



LEFT Understanding the modern paper market could make you as happy as this family.

BREAD AND BUTTER

It is interesting to reflect that we rely on paper so much in our everyday lives that it could be likened to a commodity such as bread or butter.

BY JANE SMITH

Almost everything we do, especially in business, results in paper!

And as far as the paperless office is concerned, I think we can all now accept that this will never happen. In fact, quite the reverse is happening with personal computers and printers encouraging us to produce more paper than ever before. Paper consumption is growing all the time and seems to be closely correlated to general economic trends.

With that in mind, it isn't a surprise to realise that paper is a very important aspect of an office products dealer's business.

But it is also important to remember that there is not just a mass market out there. There are always those customers that will buy on price and price alone, but others can be persuaded that price is only one consideration.

There are two areas that a dealer can use to move customers away from price. One aspect is branding. Market differentiation is possible through branding as it can offer a service concept and appeal to the consumers' emotions. It also provides an opportunity to offer a good/better/best scenario at the basic level of the market.

The other area and perhaps more in the control of the dealer is what the customer is trying to achieve with the paper he buys. Offering the right solution to your customer's needs is key and will result in a satisfied customer and the avoidance of selling on price alone at unsustainable margins.

The most fundamental question of all has to be what is the paper being used for?

The bulk of most companies' printing needs is mono, laser printed, single sided printouts from individual's PCs or multiple copies through a photocopier. The documentation tends to be for internal use and is needed on

a short term basis. In this situation a good quality standard grade will cope. As the demands of what the paper is being used for increase so does the quality of the paper.

Most branded papers will now carry details of the types of equipment and uses they guarantee, most with different symbols for the same thing, but the important ones to look for are the laser and inkjet guarantee. It's true that some laser guaranteed papers are not good on inkjet printers and vice versa but the bulk of quality grades now cover both applications.

A growing range of weights, sizes and surfaces are now available to cope with the growing demands of colour printing where the type of paper used can make all the difference between a great result and a disaster! In terms of the growth in colour printing, the conclusion of the experts is that this sector will grow and grow with colour toners becoming increasingly more popular and affordable. For the time being though inkjet is still the predominant technology for printing colour and therefore it is important to choose a good quality paper with the right weight. If the ink coverage is high then a much heavier weight of paper is needed to avoid show through and the paper crinkling when it dries.

There is also now a wide choice of coated, uncoated, matt and glossy papers to choose from and this can also have considerable influence over the impression of quality a document gives and the cost to produce it. The Conqueror brand is an example of that, where a very deep range means a choice for

the customer to suit whatever company style or tone of communication.

Product knowledge is a key aspect of being in a position to sell more than just commodity grade papers. If a salesperson understands what goes into a paper and what that does for the finished job, it adds value to his or her sales approach. The paper merchants understand this all too well and are very willing to offer their own training programmes for dealers to help them. After all it is in their interests too because they want as diverse a market as possible with the opportunity to sell up where possible.

There are two further areas relating to paper where the same philosophy can be applied. The first, and often treated as a poor relation, is that of notebooks and pads. We tend again to focus only on the commodity end of the market where it is down to price alone for a faint ruled 80 sheet memo pad. But there are some good opportunities to offer a better solution. What is the customer using the pad for? If it is external use or for confidential

notetaking then something with a cover would be more appropriate. For 'wear and tear' reasons a hardback book might do a better job. Think outside the box a bit. These may be very boring, mundane products but there are still opportunities to make more margin.

The other area to mention is the arts and crafts market.

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Relatively new, but growing at a tremendous rate this is an area of potential revenue that is definitely worth a look.

In the arts and craft market, paper, card and board is fantastically exciting, the immense collections of colours and surfaces available today offer even the most discerning artist or crafter something new almost daily. Tollit & Harvey has been working hard in this area for a while and now say they are seeing it "take off". They have an energetic new product development policy and have added substantial ranges to their portfolio consistently throughout 2005. From British made cartridge papers to Italian made pastel paper and handmade paper from India they are introducing variety from around the world to continually provide dealers with something new to help them differentiate from their larger competitors and be relevant to their customers. A lot of dealers will not have ventured into this area yet, so it certainly looks to be worthy of some further investigation. ■