

SHOW THE VALUE YOU CAN ADD TO PRINT SERVICE PROVIDERS

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If you're a reseller considering how to grow, small to medium-sized print service providers (PSPs) are worth a serious look if you have the right digital print technology portfolio to meet their expectations. That means fast production speeds, flexible media handling and superior quality output, because this sector is dealing with dynamic and challenging market conditions.

For every business in every industry, the future is uncertain. At times like these, it's tempting to do nothing and wait for circumstances to become clearer. Tempting, but dangerous, because you need to explore new revenue opportunities, to widen your customer base and spread the risk.

'When it comes to small to medium-sized PSPs, it's their time to shine. We've found a divide opening between large printing companies and their smaller counterparts. And since professional print brands now have a wider variety of printing capabilities to offer on the new generation printers, you can do more, making them affordable to own in the long run while extending your offering to the market,' said Pieter Pieters, Business Development Manager, B2B Production Print and Large Format Print at Canon South Africa. But if the professional 'graphic arts' sector is new to you, how can you establish a presence? Ask yourself what makes you buy from a particular company? It tends to come down to openness and trust, which you'll establish by showing that you understand their business and are committed to helping them grow.

So, with a new graphic arts target customer, your challenge is to get inside their head, so that you can show empathy with their needs. You need to learn what excites them, what worries them, where they want to get to and how they plan to get there.

'Sometimes it's simply about tangibility. Seeing and touching the prints. Creativity inspires creativity, so have samples of what you can and want to print in your store. Create a visual reminder that will be visible when a customer walks into your shop or visits your webpage, or even opens your newsletter. It's important to trigger the awareness that you can print the canvases, sepia photo prints, glossy photos or whatever else,' said Pieters.

Research what can help you start the process. As helpful as statistics are, you need to get to know the flesh-and-blood businesses behind the numbers. You have to understand what keeps your customers awake at night and have those issues at the front of your mind in your dealings with them. There are the perennial concerns about cashflow as well as questions about how to win new business and hold on to and grow existing customers. Competitor activity and pricing are constant headaches and there are new, urgent questions about when and how the market will recover.

Each prospective customer is different, of course, and the differences will

emerge as you get to know them. At first, they'll want to understand what value they'll get from buying from you. You can get the relationship off on the right foot by offering an idea or a piece of evidence from the market, or by sharing something you've seen another business doing, to demonstrate that you're not just trying to sell them a piece of equipment. Because the one thing you absolutely shouldn't talk about yet is the equipment itself. If you do focus on the 'box', then your negotiation narrows straight down to price. If you're clear about the broader business support you can offer, you give the prospect a reason to work with you rather than someone else.

It's important to get to understand their business, asking intelligent questions, listening properly to the answers, and using them to ask follow-up questions. Empathy matters because, unlike some of your corporate customers, for small to medium-sized PSPs the business is their life and, often, their passion. It puts a roof over their head and funds their retirement. In today's unprecedented market, they need a supplier that will support them, offer insights and ideas and, sometimes, just listen.

If graphic arts is new to you, you'll have to put some effort into learning their language, so you can use appropriate graphic arts terminology. And you need to learn as much as possible about the business environment they operate in: their competitors and their customers. What are the trends and issues in the sectors they serve? If they sell to retailers, visit branches to see how print is used. That way you'll develop those ideas and insights to show the value you can add to their business. Don't be afraid to introduce a new prospect to an existing customer if you think it will help — it builds trust and shows your commitment to the relationship. And when such meetings happen, don't feel you have to insert yourself into the conversation. Just let them get on with it if it's going well.

Be patient, too. You won't learn everything you need from the first conversation. But over time, and successive discussions, you'll know enough to offer pragmatic, relevant proposals that help the customer get where they want to go, bringing together combinations of technology to deliver the best outcomes for them. For example, take time to explore their attitude to automation, because sooner or later every PSP will have to move some element of their business online, even if only to remove errors or free employees from boring, mundane tasks.

The same goes for finishing — don't ignore it, because for PSPs it's what turns a stack of sheets into a value-added product. For this reason, many don't want inline finishing, so recognise that in the solution you put forward.

'The shift to a more consultative conversation takes time and effort, but it makes for a more satisfying relationship and better commercial outcomes for both you and the customer. The path ahead will be tough for many businesses, but fresh opportunities are out there if you know where to look and working with new customers to identify them will be exciting and rewarding', concluded Pieters.

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