

“Does a Plumber Need a Web Site?”

Case Study #6: Commercial Sheetfed Print Shop

Company Name and Location: The Great D. Press,
Deadwood, South Dakota

Founded: 1974

**Company
Background:**
Sheetfed
commercial print
shop.



Markets/Industries Served: Local businesses and ad agencies, with some major national accounts. Does all printing for local visitor's bureau.

Interviewee: S. Lyman Hoth, owner

The Story So Far

“I have to spend all my time trying keep my presses busy. I don't have a lot of time to think about weird marketing schemes,” says S. Lyman Hoth, owner of Deadwood, South Dakota's The Great D. Press. When the company started in 1974, the **Yellow Pages display ad** was the primary marketing strategy for most businesses. The company also had a prominent **physical location** in town and elaborate **signage** involving a stylized gold D mounted atop an antique printing press. “That sign cost almost as much as my first press,” says Mr. Hoth. As he built up his clientele, he began to get more work via **word of mouth** referrals. Wanting to get more national accounts, he began buying **print advertising** in the major trade publications. Hoth was also heavily involved in **trade shows** and other

Webb & Romano

events, and printed up **brochures, equipment lists, business cards, flyers**, print samples, and other promotional materials. He was also a member of the local PIA affiliate, and attended regular events.

“We began to get on the radar of some big ad agencies so we started getting some of that work,” says Hoth. Local



S. Lyman Hoth

networking events also hooked Hoth up with the director of the Deadwood Visitor’s Bureau, and The Great D. Press became the default printer for all the local travel info.

“Business was good throughout the 1970s, 80s, and most of the 90s,” Mr. Hoth said.

“Around 1999, we noticed things starting to slow down. The recession of 2001 was very bad for us.” As a result, The Great D. Press started cutting back on its advertising. “We were told that we needed a **Web site**, so I put one up. It’s got a great shot of our building on it. I updated it...oh, let’s see...about five or six years ago, when I bought some finishing equipment.” The Web site offers the ability for print buyers to request quotes, but it takes his sales reps a few days to respond to e-mail. “The more serious customers use the phone. The Internet is for people just looking for a cheap deal.” Today, he relies on his sales reps **telemarketing** efforts, cold-calling local businesses to ask about their printing needs. “One of our vendors—a paper merchant—used to like to take us out and entertain us for an afternoon at the local country club, but we can’t afford to leave the phone for a minute, lest we miss a important customer.”

Hoth cites pricing as his biggest challenge. “We lost a lot of work to other shops that could undercut us on price. It’s really quite cutthroat.”

The Great D. Press still has some long-term customers, but admits they have been cutting back on their volume. “The recession of 2008–2012 was very bad for us.” Has

“Does a Plumber Need a Web Site?”

Hoth tried any new or social media initiatives? “Some colleagues of mine insisted I be on **LinkedIn**, so I have an account but don’t really do anything with it. My grandson is on **Facebook**, but I don’t really see the point of it. Isn’t it just all about sharing gossip about Lady Gaga or something? And I’ve heard about **Twitter**, but honestly, I have no time to waste with that nonsense. All these people who are chattering incessantly at each other...don’t they have real jobs?”

One of Hoth’s primary competitors in town recently revamped its Web site, allows online estimating and job tracking, Web-to-print services, and even some compelling **online video, blogs, podcasts**, and other media that put a face on the business, and educated customers. “He must be getting even less work than us to have the time for all that [stuff].”

A Change of Mind

Hoth wrestled with the idea of handling total communications logistics for customers, but ultimately had a revelation. “I came to the conclusion that neither I nor my business was prepared to deal with a continuous communications environment. It just went counter to everything in my genetic make up,” he says. “Basically, we are adept at making sure that posters and other items come off press on time and with excellent quality. That’s what we do. We are not ‘built’ for updating social media every day or every hour.”

Hoth recognized that not every printing company has to adopt a full “marketing services” paradigm. “I thought, well, if everything else is online media, why can’t we carve out a niche and specialize in offline media? So we promote the stuff we are really good at: wide-format printing, posters, tchotchkes, and other physical products.” What helped was Hoth’s decision to work with a print management firm, which helps them get work from out of town, and allows their salespeople to become familiar with new printed products.

“I just had to be honest about what I wanted from the business. I understand why a full communications logistics approach is vital for a lot of companies, but adopting an offline media strategy really was the best thing for us.”

How the Channels Have Changed

What They Used To Do: 1960s/1970s

- Yellow Pages advertising
- word of mouth and referrals by designers/print buyers
- advertising in trade publications
- signage
- trade association listings

What They (Could) Do Now: 2000s/2010s

- Web site
- social media
- company blog offering graphic design and file formatting tips, industry trends, etc.
- online video of company owner demonstrating printing process, not screaming psychotically about how much he loves print
- advertising on WhatTheyThink.com
- trade shows/events (like Print Buyers Conference)
- sponsorship of local events and organizations