Become a Wrap Specialist

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It’s probably not too often that one gets the opportunity to tell a gathering of business owners and leaders, “Don’t drive naked!” But for one wrap specialist, doing so has led to what he feels has been one of the best business decisions of his life. This liberating step has even transformed his company into a prime success story in today’s questionable economic climate.

Four years ago, John Wiley, founder and owner of Dream Street Graphics (www.dontdrivenaked.net) in Indianapolis, Indiana, started feeling that his then-twelve-year-old business was taking on too much by offering customers anything that could be produced using its two wide format printers. Then the economy took a swan dive, which led him to re strategize his shop strictly as a vehicle wrap specialist.

The result: Business has actually tripled! There are many reasons for this turnaround—focus, premium services…and, oh yeah, that aforementioned nudity.

A Million-to-one Odds

Although Dream Street Graphics has always promoted vehicle graphics at its core, Wiley found that, as it was growing bigger and snagging national accounts, they were also accepting requests for additional output like business cards, refrigerator magnets, and T-shirts. “The next thing
we knew, we had two full-time admin people on our staff chasing down suppliers, and we were busy trying to keep track of all the vendors we’d outsourced jobs to,” he remembers.

Wiley decided it was time to just focus on designing, creating, and installing vehicle wraps. And he hasn’t looked back. “No one likes to sacrifice revenue, but life got simple when we made the decision to cut everything else away,” says Wiley. “Customers feel that you know what you’re talking about when you know much about your specialty.”

Wiley eliminated anything that failed to support his redefined focus—including unnecessary samples, catalogs, and even office furniture. “Focus is liberating,” he says. “I gave thousands of dollars worth of inventory away to other sign shops that I no longer compete with,” he remarks. “In fact, I confidentially refer everything but vehicle graphics to the companies that I previously considered competition—even if they do vehicle graphics as well.”

But this was only one stage of the plan. Wiley didn’t know it at the moment, but it was time to employ naked ambition.

Marketing Takes Off (Its Clothes)

Another element to this company’s success can be attributed to its controversial marketing campaign, “Don’t Drive Naked®,” which features sensual graphics wrapped onto whatever Wiley can get his hands on. So far, this includes golf carts, a bread truck, two mini-vans, an SUV, and even his office manager’s Mercury Grand Marquis.

Wiley came up with the attention-grabbing concept after attending his employer’s networking workshop where he felt more time was devoted to catchphrases than actual business-generating ideas. “I kept hearing, ‘Work smarter, not harder!’ “Well,” Wiley recalls, “I’d look at them and go, ‘Yeah but what if you’re dumber?’”

Now Wiley is anything but dumb. Although he’s been involved with vehicle graphics for thirty years now (beginning with a pinstriper), like lots of other business owners, he was unsure how to find customers to work smarter for.

After being told that well-designed companies get the customers they want, Wiley realized, “Not having effective graphics was, in effect, driving around town to job sites and special events. This generates lots of exposure and has allowed Wiley to tap into viral marketing (word of mouth, Internet, etc.). “Viral is about everyone talking about you—whether good or bad,” he says.

Yes, as you’d expect, this suggestive marketing has generated a love it-or-hate it reaction. “We’ve got that small margin of people on the left who love us and that small margin on the right who hate us,” says Wiley. “But they’re all talking about us, which is making everyone in the middle listen too.”

A timid man by nature, Wiley struggled with implementing this campaign, but he came to terms early on about not being able to service potential customers offended by this campaign. But every- thing has ended up working in his favor. “The people who hate us are telling people they can’t believe what I’m doing,” he says. “These people, in turn, keep it an extra day or two for the free advertising.”

They’ve Got You Covered

Rebooting his business has allowed Wiley to take advantage of the “premium” concept he strongly believes in—paying his tight-knit employees a premium salary, setting up shop at a premium location, using premium vinyl materials, etc. Wiley also understands that, for some sign makers, narrowing services down to one focus can be a frightening proposition. “But customers aren’t ignorant,” he says. “They’ll know when you’re struggling with something.”

“If you did just building wraps, for example, you can build relationships with all the people you use to call competitors and have them help you with things.”

While the Don’t Drive Naked marketing stratagem isn’t for everybody, Wiley challenges other shops to escape their comfort zones. “In marketing, we occasionally have to push past timidity and fear of loss,” he says, “The economy made our phone stop ringing, so I felt I didn’t have much to lose.”

The People Behind the Dream

This bare-all campaign would be fruitless if we were all hype and no substance. But Wiley knew it was important to surround himself with knowledgeable employees to reinforce the vehicle graphics specialist status. So each of his three installers has at least ten years of full body wrap experience, while his three designers are “quick conceptually.”

This has led to a talent for quick turn-around jobs. Since they now only stock the materials needed for wraps, response time for jobs has been slashed by a day or two. This quick turnaround has even led to an enhanced commitment to customer service. “We measure how fast we submit our first design drafts, respond to change requests, and send quotes,” says Wiley. “We’re even able to call the customer and let them know an email is waiting for them in their inbox.”

Dream Street Graphics works on both full and partial wraps, which is always dictated by the customer’s budget. “I won’t sell to anybody who doesn’t want it or someone who can’t afford it,” says Wiley.

You won’t ever find Wiley upselling either, as he believes this tactic violates the trust he’s set up with a customer. “I’ll ask them what they’re comfortable with and then tell them that I’m going to bust my butt to make them as visible as possible within that budget,” he explains. “If they tell us they only have $700, we’ll probably end up doing a $900 job for $700.”

“This will encourage them to come back to us for more work later and spread the word about us.”

Although the national franchise companies Dream Street Graphics services already have their wrap designs figured out in advance, most other customers first sit down with one of the designers to brainstorm ideas. “Designers have to be able to communicate with the customer,” says Wiley. “They can’t be hindered away in a room somewhere.”

Wiley believes it’s important to first talk to customers and find out who “they want to reach and what they want to say to their customers. He’ll then show them three basic price ranges and establish a budget. “Design is paid in whole, in

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