

WHAT'S

New

What's in store for 2006? What's in the catalogues and what are the opportunities?

BY JANE SMITH

While news in the city is of success and big bonuses for those working in the money markets, it has been a very different story in the world of office products. Last year was one of the toughest trading periods for quite a long while. Trade overall has been down and there is massive competition. In fact, one could argue that there is a situation of oversupply.

With the market depressed new products coming onto it can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand new products help stimulate demand while on the other they might contribute towards fragmenting sales and oversupply. New products however should be viewed positively at this time of year

as they do give us all the excuse to talk to customers about something new. And, because the products are new there should be no issues over price – which is always a good thing and can hold up sales targets and margins. So what kinds of new products can we expect to see for 2006?

Having spoken to lots of manufacturers, we are seeing a common theme coming through, a focus on added value! Cheap imports have become common-place in the commodity sectors of the market and rather than continue to focus on competing at this level manufacturers are choosing to move away from these basic products and concentrating on providing products that have added

features and benefits or address specific market niche areas making price the least important aspect of the 'sell'. This, in turn, helps resellers maximise their potential and provide new opportunities to add to their sales volumes and in some instances break into new product categories and/or woo new customers.

We have tried to find some examples of new products that we think are 'winners'. We are by no means the final authority on such matters but we hope they will spark your thinking into what opportunities are out there for your individual business. They by no means represent the full spectrum of new products, as this would run into the thousands. What we would recommend is that, over and above those mentioned

here, it would be prudent to take the time to look at your suppliers and in your new catalogue to pick out products that you believe would be relevant to your customer base.

The boring world of filing just got more lucrative! January is normally the time when the paperwork from the previous year gets dealt with as companies prepare for the New Year ahead. Papers either get filed away, archived or possibly shredded. We found two examples of new and innovative lever arch file products:

Leitz have introduced a new 180-degree Lever Arch File. Everyone knows how difficult it can be to insert and extract documents from a Lever Arch File especially when it is nearly full.

This product features an ergonomic, patented lever mechanism with a slide shoe, which allows the lever to be lifted through 180 degrees, giving a 50% wider opening, making filing up to 20% faster because you can file both sides and it can take larger amounts of paper in one go.

Kokuyo, supplied by BDS Supreme, has also introduced a great new filing friend. Called the Jumbo Spacebinder it is more than an ordinary Lever Arch File. It can hold a massive 700 sheets and has an S lock mechanism to maximise capacity and a secure feature to lock the rings together.

Hobby and Craft products are set to be a great sales and profit opportunity for 2006. More and more manufacturers are introducing new ranges including Tollit & Harvey and Esselte who has expanded its Xyron range.

A great new niche is a new Roltech paper roll for portable thermal printers with 25% more capacity. According to statistics from APACS, 112 million Chip and Pin cards have now been issued. In

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July 2005 there were 240 million PIN transactions, which equates to 89 per second. This clearly demonstrates the opportunity for paper rolls.

Talking of niche opportunities – ever thought of compatible copier toners! It wasn't so long ago our industry didn't think we could sell EOS – now it represents over 50% of our sales. Also 10 years ago we didn't think we'd be selling coffee and cleaning products. Now FM is an important category. So it will be with Copier Toner Cartridges. Did

you know that over 40% of copiers and multi-function machines are not on a 'cost per page' contract for supplies? So, you can start offering a 100% guaranteed compatible product.

Image is always an opportunity in those companies where first impressions count and we have found a number of items worth a look. First is the new range of Zero Series Staplers and Punches from Rapesco, which the company describes as 'powerful, beautiful, distinctive and revolutionary'. Not only do they look good they also come with a whopping 10-year guarantee. DURABLE is in the image market too now with its new VEGAS range of desk accessories. A new tape dispenser and penholder are two great additions to the range. Another new stylish introduction is the WORKPAD, an innovative 2in1 desk mat and mouse pad that's capable of storing important information.

As well as image, there is also a new growing trend towards mobile and remote working. To address this Allura from Esselte has been introduced. It is

the first comprehensive series of desktop filing products, incorporating plastic moulded desk accessories, staplers and perforators and a range of mobile filing in one highly designed range.

Finally, let's not forget that there are also good opportunities to promote the 'new improved' products that are important to keep existing and traditional categories going. Bostik is an example of this where they are constantly innovating, for example with their recent introduction of glue dots. John Dickinson is also keen to ensure that its traditional books and pads keep up with new working practices. For example the new Black 'n' Red Smart collection is a range of four new notebooks featuring the smart ruling system. Designed for organised note taking, there is a left-hand column for bullets or numbering and two right-hand columns for actions and deadlines.

New products are the lifeblood of our industry. We should embrace them, be positive in the New Year and get out to customers to talk about them. ■