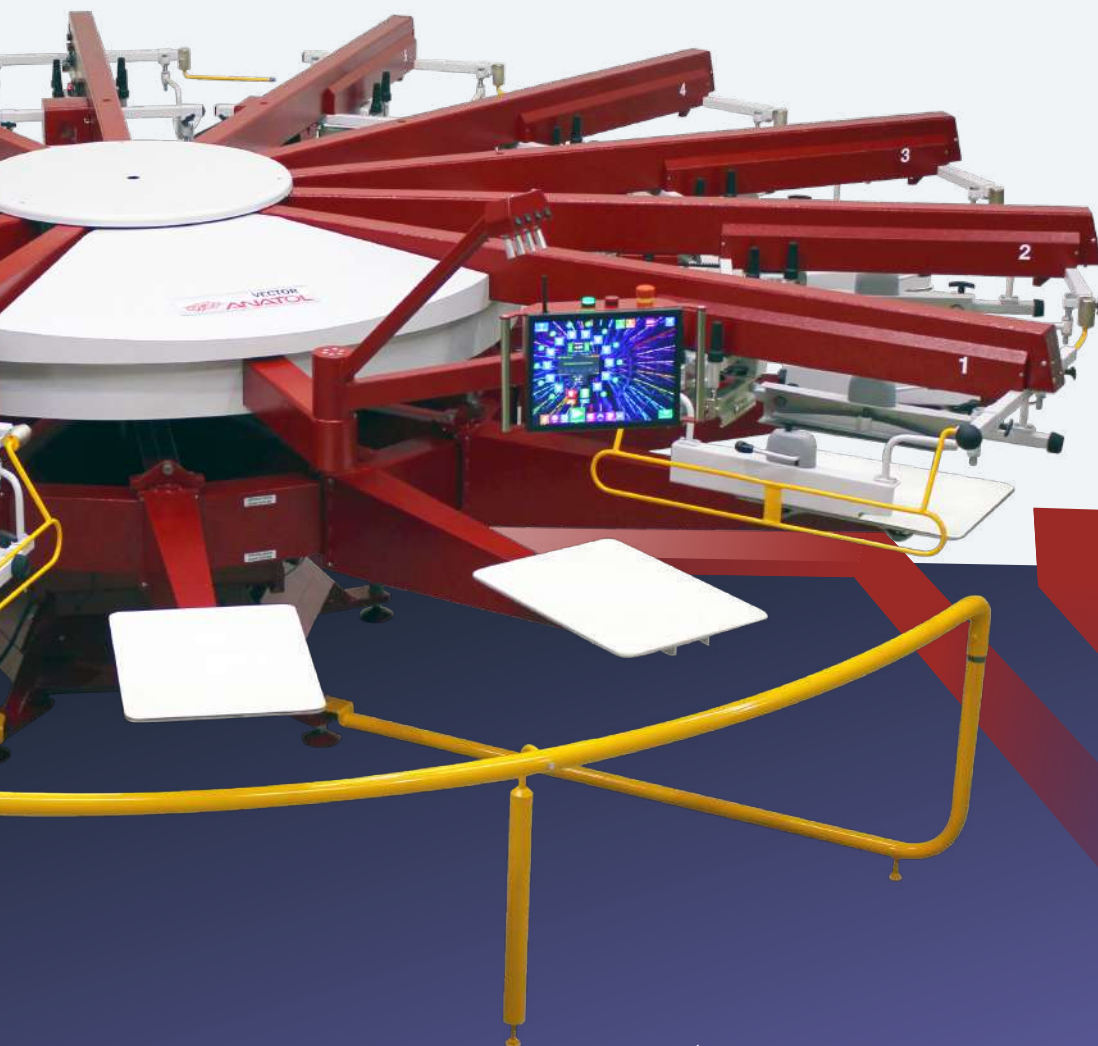


# WHAT'S HOLDING YOUR SCREEN PRINTING BUSINESS BACK?

## AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT



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## WHAT'S HOLDING YOUR SCREEN PRINTING BUSINESS BACK?

For most owners of screen printing shops, producing quality prints is the easy part. Running a business day to day, meeting your business goals and keeping your business growing can be the hard part. If your business doesn't seem to be progressing the way you want it to, start by evaluating some of the most common elements that hold businesses back from achieving their goals and reaching their potential.



## COMPETITION

Every business has its competition. By navigating competition correctly, you can keep your competitors from standing in the way of your business. In fact, when you take the time to address competition the right way, you can even use that to your advantage. Dealing with your competition the right way can allow you to grow and promote your business in a thoughtful, meaningful way. To keep your business strong in the face of competition, there are several steps you need to take.



## UNDERSTAND WHO YOU ARE COMPETING WITH

Many businesses mistakenly think that every similar business – whether that business is across town or appealing to customers via the internet – is the competition. That's simply not the case, and it can lead to a lot of frustration. To avoid letting your true competitors hold your screen printing business back, you need to first understand who your business really is competing with.



### IDENTIFYING YOUR COMPETITION COMES FROM DOING A LITTLE RESEARCH.

First, identify any business you know, for a fact, that you have lost orders to. Those businesses, obviously, would be competition. If you can't think of anyone, start talking to family, friends and customers you have an open relationship with. Ask them who they would go to for the type of screen printing services you offer.

Most screen printers rely on local customers; look around your area for screen printing businesses that are like yours. If you do worry about internet competition, do some research to find sites that likely would be attractive to the types of customers you serve.



Most importantly, remember that not every screen printer is in competition with your screen printing business. Does your screen printing business have a niche? Do you create athletic wear for local sports teams and sporting events? Do you offer high-end branded items for businesses?

Do you focus on fashion wear? Screen printing businesses within the same niche would be potential competitors. Who are your usual customers, and what products and services do they most often come to you for? Screen printers that would directly appeal to your customer base with similar products and services are certainly competition.



Once you know who your screen printing business truly is competing against, you can relieve some of the pressure that comes with feeling like you have to compete with every other screen printing business. You can focus on strategies that will attract customers to your screen printing business and away from the competition.

Take some time to understand what your competitors offer in terms of products and services, what they charge and what might make them more attractive to customers than your business. You likely will find that taking the time to understand the competition will strengthen your business because it will give you a reason to pause and consider your business's strengths and weakness and to create strategies to deal with them.

## PRICE YOUR PRODUCT RIGHT

Especially when your business is young, finding the right prices for your products and services can be challenging. Pricing them incorrectly can really hold your business back: If your prices are too low, you won't make enough to profit and grow, and if you charge too much, you will lose customers to your competitors. If you find that your shop is busy but you aren't seeing the profits you expect, the first thing you should do is evaluate your pricing; you likely will find it's too low.

## THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR DETERMINING WHAT YOUR PRICING SHOULD BE.



Coming up with your best pricing strategy begins by understanding your costs and your competitors costs. Now that you've identified who your competitors are, research what they charge for products and services that align with yours. You don't have to automatically undercut your competitors' prices, but your prices should be in line with theirs.

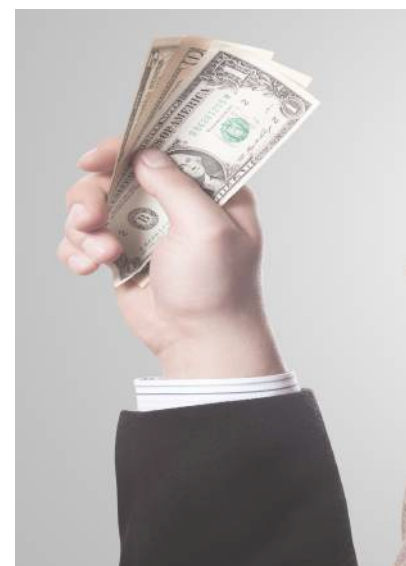
You also have to take the time to understand how much it costs you to produce your products. Take into consideration the materials needed for each product and how much time it takes your staff to produce a finished product.

Your revenue has to cover all of the costs associated - including rent, electricity, marketing and other expenses - to generate a profit.

Know your bottom-line price for all of your most popular products; your bottom-line price is the lowest amount you can charge while still covering all of the expenses associated with the product.

When you are trying to figure out how much to charge for a new product, or when you're bargaining with a customer who is driving a hard deal, knowing your bottom-line price will help you avoid charging too little.

With benchmark pricing, you take the wholesale price you pay for a product and increase that wholesale price by a set percentage to achieve your retail price.



**Benchmark pricing is a popular pricing strategy for apparel decorators. Many will aim to double the wholesale price of a substrate for the final sale price of the decorated item. From there, you can add a set dollar amount for print elements, such as adding another color or using a specialty ink.**

As you determine your pricing, don't undervalue what you do. To make a sale, many screen printers will price their products as low as they possibly can. That might get you more customers, but it will leave you without an adequate profit margin to keep your business going. Also, be sure that everyone who provides price quotes to your customers knows the process for quoting. You want to be sure that your pricing strategy is executed consistently.

## KNOW WHAT SETS YOU APART FROM THE COMPETITION



Understanding your competition and competitively pricing your products is just the start of facing your competitors. You have to understand what sets your business apart from your competitors. Why would someone choose you over them? If you can't answer that question honestly, it's going to be difficult to move your business forward.



After you've researched your competitors to see their products, services and pricing, you should have a good feel for how they compare to your offerings.

### WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT?

If you are operating in a niche market that's not being served by other screen printers in your area, that gives you a great opportunity to make your business stand out from the competitors.

If you can't think of a specific niche, you may have to put some work in to determine what your selling point to your competition will be.

**WHEN YOU KNOW WHAT SETS YOUR BUSINESS APART FROM YOUR COMPETITORS, YOU'RE READY TO MOVE TO THE NEXT CHALLENGE OF GROWING YOUR BUSINESS: MARKETING**

# MARKETING



Most screen printers chose to open screen printing businesses because they had a skill they knew was marketable. They wanted to take those skills and create businesses that allowed them to be their own bosses and dictate their schedules. Very few enter the screen printing business with a strong command of marketing. Without the right marketing strategy, it's nearly impossible to reach your business goals.

## CENTER YOUR MARKETING ON YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

As you faced your competition , you should have evaluated what sets you apart from your competition.

- What do your customers stand to gain by doing business with you?
- What problems can you solve for your customers?

This becomes your value proposition, and it's what your marketing efforts should focus on. How you draft all of your marketing materials and how you speak to your customers about your business should convey your value proposition. You want to be sure that your customers and potential customers clearly understand the value your company has to offer.



## UNDERSTAND YOUR TARGET MARKET

To set up a successful marketing plan for your screen printing business, you also have to know who you are marketing to. Identifying your target market will help you determine the tone of your marketing, the look of your brand and through which channels you choose to market your business most heavily.

If you already have an established customer base for your screen printing business, you can take a look at your existing customers to determine your target demographics.

## WHAT NEEDS TO THEY HAVE THAT THEY SEE YOUR BUSINESS AS BEING ABLE TO SOLVE?

Understand the age of your typical customers, as well as where they live, what they do for a living, their income bracket and whether they have kids. Keeping in line with establishing your value proposition, think about why your customers come to you over other screen printers.

If you're a new business , determining and understanding your target market will take some thought and some research.

Your target market largely will depend on the types of products and services you are looking to specialize in , and if you are a new business , it is important to pick one area of the market to focus on

Whether you are focusing on environmentally friendly screen printing, corporate screen printing, athletic screen printing or artistic screen printing, you will be able to build a typical customer profile based on the people who are most likely to be interested in your screen printing niche.

## **DEVELOP A CUSTOMER PROFILE BASED EITHER ON YOUR EXISTING CUSTOMERS OR THE CUSTOMERS YOU ARE LIKELY TO SERVE.**



From there, you can focus your marketing efforts on the types of marketing that are likely to appeal to the market. A younger audience will thrive on Instagram and digital marketing, while a slightly older audience might go for traditional print mailers or a strong Facebook presence. You can look for prospects within the businesses and organizations your model customer would be part of. You also will want to develop a voice and a look that will resonate with your target market.

## **UPDATE YOUR WEBSITE**

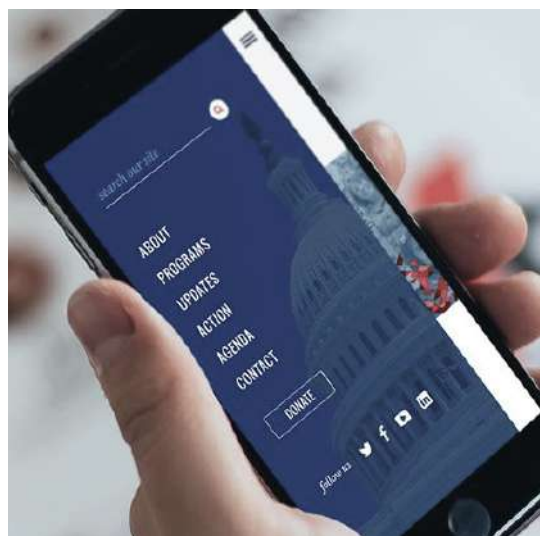
At this point, your business's web presence should be the crux of your marketing efforts and your brand identity. Even if you are not an online business, potential customers are researching your products, services and pricing online before they visit or call your shop.

All of your marketing efforts, from Facebook posts to email blasts to print ads, should be directing your potential customers to your website. If it's been years since you have updated your website, or if you've never evaluated your website's efficacy, it's time to update your site so you can be sure that it isn't holding your business back.

When updating your website, the first step is to make sure that all of your information is current. Don't have old sales information, outdated products you no longer sell or a logo you no longer use

Your website also must be mobile enabled, as the majority of website visitors are now using mobile devices like tablets and phones to do their product research. An outdated website is a red flag to potential customers; an outdated site makes your business look less professional and it may have customers doubting whether your business is still in operation.

In addition to being updated, your website also has to be user friendly. Potential customers who visit your site should be able to easily navigate to quickly find the information they are looking for.



Spend some time thinking about the information those researching your company would be looking for and evaluate how easy it is to find that information. You can employ the help of staff, family and friends to do this: Give each person a bit of information to find and see how quickly and easily they are able to navigate to it.

Don't forget to make your contact information or order form easy to find; the end goal for website visitors is to have them engage further with your business, either by placing an order or by contacting you for more information or guidance.

Finally, to ensure that your website is helping to propel your business forward, be sure that your website is search engine optimized.

## SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)



SEO involves incorporating key words and phrases into your website so your website will top the list of search results when people search for businesses like yours online.

SEO isn't about stuffing your page with as many keywords as possible; rather, you want to naturally incorporate relevant words or phrases into your website content – from the page titles to the page copy – that give insight into what type of business you run, the products and services you offer, what you can do for customers and where you are located. If you are looking to up your search engine rankings, you can find plenty of advice on SEO best practices online.

## HAVE A MARKETING STRATEGY

In the end, if you don't have a marketing strategy for your screen printing business, your marketing, or lack of it, will be holding your business back. A marketing strategy goes beyond taking out ads, posting on Facebook and sending out emails or postcards to existing and potential customers. A marketing strategy is carried out with thought about who you are as a company, who your target audience is and how you can best reach your target audience.



**Looking at many of the individual elements of marketing will lead you to your marketing strategy.**

First, you have to know what sets your company apart from your competitors and how you can meet your customers' needs better than your screen printing competition. You also have to know who your likely customers are. After you have put thought into your customer profile, you should be able to determine your best platform for reaching out to your customers.

With some thought, put together a full-blown marketing strategy. Begin with what you want to communicate to your customers about your business. Know what actions you want to call on them to take.

Then think about who you are speaking to. Choose the avenues you will use to reach that target audience.



Have a clear plan, with a **timeline**, for composing and **scheduling** your marketing communications. Know how often you will post on social media, when it makes sense to take out a paid ad online or in print and what your overall marketing budget will be.

Marketing strategies can get more complicated than this, but for businesses that haven't employed a firm marketing strategy before, this is a fine starting point.

## OPERATIONS



Many screen printers grow without adapting their operations to fit the new scale of their businesses

What works when you have three employees and churn out four orders a week won't automatically scale up to a 10-employee shop that turns out 15 orders a week.

If your screen printing business doesn't seem to be growing and thriving quite as you would expect, it's time to evaluate your operations.

Fine-tuning your operations can help you operate more efficiently, turn out prints faster and reduce the amount of misprints and waste your shop produces.

## CREATE SET PROCESSES

Do you have regular procedures for how your shop operates? From taking orders and prepping artwork to setting up presses and packing boxes of finished prints, you should.

Having set processes for your shop achieves several goals. First, it ensures that everyone in the shop knows how every order is executed from start to finish. There's no confusion about who does what. There's quality control when everyone is taught to separate artwork or cure inks the same way. There's no guess work about how customers should be quoted or how you color match an order when a customer has specific needs.

You don't have to overburden your staff with rules and regulations to create set processes. But you should have a clear expectation of how your shop works. Employees should understand how they fit into the overall process. Having processes and making sure your employees understand them will ensure that every order you take is handled in a timely fashion with a lower risk of miscommunication or wasted products.

As you set your processes, be sure that you include schedules and procedures for cleaning and maintaining your equipment and your shop. A clean shop and clean equipment will reduce the amount of waste because you won't have dust and debris landing on ink or emulsion, and you won't dirty your substrates when you set them on a table or brush them up against a piece of equipment.

Regularly maintaining your equipment will ensure that you won't have a loose print head that blurs prints during a press run, and it will reduce the risk of your machinery shutting down or malfunctioning at an inopportune time and interfering with your ability to meet production deadlines.

## SET UP YOUR SHOP FOR OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

The way you set up your shop's equipment, and how you store your materials, can have a major impact on how smoothly and efficiently your shop operates. You should be able to seamlessly move from reclaiming screens to drying, coating and exposing them. It should be effortless to take screen prints off of your press and put them onto your conveyor dryer; then you should be able to pull your cured prints off of the dryer and easily package them for shipping or pickup by your customers.

In your supply room, you and your employees should be able to easily find the supplies you need. The supplies you use most frequently should be close at hand. You should be able to tell when stores of important materials are running low. Having an orderly supply room will save time and stress on the part of your staff, and it will help you avoid running out of ink or realizing that you don't have the right squeegee when you have a press run you need to perform.

Take some time to watch your shop in action. Are there pinch points? Are workers crossing paths or retracing their steps frequently? Is staff able to move easily from one part of a job to the next? Is there enough space for everyone to move comfortably around the equipment on your production floor? Are there boxes or equipment that could pose a trip hazard or that your team has to move awkwardly around? Once you evaluate how your shop floor is affecting your efficiency and ease of production, you can make adjustments to allow your shop to run more smoothly.

## HAVE A CLEAR PRODUCTION TIMELINE

If you are rushing to meet every deadline, or missing your delivery dates, it can be a real problem for your business. This can create stress for you and your team, and it can create real operational inefficiencies. It also can cost you customers and sully your reputation if you aren't reliably delivering finished product when you say you will.

Meeting deadlines begins with understanding your production timeline.

You have to know how much time each step of your production process takes your team.

You have to know how much time a special request, such as an exact color match or an above-average amount of colors, adds to a job. When you understand your production timeline, you will be able to more accurately predict delivery dates for your customers.

Once you understand your production timeline and how to more accurately predict completion dates for your customers, you have to know how to efficiently move through your production timeline. Have a system that works for you when it comes to keeping track of your current and upcoming jobs. You should know how many jobs are on your production schedule, what their delivery dates are and the timeframe for moving each job through the different stages of production.