

Learning to manage a different ball game



Jo Francis

Well, well, well. Gazza's not going to the World Cup, and Prontaprint is getting another new MD.

Obviously the former story will generate more column inches, but it's Prontaprint's tale that is the more interesting (it's more surprising for a start).

Kevin Potts arrived at the Adare subsidiary just six months ago, and certainly created an impression – we don't get many MDs supplying cartoon caricatures of themselves

in lieu of an official mug shot.

Potts came over as a dynamic sort of chap whose boundless enthusiasm would either prove inspirational or irritating. But after a five-year period which witnessed a succession of management changes, jaded franchisees must have hoped this was an end to the procession of bosses. Promisingly, Potts resurrected the on/off relocation of the firm's headquarters, and moved the operation to a more strategic site in Watford. But it's too early to say if his "franchisee friendly" structure is a success.

I should point out that there's no question of Potts leaving under a cloud, he's simply off to do his own thing apparently. But his timing is unfortunate, and his successor still has an unenviable job on his hands.

You see, the problem with the job in question is that you're managing director of a business, but it's not really *your* business. It's the business of your franchisees – hundreds of them – who all want or need different things. There's no point offering blanket solutions or edicts. In fact, edicts are particularly unwelcome. As one Pronta-

printer said to me this week: "I don't want to be told what kit I must buy. All my customers are within a mile of the shop, and I know what they want."

There is also the little matter of contending with the increasingly fierce competition in the high street print market. The short cycle ride from Francis Towers to *PrintWeek's* offices involves passing no fewer than 12 such print shops, including a brace apiece for Prontaprint and arch-rival Kall Kwik. The England manager's job is a doddle in comparison.

Invest to end the "return to sender" cycle



Lindsay Orr

There are five flats in the building where I live, and every day without fail we receive mail for people who don't live here anymore.

I don't just mean one or two letters; I mean a constant stream of printed matter in among the inevitable leaflets for minicabs and pizzas. About a year ago, I diligently started returning them marked "not known" in the hope that the companies responsible would rem-

ove the names from their databases. And have they? No.

You might think it would be a logical move for them – money-saving at least – to tidy up the database by comparing it with postal returns before a new mailing is produced. However, even blue chip companies continue to mail the same ex-resident over and over again. What is the point of going to the trouble of returning the mail if nobody takes any notice?

Even worse is receiving a letter for someone six months after they

have moved, from a firm which has obviously bought an inaccurate list.

Every single piece of junk mail (in the truest sense of the term) that I re-address makes me less inclined to open any direct mail. This is a shame, because I know there are a number of machines on the market aimed at adding value to the direct mail industry.

So why aren't firms using them? Is it that the printer is content to stick to the same tired old formats, or is it that his clients aren't interested in doing anything new? I sus-

pect the answer may lie somewhere between the two.

We have the ability to clean databases, and there are change-of-address files available. Wasting millions of pounds every year and antagonising customers through sloppy targeting cannot be the way forward for the direct mail industry. We have the technology to produce well-targeted, truly exciting products – are we going to use it?

● Lindsay Orr is Ga-Vehren sales manager at Press & Bindery Systems.

Retreating back into our rat-holes

I refer to your article on magazine papers (*Paper Pricewatch*, *PrintWeek*, 22 May). As a low-life printer, I am better equipped than most to be acquainted with the inhabitants of rat-holes. I know that none of my



Cooper: dwelling denial

publisher friends live in such surroundings and therefore I must deny using such a phrase to your reporter.

I did say that lower paper prices should encourage publishers to produce more pages, larger print runs and even more magazines. Paying less money to paper makers may encourage publishers to pay a little more money to poor printers, but perhaps the seasonal boredom is getting to my brain, although more money could perhaps encourage me to take computer-to-plate seriously.

Actually, I am wrong about this being a boring time with the Watmoughs/BPC merger, St Ives' acquisition of Hunters Armley, Wyndeham's price soaring. Whatever will happen next?

Ian T Cooper
Managing director
Cooper Clegg

The editor writes: our low-life reporter (when we tracked him down to the rat-hole where he

was hiding) suggested perhaps the seasonal boredom is also taking a toll on his shorthand. He is looking forward to reporting on Cooper Clegg's acquisition of Watmoughs/BPC

Protesting against the promotion of print's destroyers

I write in response to a story carried in your last issue: "Losses force Exeit to bid for CVA deal" (*PrintWeek*, 29 May).

Think of all that wasted column space on an idiot out to destroy the printing industry. Perhaps your time would be better spent promoting companies who are trying to build something solid.

Let that be a lesson to all who supported and supplied them.
Richard Cooper
Managing director
Colourtouch



Cheap seps: a lesson to be learnt?

The editor writes: while we're always happy to promote companies who are "trying to build something solid", we would – justifiably – come in for criticism if we didn't cover the activities of any operation making waves in the industry.

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