

Workforce Development

Helping You To Meet Your Workforce Challenges

Training the Next Generation:

For Those Too Busy for Customer Relationships, There's An App for That, But . . .

By Matthew Hooper – Member Services and Development Coordinator

Some of the fastest-growing disruptive technologies we see these days are online, cloud-based parts sales brokerage companies. These follow the same basic notions as Uber, Airbnb or even the old-fashioned temp agency. Instead of connecting drivers with people who need rides or travelers with folks with a spare couch, another company acts as a broker offering to connect buyers and sellers of machined parts. A brokerage like this connects your shop with companies nationwide that buy machined parts. You make machined parts. Who wouldn't be tempted? If you don't have the time to prospect for new sales, why not use another company to do it for you?

Brokers acting as matchmakers may sound tempting, but it is often a trap. They're luring you into giving away the most important part of your business and charging you a lot of money for the privilege.

Is it Really About the Parts?

A matchmaker company wants to sell the parts you make to people who want those parts. It's a simple and

transactional sale. All that matters in a sale like this is price; the person who provides the parts cheapest, wins. It's the same concept as an RFP, only taken to a nationwide audience. Yes, you can win bids like this if you work cheaply enough. Anyone can compete with anyone on price, especially if you're willing to cut corners. This sort of sale will put money in your bank account. But if your business is going to thrive, money in your bank account from basic sales like this will never be enough.

Is it About Value?

If there's one thing I have learned about PMPA members, it's that they take pride in their work. A passionate precision machinist would sooner eat a whole lemon than cut corners. You care about what you do and you do the right thing. You get the customer what they need, which might not be what they asked for. You do it on time, you do it right and you do what it takes to produce something you can be proud of.

Our Real Job is Building Sustainable Customer Relationships

Those virtues, such as pride, precision, knowledge and attention to detail are the most important things your shop can provide for a customer. Once you communicate those virtues to a customer, you can turn that customer into a life-time partner. You don't want to be the shop that wins a bid two dozen other shops were competing for only on the basis of lowest price. You want to be the shop that your customer calls first when they need a job done, because they know you'll do it right. Long-term customer relationships are what sustain our businesses, and those of our customers.

Matchmaking Discounts Your Value

How is a matchmaker going to communicate those virtues to a customer? How are they going to tell the customers what makes you special? More important, why are they going to tell a customer that your shop is special?

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They won't! They don't want a customer to pick up the phone and call you when they need a part; they want a customer to call them. After all, they are just trying to match buyers and sellers of parts. They get paid only when they arrange the transaction. A matchmaker wants to take all the important parts of a sale away from you, such as the chance to build a relationship or the power to make your company stand out from the competition, and leave you with the least important part—making the product. And they want to make you pay for the privilege!

2018 looks to be a banner year for precision manufacturing. There is so much work to be done and so little time to do it in. It's tempting to try and buy your time back and let a matchmaker do sales work for you. But in the long run, it's a penny-wise, pound-foolish decision. Taking the time now to cultivate relationships and create future partnerships will guarantee your shop will thrive in the years to come.

