



Lititz Office Products: Ahead of the Curve by Embracing Technology & Responding to Change

Bill Bell, Lititz Office Products



Ask Bill Bell of Lititz Office Products (LOP) about DDMS and its importance to his dealership and he doesn't have to think too long about the answer. "It's absolutely key to all we do," he says. "The program is without a doubt the best thing that has happened to our business in the past few years, and it's played a critical role in helping us grow and become more profitable."

Bill's dealership is located in Lancaster County, PA, and has a long and distinguished history that goes all the way back to its founding as a bookstore in 1878.

Lancaster County is Amish country, with mile upon mile of farmland and a thriving tourism industry that draws over five million vacationers every year. But the area is not only about horse-drawn carriages and covered bridges. Major corporations like Armstrong World Industries, Pepperidge Farm and RR Donnelley & Sons have a sizable presence in the community and hi-tech leader MapQuest has its headquarters there.

During his high school and college years, Bill worked at the dealership his father bought in 1963. After starting out as a teacher and high school football and track coach, he joined the family business full-time in 1981 and became president when his father passed in 1995.

LOP: From Paper Clips to Panel Systems

The dealership he runs today, however, is far different from the one where he helped stock the shelves and install office furniture as a boy.

Back then, it operated out of a downtown store and sold mostly office supplies. Today, LOP is headquartered in a 13,000 sq. ft. showroom/warehouse facility located in an industrial park outside of town. Office furniture — LOP is a Kimball dealer — accounts for the lion's share of business, as much as 70% of total sales, Bill reports.

Like any family-owned and operated dealership in recent years, Bill and his team have faced more than their fair share of challenges from new competition and new customer demands. But as he talks about the dealership he's called home for over 25 years, there's a pride in its past and a confidence about the future that come through loud and clear.

"We've always tried to stay ahead of the curve, both in terms of how we operate and what we offer our customers," Bill explains.

"It's [DDMS] enabled us to become so much more productive and efficient"

Embracing Technology

Technology, of course, has played a key role in that effort. LOP first started using the DDMS system back in 1989 and implemented the current furniture module two years ago.

"It's enabled us to become so much more productive and efficient," he says. "We can be out in the field working with a client on a particular project, draw up a design on the computer and if necessary, even place the order from there," Bill explains. "And once the purchase order is transmitted and an order number is assigned, everything else—receivables, payables, credits, returns, etc.—is coded off of that number and it all flows smoothly."

Bill also gives high grades to ECi on the training and technical support side. "Our people know they can call and ask for technical support and usually get a quick response that solves the problem," he reports. "And the training that's available—both at user meetings and through the Internet—has been extremely helpful."

Growing Through Services

At the same time as LOP has embraced technology, the dealership has also shown a willingness to try new directions and approaches on the sales and marketing side. Bill first started providing asset management services back in 2000 and today, close to 75% of his warehouse is taken up storing surplus office furniture for customers.



“Sure it’s competitive but I grew up with competition. We’ve always had to face it and we’ve learned to adapt and change to keep growing and maintain profitability.”

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“It’s as much as anything else a matter of listening to your customers and looking out for needs they have that aren’t being filled,” he contends. “One of our key accounts was in a constant state of flux and looking for a place to store product they didn’t need. We stepped in and told them we could take care of it and it took off from there.”

LOP has also been building a growing reconfiguration business in the same way—keeping a close focus on changing customer needs and moving quickly to respond to them.

The dealership has been equally innovative in its efforts to build business in the local education market. “The K-12 business is about as competitive as it gets and there are a lot of state contracts for products that we don’t have,” Bill explains.

That hasn’t kept LOP out of the business, though. Acting on a theory that says if you can’t sell furniture to them, maybe you can help them buy it, Bill has successfully positioned his dealership as an expert resource for education market buyers and has been retained as a consultant to help them write specifications for RFPs on product.

“Education bids aren’t particularly profitable on a good day and sometimes it can be nice to be paid by the hour,” he says with a wry smile.

Staying Ahead of the Curve

Whether it comes in the form of product sales, services or expert consulting, business is pretty good right now, says Bill Bell. Thanks to a laser-sharp focus on customer needs, a reliable furniture partner like Kimball and the productivity and efficiency resources of his system, profitability at the dealership today is strong and growing stronger.

And despite concerns about rising healthcare costs, sky high gas prices and the overall outlook for the economy, Bill’s optimism about the future is equally strong.

“We’ve got a fantastic staff, loyal customers and the potential to double our business in the next five years,” he says confidently. “Sure it’s competitive but I grew up with competition. We’ve always had to face it and we’ve learned to adapt and change to keep growing and maintain profitability.”

It’s a formula that has kept LOP ahead of the curve for more than 25 years. And if Bill and his team have anything to do with it, it will stay that way at the dealership for many more years to come.



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