
Ready to Head for Camp? Partnering the Quill Corporation and Quad/Graphics Way

*Getting more personal with customers, having a bit of fun,
and no mosquitoes.*

Lea A.P. Tonkin

Remember back when you went to camp in the summertime, and you made some good friends, and you learned about important stuff like making s'mores, avoiding poison ivy, and why it's a good idea to have a floor in your tent when the snakes are trying to get out of the rain? Ah, those were the days. Wouldn't it be great to go back to camp and make more friends and learn new stuff about customer satisfaction?

Perhaps that travel scenario seems like too much of a stretch. But to the folks at Lincolnshire, IL-based office supplies distributor Quill Corporation¹ and printing company Quad/Graphics,² that seemed like a fine idea. In fact, they had so much fun and learned so much from their early "camping" experience in 2000 (more than 30 Quad staffers piled onto a bus and journeyed to Quill's Lincolnshire facilities) that they planned another camping get-together in 2002. Toasted marshmallows may not

have been the menu, but the idea was to share plenty of camaraderie and ideas for exploring new manufacturing methods to enhance marketing goals.

In between good-natured games and gabbing, there's much at stake here. First, Quad/Graphics strategists realized some time ago that they can't and shouldn't try to meet every potential client's needs. To be the best at what they do, they ask themselves tough questions about what customers should be weeded out and which ones are prime targets. In turn, they understand that excellent networking and partnering enable them to continuously hone their responsiveness to the selected customers. Their competitive advantage is working together to outsmart other players by understanding customer needs, driving time out of the turnaround cycle, and nimbly powering service improvements through people and technology innovation.

The whole idea behind "camp" is to

keep that continuous improvement and customer service cycle rolling, explained Vern Bush, Quill's print service manager. "We invited Quad people here to listen and learn our business. Each one of our marketing managers discussed what they wanted to accomplish, and asked for ideas about the best ways to reach the marketplace. The dialog was great. You think of things you wouldn't have otherwise," said Bush.

"Versioning" Their Way Into Increased Sales

With catalogs streaming to thousands of customers on a regular basis, Quill wants to get the most from its mailings. The company's semiannual catalog is a hefty 1200 pages, with over 100 versions. Bush said, "What's driving our 'versioning' is to expand our business with specialized catalogs for schools, government offices, packaging and shipping, warehouse, furniture, technology, and other markets. We also have a 'Chicago strategy' to add to our sales in the Chicago area."

Versioning can get pretty complex. Order forms, catalog covers, premium offers, various promotional items inside the catalogs, etc. will vary from one customer to the next, depending on buying habits and other customer data. If a customer regularly buys copy paper, maybe they need another refill — perhaps the Quill brand or another one of several offered.

Then again, what might a customer be buying from Quill that they apparently source elsewhere? Personalized offers increase the likelihood that they'll think about Quill the next time they're in the market for a copier, for example. "We have 500-600 pieces of data on each customer, so we know their buying patterns," Bush said. "If they bought a desk and not a chair, they might receive one of our furniture catalogs with a special offer for chairs.

"We need printers who can handle these versioning requirements," he continued. "Quad has helped us by putting together a polybag mailing line allowing us to send several market-specific pieces to our customers based on their purchasing profile."

Quad/Graphics Boosts Customer Understanding for Better Customer Service

Quad folks realize they face stiff competition for Quill's business. One of the two primary printers for the office products firm, they know that putting ink on paper is considered a commodity service by some companies. "What many people don't realize is that meeting customer needs is *not* a commodity," said Jim Rudek, a Quad/Graphics sales representative working with Quill. "For example, Quad prints the *Journal of the American Medical Society (JAMA)*. There are thousands of versions, depending on the physician's specialty. Ads, covers, and other areas of the publication vary. What we do for our customers is provide a 'Printing 101' two-day course. It covers how files are transformed into print, and then mailed." If customers understand how they can tailor offerings to their customers, practical improvements through innovation happen.



Figure 1. Vern Bush (Quill), left, and Jim Rudek (Quad/Graphics) working on a new catalog.

A recent training session for Quill people covered the color control system, data services, marketing opportunities in hard cover presentation, international mail, post-press technical services, and customer service, for example. Rudek hosted a "Print Jeopardy" game at the end of the session to liven things up a bit more.

Another Quad strategy is to assign a team to service accounts. "Several people at Quad work on our account — everyone from sales to the guys who do saddle-stitching and finishing," said Bush. "Because they regularly work with us, they help us to change our game plan for better service."

Keeping up with technical improvements and putting those enhancements to work for customers also builds loyalty among Quad customers. For example, their "Quadalog" concept offers new flexibility for some marketing initiatives.

Quad offered a new manufacturing plan for Quill's monthly sale flyer (previously printed by a competitor) resulting in considerable savings in manufacturing, paper, and postage costs. Total estimated savings with this change is between \$780,000 and \$1 million per year.

The changed printing process, to accomplish these savings, created an issue about which paper to use for best printed results. "We had very little experience on lighter basis weight paper. Quad gave us the use of an M-3000 press for a day, so we could trial the paper grades we were considering," Bush said. "When you consider the cost per hour to run this piece of equipment, it gives new meaning to the term 'partnership.'"

Quad also looks for new ways to push technology using a tabloid-size catalog and other formats, as a means of heightening the sense of urgency among Quill customers. Quill creates limited-time offers to differentiate itself from the competition, and the office products distributor relies on Quad to make these ideas come alive.

What Quad refers to as "Smart Tools" — a family of synchronous work flow tools designed to streamline its processes — makes the going easier on Quad and its customers. The tools (developed internally) also



Figure 2. Quill and Quad/Graphics get-together.

enable the printer to quickly regroup when client needs change. Real-time scheduling, job management tracking, material flow management, expedited image output for press and the Internet, automated page makeup, on-line remote proofing, data organization and integration, client-accessible image and ad archiving, precise color management, on-line real-time manufacturing specs, and continuous machine performance monitoring are major components of this system.

Compared to traditional batch-system work flow, this integrated approach greatly reduces production cycle times. Clients can start print jobs later (plugging in more artwork, etc. updates as needed) and get the finished product faster. A key element in this customer-focused way of working is that multiple divisions can work simultaneously for a single job. Real-time information on production job status keeps Quad people at various divisions and their clients up to speed.

Win-Win Relationship, Trust, and Fun

Quad/Graphics invests heavily in these systems and in ensuring that they are tailored to meet customer requirements. "You can spend more on service for customers by

Jingle Bells the Quill Way!

Business forms,
Office chairs,
Computers all the way.
Oh what fun it is to market
The brand new inkjet way!

Dashing through the sig s*
On a stitcher equipped our way,
Pockets we will fill
Fed in your own way.

One hundred and twenty-eight lines
In 16 different places,
Parallel or right reading
In four colors if you say.

Business forms,
Office chairs,
Computers all the way.
Oh what fun it is to market
The Quill/Quad partnership way - hey!

*Signature, an unbound catalog section

working with them on their specific needs. If you get more business and their sales also increase as a result of this teamwork, then everyone benefits," said Rudek. He added that this openness and idea-sharing strategy is driven by economics, with a good measure of goodwill in the mix. Quad/Graphics' motto (created by President and Founder Harry V. Quadracci) is, "Make sense, be fair, have fun, and don't do business with anybody you don't like."

Mutual trust is essential to partnering success, too. Communicating openly about potential cost savings and how those savings can benefit both partners, for example, builds the foundation for future collaboration.

Then there's the kind of trust it took for a group of perhaps 50 Quill employees to belt out a song at the end of one of Quad's presentations. How well did they sing? That's not the point. Their rendition of the song "Jingle Bells the Quill Way" was warmly received, Bush reported. (The words to the song are shown in an accompanying box.)

This winning combination of trust, partnership, and whiz-bang printing technology is great, for now. But will Quill's customers eventually lose their affection for print catalogs and turn exclusively to Web-based catalogs as digital offerings become more versatile? Asked about online versus print marketing of Quill's products, Bush responded, "One of the best uses of the print catalog is to drive customers to our website to place their orders. Sales on the Internet are rapidly increasing. Buying this way can save time. But our research shows most customers also like to have catalogs in hand." Quill uses a variety of focus groups to keep pace with existing and new customer requirements. And that's what it's all about — keeping customers happy and staying in the game through win-win teamwork.

So, what do you think about this camping idea? Would your customers or suppliers go for it? Ready to head for the lake to give it a try? Last one in is a rotten egg!

Lea A.P. Tonkin, Woodstock, IL, is the editor of Target magazine.

Footnotes

1. Quill was purchased by Staples in 1998.
2. Quad/Graphics, a \$2.3 billion company, is headquartered in Sussex, WI. Its print-production sites are located in Wisconsin, West Virginia, New York, and Georgia, in addition to Poland, Brazil, and Argentina; it has many imaging, photo, creative, sales, and other facilities in the United States and in Japan, Singapore, and The Netherlands. The company prints many journals, plus promotional flyers and ads and other materials.

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