

RP Abrasives Uses Business Growth Collaborative Program to Accelerate Success

Company Background:

RP Abrasives, located in Rochester, New Hampshire began in 1996 as a business serving manufacturers needing metal deburring and surface finishing. In 2002 Joe Shean, now President of RP Abrasives, and his wife were looking for a way to move back to New England. He came across RP Abrasives and decided to purchase the company.

When Joe arrived at the company they were in a long-term contract with a large mobile telecommunication company polishing parts for their phones. This customer was more than 80% of their business. Then the bottom fell out. "It was late 2002 and we thought everything was going very well," said Shean, "But six months later the customer told us they were moving production over to China."

At the time RP Abrasives was at 52 employees. But to have the company survive Joe sadly had to lay off all but 5 key employees. When Joe and his small team got together to strategize the future of the company they committed to one thing, "To move forward as a company we will never again put all our eggs into 1 basket," said Shean. "That was when we branched diversification into the company."

The next thing they did was have Tim Harris, Sales and Business Development Manager at RP Abrasives spearhead sales and marketing efforts, particularly upgrading their website to generate more leads. This allowed Joe to go on the road to develop face-to-face relationships with new customers.

Well it worked. Today RP Abrasives is back up to 18 employees and is housed in a 16,000 square foot building. Their diverse set of customers include manufacturers in industries such as surgical and medical devices, defense and aerospace, vacuum and semiconductors, food processing, investment casting, metal stamp forming and 3D printing.

Situation:

After making great strides in growth Joe and the team still felt they needed a better way of finding and retaining the right customers. "We had to know what makes a good customer, a good customer. What makes a good job, a good job." said Shean. They focused on new markets they felt were good for their business and distanced themselves from those they felt would not benefit the company.

Then in 2014 they switched from one professional web development company to another. The new web development company helped greatly with their SEO (Search Engine Optimization) enabling them to garner more leads. They also used their website to market their passivation process. But even with the website generating more leads and showcasing passivation, they still needed help distinguishing good customers from bad ones. At the same time other obstacles came up. The team needed a way to reduce the cyclical nature of manufacturing and keep the down times shorter. Another struggle the team grappled with was with how to measure customer job successes in order to become more profitable.

Solution:

Sometime in early 2015 Joe received an email from NH MEP about a free hour long information session called 5 Steps to Sustain Business Growth. He attended the session and was so motivated by what he learned that he signed up for the NH MEP Business Growth Collaborative Program in-depth series of workshops and coaching sessions starting in March of that year.

Tim was skeptical about Joe attending the Business Growth Collaborative Program. "How will the program's teachings apply?" said Harris. "We're in such a unique industry I'm not sure it would benefit us." Tammy Beatty, Production/Quality Manager at RP Abrasives also had reservations. "In many ways our biggest competitor is our customer," said Beatty. "Because we don't make anything of our own, I don't see how these workshops fit toward building customer relationships."

All Tim and Tammy's trepidations were overcome once Joe participated in the Business Growth Collaborative Program. During the program Joe learned how to grasp what is a marketing concept and how to turn it around and make it work for their company. As the program progressed the concepts he learned also let him understand and prioritize what is and what is not important. As Joe put it, "Who is a good customer, and who is not? Do we work on it right now, or do we wait? The program taught me how to look at the big picture." Then he added, "But it will only pay off so long as we devote time to doing it."

The Business Growth Collaborative Program also taught Joe how to make better use of their website and social media for greater, more measurable market penetration. He learned the use of customer e-Surveys to gauge customer interest, and the importance of creating a concise and consistent elevator pitch. The program even got into business growth analysis such as cost and benefit, and profit and loss. But in Joe's mind the key component of the Business Growth Collaborative Program was the collaborative atmosphere. By learning about what other companies were experiencing helped him internalize how to apply it to RP Abrasives.

Results:

The NH MEP Business Growth Collaborative Program gave Joe the tools he needed to grow his business even further. After each session Joe would communicate to his team what he learned. This empowered the team making them feel united in their mission to make RP Abrasives succeed. "This let us play off each other," said Beatty. "Collaboration and open communication is so important."

Since then what Joe learned in the program and communicated to his team has contributed to a large increase in sales, the ability to have added new employees, and investments made in new markets and equipment.

Of course the Business Growth Collaborative helped RP Abrasives find and retain the right kind of customer. Tim Harris recounts a recent customer story that would not have been possible before Joe attended the Business Growth Collaborative. "We noticed on our web metrics a certain company looked at 34 web pages on our website. I called them on a Thursday, met with them the following Monday, and brought samples back that Wednesday with an order. They have been a great customer ever since." Tammy Beatty summed it up this way, "Our use of web metrics gave us the information we needed to identify a potential customer, respond quickly, and follow through to exceed their expectations."

The following results for RP Abrasives can be credited to having gone through the NH MEP Business Growth Collaborative Program:

- Sales in 2016 grew by 30%
- Retained sales of \$222,000 in 2016 that otherwise would have been lost
- Added 5 new fulltime employees in 2016
- Increased investment in processes at the cost of \$12,000 in 2016
- Increased investment in new equipment at the cost of \$50,000 in 2016
- Avoided unnecessary investments of \$23,000 in 2016

Testimonial:

“The NH MEP Business Growth Collaborative is an excellent program. It definitely works for you as long as you do the work for it.”

- Joe Shean, President of RP Abrasives - www.rpabrasives.com