

HMAVIEWPOINT

Are you in tune with your customers?



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Mission Models

My name is Jon Tamkin. I am a model builder, but I'm a businessman first. I have been in the hobby industry most of my adult life, starting with my first job in a hobby shop at age 13. Mission Models first opened as a brick and mortar hobby shop and then as a manufacturer of miniature tools.

Many years later we reinvented the company as a paint manufacturer. Our products have always been 100 percent American made. This industry is my business, it's your business, it's our careers. We speak to shop owners and their employees on a daily basis. We hear the good, the bad and the ugly.

It takes a thick-skinned person to run a niche business. It takes business acumen and product knowledge to survive and serve the customer properly. The industry is ever-changing. Customers are demanding and it has its ups and downs. There are frustrations, but there are also many rewards.

Much has changed over the last ten years. It's now a global market. Why is understanding the global market essential to your business? It's about keeping your customers. Customers keep the doors open, put food on your table and pay your bills.

More than ever, customers have endless buying options. Today's customer is savvy, tech-minded, price-conscious and in tune. As a shop owner and businessperson, you should be as well. It's difficult not to stock the products we love. But business is about stocking the products that your customers want.

The customer no longer has to ask for non-stocked products or for special orders. Products are readily available elsewhere. Being in tune means taking the time to study. Read magazines, scour the web, peruse social media and attend trade shows. This is where your customer is. More often than not, your customer knows what's new and what's coming long before you do. The customer wants it now and will do what it takes to get it first. Take pre-orders on new product announcements to guarantee the sale.

We speak to shops on a daily basis. Most blame slow business on external factors but rarely look inward for problems that can easily be solved. The Internet is not killing your business – mail order has been around for generations. Take advantage of additional sales channels. Add an online presence to your shop. Your online business may make up for a slow walk-in period. But the buck stops with you. Websites are easy these days. With drag and drop tools you can create built-in shopping carts, live rates and more. It's easy and inexpensive. You can do it.

Follow the latest trends – know what's hot and what's not. Educate your employees. Employees should be experts in their field, yet have the ability to discuss and sell all other products in the shop. Customers demand proper service and communication. Bad customer service or lack of proper product knowledge is the fastest way to lose a sale. Employees can un-sell as fast as they can sell.

If you don't have it, you can't sell it. Most customers visit the hobby shop between Friday and Sunday. The first thing they look for is a new product. Just because a customer does not ask for a particular product does not mean that they are unaware. They usually are knowledgeable and ready to spend. If the customer isn't asking you about a new product, assume they are buying it elsewhere.

Loyalty goes out the window once they realize their local shop does not have what they need. Your regulars will sit in your parking lot and order the products you don't have from your competitors. One-stop shopping with goods delivered the next day means a lost sale for you. The customer will buy from any source that has the product. The insecurity of ordering products from overseas is a thing of the past.

Is your shop known for having the latest and greatest? Are your customers seeing new product? Is traffic growing? Is online business booming? Keep your customers. Grow your local market and grow your global reach.

Educate parents and bring attention to your shop. Parents bring kids. They are the next generation of our businesses.

You are the one who can control your business. Take charge and make it a success. **HM**



Hobby Manufacturers Association

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