

# Roadmap to Laser Success

Three key tenets: Knowledge, Promotion, and Efficiency

## Knowledge

- Hire a capable operator.
  - Your laser operator should be friendly, courteous, knowledgeable, and efficient. Without a mix of all of this, your sales will suffer. This is one of the most important decisions you make and has a direct impact on the success of this program.
- Update files on a regular basis.
  - P. Graham Dunn is adding new files and new product to the line on a regular basis. Additionally we tweak our files at the behest of operators such as you. If someone finds a problem or better way to engrave, we will reflect that in the files available for download.
- Limit mistakes.
  - Mistakes will indeed happen, but careful operators will save you big bucks in the long run. Always triple check spelling with your customer by offering them a view of the monitor. A double sided monitor is particularly helpful in this application. Additionally avoid phone orders at all costs and if there is any doubt as to the alignment of an item, run a red light first.
- Know how to center quickly.
  - A good operator can accommodate custom requests from customers in a timely efficient manner. Using tools available in the software, there should be no need to red light files often.
- A good operator is not afraid of the machine.
  - Some of your best sales people may not be comfortable working on the laser machine. Putting someone on the machine that is not comfortable is rarely a good idea. Your customer will sniff out an apprehensive operator and be much more skeptical of the engraving.
- A good operator does not get led around.

- Personalization may require a number of decisions are made. A good operator will help customers make decisions and not get drag into changing the layout, going back, changing it again, again and again.
- A good operator knows how to sell.
  - Make suggestions; do not wait for prompts from your customer. Often customers are overwhelmed by the number of options; put those options into a neat package for them.
- Know where to go for help.
  - P. Graham Dunn is here to help your store be successful with this program. If anything goes wrong, start by calling us. There have been a number of glitches that we have already figured out. Save the frustration of troubleshooting and give us a call.
- A good operator uses the internet.
  - Tech support can remotely control the laser computer via the internet. An operator can download the latest files. Suggestions for various holidays can be found on such sites as Quote Garden. Layouts can be emailed. Logos can be downloaded and engraved. Mitigate distractions like Facebook, but use the internet to your advantage.
- Walk before running.
  - Frankly a good operator will be up to a solid jog in a matter of days. However before importing logos and cutting out your own magnets, get comfortable engraving basic layouts. It is most important to be able to produce quality engraving with style and efficiency.
- Price your products right.
  - We suggest about a 3X markup on cost of goods, but it is important to find out what your market will bear. One retailer was selling personalized pens \$3 cost for \$19.99. They didn't sell many. \$9.99 seems to work much better. A \$.50 bookmark should sell for \$3.99 or more. Use a 3X markup as a starting point, but make sure to examine the item to determine how it will do in your market. If an item is not moving, play around with the price before deciding it is not a good fit for your market.

- Develop graphics and marketing skills.
  - The best engravers will over time push your program to a whole new level by creating your own designs.
- Maintenance is essential.
  - Be sure the machine is cleaned regularly and the filters checked at least once a week. Careful attention to maintenance will ensure many years of trouble free engraving.

## **Promotion**

- Bundle small items together.
  - A bookmark that costs \$.50 each and retails for \$3.99 or \$4.99 could be sold in bulk (driving down labor) by bundling in sets of 3. Do a special 3 for \$9.99 and watch them fly out the door! Same thing goes with smaller items like the soy candles, dog tags, whistles, and yo-yo's.
- Create eye catching signage in your store.
  - Call attention to personalized gifts. It takes more than a sample on a display unit to get the message across that these gifts can apply to any occasion!
- Make sure you have take and go material.
  - P. Graham Dunn offers brochures with a blank space on the back for your own store info. Some of the most successful stores have created flyers and even their own catalogs to promote personalized gifts.
- Be sure your clerks are prompting at checkout.
  - There are a lot of non-PGD items in your store that could have a gold tag applied to it for personalization. Up-sell is not a bad word!
- Import HS logos for graduation gifts and to support school spirit.
  - Check with the school first to ensure no copyright exists on their mascot. Most will actually send you a file to work with.

- Make custom products for your store.
  - What makes your store in your neck of the woods so unique? Make products to suit. The cost of goods on the personalized blanks provides ample room for markup. Live in San Fran, use a silhouette of the Golden Gate Bridge.
- Import logos and sell B2B.
  - Seed these sales by marketing to your local chamber, or knocking on the doors of adjacent businesses.
- Have an open house and give every one a swag bag.
  - In the bag provide some gift items. One of which could be a \$.50 bookmark that can be personalized on a return visit only! Get them back when you have more time to devote to each customer.
- Laser and cut little wood promotional magnets.
  - We give away saws at our store in Ohio, what would be a good shape for you. Make sure to include your website and phone number. And consider making these types of items for the stores around you. You could get roughly 25 on a sheet of alder which puts the cost of goods at 10 cents each.
- Make your own price tags.
  - Use a design that helps brand your store.
- Make custom magnets and ornaments.
  - There is a church that calls up our Dalton store every year to order 500 custom Christmas ornaments. If you change the design every year, you can treat them like collectors items.
- Make nametags for local restaurants.
  - With foodservice, there is always turnover and a steady demand for nametags. Or do it for free in exchange for a message about your store.
- Stack and promote a laser item or two.
  - For our recent sale we offered personalized soy candles 3 for \$9.99. Our customers were leaving with arm loads. We are not in the business of selling slat wall, so make an impact with your inventory!

- Advertise a special item.
  - Often you could offer a deep discount and still be profitable while drawing customers with a “loss” leader.
- Offer a free pen or keychain personalized with any order of \$100 or more.
  - Drive your sales up with value add-ons and introduce personalization at the same time. Increase your average gross transaction.
- Run the red light or make samples while no projects are running.
  - The simple act of running the machine draws attention and encourages sales. For the savvy, there is even a way to set the machine to repeat the process of dropping the tray and focusing.
- Talk to your customers!
  - How often this is over looked! The best merchandising in the world isn’t going to fix the needs of a customer that no one talks to. The big draw of laser engraving is the fact that few gift giving occasions cannot be accommodated by a personalized gift. Watch your conversion rate soar as you capture these sales. Need a gift for a 37<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary? No problem. What, you don’t have any gift items for a retiring National Park Ranger? Well you do now!
- Make sure the machine is located somewhere your customers will be able to see.
  - Amusement parks don’t hide their best rides behind a bunch of trees; they put them front and center to draw traffic in. The laser is your rollercoaster and just watching it run will drive sales. That said; watch out for the landing strip just inside the store. This is the area in which your customer has not caught his/her bearings. We once put a machine at the entrance of an amusement park and while the traffic was second to none, we were literally in a cattle shoot. No one stopped as they were focused on getting in the park.
- Have your customer press the green button.
  - We often say corny things like, now you can say it was your craftsmanship! And after they hit the button... and if anything goes wrong it’s not my fault! ☺ The more engaging you are with

your customer, the more they are likely to tell others of their experience. And of course this is the greatest of all marketing – word of mouth!

- Make sure your operators are prepared to offer quantity price breaks.
  - Quantities orders help reduce labor per item. Instead of setting up one item for one customer, you may be setting up 25 items for one customer. That is a lot less communicating. Quantity price breaks help drive quantity sales.
- Make sure your samples are accessible to the consumer.
  - Additionally make sure the samples are top notch. It is easy to goof and just say; well I'll make this a sample. Just remember that this is what your customers are judging you on. If the sample looks messed up, or you were practicing a little designing, you may be missing sales because of it.
- Make some creative nametags for the store employees.
  - We change ours out seasonally, but perhaps you make them in a shape that helps brand your store. Or perhaps you add some text to help interact with your customers.
- The best stores integrate personalization with their own promotion.
  - They make their own flyers and catalogs and advertise personalized gifts along side everything else they promote. The concept of personalized gifts is so versatile that the biggest obstacle to success is the awareness your customers have of what you can do.
- A happy customer is your best advertiser.
  - Operators should smile and be warm and personable. Additionally it is better to meet the needs of a customer and have them leave with a positive experience than to hide behind policy. Occasionally we will smile and accommodate a labor intensive request for the greater good!
- Use your website to tell your story.
  - Get the message out that you offer personalized gifts, corporate gifts, and gifts for every occasion – even for that 43<sup>rd</sup> wedding anniversary!

- Send eBlasts.
  - Promote specific items, or for specific holidays by connect with your best customers via email. Take pre-orders so you know how many blank items to order.

## Efficiency

- Use a Menu!
  - The biggest step we recently took to impact efficiency is the addition of a menu to our personalization counter. The most time consuming activity is designing a custom layout. We discourage this by charging a fee of \$15 or 3 cents per character, whichever is greater. Though the engraving is free if the layout is relatively unchanged. In this way your operator does not get bogged down in design unless he/she is being paid to do so. Additionally it is easier to waive a fee for a customer than to add it on after your 10 minutes into a design session on a \$15 item!
- Limit the changes you can make.
  - We post nine different font options, rather than the hundreds that are available on most computers. Imagine shuffling through 800 different fonts for a \$9.99 pen!
- Own the space and help direct your customer.
  - Make quick suggestions and do not continuously offer to change things. I heard an operator the other day say to a customer that was buying 25 pen sets. Are you sure you are not interested in personalizing each pen? It's free. I'm not suggesting that you withhold value, but you can easily add many minutes to a job by constantly offering to change things.
- We all make mistakes!
  - With personalization there is a larger risk of doing so. Keep a boo-boo basket or if your store has an outlet section or shelf, mark down the mistakes and sell them. Rarely have we sold mistakes for less than cost or had to throw them away. A plaque can be covered with a piece of gold plate. A lot of guys don't care what name is on a pocket knife if it's only \$5.

- You need to be well organized.
  - There is no way you'll run an efficient operation if operators can't find stock or jigs. Your customers will be put off by cluttered counters and poorly merchandised displays. Stay clean, stay organized.
- A good operator can set up multiple files in advance.
  - Imagine there are three customers and the first customer orders something with a run time of 7 minutes. Instead of waiting around for 7 minutes, the operator can open up a couple more sessions of Gravostyle and set up the next two jobs or more in advance. That way when the first job is done, the next is mere seconds away. This is extremely important during peak hours and peak seasons.
- If you have an order in quantity, run that job early or late in the day when it is slowest.
  - Use those orders to stir up drama in the store by running the laser.
- Pre engrave long run times to get the most turns.
  - Some files may take many minutes to complete and all but the name and date is unchanged. Go ahead and run a blank or two in advance. Upon selling that design, just select the personalized portion and run the file. Your run time will be dramatically reduced.
- Save custom files for later use.
  - You may get a custom order every year for the same design with a different date. Reduce your time spent on this order by pulling up a job save from the previous year. Again this is an area that requires organization skills, otherwise you'll waste the time you save by searching for the file.
- Offer long run times as pick up later items.
  - Or build in a cost to ship the item. Or ship for free.