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JOIN THE CELEBRATION

It’s that time of the year again, time to start thinking about the NAILD Annual Conference. This year is NAILD’s 35th Anniversary. Way back in 1977 a few savvy business men started talking, they talked about establishing an association that would serve the independent lighting distributor. An association that would cater to the unique needs of their businesses. Sure, there was a national association for full-line electrical distributors out there and quite a fine one, I might add, but, these savvy business men felt they needed a place to get together with other lighting specific distributors and vendors to share ideas, best practices; to network and learn, as well as have some fun. What a great idea! These business men had the vision and foresight to see that lighting was its own unique industry and worthy of its own national association. Before long, the National Association of Independent Lighting Distributors was born. We must thank NAILD’s founding fathers, Joe Stevens, Jack Villa, Ed Saag, Pete Haggerty, Bill Coyne, Herm Haverland, and I am sure there are others, for their vision and dedication to the lighting industry because without them NAILD may never have been established.

Over the years as the lighting industry evolved and changed NAILD had to evolve and change. I am sure today’s NAILD looks a lot different than it did at its inception. My company has been a member since 1984 and I have been attending the conventions since 2000 and I can truly say that NAILD has changed in many ways but, I can also say that the core values and beliefs have remained the same. We all want to improve and grow our businesses and become more profitable. We achieve this through networking with other distributors, communicating with our current vendors, and meeting new ones.

We share ideas on everything from human resource practices to sales techniques, from learning about new and evolving technologies and most importantly, building relationships that will help us navigate and keep pace with the rapidly changing lighting industry.

This year, more than ever, we need to build those relationships and learn about the new technologies and share the best practices. If we don’t, we will be left behind. What better place is there to achieve these objectives than the annual conference? As always, the NAILD Board, along with Linda, Cathy and Megan have been hard at work putting together a special 35th Anniversary conference full of education, networking and fun. The PGA National Resort and Spa is a gorgeous property and is sure to please. So register early and keep your eyes peeled and ears perked for more details as we get closer to the conference and be ready to join us in the celebration.

It’s an exciting time to be in the lighting industry. I can’t wait to see you in Palm Beach Gardens.

Peter Gray, LC
NAILD President 2011-2012
Simply enhancing life with light

As lighting represents 20% of the world’s energy consumption, improving its efficiency wherever possible can make a significant difference in reducing our consumption of natural resources. That’s why Philips Lighting continues to deliver innovative solutions that help your customers meet their lighting needs today while using less energy for a brighter tomorrow. See what light can do.

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NAILD Presents a Pre-Conference LC Prep Course

Friday, 9:00 AM, April 20, 2012 – Sunday (Noon), April 22, 2012

Friday, 9:00 AM, April 20, 2012 – Sunday (Noon), April 22, 2012

- Class cost $950.00
- Includes Friday lunch, Saturday breakfast/lunch plus Sunday breakfast
- All class and study materials included
- Pre-class interviews
- Post class follow-ups and study materials and on-line study starting in September prior to the exam in 2012
- Osram Sylvania/Teacher
- Deadline is March 15th
- Seating is limited so register early – contact NAILD headquarters at 716.875.3670 for more information.

Class will be held on-site of the 2012 NAILD Conference at the PGA National Resort & Spa in Palm Beach Gardens, FL.

NAILD is pleased to once again offer a study class for those who are anticipating sitting for a future NCQLP LC Exam. This prep class will be held April 20 – 22 prior to the NAILD 35th Annual Conference at the PGA Resort in West Palm Beach, FL. The LC Prep Class has been offered prior to the NAILD Annual Conference many times in the past and the results have been tremendous. This two and a half day course will help prepare participants for the LC exam in November of 2012. The course will not only cover the practical subject matter required for the exam but also provide pre-class evaluation, study materials, breakfast and lunch for the two full days with a bonus of follow-up online training.

Who should take this class?

If you are considering taking the LC Exam you are the perfect candidate for this class. This two and a half day course is intense, demanding, and fun. Upon completion of this course, you will have a clear understanding of which areas to focus your continued study in order to be successful with your Lighting Certification. Learning as much as possible and having the outline for study as well as the follow-up to gauge your progress will help ensure your success.

Don’t think you’re ready for the exam?

If you meet the requirements to sit for the exam but are not sure where to start, or, if you are ready to sit for the exam in November 2012 then the prep class is the perfect tool for determining your knowledge level and what it will take you to move closer to taking the exam.

Who is eligible for the LC Prep-Class?

If you meet the requirements for sitting for the LC exam, you are a member of NAILD and you have the desire, dedication and drive to take on this high level learning program you are eligible.

Registration:

For more information or to register: info@naild.org or call 716.875.3670.
SUNDAY, APRIL 22
10:00 AM Registration
12:30 PM Board Meeting
5:00 PM Past Presidents’ Council & Executive Board Meeting
6:00 PM Open Dinner
6:45 PM New Member Orientation (Invitation Only)
8:00 PM Open Hospitality

MONDAY, APRIL 23
8:00 AM Registration
8:00 AM Buffet Breakfast
8:45 AM Welcome by Pete Gray, LC, 2011-2012 NAILD President
9:00 AM General Session – presented by Steve Epner, CSP
‘Knowledge, Insight, Power: Increasing Industrial Distribution through Segmenting Customers, Suppliers and Products’
9:30 AM Combined Vendor/Distributor Meeting
10:00 AM Break
10:20 AM 5 OCC’s (20 minute appointments at booth)
12:00 PM Buffet Lunch
12:30 PM General Business Meeting/Awards Presentation/Board Elections/Installation of Officers/Passing of Gavel
1:40 PM 7 OCC’s (20 minute appointments at booth)
4:30 PM Networking by the Pool
4:30 PM Round Tables TBD
7:00 PM NAILD Closing Dinner
8:30 PM Open Hospitality

TUESDAY, APRIL 24TH
8:00 AM Registration
8:00 AM Buffet Breakfast
8:15 AM New Member Introductions
New Candidate Introductions
8:45 AM Educational Track Sessions
Track I – Business Development presented by Gary Thomas
‘Who’s in Control? It Better be You’
Track II – Lighting Technology presented by Dr. John W.Curran
‘LEDs and the Implications of a Semi-Conductor Lighting World’
Track III – Digital Media/Marketing (Basic) presented by Kim Williams
‘5 Digital Tactics Your Competitors Will Be Doing Next Year’
10:15 AM Beverage Break
10:30 AM Educational Track Sessions
Track I – Business Development (Repeat) presented by Gary Thomas
‘Who’s in Control? It Better be You’
Track II – Lighting Technology (Repeat) presented by Dr. John W.Curran
‘LEDs and the Implications of a Semi-Conductor Lighting World’
12:00 PM Buffet Lunch (Vendor & Distributor Meetings)
12:30 PM General Business Meeting/Awards Presentation/Board Elections/Installation of Officers/Passing of Gavel
1:40 PM 7 OCC’s (20 minute appointments at booth)
4:30 PM Networking by the Pool
4:30 PM Round Tables TBD
7:00 PM NAILD Closing Dinner
8:30 PM Open Hospitality

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25TH
8:00 AM Buffet Breakfast
8:45 AM Combined Vendor/Distributor Meeting
9:30 AM Announcements & Break out for Committee Assembly
10:00 AM Break
10:20 AM 5 OCC’s (20 minute appointments at booth)
12:00 PM Buffet Lunch
12:30 PM General Business Meeting/Awards Presentation/Board Elections/Installation of Officers/Passing of Gavel
1:40 PM 7 OCC’s (20 minute appointments at booth)
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Unbreakable
The Classic Lamp Post Story

In 1984, Tom Schidel and Bob Grossman added a new product line to add to their already successful RotoMolding business, RotoCast PlasticProducts. At the time, RotoCast was manufacturing fifteen different proprietary lines and both Schidel and Grossman felt that they could capture a portion of the light pole market by manufacturing a poles that would not crack, chip, or break.

Grossman, the first president and inductee into the Association of Rotational Molding Hall of Fame has been in business with Schidel, also a past president and Hall of Fame Member, for over 45 years.

In the early eighties, Grossman and Schidel ordered a new rotational molding machine with the intention of being kayak manufacturers. It wasn’t until Schidel suggested that they also try and manufacture long slender objects that the idea for Classic Lamp Posts was born. Utilizing the properties of Linear Low Density Polyethylene and Polymer resins they were used to working with, they created the only light poles available in the marketplace that are guaranteed to never rust or pit, corrode or need painting.

Today, that rotational molding process is used to create our trademarked PolySteel™ Light products. The material used in the classically designed, decorative, antique style poles is made from up to 100% post-consumer recycled material making our products truly green and innovative.

There isn’t another light pole made in the USA by any manufacturer that can guarantee against rust, pitting and corrosion like those made by Classic Lamp Posts.

Our Deerfield Beach, FL sales office is home base for TerraCast® President Brad Goldring, and Operations Manager, Karen Dorsey who manage the nationwide sales staff, process orders, and give the most exceptional customer service in the industry.

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On April 22 of 2012 NAILD will celebrate its 35th year as a National Lighting Association. NAILD was started as a way for a few small, independent lighting companies to interact on the issues of the day. As pioneers, these small companies were trying to find their niche in the world of traditional full line electrical distributors.

35 years later NAILD has grown to more than just a few lighting distributors and manufacturers. Today NAILD represents independent family owned or closely held companies, publicly traded companies, large full line electrical distributors with focused lighting departments, as well as associate members that are lighting focused but not the traditional stocking distributor. NAILD now has members from all over the USA and Canada. In addition, the membership has grown from a few vendor manufacturer members including small niche manufacturers with unique and one of a kind products to some of the largest in the world as M & A has seen a growth and incorporation of companies. These Vendors bring their resources, innovative products and expertise to our conference and put on a trade show that often introduces the cutting edge products that are about to be released to the general public. It is this commitment of our Vendors and the support we as distributor members bring to the organization that make these past 35 years a strong and productive relationship.

The NAILD 35 year celebration will, as always, bring high quality education tracks that cover emerging technology, business development, business management and planning for the future of your business. Also vendor/distributor meetings, trade show, round table and the all important networking opportunities that make this the perfect venue for Owners, Principles, Management and Leaders or your company or lighting teams. This three day event will give you the opportunity to interact with people just like you from all over the country and Canada to exchange ideas, build relationships, challenge thinking and stoke the fire of your imagination towards the goal of building a better and stronger business.

As one member is quoted as saying “I have been in this business for most of my life and I know most of the players but this meeting of this organization has allowed me to build relationships with competitors as well as Vendors that allow me to grow my business and serve my customers better. I cannot get that anywhere else.” NAILD is unique.

NAILD offers a one of a kind training program, Lighting Specialist program, that is such a strong and robust program and many companies, not just NAILD members, use the LS program for every new hire because it will take someone with zero lighting knowledge and make them a productive, teachable member of your company once the LS course is complete. In addition to the LS program, NAILD is going all out in providing local communities with our NAILD “Road Show”. These Road Shows will be hosted all over the country with, in many cases, our Vendor Members hosting in their own facilities. These programs are the most current knowledge as they are constantly changing based on the industry we work and earn our living in. These are not programs that offer the same canned information over and over throughout a year.

NAILD is 35 years old and growing for a reason. You should find out what you’re missing!

For more information please go to www.naild.org or contact NAILD headquarters at 716.875.3670.

~ NAILD – 35 YEAR CELEBRATION ~


(Find out the answers at the 2012 Conference)

- Who were the Superbowl (XI) Champions?
- What was the cost of a Superbowl ad?
- Who were the NCAA Football Champions?
- Can you name 2 ‘hotties’ and/or fashion icons?
- What began selling in 1977 as a weight-loss product?
- Can you name 2 most popular Christmas gifts?
- What was the horse’s name that won the Kentucky Derby?
- Can you name at least one of the top shows of the decade?
- Who quoted ‘may the force be with you’?
- What noted serial killer was captured (His neighbors’ dog told him to do the killing)?
- Billboard’s number 1 song from April 23 – 29?
2012 – 2013 Board of Director Candidates

David Walker, Director of Distribution Sales
Howard Industries, Inc.

I joined Howard Lighting Products in 2006 after 22 years working for manufacturers in the Industrial Ventilation and Heating industry. Although I was very comfortable working with Reps and distributors, I knew nothing about lighting. It didn’t take me long to get completely overwhelmed and I started to doubt my decision to change careers. The learning curve was going satisfactory until I took the original LS-I course in 2007, then everything started to come together.

Bill Jacobs, President
Alloway Commercial Lighting

As a fairly recent member of the lighting industry and community, I have found that the lighting business is not only exciting, but also full of opportunity. I became interested in joining the NAILD board after my 1st NAILD conference in Palm Desert. The issues and opportunities affecting the industry have a direct impact not only on my business, Alloway Commercial Lighting, but also those of my NAILD peers. There is no better way, in my mind, that I can have a positive impact in the lighting industry, than to participate actively in the organization dedicated to the success of the independent lighting distributor. I look forward to getting involved in NAILD and working (and learning) with other lighting distributors around North America.

Bill grew up in Seattle and attended the University of Washington. After a stint in the automotive business in Southern California, Bill and family made a move to get back to the northwest. In Boise, Bill has worked for both large companies and start ups including Micron PC, HP, Apexx Technology and MarkMonitor.

Having worked in various management positions and a variety of departments from sales to operations, Bill decided to own his own business and in 2008 bought Alloway Lighting. Over the course of 2 years, Bill has steered Alloway Lighting to a commercially focused business. As a lighting distributor Alloway Commercial Lighting provides lighting products and energy saving solutions to businesses. A favorite aspect of being a business owner is meeting other business owners and learning about their businesses.

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zipline™
BI tools have actually been around for years. Much of the early work was done using spreadsheets. In its simplest form, BI is the ability to accumulate, organize, and analyze data from multiple sources. That is it. Pull everything together no matter where it comes from (internal or external databases) and use computing power to make sense of all of the data.

Everyone has too much data. It is everywhere. Most business leaders and managers are drowning in data. How do you make sense of everything you have?

We can start by understanding the different levels of value from data. The first level of analysis is to organize the data into like groups and sort it to create basic INFORMATION. These are traditional reports we are all familiar with.

Working with the information, you can learn what to do with it – that is INTELLEGENCE.

Then you are ready to integrate data from different sources. You need to be able to do more than just list data, but to perform various statistical or analytical tasks to refine it and to tease out more valuable results – such that it becomes KNOWLEDGE.

When you are able to institutionalize knowledge, it becomes corporate WISDOM. Wisdom is the ability to replicate and apply business knowledge consistently throughout an operation corporate wisdom is the ultimate value from processing data.

What are some of the tools?

The list of tools is relatively easy to develop. It basically encompasses any program that assists with the accumulation of data, the organization of data, and the reporting of data. Tools include report writers, spreadsheets, and other applications that analyze data using statistical processes, trend analysis, and advanced mathematical capabilities such as regression analysis.

Reporting tools include graphical representations of the information, real-time updates, a “drill down” capability, and collaboration (sharing) with remote peers and trading partners.

What data is used?

The input includes all of the data that is available from the ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) or back office systems. All third party application data needs to be accessible. Input from the best trading partners ratchets the value up. Benchmark data for industry associations and other sources may provide comparative statistics. Finally, there is the public data and leading indicators that can really help turn information into higher levels of knowledge, intelligence, and finally wisdom.

This last category (public data or external databases) is the least used and where the greatest potential exists. For example, a distributor of supplies used in retrofitting buildings (lighting fixtures and lamps), might use data from the state, city, or county on occupancy permit applications. By integrating this data with your sales data, you can see if you are bidding on all available projects.

Retrospective or Prospective

There are two very different time frames in which to develop business intelligence. Both are very useful, although very different. They differ in how they are developed and why they are used.

Retrospective is the most common form of BI. People often complain that this type of reporting (most of which seems to be financially oriented) is mostly used to assess blame. It is a way to look at what happened, figure out who did it, and what the effect it had (usually in dollars and most often negative).

Looking back should be much more than using financial results to affix blame. It is the way to understand your history and use it to project and plan for the future.
Retrospection can also allow a company to recognize unusual occurrences. Having good information can allow the company to recognize ‘outliers’ that appear in the sales numbers. Any unusual movement (up or down) should trigger a flag to do more research. Find out exactly what happened and why. Without this step, outliers may be allowed to contaminate averages and other reportable items that will affect decision making – causing management to make the wrong decision, which can have outsized consequences.

Dashboards are another popular retrospective (although only slightly in the past) reporting device. Real-time dashboards show what just occurred (within the last day, hour, or minute – depending on your needs) so that immediate action can be taken if something falls outside of a given boundary.

Prospectively, try to look into the future. Demand forecasting is one great example. How do you take the current purchase history of your customers, analyze it according to past patterns of buying (from your historical reporting), and integrate leading indicators to give you a more accurate forecast?

With the proper tools, it is possible to work with customers to help them where they may not have the capability to do it themselves. Share forecasting models. Prepare for changes together and plan for future needs. The more you partner with them, the more they are tied to you and the greater the barriers to competition.

Other future-type analysis could help forecast warehouse space (real estate) needs, employment levels (hiring requirements), or on a shorter term basis, build truck routings for the next day’s deliveries, and predict cash flow needs for tomorrow, next week, next month, or the quarter.

**WHAT CAN WE MEASURE?**

Look beyond the normal Key Performance Indicators. Ask yourself what would help you better control costs, quality, time, or any other parameter that will allow you to be successful?

Develop an understanding of the customer base and inventory to be able to segment each to make management easier and more effective.

- Customer satisfaction
- Develop Activity-Based Costing models to better measure margins on services
- Warehouse space utilization
- Cash management
- Bid win ratios by salesperson by industry by clients

Then, get your trading partners involved. Cooperate and collaborate. The closer you can tie in trading partners, the more they become true partners and not just customers or suppliers. Partners do not change frequently or easily. Customers and suppliers can change at the drop of a hat, or a couple of cents in price.

**CONCLUSIONS**

BI can be a tool to unmask hidden capabilities. It can turn invisible performance into visible results. More importantly, it empowers employees. Finally, they are able to see how their actions affect results. They are able to see how they compare – to others within the organization or to competitors in different geographies.

**MAKING BI WORK FOR YOU**

Getting started is usually easier than most business people think. Start by doing a diagnostic. Identify your pain points. For each one, create or extract metrics that give an accurate picture of where you are and what you are doing. Determine what you need to manage your business.

Most leaders and managers usually require 6 to 12 key metrics to know how they and their team are doing. Each individual must figure out what metrics they want to use and how to calculate them.

Once the metrics are established, it is important to know where you are and where you want to be.

The last parameter is time. What is a realistic time frame in which to move the numbers a specific distance?

Probably the single most important factor to be successful in the application of metrics is to allow the persons being measured to participate in defining the metrics themselves. People do not mind being measured. They actually like to know how well they are doing. The problems come in when they are afraid that numbers or measures will be used to hurt them. Allow them to be part of analyzing data to find out where you are and then to participate in setting the realistic goals and time frames.

Mr. Epner will be presenting a program on how to capture and utilize the vast amounts of data in a computer system at the 2012 Annual NAILD Conference in Florida. Business Intelligence (or BI) is one of the current hot button topics. His general session ‘Knowledge, Insight, Power: Increasing Industrial Distribution Profitability Through Segmenting Customers, Suppliers and Products’ is a program on how to capture and utilize the vast amounts of data in a computer system. Spreadsheets are one part of the problem most people have. This session (and continuing on in his track session) will show members how improvements in forecasting accuracy will reduce supply chain cost, increase service levels and greatly increase profitability. We will briefly discuss (to make sure) how we are delivering education that you will be able to walk away with and do something with the next day in the office.
What’s the Big Deal about Lifetime?

By Dr. John W. Curran

When was the last time you went to the store and bought some replacement 60W light bulbs? When you did, how much time did you spend reviewing the lifetime displayed on the package? Did you even notice that there was a lifetime displayed on the package?

If you are the average consumer, the answer to the last two questions is most likely zero and no. Why is that – because the average incandescent 60W lamp cost the consumer $0.50 or less. Yes, folks get irritated when lamps burn out, and it’s my personal theory that light bulbs can communicate with each other and plot to burn out in groups, but that’s another story. The fact is that since incandescent lamps are so inexpensive, lifetime is not a consideration.

So why is it that when it comes to LED lighting, lifetime becomes such an important issue? The reason is economics – LED lamps and fixtures cost much more than the traditional products they replace. In many cases, the energy savings alone do not result in a reasonable payback. The cost of replacement/maintenance is the factor that can tip the equation in favor of LED lighting, and the replacement cycle is strictly a matter of lifetime.

The industry has struggled with the subject of testing for lifetime. Until 2008, the only universally accepted parameter was the definition of “end-of-life” – the point when the LED’s light output had decreased by 30% of its initial value. That left a lot of room for interpretation and various device and luminaire manufacturers used their own testing methods to predict “lifetime.”

In 2008, the IES published LM-80, Approved Method: Measuring Lumen Maintenance of LED Light Sources. This standard gave the industry a procedure to measure the light loss from LED sources. Unfortunately, LM-80 only provided a method of conducting the measurements. It did not provide a procedure for what to do with the data, once it was gathered. While an important step, LM-80 did not provide the whole answer.

Last year, the IES released TM-21, Projecting Long Term Lumen Maintenance of LED Light Sources. Now the industry had a standardized method of “connecting the dots,” and could do something with the data previously gathered using LM-80. So everyone lived happily ever after?

Not quite. While a major step forward, TM-21 still leaves some issues unresolved. For manufacturers, it limits extrapolation of lumen depreciation curves to 6 times the actual measurement time (5.5 for testing of 10 samples or less). For a manufacturer to claim a 50,000 hour “lifetime,” a year of testing must precede the first sale. This has caused a lot of griping among manufacturers.

More troubling for customers, LM-80 and TM-21 only cover the LED devices themselves. What about the drivers, lenses, heat sinks and housings? An LED luminaire (or lamp) is a system, composed of many components. Any component failure, for example the driver, can result in instant end-of-life.

Which brings us back to where we started . . . LED luminaires are generally expensive products that often depend on a long lifetime to make the economics work. But there is no accepted standard to predict how long the LED luminaire will last. How should a distributor address this issue?

1) Deal with reputable manufacturers. There are many new companies in the luminaire business, many with unique designs and promises of long lifetimes. How many of those with 10 year lifetimes are willing to give 10 year warranties? And what good is a 10 year warranty if the manufacturer is out of business in 2?

2) Drivers are generally considered the weak link in today’s LED luminaires. Discuss driver design with the manufacturer. Find out what efforts have been taken by the luminaire manufacturer to create or purchase a quality driver. What testing has the luminaire manufacturer done on the driver?

3) Limit involvement with projects that require extremely long lifetimes (+7 years or more). Getting a driver to last 5 years is a reasonable goal; 10- year is much more difficult and costly.

The cost of LED lamps and fixtures is a disadvantage, and long lifetimes are a major selling point against that objection. Just make sure the rest of the system is up to the task.
Discovering (e.g., asking questions) possible problems should be an integral part of the selling process. Too often, however, attempts to uncover problems are limited, short-lived, inadequate and, sometimes overlooked. The initial information and data gathering phase (preliminaries) is valuable but, when the product/service is costly or extremely important in the eyes of the buyer, preliminary data rarely provides enough information to “solve the problem”. This step frequently uses “closed-ended” questions (“yes” or “no” answers) to satisfy a prepared list of inquiries presented by the sales representative. In a scenario that involves a low value sale, determining the need (or want) is fairly easy. Higher dollar sales, on the other hand, generally require a clearer, more in-depth understanding of the need or want, necessitating a more extensive questioning plan.

For example, if you are selling hot coffee, asking simple “yes” and “no” questions work. “Decaf or regular, Sir?” “Should I leave room for milk, Miss? That will be $2.00”. But if you are selling high value equipment or services, “yes” and “no” answers will prove to be grossly lacking.

**Building sales and relationships? JUST ASK!**

In his book, *SPIN SELLING*, Neil Rackham claims, “Investigating is the most important of all selling skills…” Seasoned sales representatives know, of course, that having basic information about a prospect’s interests, service expectations, pricing demands and product requirements is mandatory. Once these facts are known, the actual selling cycle begins: sell yourself, sell your company and sell your product. But what's the best way to do that and when?

Historically, sales training has focused on explaining features, functions and benefits, overcoming objections and how to close the sale. This approach has been used whether the sale was a one-time sales call for a $25 order or multi-calls for $125,000 in sales! But author Rick Page (*HOPE IS NOT A STRATEGY*) warns “…*selling is not selling*”!

Rackham’s sales-skills studies clearly indicate that higher valued sales require a different, more sophisticated sales recipe. And the secret ingredient to that recipe lies in the art of questioning. Or, as stated in *The Official Ziglar Sales Blog* (Feb. 2010), “*Questions Are the Answer to Successful Selling*.”

**Discovery stage**

Is there a problem here?

If life is good for your prospect/customer, in terms of the product and/or services you offer, there may be little or no opportunity for a sale. An opening objective, therefore, is to *help your client realize, acknowledge and admit to an existing need or problem that your product/service can satisfy.*

“Discovering” (e.g., asking questions) possible problems should be an integral part of the selling process. Too often, however, attempts to uncover problems are limited, short-lived, inadequate and, sometimes overlooked. The initial information and data gathering phase (preliminaries) is valuable but, when the product/service is costly or extremely important in the eyes of the buyer, preliminary data rarely provides enough information to “solve the problem”. This step frequently uses “closed-ended” questions (“yes” or “no” answers) to satisfy a prepared list of inquiries presented by the sales representative. In a scenario that involves a low value sale, determining the need (or want) is fairly easy. Higher dollar sales, on the other hand, generally require a clearer, more in-depth understanding of the need or want, necessitating a more extensive questioning plan.

For example, if you are selling hot coffee, asking simple “yes” and “no” questions work. “Decaf or regular, Sir?” “Should I leave room for milk, Miss? That will be $2.00”. But if you are selling high value equipment or services, “yes” and “no” answers will prove to be grossly lacking.

May I ask you a question?

To determine the *real needs* (vs. wants) of the customer and how you can help, it is necessary to dig deeper into the prospect/customer’s world, and this is done by using different, more thorough and effective questioning techniques. Questions that fit this category are referred to as non-directive or “open-ended” questions. The advantage of this latter style of questioning is that it requires the prospect/customer to respond in some detail, not with a simple “yes” or “no”. This type of exchange often reveals important, more significant information not disclosed in a one word reply.

Like courtroom attorneys, sales people must establish a series of questioning strategies that will shed light on relevant issues or problems. The goal of these various approaches may be to 1) gain information, 2) clarify conflicting facts, 3) deepen one’s understanding and/or 4) evaluate a given situation or circumstance. For each inquiry, the line of questioning must be designed to produce pertinent and useful answers.

**Discovery objectives may include:**

- What has happened that would cause my product/service to be considered for purchase?
- Is the prospect/customer displeased with the current product manufacturer or service provider? If so, why?
- How deeply involved was the prospect/customer in previous product/service decisions?
- What considerations justified prior product/services choices or decisions?
  - Product quality/features
  - Price/availability
  - Strong relationship with competitor

**Typical questions in this stage might be:**

- “I noticed that you are using XYZ’s ‘economy’ model. How is it performing based on the criteria used when the product was purchased?” (Looking for problems with competitor’s equipment.)
- Considering the significant growth your company has experienced over that past 5 years, what sort of changes have you seen in production capacity? (Looking for growth opportunities.)
- Changing the lighting on all floors can have an appreciable, positive impact on the workforce. Who would be involved in that decision? (Looking for decision makers.)

Once the discovery stage is finalized, the sales representative is ready to move into the Problem Stage.
PROBLEM STAGE

Rackham mentions two key questioning methods to help sales representatives expose potential problem areas. When entering the Problem Stage, it’s important to avoid asking questions that could be misunderstood as condescending or ridicule. Be sensitive to past decisions that may have been made in which the buyer's choices were based purely on subjective preferences, or emotion, rather than based on bona-fide reasoning and hard data.

**Problem Questions** focus on getting the prospect/customer to acknowledge existing or potential product/service difficulties. This line of inquiry may target specific or general issues. In either case, the sales representative should attempt to ask many probing questions about the issue in order to solidify the idea that a problem exists and that it needs to be addressed.

**Implication Questions** should be designed “... to convince the customer that the problem really is serious.” If the prospect/customer downplays the problem or refuses to admit that it is worthy of immediate action, the sale may be lost or indefinitely delayed. Sharing antidotes about others who actually ignored similar problems that resulted in misfortune because of delay or failure to act can intensify the client's interest to move forward. Be careful, of course, to make certain that what is being implied is reasonable and logical.

This process is rarely done quickly, but rather, it is typically the result of many discussions. According to Rackham, to be truly successful, sales representatives must patiently continue their questioning to uncover and fully define problems that are or will be consequential and/or urgent customer concerns.

Additionally, because identifying a client’s needs could require conversations with several individuals, each with a slightly different point of view, it may be necessary to implement multiple questioning strategies. Knowing the depth of knowledge and personal involvement of each interviewee will dictate the sales person's questioning techniques. Keep in mind that the interests and needs of the ones being asked may vary substantially, based on their responsibilities and backgrounds.

Engineers, Chief Financial Officers and CEOs may all have a hand in the decision of the final proposal, but may view the problem differently, i.e. application, cost or company strategy. When presenting questions, make certain that they are relevant to the responsibility and authority of the one being questioned.

Once the prospect/customer has indicated the need to take corrective action, a third line of questioning should be used. This category (Need-payoff Questions) is a powerful tool because, if used correctly, the prospect/customer self-evaluates the situation, concludes that action must be taken and agrees that the product/services offered by the sales representative are worth considering. This technique is initiated by asking the customer/prospect to describe how the product/services features being offered might resolve the problem. Asking multiple questions along the same line, but worded slightly differently, can be quite effective because each positive reply by the customer/prospect subconsciously secures the resolution potential being proposed.

Implementing an extensive, formalized questioning process is rarely fast-paced and often requires considerable forethought and planning. Yet, such comprehensive and professional investigating techniques build confidence and trust by the customer that lesser efforts often fail to do.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING STAGE

Rackham points out that when a buying decision is seen by the potential buyer as costly, in terms of dollars or personal reputation, the “... seller and product become much harder to separate.” Moreover, he suggests that these types of sales involve a longer selling cycle, thus, necessitating a different selling style: transforming from a transactional style to a relational style.

Trustworthiness is critical to any healthy relationship and should never be intentionally violated. In FIRST THINGS FIRST, trust is described by author Stephen Covey as, “... the foundational principle that holds all relationships ... together”. Reliability and competence are components of character and, with trust, make sustainable relationships viable.

A lesson to be learned about the topic of questioning is that, although day-to-day transactional sales are explicitly mandatory, relationship building is equally compulsory. Asking questions is an art form to be mastered by forethought, practice, application. Asking thought-provoking questions builds confidence and a sense of sincerity; necessary ingredients to a relationship.

Remember, the (next) question may be in the (previous) answer!

CONERENCE IDEA: Consider trying out some “questioning” techniques at the conference in April. Ask colleagues about their most successful 2011 negotiation or most difficult problem. Questions! Questions! Questions!

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Mr. Thomas, a presenter for the 2012 NAILD Conference will address ‘Who’s in Control? It better be You!’ The ‘Who’s in Control? It better be You!’ workshop is designed to show how to produce greater, more effective results each day. By uncluttering personal disorganization, identifying and reducing impediments to continuous progress, and pinpointing high value tasks, participants will realize the potential for greater control in their daily actions by more effectively using the talents they already possess! The “Take-aways” are: The process can be used immediately; Highest value tasks will be completed first, and; “time management” related stress will be greatly reduced.
Elements of Digital Marketing

By Kim Williams

When people discover that I work with a large website design and marketing firm, I often get asked questions about what it takes to succeed online. Over the years, it has become clear that there are 4 major factors, or elements, that require understanding, focus and an investment of time and money in order to be successful online.

Three of those elements are often overlooked. A great deal of chatter is being made over marketing tactics (Search Optimization, Paid Advertising, Mobile Marketing, Email Marketing, etc.) before dealing with other foundational elements of the internet marketing landscape. Let’s look at two of these.

HOSTING

Although hosting isn’t the sexiest of topics, it is the most primary ingredient in a successful digital marketing plan. In short, if the hosting platform fails or doesn’t respond to your changing need your website could disappear and then nothing else matters.

Consider the following when choosing a hosting provider:

1. What are the storage limits of your hosting agreement? Storage applies to the space on the server that your website files occupy. The needs vary, so it is also important that you know the size of your site. Also, if you are uploading data – how fast will you exceed your current platform?

2. Ask also about bandwidth limitations. Bandwidth has to do with the amount of traffic (visits and file transfers) used by your site. As with storage, what are you using currently? What needs to you project over the next 12-18 months?

3. The most important question to answer is, “What happens when I exceed these limits?” Having a hosting provider that can flex and adjust to your needs without shutting down your site is critical.

With the assurance of a solid hosting platform, we can continue to manage our digital marketing by moving on to the 2nd Element – A Great Website!

A GREAT WEBSITE

Websites are as varied as the companies and people who they represent. Defining a website as “Great” can be a somewhat subjective evaluation. Different industries and products often require different elements; however, there are three factors that consistently drive a website to Greatness:

1. It loads fast – Internet users are an impatient bunch. Aren’t we? When we click to enter a site we expect it to load. Even a small delay can cause the viewer to question their connection, hardware and even worse – cause them to bounce away without ever seeing your site. Site structure and platforms affect load time, as do graphics, flash and video. Having the right mix of structure and content to allow for quick presentation to the user is essential.

2. It looks good – Beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, but when it comes to the look of your site it only matters how good it looks to your future and current clients. Making sure that the look of your site not only carries your brand to the internet marketplace, but that it does so in a way that appeals to your target client is what makes a great look for you. Take the time to plan and design based on your goals and target groups.

3. It has clear content – A great website contains content that is rich with your message, easy to read and well organized for others to find what they are looking for. Make certain your content is well organized and easy to navigate. Visitors will have little patience trying to find specific content via multiple clicks and sub-navigation.

Keep these two basic elements firmly in mind as you move into the larger world of Internet Marketing, as they will greatly increase your online results.

Mr. Williams will have 2 track sessions at the 2012 NAILD Conference. His sessions will cover the “5 Digital Tactics Your Competitors Will Be Doing Next Year”. These presentations will include a high level overview of the elements of digital marketing and then an advanced look into the role Search and Social Media Marketing must play in your internet marketing strategy. Internet marketing is the voice of a company’s digital presence speaking the facts and benefits of your products and services across the web. Understanding the venues and strategies available is essential for online success. Participants will leave with an understanding of the importance of solid hosting, the dynamics of a great website, the need for reliable analytics and a series of digital marketing channels as required for effective digital marketing.

Search Marketing and Social Media are key unique marketing tactics that require a company to position itself online. Search marketing is about being visible. Social Media Marketing is about creating an environment for brand and product advocates to gather and engage with your product/service. Participants will leave with an understanding of the key elements of Search and Social Marketing, including SEO, PPC, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
Credit card processing fees are a cost of doing business that most successful companies can’t avoid. Whether they’re buying products or services, consumers, businesses and government agencies often prefer paying with a credit card. And as a result, credit card purchases may account for 65 to 100% of a company’s sales and thousands of dollars in processing fees each year. Unfortunately, credit card fraud is a problem most businesses don’t think about until it hits them. If you sell online, or by mail, your business is particularly vulnerable to losing money due to fraudulent credit card orders. Learn what you need to know to minimize your risk from credit card fraud losses.

Credit card processing system can be confusing and the process can be complex. The most common questions I hear from potential merchants are “What will my rate be?” and “How much does it cost to accept credit cards?” The real answer to this question is “it depends” although understandably that isn’t what most business owners want to hear. To understand how it all works, it helps to grasp the types of companies that are involved, and how much money they typically charge for processing a transaction.

Are your credit card processing fees too high? As merchants know, credit card processing fees get levied on each credit card sale they make. These fees can vary by hundreds of dollars a month – or more – depending on sales volume and the merchant services provider your company chooses to provide their credit card processing services. Choosing the wrong merchant services provider may cost you thousands of dollars a year in extra credit card processing fees.

To learn how transaction fees are calculated and get tips on negotiating the best merchant account agreement for your business, attend this track session at the NAILD conference.

David, another educational track session presenter at the 2012 NAILD Conference, will walk you through “What you need to know about Credit Card Processing.” This presentation will cover the following:

• Benefits of having a merchant account and what types of merchant accounts are there?
• How to shop for a good credit card processing company and the best questions to ask?
• How to correctly process transactions and avoid charge backs, fraud and disputes.
• How to read your merchant account statements and understand your fees?

Lighting Legislation & Its Effects on the Evolution of Future Lamp Product Technologies & Offerings

By David Nelkin

David will be an educational track session presenter at the NAILD 2012 Conference. His presentation will focus on the upcoming (and at the time of the presentation recently enacted) lamp legislations that affect various product technologies, including incandescent, halogen and linear fluorescent lamps. After a brief discussion of the legislations and what products will be eliminated, the core of the presentation will focus on what current products remain available to address various applications where lamps will be eliminated and which products are the most appropriate choices for different applications. This session will touch on some of the newer technologies and discuss how they also will affect the evolution of lamp manufacturer’s product offerings.
HALCO LIGHTING TECHNOLOGIES’ HIRES DIRECTOR OF MARKETING

Halco Lighting Technologies® welcomes Jill Mungovan to the position of Marketing Director. Mungovan brings over 12 years of lighting industry experience to the Halco team, including eight years managing marketing departments in the commercial/industrial sector. Prior to joining Halco, Mungovan held several positions with Cooper Industries, most recently as Marketing Director for Cooper Wiring Devices & Cooper Interconnect. She has also served as Marketing Manager for SIM-KAR Corporation in Pennsylvania.

In her position, Mungovan will be responsible for planning and executing high-impact, strategic marketing programs to new and existing markets. She will continue to expand upon the company’s business-to-business marketing initiatives to attain desired corporate objectives.

She can be reached at 678.533.2064 or jmungovan@halcolighting.com.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Our first Lighting Specialist graduate of 2012 has completed the NAILD Lighting Specialist I On-line Courseware as well as the Hands-on requirement.

Elliott Electric Supply, Inc. – Mathew Blocker

Not only is Mathew the first LS I graduate of 2012, but the first IMARK member graduate!

Each graduate receives their NAILD Lighting Specialist I certificate and pin. They are invited to use NAILD LS I appellation on their business cards.

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What you Don’t Know
about Profit Can Kill Your Business!

By Dr. Albert D. Bates

Introduction Excerpt:

Most business owners are victims of a work-ethic mentality. You are probably one of them. They believe that their role in life is to work long, hard hours. Interestingly, most owners actually enjoy working those long, hard hours.

The problem is that too often those long, hard hours generate a lot of psychic income but do not generate the dollar profit that should accompany that psychic income. In fact, most businesses produce inadequate profits.

Research conducted by the Profit Planning Group over the last thirty years suggests that companies of all sizes can be lumped into three profit categories:

• **Disasters** – Approximately 30% of all firms either lose money or generate profits that are so low the business really should shut down. Whenever there is a recession these are the buildings with “going out of business” signs in the window. Psychic income doesn’t pay the rent.

• **Soldiers** – The vast majority of firms (around 60%) produce profits that keep them from shutting the door, but are far from adequate. To a certain extent the owners are trapped. The psychic income is nice, but the profits are not. After working for 40 years, what is the result?

• **Winners** – The top 10% of firms generate sensational profits. On top of that, they also get that wonderful psychic income.

Step One Excerpt:

Take the Business Back from Your Accountant

Most of the people who start and run small to medium-sized businesses are not accountants. They are people who have the guts to take a risk. They are also the folks who only remember that debits were against the windows and credits were against the wall in Accounting 101.

In short, finance is a foreign language for the overwhelming majority of small business owners. Most likely this includes you. Consequently, your accountant handles all of the financial stuff and occasionally tells you how you are doing.

Note this carefully: Your accountant doesn’t know jack about how to increase the profits of your business. In fact, the original working title of this book was *Fire Your Accountant*! Since your accountant probably has a family, you should not resort to firing. You should simply put your accountant on a very short leash. Remember that you are the owner and the decision maker, so your accountant must do what you want when you want it.

In the end, your accountant will prove very useful after you have read this book and successfully implemented the concepts. Namely, your accountant will work to keep you from paying too much in taxes on all that profit.
Step Two Excerpt: Set a Realistic Profit Target

Whenever the owners of small to medium-sized businesses are asked how much profit their firm should generate, they always come up with the same two answers: “As much as we can.” . . . “More than we do now.”

Neither of these is particularly helpful. If the firm is going to reach its full profit potential, it has to know what that potential is. Neither “more” nor “lots” provides the specificity that is required.

There are two components to setting a profit goal. Both need to be given very careful attention:

• Maximum Profit Level – This is determining the highest realistic profit level that can be produced. This is measured in terms of profit before taxes as a percent of net sales. The Maximum Profit Level is what the firm could produce if everything were properly planned and controlled. It might be 5.0% or 10.0% or any other number.
• Time Frame – This involves determining how fast the firm should be able to reach the Maximum Profit Level. For some firms it might be one or two years; for others it might be closer to five years.

In determining the Maximum Profit Level the profit figure must always be after paying fair compensation to the owner. In short, the firm needs to produce that fair compensation plus the Maximum Profit Level number.

The Maximum Profit Level represents the sort of results produced by the winners – the top 10% of the firms in terms of profit performance. There is no need to bother with what the other 90% of the firms do.

Step Four Excerpt: Get Control of Your Gross Margin

This step will introduce a concept so innovative, so creative that it will literally knock you off your feet. Here it is: Buy low, sell high. You can get back up now.

Okay, so everybody in the world has heard that one before. The truth of the matter is that almost nobody is actually doing it. Until the lesson is not only understood, but implemented, it is still something new and exciting.

Unless you can get control of your gross margin, your company will never be as successful as it needs to be. It will never reach its Maximum Profit Level. Never is an awfully long time.

Step Three Excerpt: Understand Your Profit Dynamics

There is an old management saying, “The way to make more money is to do more of the things that are good for you and less of the things that are bad for you.” Like all old management sayings, it is brilliant in concept, but says nothing about how to do it.

The problem with running a business is that everything is important. Driving more sales would certainly be good for you. So would lowering expenses. Collecting receivables faster looks nice, too. There are more good things than can be done in a day.

In addition, there are a lot of things that have to be done whether they are good for you or not. Payroll checks really need to be written on time, reports have to be sent to the IRS and so on. The list is endless.

It is absolutely essential that you understand the size and nature of the key profit drivers in your business. The size issue is easy:

• Gross Margin – The big enchilada of profit determination
• Fixed Expenses – Also a very strong driver of profitability
• Sales – Relatively important as a profit driver, but slightly less important than fixed expenses and much less important than gross margin
• Investment Levels – Modest impact on profitability

Step Five Excerpt: Developing a Plan

Most firms think of the increasing profit by trial and error. If sales were increased by 5%, how much would profit go up? It is great for doing “what ifs” but not good for planning. The trial and error component of the process needs to be eliminated.

The planning process requires a procedure that makes the activity much more directional. That concept is what is commonly called “Profit First Planning.” Excuse the acronym avalanche, but PFP.

Dr. Albert D. Bates, Chairman and President, is the founder of the Profit Planning Group, a research and executive education firm headquartered in Boulder, Colorado. The firm works exclusively in the area of corporate financial planning.

The book is available on both Amazon and Barnes & Noble or directly from the website: triplyourprofitbook.com. Cost: $39.00
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Calendar of Events

2012

April 15 – 20
Light + Building
Frankfurt, Germany
www.light-building.messefrankfurt.com

April 22 – 25
NAILD 35th Annual Conference
PGA National Resort & Spa
Palm Beach Gardens, FL
www.naild.org

2013

April 25 – 28
NAED Leadership Summit
Washington, DC
www.naed.org

May 9 – 11
LightFair International
Las Vegas, NV
www.lightfair.com

April 22 – 25
NAILD 36th Annual Conference
Hilton Scottsdale Resort & Villas
Scottsdale, AZ
www.naild.org

For more information on NAILD visit www.naild.org or call 716.875.3670.
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