



**Strategies and
Tactics** Powering
Wide-Format Sales



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 20 years, digital wide-format printing has evolved into one of the more profitable product areas of the printing industry. Innovation from all sides of the production process — from substrates to inkjet printing technology to eCommerce workflow systems — is a major contributor to wide-format's growth, allowing providers to meet customer demands for new applications, fast turnarounds, and eye-catching print effects. Another growth contributor is the combination of wide-format with digital media, giving marketers a powerful marketing communications tool.

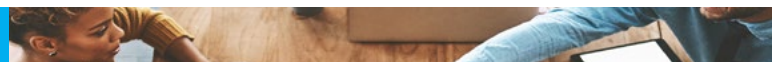
While there are many wide-format application opportunities to pursue, successful providers devote time and resources in developing sales efforts. Profitable firms recognize that selling is a process that requires planning and commitment. *Wide-format Impressions* and NAPCO Research conducted a survey of wide-format print providers (those that print on digital wide-format devices with a width of 36" or more) to uncover the actions firms are taking to improve sales results. The research was commissioned by the Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA).

KEY FINDINGS

Top Strategies of Firms with Double-Digit Sales Growth

Unpacking the results of the survey, respondents reporting that their sales grew more than 10% over the past year due the following:

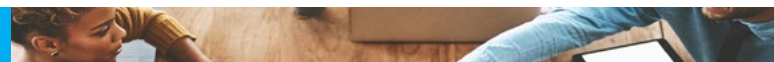
- Follow written sales plans
- Invest in sales staff knowledge and development
- Leverage referrals to capture sales leads
- Use a variety of methods to actively promote and attract customers
- Focus reps on building new business
- Leverage technology to support business operations



Additional Findings

Other important high-level findings of note include:

- Survey respondents report healthy sales growth with close to two-thirds (64%) experiencing growth of 5% or more and 44% report year-over-year sales growth of 10% or more.
- Finding sales staff is one of the biggest sales challenges facing respondents. Despite difficulty in hiring sales staff, respondents overall do little to develop their current staff to step into sales roles.
- Sales cycles are increasing as providers are offering more complex services to customers that may involve more people in the client decision process and require more time for project sign-off.
- Respondents' top sales management challenges include market pricing pressures (59%), followed by hiring new sales reps (48%). These were also the top challenges for respondents reporting double-digit sales growth.
- Additional sales management challenges include selling skills of sales reps (31%), decreasing customer demand for print (28%), training new sales reps (28%), and resistance to adapt new sales techniques (23%).
- Price competition is a continual challenge as many customers view some applications as commodity products. Finding skilled sales staff is a challenge but is necessary for elevating sales discussions from price to value.
- The top three mistakes sales reps make are not asking customers the right questions to either identify opportunities or move a sale forward, not setting proper customer expectations, and failing to articulate how their company is different from competitors.



INTRODUCTION

Digital wide-format printing offers print providers many revenue generating opportunities. This is a broad application area that encompasses many types of work. Today's digital wide-format printing devices produce an impressive array of applications from signage to textiles to electronics. If you can envision it, you probably can create it on a digital wide-format printing device.

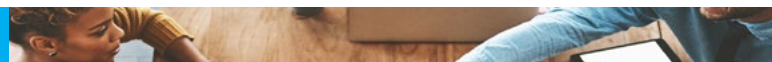
In addition, the combination of more media choices, better inks, and various printing technologies (aqueous, latex, solvent, and UV curable) allows print providers to offer clients exciting new products. Because wide-format devices can print on almost any surface, there is a breadth of application opportunities, including banners, posters, soft signage, textiles, ceramic tiles, wall décor, vehicle wraps, and integrated circuits.

While some application areas are maturing, others continue to expand. Barriers to entry are easing for some sign and display products, as base-level digital wide-format equipment becomes more affordable, and more companies are offering applications. Looking to expand product offerings and regain revenues from lost page volumes, many general commercial print shops now offer digital wide-format printing.

Wanting to find out what sales strategies and tactics were delivering the best results, *Wide-format Impressions* and NAPCO Research (both units of NAPCO Media LLC), surveyed companies that produced printing on digital wide-format devices (those with a width of 36" or more) to:

- Determine the critical challenges management encounters in improving the results of sales activities
- Identify those strategies and tactics that lead to sales results and enhance sales staff skills
- Define the common practices followed by companies experiencing double-digit sales growth

More than 100 print service providers responded to the survey, which was sponsored by the Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA).



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Wide-format Impressions invited readers in management positions to take an online survey in September 2019. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the primary businesses of survey respondents.

Figure 1

Respondent Base

Primary Business	Number	Percent
General commercial printer (offset & digital printing)	24	24%
Wide-format/graphics/signage	30	29%
Digital printing specialist (primarily digital printing)	18	18%
Marketing services company with in-house printing capabilities	8	8%
Sign shop	9	9%
Screen printer	6	6%
Franchise printer (e.g. AlphaGraphics, Sir Speed, PIP, Minuteman Press, Allegra, Signs Now, Fastsigns, Signarama, etc.)	7	7%
Total	102	100%

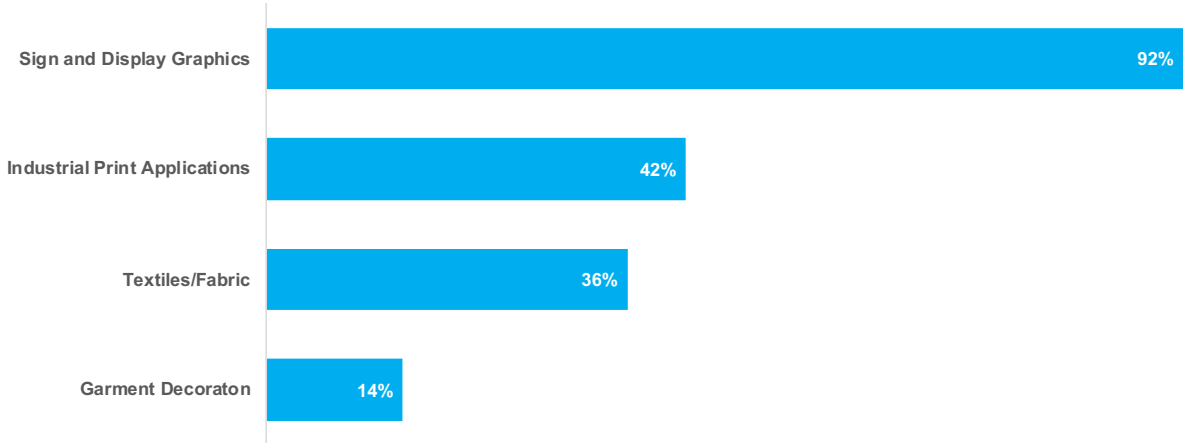
Q. Which category best describes your company's PRIMARY business? Select one
 N=102 Providers that offer wide-format printing



Asked to describe the type of work they produce on their wide-format printing devices, the majority of respondents produced sign and display graphics, followed by industrial print applications, textiles/fabrics, and garment decoration. (Figure 2)

Figure 2

Work Produced on Wide-Format Devices



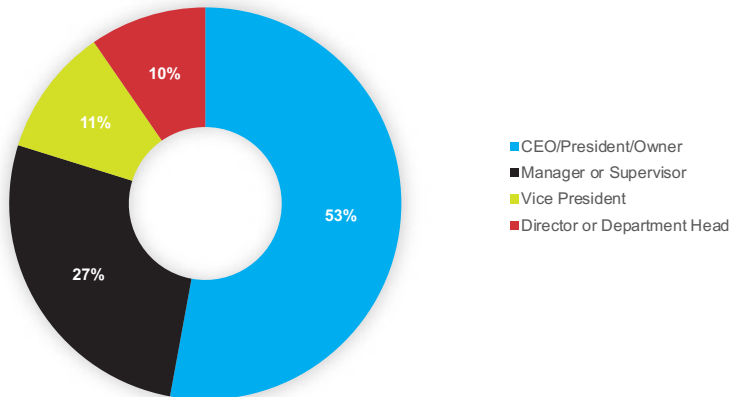
Q. What type of work do you produce on your wide-format printing devices?
 N= 102 Providers that offer wide-format printing



All respondents held business management positions and were able to answer questions on their company's sales efforts. The primary job function of more than half of the survey respondents (53%) is CEO/founder/owner. Additional job titles included vice president, director or department head, or manager/supervisor (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Respondents' Job Title



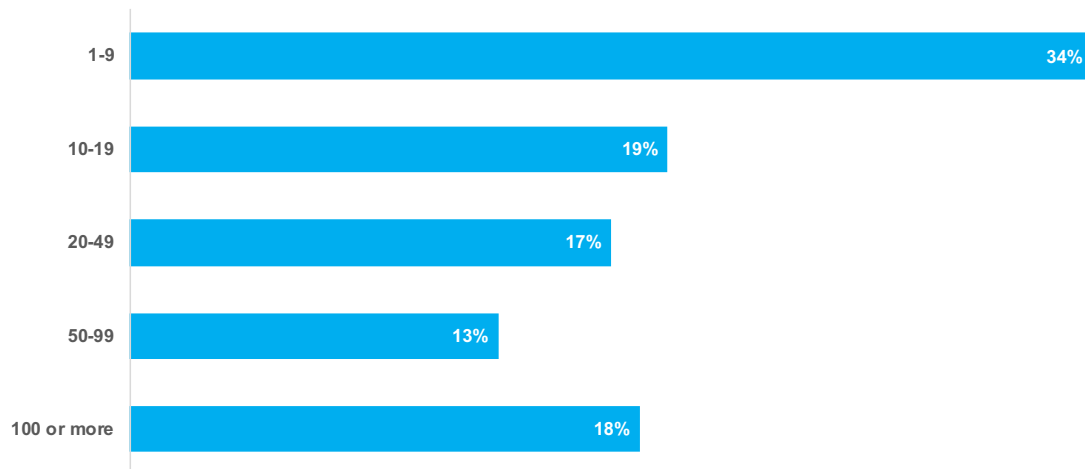
Q. Which of the following best represents your position?
N=102 Providers that offer wide-format printing



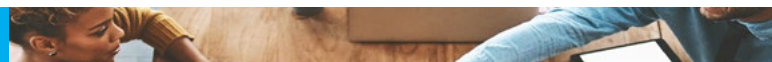
Indicative of the industry at large, a majority of the survey companies had fewer than 50 employees (64%). The survey base was comprised of wide-format operations of various employee sizes (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Company Size by Number of Employees



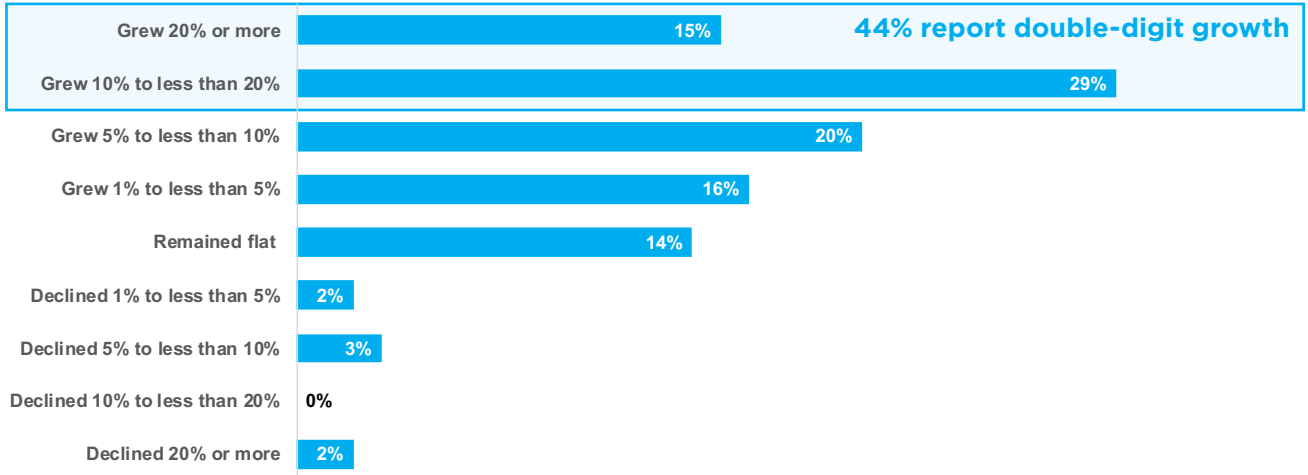
Q. How many employees work at your company?
N=102 Providers that offer wide-format printing



Survey respondents were asked to report their sales growth over the past 12 months, and nearly 8 out of 10 (79%) have reported growth. Sixty-four percent had a sales growth rate of 5% or greater, with more than 40% of survey respondents reporting double-digit sales growth. 15% reported growing 20% or more. (Figure 5) Despite an increasingly competitive landscape as more companies enter the field, providers of wide-format products are enjoying healthy sales growth.

Figure 5

Respondents Annual Rate of Sales Growth



Q. What was your company's rate of sales growth in the last 12 months?
N=102 Wide-format print providers

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IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES TO SALES GROWTH

Discovering key challenges and obstacles to sales growth is an essential step for developing corrective actions that yield results. The research identified hiring sales staff, updating staff skills, and changing customer demands as top sales management challenges.

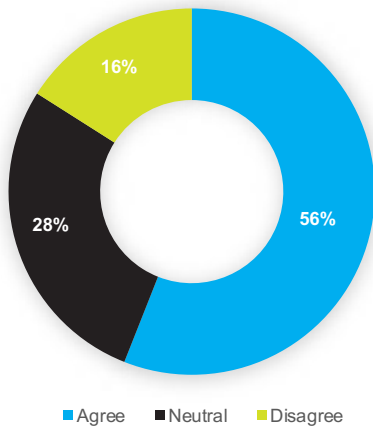
Two key sales challenges reported by respondents were the ability to hire sales staff (Figure 6) and the increase in the length of the sales cycle (Figure 7). Survey respondents report that finding sales staff is one of their biggest challenges. Despite difficulty in hiring sales staff, respondents overall do little to develop current staff to step into sales roles.

As for increasing sales cycles, this likely reflects the increased complexity of customer demands and the services firms are providing customers to stand out from competitors. As providers look to differentiate from the competition by offering more value-added services — which customers are demanding — more approvals and reviews are often required by clients.

Sales Challenges

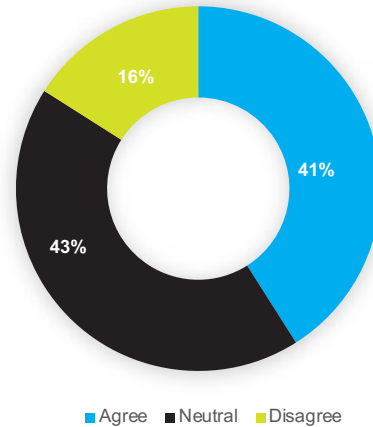
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Figure 6
Finding Sales Staff



Q. Indicate level of agreement with: The biggest challenge our company faces is finding new sales staff.
N= 68 Providers that offer wide-format printing

Figure 7
Sales Cycles Increasing



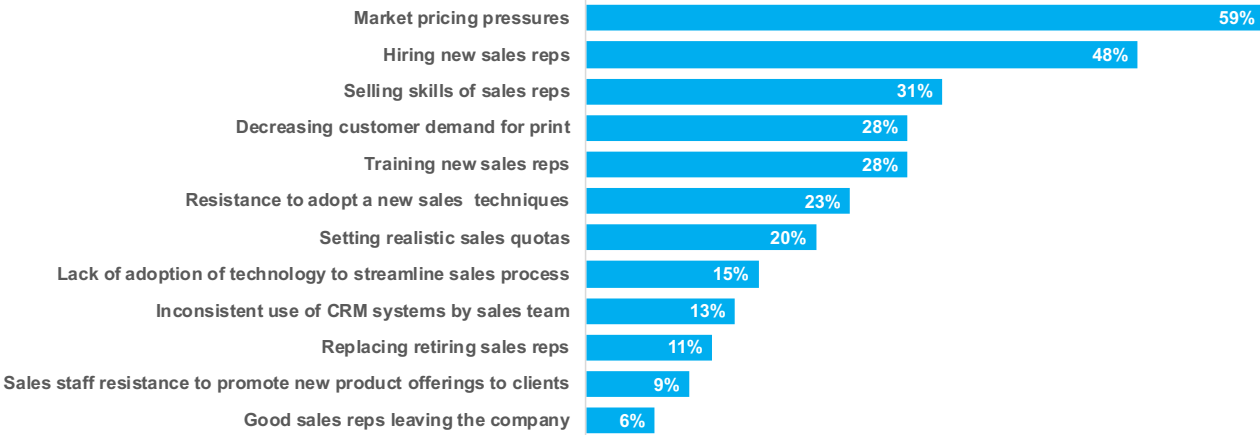
Q. Indicate level of agreement with: Sales cycles are increasing
N= 68 Providers that offer wide-format printing

When asked to name their top sales management challenges, respondents cited market pricing pressures (59%) as their top challenge, followed by hiring new sales reps (48%). Additional challenges included selling skills of sales reps (31%), decreasing customer demand for print (28%), training new sales reps (28%), and resistance to adapt new sales techniques (23%) (Figure 8).

Pricing pressures and hiring new sales reps were also the top challenges for respondents reporting double-digit sales growth. Price competition is a continual challenge as many customers view some applications as commodity products. A tried and true practice for escaping the commodity pricing trap is to sell on value and demonstrate to customers the extra benefits they receive. The skills of sales reps can also elevate the pricing discussion from price to value, but sales staff skills are a key challenge.

Figure 8

Top Sales Management Challenges



Q. What are your top THREE sales management challenges?
 N=102 Wide-format print providers



Sales reps are another source of sales challenges. Rep's actions can slow closing deals, interfere with successful prospecting, and disappoint customers. Respondents report the top three mistakes that their sales reps make (Figure 9) are not asking customers the right questions to either identify opportunities or move a sale forward, not setting proper customer expectations, and failing to articulate how their company is different from competitors.

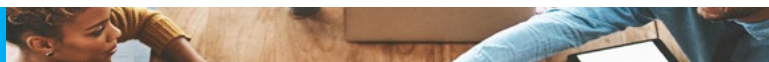
Figure 9

Top Sales Mistakes



Q. What are the top THREE mistakes your sales staff make?
N= 102 Providers that offer wide-format printing

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PRACTICES OF SALES GROWTH LEADERS

A key research goal was to identify the common practices and similarities of wide-format print providers experiencing high sales growth, so that other firms can follow suit and improve their own sales results. While these providers encounter the same challenges as shops not experiencing double-digit growth, they somehow manage to generate annual sales growth rates that exceed 10%, and sometimes even as much as 20%. The question is: how?

By analyzing the survey results of respondents that reported sales growth of more than 10% in the past 12 months, the following insights emerged.

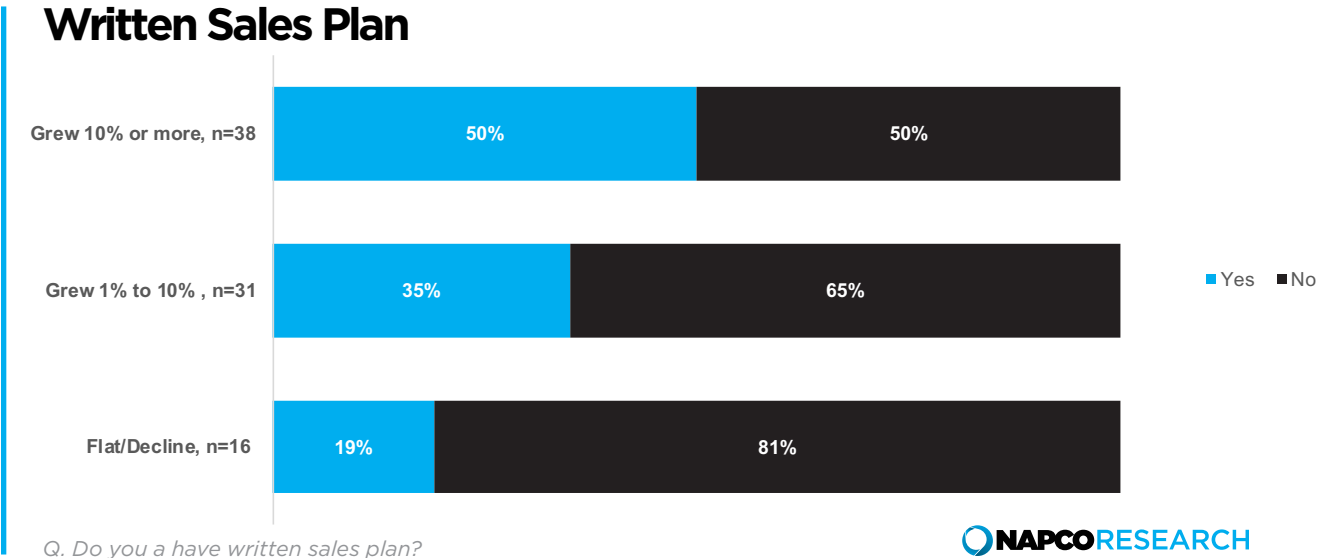
FOLLOW WRITTEN SALES PLANS

Half of respondents reporting double-digit sales growth reported having a written sales plan, compared to 19% for firms reporting flat or declining sales (Figure 10). A sales plan lays out a company's plan for improving sales results in a specified time period. It usually includes:

- Specific revenue and performance goals for a given period
- Strategies for achieving goals
- Resources and activities required to carry out strategies

A written sales plan makes it possible for everyone on the sales team to see the big picture, share the same overall objectives, and work the same plan to achieve them. Without a written plan, sales plans are just talk.

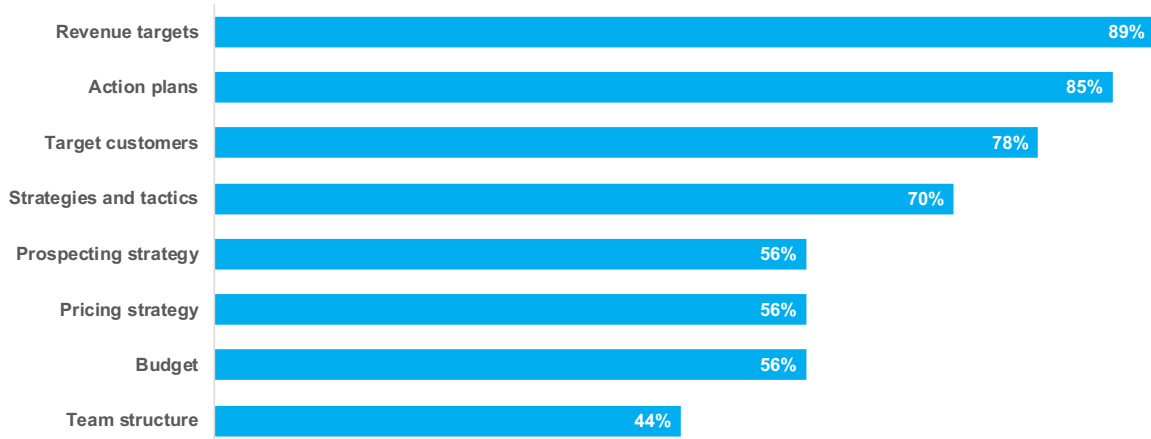
Figure 10



Most respondents with a written sales plan reported it includes the following: defined target customers, revenue goals, and strategies and tactics for achieving results (Figure 11). There was little variation in plan components by respondents' level of sales growth, most likely because of the small number of respondents having sales plans.

Figure 11

Sales Plan Components



Q. Which of the following are included in your sales plan?
N=27 Providers that offer wide-format printing



INVEST IN SALES STAFF KNOWLEDGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Firms reporting high sales growth invest in developing the skill sets of their sales staffs. According to the survey, many respondents reporting double-digit sales growth offer training to sales staff to develop a wider skill set encompassing technology education and sales skills enhancement (Figure 12). Firms reporting double-digit sales growth focused their training more on:

- Understanding printing processes and technology
- Selling value-added services
- Using of sales technology tools
- Types of Training Offered to Sales Staff

Figure 12

Types of Training Offered to Sales Staff



Q. What types of training, if any, do you offer sales staff members?
N=38 Wide-format print providers that reported double-digit sales growth

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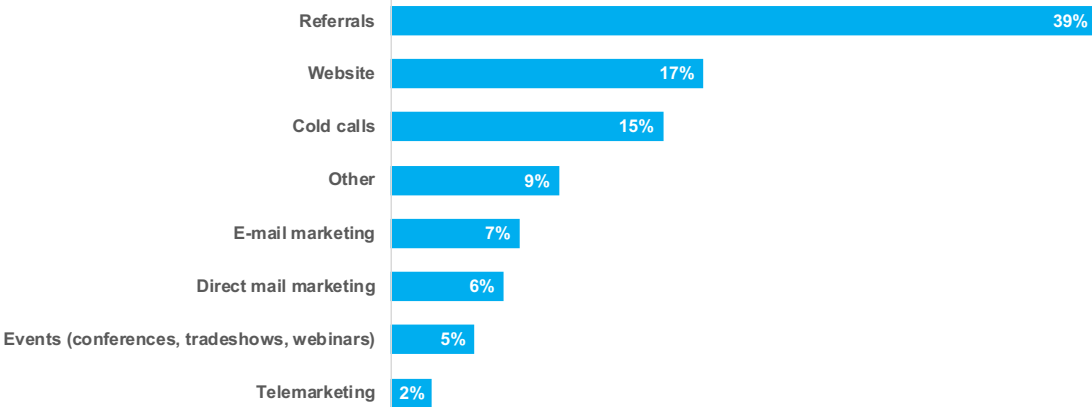
Another survey finding is that 21% of firms reporting high-sales growth have documented professional development plans for their sales reps. In addition, 18% of these organizations have structured programs to develop employees into sales reps.

LEVERAGE REFERRALS TO CAPTURE SALES LEADS

The most common source of sales leads for respondents reporting double-digit sales growth is referrals, followed by their websites and cold calls (Figure 13). Sales referrals work because they help bridge the trust gap between an organization and a referred prospect. Asking for a referral can be one of the simplest ways to generate new business. Usually the best sources for referrals are existing customers, especially after a job well done. Social media is another way to get referrals and more than three-quarters of respondents reporting double-digit sales growth use social media to attract customers.

Figure 13

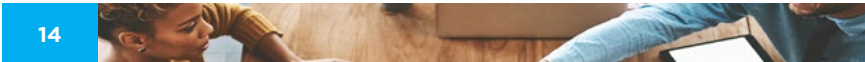
Sources of Sales Leads



Q. What percent of your sales leads come from the following sources?
N=38 Wide-format print providers that reported double-digit sales growth



In addition, 48% of respondents reporting growth of 10% or more provide sales reps with validated sales leads. Validating sales leads gives sales reps more time to actively sell.



Use Many Methods To Attract Customers

Referrals may be the single biggest driver of new business, but successful wide-format providers don't rely only on word of mouth to grow their company. These market leaders invest in a variety of self-promotional efforts that encompass and combine digital, print, and social media.

When asked how they promote and attract customers, the top methods of respondents reporting double-digit sales include websites (87%), social media (76%), and e-mail marketing (58%) (Figure 14). Other essential promotion tactics are internet advertising (47%), SEO (42%), sponsorships (39%), signage (34%), and direct mail (34%).

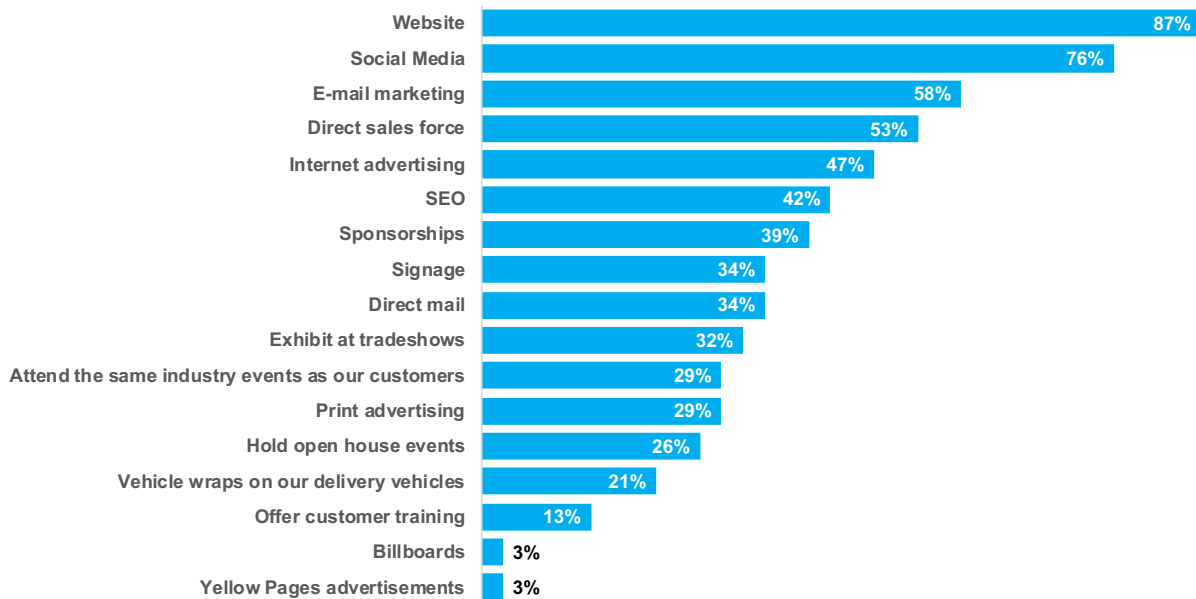
Attracting and adding customers requires demonstrating expertise through a full spectrum of promotional activities. The first thing most prospective customers do when someone refers them to a business is visit their website or LinkedIn page to learn more. Websites are a critical marketing promotional tool for wide-format providers and offer the opportunity to display the breadth of work and types of clients served. In addition, signage and direct mail are effective ways to show off expertise.

Over one-third of respondents reporting high growth sponsor events. Sponsorships can facilitate good will in a community and establish social relationships with prospective customers. Donating signage to local events that include a firm's contact information is often an effective marketing method.

Getting a company's name out in front of the local professional community requires ongoing, innovative promotion.

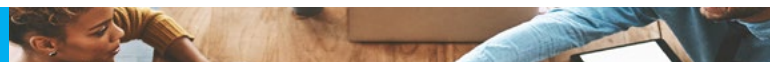
Figure 14

Methods Used to Promote and Attract Customers



Q. Which of the following do you use to promote and attract customers to your business?
N=38 Wide-format print providers that reported double-digit sales growth

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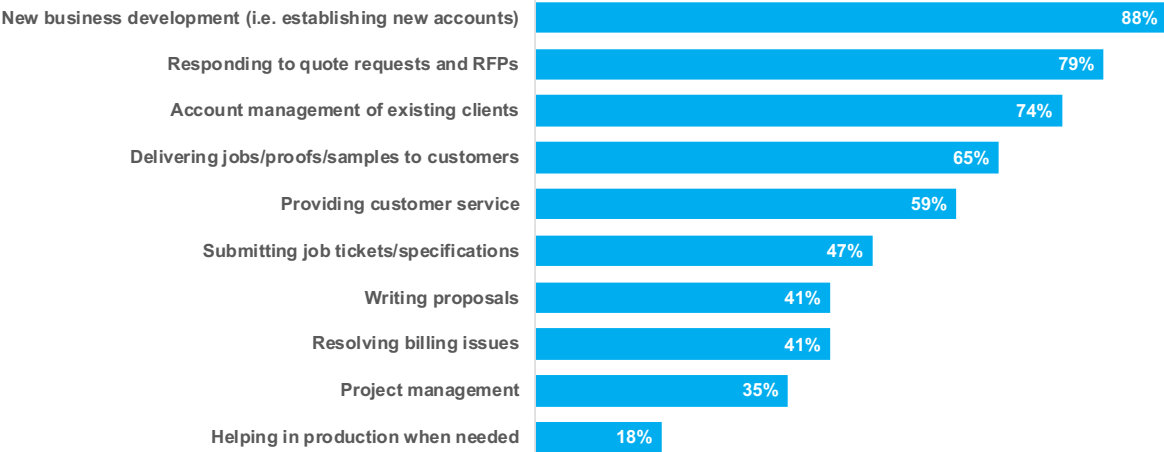


FOCUS REPS ON BUILDING NEW BUSINESS

Survey participants were asked to identify the key responsibilities of sales reps. Sales reps at companies reporting sales growth of 10% or more are focused on establishing new business and accounts and also managing current accounts (Figure 15). Developing new business is essential for continued sales growth, but equally important is keeping existing customers happy. Reps at successful firms understand the value of both.

Figure 15

Sales Reps Responsibilities



Q. What are your sales reps' responsibilities?
N=38 Wide-format print providers that reported double-digit sales growth

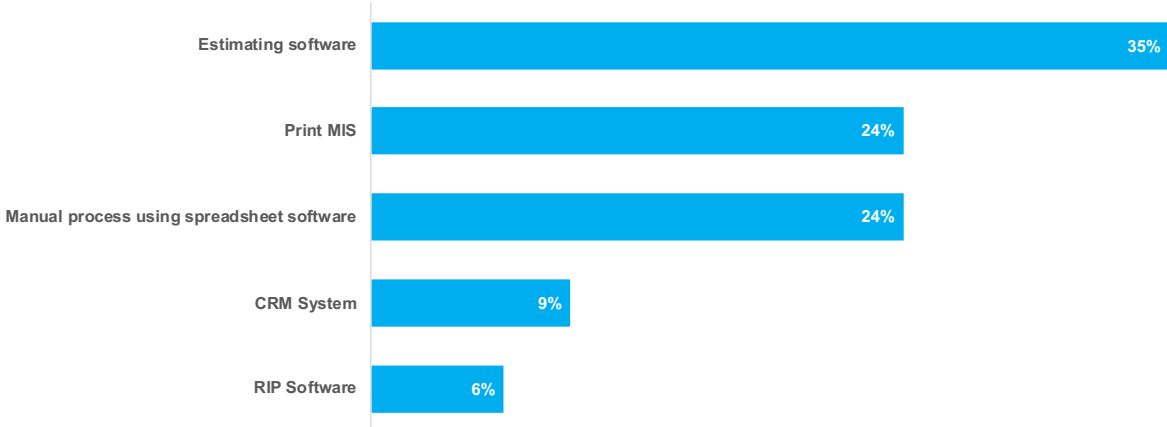


LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO SUPPORT BUSINESS OPERATIONS

A common characteristic of respondents with double-digit sales growth is the use of software technology to support sales and customer care. Half of respondents with sales growth greater than 10% reported using a customer relationship management (CRM) system. In addition, these companies were more likely to use software to support job estimates. When asked to name their primary method for creating job estimates, about 60% report using either job estimating software or a Print MIS, compared to a manual spreadsheet (24%) (Figure 16).

Figure 16

Methods of Job Estimating



Q. What is your primary method for creating job estimates for wide-format work?
N=34 Wide-format print providers that reported double-digit sales growth



An important aspect of ensuring profitable sales is accurately measuring costs and making sure jobs are produced efficiently. Using software tools to support various front-end components — estimating, managing inventory, project scheduling — and an assortment of back-end aspects — warehousing, shipping, invoicing, and so on — helps take the guess work out of profitability.



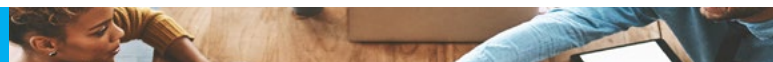
CONCLUSION

Successful wide-format print providers invest time and resources in their sales efforts. Faced with major challenges such as hiring sales staff, increasing sales cycles, and price competition, those organizations experiencing sales growth are finding ways to overcome obstacles and excel.

Common characteristics of firms reporting double-digit sales growth all revolve around building sales strategies that both define sales goals and focus on staff. These successful firms write sales plans and create and support programs to develop sales staff in order to give their sales staff a broad base of skills that combine technical knowledge with selling aptitude. In addition, their sales reps' top focus is new business development.

Respondents reporting double-digit sales growth also appear to have mastered using communication channels to capture sales leads, promote services, and attract customers. Leaders use a mix of in-person, digital media, and print to support customer outreach, lead generation, and promotion.

Lastly, leaders support sales and business operations with technology to track sales, help manage customer relationships, better estimate job costs, and enhance the profitability of work.



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WHO WE ARE

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SGIA — Supporting the Leaders of the Digital & Screen Printing Community

Having its origins in the screen printing industry, SGIA embraced the digital revolution early on and is now the trade association of choice for professionals in the industrial, graphic, garment, textile, electronics, packaging and commercial printing communities looking to grow their business into new market segments through the incorporation of the latest printing technologies. SGIA membership comprises these diverse segments, all of which are moving rapidly towards digital adoption. As long-time champions of digital technologies and techniques, SGIA is the community of peers you are looking for to help navigate the challenges of this process. Additionally, the SGIA Expo is the largest trade show for print technology in North America. “Whatever the medium, whatever the message, print is indispensable. Join the community — SGIA.”

