Plain talk
To rebuild, or not to rebuild

COLUMN BY ROB BUKSAR



If we were studying Shakespeare, we would be considering his famous statement, "To be, or not to be…" Since we're talking about rebuilding, our question is, "To rebuild or not to rebuild…" Let that be the question.

You may be in unique circumstances and this proposition doesn't even apply—good for you. Yet, I happen to know for a fact that it involves more of us than you think. You just don't realize it or haven't been hit upside the head with it.

If you've been around 25 years or more, you have lived through the transition of our manufacturing infrastructure. It's been very similar to Alice in Wonderland's Cheshire Cat. As he spoke, he disappeared piece by piece until all that was left was his smile. Moments later, that disappeared also and he was all gone.

In the early days, if you had an overseas connection for your parts or units, you had a great advantage over most of your competition. At that time, the transactions were involved and costly. Few had the know-how or money to bring in the necessary volumes to make the deal happen. Consequently, most of the big time wheeling and dealing was confined to the big guys. They could pull off just about anything they wanted because for a good long time they practically had an exclusive!

These days, we are so overwhelmed by Chinese merchandise, it's difficult to find anything else (if it even exists any longer). Furthermore, everybody and their brothers know where and how to get it. It hasn't been a secret for a long time and most everybody is familiar with it.

So here's what this boils down to. You have a good customer from across town that has just called you for a couple units. Nothing really special, items you keep a reasonable inventory of. He either comes himself or sends a driver on a 30 mile round trip to purchase these units from you. When the customer gets back to his shop, he realizes immediately that you've sold him new Chinese units with your label on them. He immediately gets you on the phone and reads you the riot act. He tells you that he could have purchased the exact same units from AutoZone, one block away, for 30 percent less and he would not have had to drive 30 miles to do it. Or, once your customer gets up to speed with what just happened, he just doesn't bother to call anymore. He immediately goes to Auto Zone.

All I'm suggesting to you is be mindful and careful of what you're doing. Is this going to be the case 100 percent of the time? Of course not. But I will suggest this to you: Your larger, more sophisticated customers have more contacts, resources and money than you do. If they wanted the offshore stuff, they don't need to pay you an additional 30 percent to get it. They can get whatever they want, when they want and very probably cheaper than you!

There is a real good possibility if they are calling you that they either specifically want your work, for which they are willing to pay a premium, or they want a continued affiliation with you personally for some reason.

Either way, it's a judgment call you may want to consider with some customers. If you lose your distinctness, what makes you different or even the perception of difference, you're on borrowed time. The Chinese stuff is everywhere and available to everyone cheap.

Small, independent businesses of all types are being attacked more ways than I have time to list. It sure looks like we're on the endangered list. Pay attention, be mindful and pray for relief from a powerful, unseen hand. We need all the help we can get! To rebuild or buy—who would have ever thought?

God bless America!

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