

2008 Goal Setting & Goal Getting

A little planning can
boost your shop's sales.



by Phil Sasso

“Are we there yet, dad?” my son, PJ, asked, pretending to be patient after fighting bustling crowds while last-minute Christmas shopping for my wife, Beth.

“No, PJ,” I responded. “Actually, I don’t even know where *there* is. And I have no idea what we’re looking for when we get *there*.”

Needless to say, that shopping excursion ended empty-handed – one uncomfortable day closer to Christmas.

Laughable as it might sound, if you’ve ever been there, you know what I went through. My problem was that I set out without a plan just expecting a *thoughtful* gift to fall into my lap without having to *think* about it.

Unfortunately, many restyling shop owners and managers run their shops like I went shopping: without plans, objectives or strategies. With no marketing plan for the New Year, they face 52 weeks of blindly stabbing in the dark hoping to increase sales. One reason many



don’t have a plan is that it seems like an intricate and overwhelming chore. But it doesn’t need to be.

It’s never too late to start planning, so, grab a pen and notebook of paper. I’ll show you a simple way to create a very basic plan to increase your sales and profits in 2008.

Where are we?

The first step in developing a solid marketing plan is to take a few moments to assess your starting point. Write down your answers to these questions:

What were last year’s sales?

Just take a look at your December profit and loss Statement and jot down your gross sales numbers. If you don’t mind number crunching, you can take that a step further ...

- *Sales by category.* If you track sales by department or product line, it is help-

ful to break out your sales numbers so you can also identify your biggest profit centers and/or best-selling brands.

- *Sales by month.* It’s also helpful to know your sales peaks and valleys. You can best visualize that by plotting your monthly sales on a bar chart. *(If this is too tedious for your liking, ask your bookkeeper or accountant to help.)*

What promotion worked last year?

Remember: “Nothing succeeds like success.” What promotions, events or ads were the most successful? When did you run them? Make a note of what worked and any ideas for improvement.

What promotion didn’t work?

Were there promotions, events or ads that were disappointing? Why? Is it something you need to work on or is it best to cut your losses and not bother with it again this year? Make notes on all this, too.

Are we there yet?

You'll never know if you achieved your goals if you don't know what your goals are.

So, once you have last year's sales statistics in hand, it's time to set your 2008 marketing objectives. Turn to the next sheet of your notebook and write down your 2008 sales goals. You could write "Increase sales by 10 percent," but that's a little too vague. It's like me saying "Gift for Beth." It's better to set SMART goals (see sidebar). Decide what categories you need to work on by answering these questions:

What can you grow?

How much do you think you can increase sales of soft or hard shell bed covers? Bedliners? Hitches? Chrome accessories? Other products or services?

What can you add?

Are there products you don't carry that would help you grow sales? Are there brands that you think would make you more competitive?

What should you dump?

Are there brand or lines that you can't move? Is a product or service generating more comebacks than compliments? Is there a way you can improve it or is it better to drop it altogether?

How will we get where we're going?

Having goals is great. But developing a marketing strategy, too, will take you from goal *setting* to goal *getting*. Here's a story that illustrates my point...

One day, two restyling shop competitors went up north on a camping trip. Away from their shops they got along famously. They worked together well and enjoyed themselves.

One morning, while they were eating breakfast, a big grizzly bear came lumbering into their campsite.

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SETTING SMART OBJECTIVES

A big help in achieving your marketing objectives is simply putting your goals in writing. Verbalizing your goals focuses your vision. Here's a SMART goal-setting checklist created decades ago by consultant George T. Doran:

Specific - *What do you want to achieve?* "Increase Sales" is much too general to be a practical goal. "Increase sales of truck lids" is more focused.

Measurable - *How will you know you reached your goal?* If you can't measure it, you won't know when you reached it. "Increase truck lid sales by 11 percent" is a good, measurable goal.

Assignable - *Do you have the resources to reach your goal?* "Assignable" basically means can you dedicate the needed staff, equipment, time, and/or money to the goal. "Increase truck lid sales by

11 percent with an extra \$200 monthly ad budget" shows the resources you plan to assign.

Realistic - *Can you really do it?* Challenging goals are motivating. (Urban planner Daniel H. Burnham said "Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood.") But don't strive for the impossible—it can be defeating. Keep your goals within reasonable reach.

Time-Related - *What's your deadline?* A goal without a deadline is just a dream. Set a date you to hit your target. "Increase truck lid sales by 11 percent by Dec. 31, 2008 with an extra \$200 monthly ad budget."

Although I use a marketing goal as an example, you can set SMART goals for anything: training, quality, customer service—any objective you want to achieve.



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They both had the same objective: not to get mauled. Instinctively, they began running.

Then one changed his strategy and thought of a competitive advantage. He stopped, pulled off his backpack and quickly laced up his Nikes.

"What are you doing?!" yelled the other over his shoulder. "You think that'll help you outrun a bear?"

"I don't have to outrun the bear," said the first. "I only have to outrun YOU."

Obviously, having a strong strategic plan can give you an edge over the competition. As I often say: strategic thinking is more productive than wishful thinking.

Turn to another new sheet in your notebook, title it "Strategies" and answer these questions about how you will support your specific sales goals above:

What promotions will you run?

Will you have seasonal sales? When? Will you introduce new products? When? How? Will you have a customer appreciation program?

What events will you hold?

Seminars? Open houses? Celebrity visits? Off-site events? Car shows? Staff sales training? Other?

What ads will you run and when?

Local newspaper or magazine ads? Direct mailers? Radio? Cable TV? Internet advertising? Yellow Pages? Other?

You can download a simple month-by-month planner PDF from my website (philsasso.com/planner) to help you orga-

nize your year-long strategy.

But deciding where you want to go is one thing. Actually getting there is another.

As I write this, Beth asked about directions to our niece's 7th birthday party in Milwaukee this weekend. Last year, a poorly marked detour in the Marquette Interchange Project in downtown Milwaukee felt like it took us all the way back to Chicago. Without a Milwaukee map, we got lost and had to call for directions. My male ego was dented.

Much like a road trip, a marketing plan may follow the expected route, or require an unexpected detour. Your car show might get rained out. A delayed shipment might not arrive in time for your March Madness sale. Your newspaper ad might end up with a typo. But having a road map can help you navigate detours more easily.

Speaking of detours, how did my Christmas shopping end? Fortunately, I had just enough time to develop and execute a plan. The next day I went shopping with both a store and gift firmly in mind. My trip was much quicker *and* more rewarding. And Beth was delighted with the gift.

I couldn't have planned it better.

Phil Sasso is president of Sasso Marketing, Inc., an aftermarket advertising, public relations and website design firm. Phil is also a speaker, trainer and consultant. And he plans to plan ahead when gift shopping from now on—hopefully. View his blog at philsasso.com/blog or contact him at sassback@shaboom.com.

