

A Picture Is Worth A Thousand Words

Periodically, the Purchasing Department conducts comparative pricing surveys looking at items stocked at our district warehouse to compare them to the same items sold at local retail outlets or through various office supply websites. Our findings are analyzed and rolled into warehouse justification studies that are shared with various Chambers of Commerce groups, budget review committees and district staff. By sharing this information, we demonstrate that our schools can actually get more for their money by shopping at our warehouse facility.

Responses from recent consumer surveys had numerous comments that the brands stocked at the warehouse were not the quality items that many of the teachers preferred. When investigating the survey responses, we found that on many occasions, we were actually stocking the very brand names the teachers preferred, but the information was not getting down to the teacher level. The schools could go online to get a verbal description of items available, but they could not 'see' the items.

After talking with warehouse staff, we were made aware that they frequently received phone calls from teachers asking them what were the brand names of particular items that were stocked at the warehouse. In most instances, this request could only be handled by having an individual actually go out into the warehouse and find the item in question to determine the brand in stock at that particular time. This proved to be very disruptive to our warehouse operation and very inefficient.

Purchasing looked at various office supply websites such as Office Depot and AcquireX to determine what changes could be made to our warehouse marketing strategies. It was our opinion that if our warehouse were in competition with these retailers we would have to offer very similar products and services. The most dramatic difference was that these websites all had actual pictures showing each item contained in their inventory.

We already had an on-line catalog with real time pricing, so with the assistance of our MIS department, we were able to link each warehouse item to an actual photograph of that item. With the purchase of a \$418 digital camera, we trained our warehouse staff to photograph each item – showing the brand, model number, relative size, and issue unit of measure for delivery purposes. The initial photographs were up-loaded and reviewed by purchasing staff for clarity and relevant information shown. Retakes were requested for several items, but the entire photo-taking process for all 768 items was done in 15 total man hours, at a cost of approximately \$258. We have notified all of our schools of the availability of the photographs for all warehouse items and have received many compliments via phone calls and emails concerning this new feature. The number of phone calls at the warehouse, for product information, has been significantly reduced (by nearly 85%). It will be some time before we can ascertain whether this additional information has increased the usage (product turn-over) of our warehouse, but we feel we are getting closer to equaling or exceeding the service provided by our competitors such as Wal Mart, Office Depot, or Stepp and Eisenhauer Office Supply Companies.

Expanding The Use Of Photographs On Our Websites

We have also just successfully completed our first Sale of Used Furniture & Equipment bid (in February 2003) using on-line pictures of each item being sold. The best part of this new process was that nearly 20% of the 84 items being offered for sale were requested by schools and pulled from the list to be put back in service within our district. We increased participation in the sale by 116% or 32 bidders, as a result of people being able to see what was being offered for sale on line. This also reduced the administrative time required by district staff to answer requests to view the items in person at our surplus warehouse location in Daytona Beach. The average price per item sold went from \$46 to \$96.

We not only increase the number of bidders and the dollar amount received per item being offered but, more importantly, we give our schools one last chance to obtain items that they may have had to purchase if these surplus items were not available to view on-line through this process.

We will utilize the same photographic on-line process when we offer our next sale of retired school buses and other vehicles. We are hopeful that the end result will be more bidders and increased revenue from the sale of surplus vehicles.

The estimated total cost for implementing the digital photographic picture process was \$676. We feel that the improved communications for schools and the community far exceeds the minimal dollar amount spent to implement this enhanced feature in catalog and bid development.