



Sales/Marketing Strategies

Q: How do I create a sound, robust marketing plan – that won't take up a lot of my production time – on a budget?

■ **Determine your market.** First and foremost, identify your intended market so your limited resources are being used as efficiently as possible. “Start to target and make your products accordingly,” says Henry Bernstein, North American director of SEIT Laser at Hirsch International. “If you're taking a broad marketing approach, what happens when you have no plan is you wander aimlessly trying to figure out how and where to market.”

■ **Create a schedule.** “One of the strategies that we employed involved a committed schedule of marketing,” says Jenni Cox, founder of National Network of Embroidery Professionals. “By that, I mean on Tuesdays from 9 a.m. until 11:30 a.m., I did telemarketing – period. I didn't answer the phone, open e-mail, talk to employees or order inventory, and I didn't touch a hoop.” Cox discovered that when she dedicated appointment time to herself and made her company her client, her marketing efforts were much more effective.

■ **Get published.** “With a limited budget, I'd attempt to get articles placed in a local newspaper or magazine,” says Ken Thoreson, president of Acumen Management Group. “If there's a local business magazine or business journal that's published, decorators should get to know the writer or publisher and show them some unique products, and try to get the products highlighted so they'll write an article about them.”

Q: How do I sell more decorated apparel to existing clients who say their budgets are drying up?

■ **Be creative.** “The key here is that you have to be more creative and show how the end-buyers are going to sell the product, or come up with creative ideas to help the buyer do a better job of marketing their company,” Thoreson says. For example, instead of taking the standard types of products to a sales presentation, come up with one or two campaign ideas with unique products for growing your client's business and explain how the campaign and products fit into that strategy.

■ **Diversify.** Offer different decorating techniques in a variety of price ranges. “For example, if a customer is already buying embroidered articles for \$15, it should be very easy for you to show them an additional program of direct-to-garment printing for under \$10,” Bernstein says. “Price is relative to the situation; however, direct-to-gar-

ment is more profitable at a lower price point.”

■ **Ask probing questions.** Instead of trying to sell your client the same thing they've always bought, really investigate to find out what their needs are and sell to their needs – rather than yours. “You need to have an effective conversation with them about what they're trying to accomplish,” Cox says. “When you shift gears, your value to the customer improves dramatically because you're helping them to address a marketing or sales concern that's keeping them awake at night.”

Q: How do I start selling more vertically in niche markets that I already sell into?

■ **Collect testimonials.** First, you need a list of the people you've already sold to and what your product has done for them. “That allows other people who haven't bought from you to penetrate your inventory more fully,” Thoreson says. “If you say, ‘People in the gun industry have used my product,’ they'll know someone who knows someone who works in that industry.”

“The number one thing in getting paid on time is billing on time. Many small businesses get behind on their billing; therefore, they get behind in collecting. Billing is just as important as getting the sale.”

Jim Weter, United Thread

■ **Do some research.** “Look at industry publications, newsletters and Web sites, plus magazines in the niche markets, and see who's advertising in them – then see what kinds of products you can create that dovetail with the ads,” Cox says. “If they're still advertising, they're still selling. If they're not selling, those ads are gone.”

■ **Add to your product line.** This is where decorators have it easier than business owners in other industries. “You can do promotional products or screen printing, or you can add appliqué – there's a thousand things you can add,” says Anna Johnson, owner of Super Embroidery and Screen Printing. “The easiest way to get more business is to sell more stuff. It's good to give customers things they can use. You can get pens and notepads. Magnets are good. Let them know what you do; if you don't tell them, they'll forget, because they have busy lives.” Aim to be a one-stop shop for your customers by offering decorated apparel and accessories, along with other advertising specialty products.