

CIRCUITS ASSEMBLY

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Killing Business

A post mortem of opportunities lost by internal mistakes.

It is definitely busy out there! Most OEMs and EMS companies, it seems, have been going gangbusters for the past six to eight months. But more business does not necessarily mean better levels of customer service. In fact, many companies deal a death blow to their long-term prospects by letting service slide just as their sales graphs start going up.

Is your company killing business? Customers expect their concerns to be heeded, and their problems to be solved. Ignoring this reality is like killing the cash cow. Certainly, no one dies from an unreturned phone call, a slipshod quote or a botched board delivery. But too many of those things can terminate your trade. I am amazed at all the “bodies” I see in the PCB industry, businesses destroyed by suicidal behavior.

Here are a few of the chalk-line cases I have seen lately:

DOA no. 1: Fumbling with the formalities. The buyer at a well-known high-tech OEM said he waited more than three weeks just to get a nondisclosure agreement signed from a prominent EMS firm before he could give out an RFQ. Unwilling to wait any longer, the buyer found another, more responsive, assembler. Your company should have a rapid-response process in place to send out an NDA, a brochure with company information and a welcome letter to new prospects at a moment’s notice.

DOA no. 2: Refusing to play the referral game. Occasionally I come across a project that is not a good fit for my company. In that case, I will recommend another company better suited to the job, and, having already performed the triage on this case, I will request a consulting fee. The shortsighted companies will throw up a wall of bureaucracy, muttering about contracts and local sales reps (the same reps who have failed to contact the prospective customer). Surely, something can

be worked out that benefits everyone. How many future prospects do you think I will refer to the companies that fail to reward my efforts? Word-of-mouth referrals are priceless, but you should pay for them anyway.

DOA no. 3: Death by delay. Some companies take far too long to turn around quotes, or fail to inform customers as early as possible about unavoidable delays. If you need to hire additional staff to handle the needs of your customers and prospects quickly and efficiently, do not hesitate to do so. Otherwise, you may find your company has too much time on its hands.

DOA no. 4: Failure to follow up. Many firms disregard the details that will keep a customer coming back. Does your company check up on prospects and customers, gauge their feelings and query them on quality issues? Do you have corporate paramedics who can be first on the scene when the customer needs them? Are the aches and pains of contract manufacturing diagnosed properly (via corrective actions) and an appropriate remedy carried out?

If you recognize your own company in any of the aforementioned life-threatening situations, the business you are killing may be your own.

You can still revive the patient. It does not take a brain surgeon to devise a winning bedside manner and the treatment plan needed to keep your prospects healthy and happy. It just takes a staff that is dedicated (from the top down) to maintaining your company’s most important asset – the customer. ■

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