizing is paramount – you get what you pay for. Beware of cheap digitizing. Proper digitizing saves production time by way of less trims and proper densities. A lack of proper design routing will cost you money. Good stabilizers can only go so far in compensating for poor digitizing. It is difficult and sometimes not possible to overcome digitizing flaws.

Always use only the best accessories – thread, backings, lubricants, needles etc. Maintain your machines and watch speed and tensions. Use only the best stabilizers because they are the foundation upon which good embroidery rests. Using a good-quality stabilizer is cheaper in the long run. One layer of the proper weight stabilizer is all that you should need per embroidery application. Good stabilizers also are needle and sewing friendly.

Target Your Marketing

Targeted marketing is always more effective than shotgun methods. By targeting a group, such as ad agencies this makes creating a marketing plan easier.

The first step is to identify advertising agencies in your area. Your local phone book will be a handy resource for that as well as the Internet. Google is an especially useful tool for gathering information. Put together a list and gather as much information about each company as you can.

Specifically, you will want to find out the name of the president or owner who is in charge of making a decision about purchasing embroidered apparel. Also try and find out the size of the company such as its annual sales and number of employees. For larger companies, you want to find out if it's divided into departments. In this case, you may want to contact more than one person in the company about your services as each department head may make decisions for

its roster of clients.

By knowing a little bit about the company and who its clients are, this gives you clues as to what styles of shirts to present and what the company's budget may be. This info is invaluable as you make choices about what materials to include in your package. For upscale companies you'll want to show higher-quality shirts and examples and for smaller companies, you may choose more value-priced apparel.

The next step is to put together a package of materials to send to each company on your list. This package should include a brief letter explaining who you are and what you do. If you have any printed literature such as a brochure or flier showing examples of your work and a list of your services, that would be ideal to include. You might also include a digital art guide, an explanation of digitizing services and costs, and your pricing.

Assuming you are sending to a list of between five and 20 companies, it would be well worth the time to customize each kit to the potential client. Address the letter of introduction with the president's name. Refer to the client's company by name when you discuss what you can do for the client, etc. If you are not able to determine the president's name via the Internet, typically a quick call to the main number asking for this information gets you what you need. Be sure it's spelled right!

If you have done work for well-known clients in the past, now's the time to do a little name dropping. A brag sheet with testimonials is ideal, but if that's not available, create a list of companies you are already doing business with. And make a note to start asking your best customers to shoot you a testimonial via e-mail for future promotion purposes.

If possible, it's nice to show photos of past clients' logoed apparel jobs. Again, if you haven't been holding on to samples to show off and/or photographing jobs before you send them out the door; add this to your to-do list so you will have these valuable resources for future marketing ventures.

You also may want to include either a catalog showing styles you offer or style sheets from particular vendors of shirts you think might appeal to this client.

To maximize the effectiveness of your sales package, you should include a sewout of the client's logo or to take it one step further, sew it on a shirt. You would only take this much time and effort for clients you were the most interested in attracting. Otherwise, pick a good example of a logo or even your own logo and include it as a sewout to show the quality of your work.

Once you have decided on the contents of your package, then you must decide on the "wrapping." You want to project an image of professionalism so keep this in mind when choosing. A low-budget method is to buy pocket folders from an office supply store and decorate them with company stickers with your logo and contact info. You also will want to insert your business card on the inside.

The next level might be to have folders custom designed and printed. If you will be doing ongoing marketing throughout the year, consider have 500 to 1,000 folders printed that you can use for not only sales marketing efforts, but to send out to the media, and to present to any new clients who are asking about embroidery. Once you have them, you may be surprised at how handy they become and how helpful in presenting a professional image. Don't flinch at the cost. You might pay for the entire order of folders with one or two jobs from a national advertising agency.

A third option would be to get really creative and come up with a box, a bag, or some other

type of container that would attract curiosity and demand to be opened. A tote bag with your company logo embroidered on it also serves as a sales piece advertising your work. There are promotional products companies that specialize in packaging and they can assist you in coming up with a truly unique idea that will greatly increase the attention your message receives when delivered.

If you are going to deliver your sales packages in person, then you will have no limitations in how it's packaged. If you are going to mail your packages, obviously postal regulations will have to be kept in mind as well as the cost.

Once your packages are delivered, wait about a week and then start your follow-up calls. Your ultimate goal is to obtain an appointment where you can meet your prospective client in person and present your sales message.

The secret to getting an appointment is to avoid telling a customer what a great deal you can give him. Companies hear this spiel all the time. Don't try to sell on price. Impress upon your advertising agency prospect that you can help him and his customers develop the right business image through professional, fashionable embroidered apparel.

You want to start out the conversation asking the prospect if he is already using an embroiderer and if he's happy with the quality and service he is receiving. Try to find out about his needs in terms of types of apparel, size of orders, and embroidery. Find out if the company has any needs that are not being met to its satisfaction and emphasize your company's abilities to provide top quality and service as well as quick turnarounds. You might also mention that you can provide embroidered apparel to fit any budget.

Your goal is to set up a full-scale appointment; however, if the client seems resistant to your pitch, you may want to wait before trying to nail down the meeting. However, if you get positive feedback, don't hesitate to try and schedule a convenient time right then and now.

If your prospect has an embroidery source he is happy with, request that he keep you in mind in a pinch when perhaps the regular source is overbooked or on vacation at a critical time. Or perhaps the corporation's needs grow beyond its current source's capabilities.

Obviously, not every call is going to result in an appointment, but don't let yourself get rattled if the answer is no. Keep track of each call you make and the results and then go on down the list until you've called each prospect. You might even make a note to do another follow-up call in a couple of months. Sometimes, you are simply calling at a bad time and you will find a second call nets you results. This marketing method is a tried and true way of building up sales. It does work and it will get you started on your goal of acquiring more advertising agency customers.

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