

Make Big Money In Your Own Bumper Sticker Business

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Make Big Money In Your Own Bumper Sticker Business

Bumper sticker sales can be a lucrative source of income for one who is willing to learn good selling techniques, anticipate customer needs and plan ahead.

One company sells bumper stickers kits -- a few strips of adhesive paper, some magnetic letters and a couple cans of black fast-dry spray paint.

The blank bumper sticker paper is placed on a metal surface and magnetic (to keep them from slipping) letters arranged to spell out the message. Then, the spray paint applied.

When the letters are removed, the "message" shows in the original color of the paper strips on a black (or whatever color spray paint is used) background.

Of course, there can be many variations in this process and some do make a few dollars with these kits at fairs and flea markets -- but this is more a novelty than a business.

The real bumper sticker business is quite different. It involves going out and getting orders for a high quality, commercially prepared (screen printed) products.

Virtually anything that will fit on a bumper sticker can be printed on one. The printers require a choice of letter size and styles (they have all those) and actual size, copy-ready art work. They can do the art work from sketches, but it costs more.

The real "secret" to making real money in this business is in combining orders. Bumper sticker sales people make 40% to 50% on normal orders, but they can increase their profit margin substantially by planning ahead.

Professional screen printers that make bumper stickers give many price breaks at different volume levels. The reason is that much of the actual cost is for setting up the screen printing apparatus and changing inks (colors).

To encourage larger orders and channel orders towards the most efficient (therefore, cheapest) production, printers offer a ("copy change" option. This option allows you to pay a one-time fee for changing the copy (to an entirely new bumper sticker) and combine two or more smaller orders into one large order.

A copy change is when they "stop the presses" to insert a

new master screen. Obviously the material must be the same size and there can be no additional colors for the second (and succeeding) orders.

Theoretically, they can also change the paper color (to black for instance). If the original order is red and green on white paper, the second can be red, red and green or green on white paper at no additional charge except the copy change fee (usually about \$15).

If they run 2500 red, green and white stickers, then change and run 2500 more red and white, that is ONE ORDER FOR 5,000 plus a copy change charge -- not two orders of 2500 each. The 5000 rate will be about 25% less, even with the copy change fee! If the customers each pay the 2500 rate, someone can make a tidy extra profit!

To show how this works, let's assume you sell John 2500 red, green and white bumper stickers.

The retail price for 2,500 two color (no charge for the white paper - the "third color" stickers is \$525 (5000 would have been \$775), or 21 cents each. Then, we sell another order of 2,500 to Jones Co. in the same size and same (or less) colors, also for \$525.

The salesman's share if these two \$525 sales is 40%, or \$420 (the company gets the other \$630). But, wait a minute! If the salesman combines these orders into a single 5,000 order, he only owes the company 60% of \$775, instead of 60% of \$1050 (the two separate \$525 orders). That is, 60% of the 5,000 price (\$465), plus the \$15 copy change fee, or a total price of \$480 instead of \$630 -- for an ADDITIONAL \$150 profit (\$570 instead of \$420).

This increases the salesman's commission from 40% to a whopping 54%! With this amount of "cushion" the salesman can afford to do some bargaining -- like offering a discount to accept a certain size or color combination that will enable him to combine orders.

Another excellent opportunity in this business for those who can plan ahead is taking advantage of situations that arise.

For example, suppose you have an idea to promote your city's motto or school basketball team -- by having special bumper stickers made and selling them.

If you place an order for a thousand of them they will cost about 20 cents apiece (the 1,000 price with your discount). But, if you wait until you have an order for, say 2,500 and design your idea to coincide with that order, you can get

them at your share of the 2,500 price or about 13 cents each (counting the \$15 copy change fee).

That is good news, but not THE good news: if you buy 2,500 instead of 1,000, they will cost you the same as 1,000! This is because the your order of 2,500 brings the total order to 5,000, which means you pay the company for the first 2,500 as well as the second batch (your order) at the 5,000 rate.

The discount you get on the first half helps to pay for the second, and you still can deduct your commission. A good bumper sticker sales person should have several "possibles" in reserve to use when the opportunities arise. An order of 10,000 might enable you to buy 1,000 at 4 or 5 cents each.

There will also be occasions when the customer's order gets close to the price break line, but doesn't touch it. An order of 9,000, for example, would enable you to get an order of your own for the 1,000 it takes to reach the 10,000 price break line -- and probably not cost you a cent!

A third major opportunity for bumper sticker sales is promotions. Banks are usually willing to contribute to the high school sports program.

For example, they might donate \$1000 to the football team boosters. But, if they contributed that same or even smaller amount towards bumper stickers that advertise the team, the booster clubs would realize much more, by selling the stickers for fifty cents apiece. Not only that, but the bank could put their name in small letters in the margins!

Enter salesmanship: convince OTHER businesses to contribute (to get their name printed on some of the stickers) to increase the size of the order until you end up paying at the 10,000 rate while the sponsors pay rates according to the size of their orders.

You pay the copy change fee, but you benefit from the price breaks, which is much better. You can even get a sponsor for the paper backing on the self-adhesive stickers.

One salesman had a local fast food store make them into coupons for free sodas with orders -- having the backs printed costs the same as one additional color. Promotions can also be used strictly to get business.

One entrepreneur sold an order for 10,000 in a small town by selling each of the nearly 30 merchants small orders of the same sticker that advertised their town. Each merchant's order had the same design, but included their name in half inch

letters at the bottom.

They paid the \$10,000 rate for however many stickers they wanted, plus the copy change fee, which meant they got a pretty darned good deal. In fact, after the "deal" was completed, the only complaint was that they should have ordered more -- a lot more!

The next year, the "deal" was much easier to sell. In this case, the sales person worked with the Chamber of Commerce and did not make a bonus -- but the commission itself amounted to a little over \$500.

Note that the sales person could have ordered similar stickers, but with totally different "copy" at the 10,000 price, less commission.

A clever entrepreneur should have many ideas for bumper stickers -- political slogans, sports names, city mottos and cartoons or funny sayings. Some businesses pay "regular" prices to have their slogans printed, and then retail and/or wholesale them.

As a bumper sticker dealer, however, you are in an ideal position to wait for the right opportunity, than have your own stickers printed for a tiny fraction of what an "ordinary" order would have to pay.

The screen printing companies that make bumper stickers also print many other products; virtually anything that can be provided in "camera ready" form or can be printed.

Some of the other products are decals, stickers, truck signs, for example, are much better and cheaper than painted signs for fleets of trucks, when purchased in even small volume -- and they can be waterproof and/or have a permanent adhesive (they must be removed with a grinder).

These orders can also sometimes be combined for extra sales commissions. The business of bumper stickers automatically includes many other screen printed products -- and will lead to even more of a variety, depending on your locale, interests and the needs of your customers.

A person going into the bumper sticker business should have some good quality business cards printed (use the raised print, so it looks "screened") and give them out when calling on potential customers.

Make it a point to consistently call on as many clients as possible -- and to periodically call back. always have several potential plans or promotions ready to suggest to potential

customers. Look at their situation and try formulate plans that will benefit them at reasonable cost.

The banks want to be visible in community support; the real estate companies want to promote the area; the merchants want their name and/or product seen around town, the city wants to advertise the annual festival, organizations want to publicize their works and charities, and of course, everyone wants the local football team to win (and their name to show in the process).

then there is pure advertising -- "We bought our used car from Honest John"; "Watch Channel 16"; "Danville CB Club," etc.

Finally, there are the politicians. About 6 weeks before election filing time, visit both party campaign offices to find out who will be running for what. You can offer individual deals, or combined when the opportunity arises.

Here are a couple of possible problem areas to watch out for. The first is copy (wording, spelling, type and positioning of illustrations). Get all desired copy IN WRITING, have the customer initial the order (signifying that they checked the copy), and then KEEP A COPY.

If the customer makes a mistake, be in a position to PROVE IT to them (some will actually forget what they ordered).

If it is the printer's fault, be able to prove that, too. But, when it is your fault, take your medicine and learn a lesson. These can be very powerful lessons, especially the 10,000 orders!

Let's hope a word to the wise here will save you from the latter. The other possible problem is payment.

Unless you are CERTAIN the customer will pay you upon delivery, it is best to get your money UP FRONT. At the very least, get the part you must pay the company, or about half down.

To go into this business, contact several companies and STUDY, STUDY, STUDY their pricing structures. You must know all the "ins and outs" to be able to take advantage of them.

Next, get your business cards and invoices. These can be purchased from a five and ten or stationery store -- and must be in duplicate (or triplicate), so both you and the customer can keep a copy.

An inexpensive rubber stamp can be used to stamp the original of each invoice with your company name and address.

explain what you have to offer and let them know where to find you when they would like to consider bumper stickers (or any of your other products).

While you are there, drop a suggestion or two as to the possible advantages -- like how nice it might be to have their name on a bumper sticker that advertises their town or football team, and how much longer a bumper sticker lasts than a radio or newspaper advertisement.

Between calls, look for situations where some of your pockets might be put to use (upcoming events, elections, new businesses, sales promotions) -- tell those in charge how you might be able to help them achieve their goals effectively and inexpensively. After you have promoted a couple of successful operations, others will seek your services.

Place occasional ads, list in the yellow pages if you can afford it and keep making those calls. About once a month would be about right for most larger businesses like banks, real estate brokers and markets.

When you have developed your knowledge of pricing and screen printing capability and your self confidence, start contacting large accounts, like chain stores and trucking companies. By then, you will be able to professionally offer them realistic plans that can benefit them (and you!).

BUSINESS SOURCES

GILL STUDIOS, Box 2909, Shawnee Mission, KS 66201, 913/888-4422. Wholesale bumper stickers, decals, banners, self-stick truck signs, etc. Excellent company.

MAGIC SYSTEMS, INC., Box 24153, Tampa, FL 33623-9990. Sells bumper sticker, rubber stamp, hot (gold) stamping and T-shirt printing "kits" under similar company names.

BANNER SIGN CO., 1010 Raymond Way, Anaheim, CA 92801, 714/241-2131. Wholesale flags, banners, decals, etc. Free catalog.

THE TRENBY CO., 8044 W 3rd St., Los Angeles, CA 90048, 213/655-9635. REUSIT kits large (6-8) letters that stick inside show windows (by static electricity). Wholesaler.

NATIONWIDE (nap), 3523 Crosspoint, San Antonio, TX 78217, 512/646-0511. Wholesale flags, pennants, printed vinyl products.

TACTYPE, 127 W. 26th St., New York, NY, 1001. Wholesale dry transfer lettering and symbols (rub-on).

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