



# MARGIN & PROFIT

Keep your sales strategy sharp to be successful.

BY JANE SMITH

**Office life has been gradually changing for some time but has your sales strategy?**

## THE TRENDS

The UK's economy has moved further and further away from manufacturing and into service industries. More of us are 'on the move', mobile working and working at home and these days most homes have a PC and printer. People are beginning to talk about 50 year mortgages and as a result more of us can look forward to longer working lives.

## GOVERNMENT INFLUENCES

Legislation is fast changing our working environment too, with various EU directives including areas of Health and Safety, Access and Disability, Data Protection, Waste

Packaging and the latest WEEE directives. To comply with these directives will involve spending on office related products.

We are also being encouraged to be 'greener' and to re-use and recycle more. It is no longer considered 'trendy' or 'extravagant' for organisations to proactively look for ways to operate with a strong environmental policy. It is now considered 'best practice'.

## WELL BEING

Another important factor to influence our working lives is the realisation that healthy, motivated and happy employees lead to higher productivity and lower absenteeism and other 'hidden' costs within organisations. Putting employees in control of their environment and providing the means to work efficiently are important to companies and good, well-

equipped offices are part of that.

So, what does all of this mean to you? Well it's time to have a rethink — time to put these elements into a sales and marketing strategy that can improve your margin and profit. All too often we're spending too much time defending the 'bread and butter' business of selling pens and pads and forgetting the added value sales opportunities that are presented to us. The principles of single source supply are not new, but perhaps the way in which this proposition is communicated is outdated. Yes, you still want to be seen as a one-stop shop. After all, if you're delivering to a business, the higher the value of the order, the more profitable the 'drop' becomes. But perhaps we're moving away from the arguments of compliance and volume related pricing and more towards the delivery of a 'best price'





Next month we'll continue to look at product opportunities and look into account review strategies to improve your 'bottom line'.

office solution taking into account all aspects of a company's office and employees needs.

Running an office these days is really quite complex. Whilst there are still offices out there that comprise desks, chairs, PCs, stationery cupboard and a token plastic plant in the corner, many are changing to encompass all of the facets of office life described above. This surely must give you the opportunity to sell 'whole' solutions. That's probably what most customers are looking for — someone who can answer their problems. Of course they'll be expecting value for money but some of the areas outlined above will lead to sales of products where price is less obvious and margins are still healthy.

#### **How can the emerging 'new office' environment be turned into margin and profit?**

We've covered mobile and home working in USP before and there are some good opportunities. Digital dicta-

tion is a big area that has seen a revival because this newer technology lends itself beautifully to executives on the move. There's good sales growth in laptops, laptop cases, and mobile communication equipment, including headsets for hands-free driving, telephony and things like memory sticks.

And what about all those PCs and printers at home? Who's funding them and what are they being used for? Is there a way you can put together a 'package' for your customer to capture these sales to stop the likes of the high street stores from 'eating your lunch'? I know you might be thinking that organisations are not going to want to fund people's private consumables use, but what about offering a staff discount scheme? Looking at the prices on offer in the high street you'll still see a margin and costs will remain the same because you'd be delivering to the one location anyway? It's a thought.

Another important product category that covers both the home and mobile working aspect as well as touching on

the new Data Protection legislation is of course shredders. Offices everywhere need them! And with data theft very much on the increase and in the headlines it's surely time to talk to your customers about the benefits.

In fact, when it comes to legislation and how offices comply, you can start to uncover a whole list of related products that can be put forward. Firstly there's the products relating to the use of display equipment, where an assessment can highlight the need for all manner of products including screen filters, copyholders, monitor risers, footrests, wristrests and backrests. Then there are the new provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995. These come into effect on 1st October this year and all employers must comply. Designed to end the discrimination that many disabled people face, the most relevant aspect of this Act for dealers is 'access to goods, facilities and services'. It means that if somebody should request a catalogue, product guide or instruction manual in

Braille, large format print, tape, email or disk one will be legally obliged to find a way of providing it. Health and safety in general has seen its profile raised considerably over recent years and products to help compliance can be as simple as wet floor signs, directional signs, accident books and first aid kits.

Companies' environmental policies are important to you too. In this respect there are opportunities for you to help them achieve their company objectives and continuous improvement targets. Whether it's helping them switch their paper to a recycled variety or the use of compatible and/or remanufactured laser and inkjet consumables, either can provide a significant opportunity to claw back a few margin points. Recycling schemes are also becoming more popular and the new WEEE directive will further fuel this need. Whilst this could initially be seen as a cost to you it may also provide an ideal opportunity to add value as far as your customer is concerned and 'lock out' any competition. ■