



So, You Want To Grow Your Business

By Mark Grace

Let me introduce myself. I'm your customer and your customers' supply chain. Are you in that chain? Is any part of your product or service visible in your customers' product or your customers' supply chain of suppliers and customers?

If it is, you have an excellent platform from which to grow your business. If not, figure out a way to get there. You want to be a part of your customers' product and ever-expanding customer networks. Growth comes from being with your customers as they grow. You can define who you are by what role you play in their products and services.

Do you participate with them as they make, sell or service their products? Or do you just supply them your product and service, and focus on what you do?

If you make copiers, print documents and manage documents, it's good if your customer views that as part of his product, and not just a part of what you do. If it's only part of what you do, then you're just a cost (eventually being reduced as low as possible). If you define yourself as a cost, you're a cost. To survive, you must be the most efficient, or you will not succeed.

Wrap your mind around how you can be part of their products for a generation to come. It's really easy. You just have to observe what they do and talk with them to see what must be done. Once you know, you can design the appropriate value-added service.

Here are some simple questions to ask yourself:

- Can I watch my customers use my products, and then integrate them into what their customers do while they:
 - » are in their offices?
 - » make their products?
 - » deliver their products?
 - » are at their customers?
 - » throw it away or reuse it?
- Are there areas where my customer could do a better job (or have big performance issues?)
- Are there new technologies or business approaches (think social media) that my customers must add to their products? Or, can I add it to my product for them? How can I help?
- Can I hold "I notice" sessions to discuss what can be done now?

Growth comes from being with your customers as they grow. You can define who you are by what role you play in their products and services.

On the other hand, if you work with your customer as part of his product team, you have a working relationship to add more products. This may be a radically new perspective. We call this "Better Progression" with your customer.

So, if you define yourself around what you do – i.e., print or manage documents – and your capital investments tie your hands, you may lose touch with your customers as they grow. Industries lose their way when they no longer integrate into their customers' products.

You can think and act locally when integrating with your customer. Locally, you have relevance, loyalty and direct personal connection to deliver your full differentiation. Some may think you can put all the capabilities into your product and let customers use it without you.

That may work to a limited degree, but you may find they use your product in the low-50th percentile, similar to your inferior competitor. By integrating, you can ensure you're in the 100 percent and linked to your customer and his product.

You may be satisfied with incremental growth of your product extensions. But that may be dangerous as your customer finds new ways to make, deliver and service his products with new digital technologies that you may not have.

That said, work to be a part of his evolving product and supply chain.

We'll talk next time about "Better Closing" – the approach whereby your customers become your prophets and sell your products. ■

Mark Grace founded Beyondvia.com, where visionary leadership transforms industries (like oil and gas, utilities, industrial products, and consumables) to dramatically grow profits using the Better Way and the five approaches: Better Progression, Better Closing, Better Communication, Better Decision Making and Better On-line Operations. To grow your profits, call him at 656-595-6760 or email markgrace@beyondvia.com.