



FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT!

From as far back as I can remember, I was always told that first impressions count and was made to polish my shoes, comb my hair and stand up straight!

But that advice has held true and whether we like it or not first impressions really do count. What's the saying? You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

BY JANE SMITH

Along with the technology revolution in the mid 80's and the explosion of the world-wide-web people spoke of the paperless office and we all thought that our appetite for the printed, written word would be overtaken by digital and virtual alternatives. Although millions of emails are exchanged every day, most tend to be of the 'unofficial' information variety where speed is important. When it comes to 'official' communications such as a prospect or letters of introduction, presentations or quotations we are still more impressed by the physical presence of a hard copy.

Paper is still very much big business and over recent years has become a very sophisticated commodity. As we all know 'bog standard' copier paper is a mature market offering low margins and plenty of headaches. It's very competitive and an important spend to most of your customers.

For you it's a necessary evil. But there are opportunities to up-sell and range-sell where there is definitely growth and an important opportunity to make more money.

The move towards colour and reproducing high quality pictures and photographs is being driven to a large extent by businesses' need to get noticed and to deliver the right impression to their prospects and customers. In turn this is leading to an increase in the demand for application specific papers. Using the right paper gives the right results and maximizes the performance of the printer.



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Andy Broad at Xerox told us that the market for A4 paper in the UK in 2002 was a staggering 700,000 tonnes that's 280 million reams! And 5% of that is application specific and growing. That's the specialist finish papers like photo glossy, matt and the higher weights designed to give that extra special 'feel' and impression with great print results. He also went on to say that it's important to understand what printers are capable of, demonstrate this to customers and in that way promote the use of a range of different papers for different uses.

Similarly Sarah Flower, Brand Manager for Conqueror, manufactured by ArjoWiggins explained that 'increasingly sales teams are taking on more of an advisory role. In this capacity they can inspire their customers' imaginations by suggesting appropriate products to enhance a company's image and complementary products and uses. 'This could be anything from promoting a metallic range for eye-catching CVs or Press Reseases, to using i

ridescent finish paper for party invitations or stunning menus' she said.

Whilst the volume of application specific paper may still be a lot lower, the margin potential is much, much higher.

Whether you're speaking to Xerox or ArjoWiggins or any of the other key players such as Antalis, Howard Smith, Premier Paper, Talk Paper or Neusiedler the message and theme seems to be the same. Continue to operate only at the 'bog standard' end of the market and you'll be losing out on a growing market and higher margins. OEMs such as HP, Canon and Epson are also 'cashing in' on the action with an ever developing range of application specific papers.

But don't be restricted just by what is getting printed off the printer. Ask questions about envelopes, business cards and complement slips. As Sarah points out ' there are great opportunities through cross-selling'. And it's true, by selling a solution to provide a customer with their complete range of matching and co-ordinating business stationery you can be instrumental in helping them make their first impressions count!

Finally, the finishing touches to documentation destined for the postbag. How documents arrive in the post can also have a bearing on first impressions. Using the right size envelope, letters neatly and squarely folded etc. is not an obvious area but one that could be quite lucrative to you. Mailroom equipment such as folding machines and franking

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machines not only boost efficiency but also ensure that mail is dispatched to an optimum quality standard. Franking machines also provide the opportunity to reinforce a company's image with the option to include a logo or message within the franking process.

Pitney Bowes, a leading manufacturer of mailroom equipment recently carried out a First Impressions Count Image Survey. In their Executive Summary they explain that findings amongst small businesses show that they care about the image they project. They value being perceived as 'reliable', 'efficient', 'friendly' and 'caring'. However they are not making best use of the promotional tools and business practices that could improve those impressions. And the ones they are using - in particular the post - are not working hard enough for them. Could this be another opportunity for you?

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