



Community Papers of Michigan

INFORMER

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Jon Jacobs

DECEMBER 6, 2016

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OF YOUR VISIONARY GUIDANCE AND
UNDAUNTING LEADERSHIP WHILE SERVING AS
COMMUNITY PAPERS OF MICHIGAN
PRESIDENT
2014 - 2016

Your dedication and devotion to preserving the principles and ideals that CPM was founded on, along with fostering new ideas which has taken our association to the next level for the good of all CPM members, will forever positively impact this association.

On behalf of CPM's Board of Directors, the Executive Director and the entire membership, we thank you for your service.

 **Community Papers of Michigan**

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Community Papers of Michigan Elects Don Rush as New President



From Left: Fred Jacobs, Don Rush, Bettie Watson, George Moses, Marty Bennett, Elaine Myers, Terry Roby, Jon Jacobs, Wes Smith, Jack Guza

East Lansing, Mich., December 13, 2016 - Community Papers of Michigan (CPM) recently conducted their election of Board Officers, and elected Don Rush to serve as president to lead the association for a three-year term. The election took place during CPM's final board meeting of 2016, conducted at the Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center located on the Michigan State University Campus, East Lansing.

Rush is the assistant publisher of Sherman Publications, Inc. (S.P.I.) based in Oxford and oversees day-to-day operations at S.P.I.'s office in Clarkston. Sherman Publications publishes four community newspapers, The Clarkston News, The Oxford Leader, The Lake Orion Review and The Citizen in Ortonville; as well as two shoppers, The Penny Stretcher and The Ad-Vertiser, and a 50,000-plus circulation coupon magazine, The Big Deal. The publishing group serves communities, advertisers

and readers within northeastern Oakland County and beyond. Rush grew up in Clarkston, resides in Goodrich and has two teenaged sons, Shamus and Sean.

Rush pens a weekly column, 'Don't Rush Me', which has won awards both in the state and nationally; he has also received awards for feature and editorial writing and photography. He has worked in all aspects of the community paper industry, including circulation, dark room work, page design and ad composition, managing a sales department, and working on a five-unit Community Goss press as a "printer's devil".

"Mr. James Sherman, Sr. hired me right after I graduated from Central Michigan University, as a reporter. Soon I was promoted to editor of The Leader, then to assistant publisher. Mr. Sherman said of my new title, 'You are now a publisher. That means getting a quality product out the door, on time and at a profit. How you

figure that out is your problem.' So, I got that going for me." Rush continued, "It will be an honor to work for the industry. Contrary to popular belief, the print industry is a viable business model. Print publications work at getting local news and advertising to readers. I think my job as president of CPM will be to help publishers get that news out to their communities and help grow their publications. I also want to take some time and get to meet the movers and shakers of our member publications over the next three years." *(Continued)*



CPM Executive Director Jack Guza stated, "Don Rush is an excellent choice to lead our association. Don has been a Board Member of CPM for the past four years, and is a true believer in the power of print, in particular, community newspapers. Don is known within the state and the country as a true advocate and cheerleader for our industry. He gained notoriety during a recent national community paper conference for his former podcast 'Don't Rush Me, The Sh-o-o-ow!', which featured Don providing colorful commentary regarding the value, reach and importance of highly local community publications for readers, advertisers and communities. The podcast was considered a first in our industry."

Outgoing CPM President, Jon Jacobs, will serve as Past President of the association for a three-year term. Jon was recognized at the meeting with a special plaque thanking him for his many contributions to the association during his tenure. Jon is the Publisher of The Lowell Ledger and Lowell



*From Left: President Elect, Don Rush;
Vice President Elect, Marty Bennett;
Secretary Treasurer, Fred Jacobs*

Buyers Guide in Lowell. Rush said, "Jon was born into community papers, it's in his blood. He is a strong community leader in Lowell and an innovator in the industry. He is never afraid try something new; he is a true asset to our industry."

Marty Bennett, of Otsego, was elected vice president of CPM for a three-year term and is a long-serving Board Member of the association. Marty is a

third-generation owner of The Community Shoppers Guide in Otsego, a weekly shopping guide that serves readers in portions of Allegan, Barry, Kalamazoo and Van Buren Counties.

Fred Jacobs was re-elected as secretary-treasurer of Community Papers of Michigan. Fred is the longest-serving Board Member of CPM and is the owner and CEO of J-Ad Graphics, based in Hastings. J-Ad Graphics publishes eight weekly community newspapers; two paid weekly newspapers; a new children's publication with circulation throughout western Michigan K-5th grade.

CPM is the trade association representing 106 community newspapers and shopping guides across Michigan with a combined weekly circulation of over 2.1 million. In addition to providing training and industry information to members, CPM actively sells advertising into their members' publications, working with individual companies and advertising agencies across the country. For additional information visit: communitypapersofmichigan.com or call 800-783-0267.



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Getting The Right Salespeople For Your Publication



By Bob Berting
Berting Communications

Developing a great sales force is one of the greatest challenges facing newspaper publishers today. The key to finding the right people is to hire people who have the knowledge and skills to do the work that needs to be done. This simple statement can cut down endless hours of training by management when they discover the fact that the new salesperson isn't the advertising consultant the publication needs.

Recruiting Advertising

The requirements for the position of advertising salesperson should be very specific. A typical ad might state the following qualifications for the job:

- Creative ad design capability
- Extensive copywriting experience
- Ability to sell advertising campaigns
- Knowledge of all major media

Now you might think—we can train them to do these things. That's easier said than done. If they don't have these qualifications, you will spend countless hours training them. If they can't do what is necessary to be a creative consultant that knows how to sell long range advertising programs, they will revert to the easy way out—be an ORDER TAKER. In other words just go around and pick up copy, bring it in to the production department, send a proof if

requested. The customer will gradually begin to realize that their salesperson is not a knowledgeable and creative consultant but just an ORDER TAKER. Most of the time, this scenario can be avoided if only the new salesperson had the qualifications needed to be a strong and capable advertising consultant for their customers.

The interview

When evaluating applicants on the interview, look for these traits:

- Personal drive—have they a background of determination?
- Empathy—do they have a proven record of bring a problem solver?
- Ability to take direction— accept new concepts—be a good sponge?
- Persistence—how bad do they want the job—are they really applying?
- Appearance—are they properly dressed? Watch what they wear on the interview. Have other members of your management team sit in on the interview and get their opinion of the applicant.

Do a background check

Although many management people will want an applicant to come back for a second (and sometimes third) interview, before calling their references, this is not a good idea. The time to do it is after the first interview. On these contacts, you might find a wealth of information and possibly low marks on work performance, which may cause a quicker evaluation of the applicant.

The job description

It's very important that an applicant thoroughly understand the job description of the advertising sales position. Many times, much time is wasted on interviews because the applicant didn't completely understand what the job requirements are. There are even cases where a new

salesperson is hired before they even know what the job description is.

The look of your operation

There are 2 sides to the interviewing process. How attractive is your workplace to the applicant? What are the working conditions? How good is your reputation—what about the morale of your people? Let an applicant walk through your facility and see how they interact with your staff.

Give the applicant a layout to do

In my opinion, you can't hire people who can't design an ad. If they are to be a professional advertising consultant, they must know how to demonstrate their ideas to their customers.

I would never hire someone where I would have to spend hours training them to do layout and copy.

Even if you have a great layout artist, the salesperson still has to know how to get the customer's personality and image involved in the ad creation. The interaction between the salesperson, the graphic artist, and the customer should produce great creative campaigns.

Newspapers can improve the quality of their sales force and keep turn over to a minimum by developing efficient procedures to identify key job attributes. Effective hiring practices can greatly reduce the failure rate.

Bob Berting is a professional speaker, advertising sales trainer and publisher marketing consultant who has conducted over 1500 live seminars, tele-seminars and webinars for newspaper sales staffs, their customers, and print media associations in the U.S. and Canada. His newest offer for the newspaper industry is a package of his two e-books "Dynamic Advertising Sales and Image Power" and "Advanced Selling Skills For The Advertising Sales Pro". Both books can be ordered on his website www.bobberting.com individually for 19.95 or both for 35.00. Contact Bob at bob@bobberting.com or 800-536- 5408. He is located at 6330 Woburn Drive, Indianapolis, IN 46250.

5 cool ideas to avoid information OVERLOAD



By Michael Angelo Caruso

The good news is that we live in an information age.

The bad news is that there is way too much information.

Of course, we don't have any control over the amount of information being pushed at us, but we do have control over how we choose to process it—or if we should be concerned with processing all of it.

Here are 5 Cool Ideas for avoiding information overload.

1. Writing things down relieves stress.

Humans experience stress when they have to remember too much.

Putting things on paper allows you to focus on more immediate concerns, like whether your zipper is down.

Record the information into a time management system, rather than on scraps of paper. Offload, don't overload.

2. Keep one calendar and put everything in it.

Maintain one calendar and keep it with you at all times. This calendar should include social events, work appointments and the kids' soccer games.

Keeping one calendar will help integrate your business and personal life.

3. Use your calendar as a diary.

Almost every time management system allows for notes or journal entries. Keep copious notes and you'll be able to write your memoirs one day.

4. Use e-mail to document your life.

information-overload michael angelo caruso blog Save important e-mail to topic folders labeled "Family" and "School." These time-stamped messages can serve as an official record of past events.

At my company, we use e-mail messages as contracts, invoices, and receipts. This cuts down on the amount of paper that needs to be filed and stored.

Be sure to have a data backup in case your computer crashes. Take care when transferring data from your old computer to the new one.



5. You are what you read.

information-overload michael angelo caruso People who gossip, read junk magazines, and watch bad TV will have richer lives when they make a conscious choice not to overload on useless information.

Try substituting magazine time with book reading.

Instead of watching sitcoms, take in quality films.

Remember, if you read good books and watch good movies and eat good food and drink good wine and think good thoughts and have good friends, you will have a good life.

About The Author

Michael Angelo Caruso is one of America's premier keynote speakers. He is known as "the speakers' speaker." He teaches presentation skills and is in demand for conventions, conferences, and annual events of all kinds. Michael specializes in working with leaders, salespeople, and the customer service industry. For more information about Michael Angelo Caruso visit his website <http://www.michaelangelocaruso.com> Contact Michael @ Edison House, 333 E. Parent Ave. #4, Royal Oak, MI 48067. (248)224-9667.

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Meeting Deadline!

Learning to get along at crunch time



Kevin Slimp
The News Guru

A few years ago, I spent several days with a newspaper in Tennessee. They were converting from an editorial workflow based on QuarkXPress to InDesign and asked if I would be on hand when they sent their first issue using the

new system to press. There wasn't much for me to do while the staff cranked out pages. I was simply there to look over the PDF files before they went to press.

Deadline was 3:00 p.m. I remember checking to see if all the pages had been converted to PDF when I realized a couple of pages from the sports editor were missing. I walked down the hallway to his office and asked about his pages.

"It's almost ready. I just have this hole to fill," he told me.

The hole was about three columns by five inches or so. I told him to get the hole filled and send the PDF files to me so we could get the paper out.

About ten minutes passed and we still didn't have the sports pages. I walked back to his office and told him we needed those pages.

"You'll have them in just a minute," he told me.

Five minutes passed, and his pages still hadn't arrived.

I made the familiar march back to his office and, trying to be as gentle as possible, asked where his pages were.

"I still have this hole," he told me.

I suggested he fill the whole with a photo or house ad or something. We were past deadline, after all. That's when I got the real story.

"The publisher told me if I kept filling space with extra photos and house ads, he was going to fire me."

Quite the conundrum. I certainly didn't want the young man to be fired, but deadline is deadline, and I was there to make sure the paper got out on time. That's when I came up with what seemed like the only way to get the paper to the press.

"Do you want me to write something to fill the hole?" I asked.

"That would be great. Would you really do that?" he stammered.

I quickly walked to the publisher's of-

fice and asked if he minded if I wrote a story so we could get the paper out.

"Sure. That would be great, if you don't mind," he answered.

Double-checking to be sure I didn't get the young sports editor in trouble, I stopped by the editor's office and asked if it was OK with her.

It was June, long before college football season was set to begin, and in less than five minutes, I wrote "Kevin's Pre-Preseason SEC Football Picks."

It was one of those fluff pieces. What did I know about the upcoming college football season? I remember writing, "Florida will win the SEC East because they always win the SEC East."

Two days later I thought I was seeing things when I saw my column appear in other newspapers. Apparently there were a lot of holes to fill that week in papers across the South.

Deadlines are funny things. Writers hate them because they force them to finish a column when they don't know what to write, then they are forced to make changes to accommodate last minute space adjustments. Paginators hate them because the advertising staff can't seem to get ads in by deadline. Sales staffs hate them because the paginators always get mad at them for bringing in last-minute ads. And printers hate them because no one seems to meet them. And customers, well they just want to get their paper on time.

I have had the opportunity to work on-site with thousands of newspapers over the years, and a person can't help but learn a few things in that much time.

It's deadline, and like many of you, I have to get this column out. In an effort to get that done on time, let me share a few helpful hints for those of us doing our best to get the paper out at deadline:

Paginators: Ads are going to come in at the last minute. Changes are going to be requested. A change isn't a personal attack. When I owned an advertising business



years ago, my biggest client told me the thing companies loved about working with me was I didn't take it personally when there were changes to be made.

Ad Reps: Be as patient as possible with your customers. The paper shuts down without them. Be gentle with your designers as well. They have a deadline to meet. Understand your business office isn't trying to keep you from making commission. Everyone is just trying to meet the deadline.

Reporters/Writers/Editors: Ads come in at the last minute. Without ads, we don't have papers. Stories must be cut. Room must be made. Paginators are doing their best to get your 1,400 words to fit in a space big enough for 800 words. Do not take edits personally. Most of my syndicated columns go through a minimum of two editors, sometimes more. I thank them for each suggestion and rarely ignore them. More concise writing leads to better stories. I take my word count seriously and gladly adjust it when necessary.

I could easily write 2,500 words on the topic of deadlines, but I have a limit of 1,000 words for this column. Plus, as I look at the clock I realize my deadline is right now and editors are waiting by their email.

My final advice concerning deadlines: Be considerate. Put yourself in your coworker's shoes. It's not the end of the world. It's just deadline.

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Clip art is a great resource for finding borders to frame ads. Sometimes I need a distinctive, yet flexible and multi-purpose border. That's why I've created my own...

Borders



Head for the borders. When I do small ads, usually a 2x2 or 2x3, and the customer would like their ad to stand out, I have a number of borders to rely on. And sometimes they aren't just borders, but backgrounds that are used like a border, or parts of a border that also use regular rule lines, as you'll see later in some of the samples. I have created a library of slightly unusual, but not overwhelming, borders to work with.

I've made a lot of border graphics over the years, so I have quite a variety—it helps speed up the process to “re-purpose” them. A successful border for me is one that's different than the standard rule line, yet not so large as to take up valuable text space.

The samples shown have been modified to fit the column width (15p3) and they all have the same depth (9p) for consistency and more accurate comparisons. These ideas can also be altered depending on the season, and most of them don't take a lot of time to complete. These borders may be all the artwork that you need for smaller size ads, but they would also work well for larger ads, too.

Most of these borders will give me the best use of the space without distracting from the information contained within the border. Backgrounds were used in instances when I wanted to offset the text slightly—again, a lot of this depends on the amount of text, what is being sold and whether or not there is room for any other artwork—in most instances there isn't.

Create your own borders/backgrounds in **Photoshop, Illustrator** and even in the page layout programs, such as **Adobe InDesign and QuarkXPress**.

The use of transparencies also adds a lot more options for you to have to develop your own library of borders and backgrounds. Once you have a number of different borders, store them in a library so you always have access. With just a few size modifications, you have and entirely new resource!

Let's get started...

GENERIC BORDER

This border could be used for thank you ads, invitations, events, church events, even help wanted ads. The border is subtle but still defines the space. Just remember that the wider the border, the more you have to keep the text away from the edges.

GENERIC BORDER

This border is more informal and probably best suited for ads that portray a more casual, breezy feel to the information that is being presented—chili suppers, rummage sales, thank you ads, services offered, birthday wishes, etc.

BACKGROUND BORDER

This border is actually a background with another box with a transparency and drop shadow. It helps set off a small amount of text and provides more of a break from the other ads on a page. A lot of small ads look fine by themselves, but they get lost on a whole page of ads this size.

CELEBRATION BORDER

This border is useful for advertisers who are having a celebration or just like having balloons in their ads. Keeping the balloons off to one side can maximize your space, and you can always adjust the balloon size to accommodate the text—don't forget to add a run-around or wrap!

BACKGROUND BORDER

Another background border but with the text area offset to show a little more of the background. Again, you can control the amount of background showing by altering the size of the text box. You could even add a thin rule line to the background border...or not!

SEASONAL BORDER

The greens and pinecones were taken from a border that would have been waaaaay too large for this small size border. By cropping I can give the advertiser a holiday border and still maintain and control my text area.

SEASONAL BORDER

This border also has another clump of leaves on top of the text box which can be done with any seasonal graphics. For Christmas, use ribbons or gifts as the background with a ribbon or gift box on top.

WOW!

BACKGROUND BORDER

I added another element into a background border and made it a transparency to generate another idea. Once you start developing your own ideas for borders, you'll always have an idea on hand—and they can work on a large scale as well.

GENERIC BORDER

This border has a slight 3-D effect which is what the customer requested. The idea is to contain the information without overwhelming. Scale does matter in the smaller space ads. This border is actually suitable for quite a number of different advertisers.

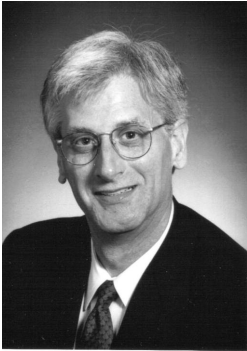
Final Thoughts

A lot of clip-art borders work well for large ads, however, they tend to be wide and I can't always use them because of my space limitations. But if you take some of the artwork from the border (vector or illustrator-like art works best) and combine that with a regular rule border, you can create borders that give small ads more freedom.

I used subtle color for the borders to highlight them a bit more, but any can be used in black and white as well. The **Photoshop** art also allows me to add color with out going back into

Photoshop! *Until next year!*

I welcome your input and suggestions. A former art teacher, I entered the free paper publishing business in the early 80s. I write for IFPA, Community Papers of Michigan, and am still learning.
E-mail: hanrahan.in@att.net Ellen Hanrahan ©2016



By John Foust
Raleigh, NC

Going to a networking event?

A lot of newspapers encourage sales people to attend networking events. When one of these events pops up on your calendar, here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Have realistic expectations. C-level executives and sales people go to different events. As a sales person, you probably won't meet many decision makers from your target companies. Frankly speaking, top ranked decision makers don't like to go to events where they will meet one sales person after another.
2. If possible, get a list of attendees (and/or their companies) in advance. This will allow you to develop a strategy. Whom should you meet? What would you like to learn in a brief conversation?
3. Don't expect to make a sale at the event. This is not the right place for a sales presentation. Your job is to circulate. Find key people you would like to meet, get to



know them, and – if it's appropriate – ask if you should contact others at their company.

4. Act like a host. Keep the focus on others, not yourself. If you see someone standing alone, strike up a conversation and help them feel comfortable. If you know two people who could benefit from knowing about each other's businesses, introduce them. And keep in mind that a good host never lingers in one place too long.

5. Prepare an elevator speech. Brevity is important, 30 seconds or less. Keep it simple and stay away from minutiae. Relate your point to what you know about the other person's business.

6. Listen more than you talk. Don't join the crowd of networkers who talk only about themselves. That's tedious and boring. When you are sincerely interested in what others are saying, they will enjoy your company. And they will be more likely to remember you.

7. Meet new people. Get out of your comfort zone and resist the temptation to spend your time around people you already know – people who aren't in position to send business in your direction. The worst use of your time is to hang out with people from your office.

8. Keep it simple at the hors d'oeuvre table. People are on their feet at most networking events. Although that's not an ideal eating arrangement (do you eat standing up at home?), it's a good way to meet a number of people. The best host-like behavior is to be unencumbered as you move around the room, because it's not easy to shake hands while holding a plate filled with crab puffs and cantaloupe cubes in one hand and a glass in the other.

9. Understand business card basics. Exchange cards, then write notes about your conversations on the back of the cards you receive. This is especially important if you promise to provide information about your paper.

10. Follow up right away. Don't give a new contact time to forget your conversation. If you promise to send information – or if you run across an item of special interest – get back in touch as quickly as possible. Then stay in touch.

John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com



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New Year—New Opportunities for Growth

Mark Twain once said, “The only person who likes change is a wet baby.” Truer words were never spoken. It is human nature to resist change, we much prefer a comfortable inertia to an adventurous proactivity. We greatly admire pioneers and innovators but generally choose to remain firmly ensconced in our comfort zones. Unfortunately, in a fast-changing world, this is a recipe for certain failure. This leaves us with only two choices, we can drag our feet and resist change until we are dragged kicking and screaming into the new future, or we can take control of our future, making conscious decisions about how we will react to the new realities we face. While we should embrace change on an ongoing basis, the coming of the new year is the perfect time to look at areas where you can make improvements to your organization.

Planning your journey into a brighter future is a lot like planning any trip to an unfamiliar location. When we need to drive somewhere new, we rely on our phones to point the way. To do this, our phones need two pieces of information—where we are and where we want to go. We need this same information to steer a course into the future. The process of change begins with taking a close look at every aspect of your business. The deadliest phrase ever uttered by any business leader is, “We’ve always done it that way!” Unless you’re managing Colonial Williamsburg, this type of thinking has no place in your organization. What made sense in the past, may no longer work in the present situation. Put everything you do “under the microscope,” and look at them with fresh eyes. Evaluating them on their effectiveness rather than their familiarity.

To set your organization’s “GPS,” you also need to have a destination clearly in mind. You need to know where you want your organization to be in a year, or in five years. I think the great management guru, Peter Drucker’s quote, “The purpose of a business is to create and keep customers,” is a good place to start. I would add these words to Drucker’s statement, “While making a profit!” This is the yardstick by which everything we do should be judged. It doesn’t matter what the future brings, if we keep our customers happy (including our readers) and make money doing it, our businesses will survive and thrive. When deciding whether to keep something the same or to adopt a new course, you should ask yourself, “Will this help my customer? Can we make money by doing this?” If the answer to either of these questions is, “no,” take another course of action.

A “brand-new” business

I am typing this article on a computer with a “QWERTY” keyboard. QWERTY is not the most efficient layout for a keyboard and in fact it was intentionally designed to be inefficient. In the early days of mechanical typewriters, it slowed the typists down preventing the machine’s mechanical arms from jamming. The QWERTY keyboard has been obsolete since the invention of the electric typewriter. This story offers two lessons. First, many things outlive their original purpose and are accepted as “that’s just the way things are.” To avoid this, we need to look at everything with new eyes. It is a good idea to “start a new company,” as a thought experiment. What would your ideal company look like? What would you do differently? Obviously, you can’t scrap everything you are currently doing, nor would you want to, but this exercise gives you something to shoot for. It also kick-starts your imagination and produces new ideas to use in your real-world business.

The other lesson to take away from the QWERTY story is that before implementing any change you must consider how it will impact the users of your product. From time to time,

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some inventor creates an “improved” keyboard layout. They tout the new design’s efficiency and practicality. None of these “improvements” have ever caught on. After years of using the QWERTY set-up, people were comfortable with them and unwilling to change. The lesson here is that the public will only embrace changes that enhance the user experience. I experienced this first hand when my company decided to change the size of our Pennysavers from a flexie magazine to a tab. This was done to save printing costs. No effort was made to ask the public about the change. The new size sparked an uproar from our readers. They liked the convenience of the smaller size. Readers and advertisers felt that we had fewer ads because the larger format required fewer pages. This led to a significant drop in readership and retention. This change was made for the convenience of the company with no consideration of the needs and wants of our customers. The minor cost savings was far offset by the loss of advertising revenue.

Doing a “360!”

Most employers conduct an annual review for their employees, evaluating their past performance and setting objectives for the coming period. You should consider doing a “360-degree review” of your entire enterprise. As the name implies, this involves looking at your business from every angle to identify potential areas for improvement. A good “360” goes much further than an analysis of the P & L ledger. The “numbers” are important, but a thorough review involves all the stakeholders, managers, employees, readers and advertisers. Often the best ideas come from the people closest to the product, salespeople know what objections they face, customers know what they want from your products, and readers know what features they want to see in a paper or on the web. These people are all vital to the success of your enterprise and their thoughts should be considered. You should look at changes in the industry and in your marketplace, what can you learn from your peers and your competitors. Have the demographics of your market changed, and if so, how should you adapt to these changes.

The following is a short list of some of the things you should include in your “360”:

Product mix

- Current products—Are all products still viable (i.e. making money)?
- New product opportunities—Are there geographic areas, demographic groups or niche markets that are currently underserved by local media outlets?
- Web products—Do you have a strong web presence? Are your online products profitable?
- Special sections—Look at each special section on the calendar and evaluate their profitability. Are there sections that should be dropped? Are there special sections which should be added?
- Related business opportunities—Should you consider adding additional services to your product mix (promotional products, commercial printing, SEO, SEM, web design etc.)?

Product design

- Overall appearance—Is the design of your product attractive? Does it have a contemporary feel? (This is important to counter the “print is dead” myth)
- Visuals—Do you use photos and graphics to make your products visually attractive? (Consumers who have grown up on the web are far more visually discerning than previous generations)

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- Masthead and front page—Does your product “grab” the customer and inspire them to purchase and/or open your products? Does your design make consumers want to see what’s inside?
- Flow—Is it easy to read your print products? Are your websites easy to navigate?
- Advertising—Are the ads in your products attractive? Do they add or detract from the overall appearance of your products? Do they create a positive image for your advertisers?

Content

- Editorial—Should your products include editorial? If so, what should the ratio of editorial to advertising be?
- Relevance—Do you offer content that matters to your readership?
- Uniqueness—Do you provide content that your readers can’t find anywhere else? Does your product accurately reflect the community it serves? (Good local content)
- Promotions—Do you offer contests or other promotions to generate excitement about your products?
- Interactivity—Do you provide readers with a voice in your products by including things like “man on the street” interviews, photos taken by readers or interactive blogs?
- Features—Do you include content like local columns, crosswords, horoscopes etc. to build readership habits?
- Sponsored content—Should you consider adding advertorials or sponsored content to your product mix? If so, what limitations should you place on this material?

Sales and marketing

- Self-promotion—Do you promote in your own products? Are these promotions attractive and effective? Should you consider promoting your products through other means?
- Community involvement—Do you maintain a high-profile presence at local events? Do you actively participate in local business and service organizations?
- Searchability—Is your SRDS listing correct and up to date? Are your numbers listed properly in the local white/yellow pages? Does your company appear prominently on search engines?
- Media kit—Are your sales materials attractive? Do they create a positive image for your company? Do they tell prospective customers what they need to know to make a buying decision?
- Sales goals—Are your sales goals realistic? Do your sales people know what is expected of them?
- Standards and controls—Do you set clear expectations for your sales people? Have you established metrics to measure individual sales results?
- Pricing—Have you reviewed your rate card to ensure that prices are competitive and realistic? Are there opportunities to bundle or package prices to incentivize advertisers to increase their buy?
- Training—Do you provide sales training and coaching for your sales staff?

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Operations

- Staffing—Are your staffing levels correct? Is everyone busy throughout the day? Is anyone overwhelmed by their duties? Does multitasking impact the quality of the work? Can tasks or hours be shifted to improve efficiency?
- Structure—Does your management make the best use of everyone's time and facilitate work flow?
- Workspace—Are your workstations arranged for maximum efficiency? Are your facilities, well lit, neat and pleasant to work in?
- Equipment—Do your people have the equipment and supplies they need to do their jobs? Would new technology improve work flow?
- Vendors—Have you reviewed your relationships and contracts with suppliers and vendors? Have you investigated other sources of supply?

Positive work environment

- Clarity—Does everyone have a clear understanding of what is expected of them? Do they know where they fit in the organization and the importance of their contribution?
- Skill sets—Does everyone have the training and direction they need to feel confident in their ability to meet the expectations set for them?
- Harmony—Do all departments work cooperatively with every other department? Does every employee show respect for their coworkers?
- Communication—Does information flow freely throughout your organization not only top to bottom but also from the bottom to the leadership and laterally through all divisions?
- Responsibility—Does everyone accept responsibility for maintaining a positive and professional work environment?

Final thought

My grandfather used to say that the “best fertilizer is the farmer’s footprints.” Seeing my confused look, he explained this to me, “a smart farmer walks around his land with his eyes open and his mind working. In this way, he sees problems before they happen and sees new ways to get more from his fields.” My grandfather’s advice holds true not only for farms, but for any business. A 360-degree review of your business is a lot of work, but it will pay big dividends in the coming year and far into the future.

This article was written by Jim Busch.

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