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## IMPLEMENT A SUCCESSFUL “TRY & BUY” PROGRAM

In May of 2005, a manufacturing division of a major international construction equipment supplier was looking for help marketing a large inventory of premium consumable tools for road construction contractors. Introduced the previous year, the tool was much more durable than its conventional counterpart; however, the company had not promoted the product aggressively and a large inventory had accumulated. Although the premium tool was more expensive than similar tools, the difference in cost was more than offset by the fact that it had twice the life span of the other products.

Complicating the challenge were several issues. The tool had to be sold by sales groups around the world responsible for selling numerous different products from several manufacturing divisions. Competitors were beginning to enter the marketplace with their own premium tools. And, the company was completing development of an upgraded version of the premium tool that would be introduced in the fall. This introduction would greatly reduce interest in the original premium tool, leaving the manufacturing division with a large volume of potentially stagnant product.

The division's product marketing manager was assigned the task of finding a marketing firm that could develop sales tools to support the product. The manager, responsible for North American sales, spoke with several advertising agencies but became frustrated with their lack of industry experience and little, if any, knowledge of the sales channels and the contractors who would purchase the product. Another manufacturer in the industry suggested that he contact the sales development, research and marketing firm it had been using for its efforts.

The manager met with the Barlow Marketing Group (BMG) on May 12 where he discussed the company's situation. BMG asked industry-specific questions, which reassured the manager that the group had a tremendous breadth and width of construction knowledge and experience, as well as services and capabilities. He quickly realized BMG was a construction equipment-focused group that had experience in North American and international road machinery, and scheduled a second meeting that would include the company's vice president of global operations, his European counterpart and the head of its engineering group.

### **Time Was Running Out, Conventional Thinking Wouldn't Work**

The meeting was held in BMG's office in Fort Wayne, Indiana, because of its central location. On June 13, members of the management team traveled from the southern, eastern, and northern U.S. and from Europe to Fort Wayne where they were greeted and treated to dinner. During casual conversation that evening the company's representatives discussed the need for sales support material. However, upon in-depth questioning by BMG personnel, the true need of the company was uncovered. It was sitting on an inventory of several hundred thousand premium tools that had to be sold by September, which was the end of the peak

selling season for road construction in the northern states, and was also when the division planned to introduce its updated premium tool. The representatives had arrived thinking that a series of product catalogs should be produced which described the conventional and premium tools. BMG recommended a dramatically different course of action.

During the course of that evening and at the meeting the next day, many ideas were discussed. By all accounts, the belief was that once the premium tool had been used by a customer, he would more than likely reorder the product in future purchases. Therefore, the catalog project was not eliminated, but was postponed in favor of a far more aggressive and active marketing plan.

BMG proposed a “Buy & Try” program that would encourage customers to make a trial purchase of the premium tool without risk. By the end of the day, BMG had outlined a “Buy & Try” marketing and sales program including objectives, strategy, action plan and timeline. The real challenge was going to be full implementation of the plan within a one-month time frame.

The company agreed to hire BMG on a monthly retainer basis, to kick-off the “Buy & Try” program and for follow-up programs as well. BMG was responsible for developing the complete program, which included:

- Program plan/guidelines
- Company communication
- Logo creation
- Product photography
- Customer database management
- Hardhat logo stickers
- Special pallet product container labels
- Coordination of language translation
- Product sales sheet development and printing
- Development, design, printing and mailing of postcard (first mailer)
- Envelope design, printing and mailing w/sales sheet (second mailer)
- Development, design, printing and mailing of self-contained third mailer
- Promotional item procurement, design and delivery
- Introduction program to sales force
- Fulfillment, delivery of support materials to sales force

The initial program was approved by the management team before they departed Fort Wayne, but they would have to get sales force buy-in at the sales meeting scheduled for the end of June. Precious time might be lost if materials weren't developed in anticipation of approval at that meeting. BMG moved ahead with development of a “Buy & Try” logo and coordinated professional photography of the premium tool for use on marketing materials. A professional logo incorporating the premium tool image was completed and sent to the product marketing manager only three days after the June 14 meeting. He presented it at the

sales meeting along with the details of the plan. The program was approved with modifications.

### **Issuing A Challenge**

The strategy was to target a group of influential, big-name, road construction customers and get them to “Buy & Try” the premium tool. Specifically, the “Buy & Try” program needed to reach decision-makers and influencers among the selected customer base and get them to take immediate action.

Risk would be reduced with the “Buy & Try” approach. This program was set up such that any customer that purchased the premium tools and failed to get the expected extended-life results from its use would be credited with an equal value toward their next purchase of the manufacturing division’s conventional tools – basically creating a risk-free proposition.

#### Program Goals:

1. Eliminate the potential financial risk to customers willing to experiment, and provide the data necessary to justify the cost.
2. Encourage and motivate customers to immediately try the premium tool for the first time and remain a customer throughout the season.
3. Provide the division with a high volume of experimentation and in-field application data to support the performance claims.
4. Produce a large group of the most influential contractors that would speak highly of the premium tool and provide the credibility the product needs within each geographic territory to generate sales among the next levels of contractors.
5. Increase sales while clearing out the inventory and clearing the path for the advanced product version.

Details of the “Buy & Try” program and support information were communicated to the sales force in two primary markets: North America and Europe. In addition, the program was introduced in China and Australia to take advantage of their alternate selling seasons. The program would be launched in America and Europe in the first week of July. Customer mailings and delivery of all materials were to be completed by the first week of August.

### **Around The World In 40 Days**

BMG’s staff began working on completion of the elements of the “Buy & Try” program. BMG proactively kept the product marketing manager advised of the status of the program each step of the way. Unlike many marketing organizations, each person on BMG’s staff that was working on the project could be contacted directly by the product marketing manager. Thus he could check status, supply information, and provide approvals without going through

layers of organization management. This enabled the various projects to be worked on simultaneously, yet cohesively. It also provided for rapid completion of each element of the program.

As the program progressed, certain elements evolved and changed. For example, a wear characteristics brochure was incorporated as part of the sales sheet and carton label instead of being produced as a separate collateral piece. The third mailer, originally planned as a letter, became a marketing brochure showing the estimated cost savings to the customer, broken down by labor, machine downtime and product replacement. The purchase of shirts was dropped in favor of using existing promotional items.

The sales force provided information on their most prominent contractors and BMG consolidated and organized the fragmented information into a usable database of more than 200 prospects. The first mailer (postcard) was developed, approved, printed and mailed within two weeks of the approval to proceed. The sales sheet and wear characteristics labels were created at the same time. This sales sheet was translated into German, Italian, French and Spanish for use in Europe. BMG drafted a letter and distributed the sales sheets to the North American sales force for use in customer calls. The wear characteristics label was sent to warehouse management to apply to the cartons of product. The second mailer (sales sheet) was sent out in a customized 9” x 12” envelope two weeks after the first mailing. Hardhat stickers were designed, approved, printed and distributed to the sales force to provide to customers taking the “Challenge”. The third mailer (self-contained mailer – brochure) was developed, approved and sent out in early August.

The “Buy & Try” program had been strategized, approved, communicated to the sales groups, database organized, materials produced and distributed, mailings completed and fully executed, all in 40 days and within budget. BMG communicated with the company on a regular basis, providing updates and making revisions as requested. By the time the program was completed, the sales effort was in full swing throughout North America, and Europe, and started in Australia and China.

### **Measuring Success**

The proof of the program’s success is usually measured in results. A key ingredient in the success of any sales and marketing program is the implementation and application by the company’s sales force. The division is tracking the number of targeted existing customer accounts that have begun using the premium tools as the primary measure of success. Consequently, a reduction in the inventory has also begun and will be the ultimate test of the “Buy & Try” program.

While final results wouldn’t be known for a few months, the development and execution of the plan to address the situation was considered a tremendous success by the division’s management. BMG proceeded with experience, speed, flexibility, professionalism, communication and dedication.

However, all well-executed sales and marketing programs produce other benefits as well. In this case, the sales groups had a real motivation to go out and sell this division’s tools for the first time since corporate set up the independent sales groups. In addition, the sales groups and customer base are now better prepared for the next new product launch.

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BMG is a hands-on sales development, research and marketing firm with a focus on manufacturers selling equipment and services into the construction, mining & aggregate, environmental & recycling and agriculture markets worldwide.

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