Working Smarter Instead of Harder

By John Kasun, ArrowTrade Business Editor

If you are in business for yourself the old saying, “Time is money”, is more than just a saying; it means putting real money in your pocket. When it comes to saving time it is important to “work smart” and that means identifying things that waste time and making the best use of your time in slow periods. Wasted time is very much like a problem with your plumbing system. If a pipe breaks in your basement it is hard to ignore and normally gets immediate attention while a small drip in a faucet can be easily overlooked as not that important. Yet those little drips from the faucet can easily wind up costing a lot more money over a period of time than a major water break.

In business big problems normally get swift attention but the little problems if left unchecked can cause as much if not more damage. So what does all of this mean? It means that paying attention to the small details in your business keeps them from becoming big problems and more importantly it helps you create the “constant improvement” attitude needed to ensure your business stays on top of its game.

In many ways running an archery retail business is like flying a jet plane which a pilot friend of mine once told me is made up of long periods of inactivity and boredom followed by short bursts of absolute panic. Keeping those times in balance is the mark of a good manager and an efficient operation.

At Lancaster Archery Supply located in Lancaster, Pennsylvania two rows of hunting bows are displayed along one wall. The top row holds 150 bows while the bottom row contains 100 ready to go bow packages. “We have found that the faster we can get a customer shooting his new bow and hitting the target the quicker the sale,” Rob Kaufhold, President of Lancaster Archery Supply explained. “When the shop is slow the staff uses that time to put together a series of bow packages in various price ranges, complete with the accessories mounted and adjusted accordingly. This is a great time saver when we get busy because we can simply pick up a package bow in which the customer is interested and take nothing can be more intimidating than having a customer wait for you to set up or adjust their bow especially if something does not go smoothly. Using slow periods to do some of the basic work and set-up that goes with every bow sale makes sense, saves time and allows for better customer service.

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Two rows of hunting bows are displayed along one wall at Lancaster Archery Supply. The top row holds bows alone while the bottom row contains ready to go bow packages. The bows and accessory packages made up on the bottom rack allow Lancaster Archery to quickly get a customer to its adjacent range to try a bow that is “ready to go.” These packages are made up of popular bows and accessories put together by Lancaster’s staff during slow periods allowing them to service more customers quickly during rush periods.
him directly to our range which is adjacent to the show-
room. With the bow and sight already adjusted and a few
simple shooting tips we can have the customer hitting
the target quickly. When this happens the customer is in
love with the bow and gives the credit to Lancaster
Archery Supply; the sale is complete and we can move
onto the next customer. Unless a customer knows exac-
tly what he wants they normally ask our opinion on what
we might suggest. By simply putting those recomma-
thions together ahead of time we save time and money
for the customer and ourselves. This simple procedure
makes the best use of our slower times and allows us to
service more customers in a shorter period of time when
we get busy. It’s a win-win situation.”

“While I do make up some bow packages ahead of
time the number is limited,” said Tammy Hipp, who with
her husband Greg own and operate G&T Sporting Goods
in Mount Storm, West Virginia. “I find that many of our
customers want slightly different combinations of
equipment and we like to allow them to customize their
outfits to their own taste. However we make sure we can
put their equipment packages together quickly once they
make their final choices. When we are not busy I make sure
that all of the threaded holes in the bows risers are clean
and clear. Often in the fin-
ishing process these
holes can become par-
tially plugged. By
running a tap and
clearing the threads
ahead of time I can
avoid a problem that
could occur when we are swamped and I am trying to
mount a rest or sight for a customer.”

“I try to make use of any spare minute I have by
doing something that will make it easier when we get
rushed,” Tammy continued. “It doesn’t have to be any-
thing big; small things add up when it comes to saving
time and trouble. For example, I like to cut my string
loops to length ahead of time and burn the ends getting
them ready to tie. While making a loop is simple it is bet-
ter to have them ready to go than to try to get one ready
when I need it. It saves me time when I am servicing a
customer and anything I can have ready to go before-
hand means I avoid making a mistake or running into
trouble when I’m under the gun to get the job done
quickly. Another thing I have found that saves time and
trouble is making up a service sheet on each customer.
We record all the critical measurements for each bow we
sell or service on a Customer Specification Sheet. It
includes draw length, draw weight, nocking point height,
distance to peep, arrow size, arrow length, fletch color
etc. If the customer has a problem or any questions in
the future it allows me to provide him quick service with-
out reinventing the wheel. Not only is this a time saver
for us but it helps build customer loyalty through what
the customer sees as the top quality service.”

When I operated my own shop I often got frustrated
because although my repair shop was fully equipped
with the tools necessary it seems as if someone on my
sales staff was always walking around with a
bow square or
nock pliers in
their back pock-
et while some-
one else was
looking for
them.

Tammy Hipp, owner of G&T
Sporting Goods in Mount Storm,
West Virginia makes up a Customer
Specification Sheet for each bow
sold or serviced in her shop.
Recording all the critical data allows
her to provide quick service for the
customer in the future saving time
and frustration of doing the job from
scratch. At right she makes up some
string loops she will need in the
future. Tammy does as much as pos-
sible when the shop is slow so she
can handle the rush times as effi-
ciently as possible. “With just my
husband and I running the shop we
have to work smarter to avoid work-
ning harder,” Hipp laughed.
Regardless of how I harped on the subject the problem continued to persist. We were constantly wasting time looking for tools. Finally I furnished every one on the sales staff their own set of tools and put a complete set at the repair bench as well that I sprayed bright orange. The rules were quite simple, here is your own set of tools and if you are caught with the orange ones away from the repair bench the penalty was death. We never had another problem and the time and frustration spent looking for a tool was now spent on helping the customer and in turn making more money.

Personally, I also had a bad habit when on the phone. I had a tendency of making notes on the nearest piece of paper and that could be anything from the back of a catalog to the outside of a McDonalds Big Mac box. The problem is I was always wasting time looking for those notes. To solve that problem I placed a notebook near the phone and fastened it to the counter with a short cord. After that I could always find the book and my notes. The time and frustration I saved allowed me more time to spend on productive projects while lowering my blood pressure as well.

The trick with finding ways to save time and in turn money is simple. Take notice of the things that are irritating and frustrating and waste time and then find some way to eliminate them. It doesn't have to be complicated and you don't need an efficiency expert to design a system for you. The best answer is the one that suits you and your style of working.

While most archery shops I have visited had professional staffs that could easily handle the customer quickly and efficiently I have seen few shops that make the best use of its staff's time during slow periods. If you are a shop owner or manager do not make the assumption that everyone automatically knows what to do next when things are slow. It is only human nature to take it easy when the pressure is off but the problem is that your labor costs do not take a break. To make the best use of your employees' time lay out specific duties to be performed when the customer demand slack off. That might be making up bow packages, putting together custom orders, checking inventory, restocking shelves or a host of other duties. But remember no one knows what you are thinking so make a list and post it in priority order instructing each employee to check the list during slow periods and handle the next chore on the list. That simple action helps improve the return on your labor dollars with no additional cost to you.

“At one time I made all of the arrows I sold in my shop,” said Adam D'Angelo, owner of Hunters Haven in Elkins, West Virginia. “However it was extremely time consuming. I now buy over 60 percent of my arrows already fletched. It was a simple case of deciding how to best use my time and for me fletching arrows made less and less sense.”

“Although I sell a lot of kit bows as provided by the manufacturer in my shop I check all of the bows against my own standards,” D'Angelo explained. “Having the sights and rest preassembled from the manufacturer does save time but I like to fine tune the set-ups so I can get my customers on target as quickly as possible. Using time in my slow periods to do this fine tuning saves me valuable time when things get busy allowing me to service more customers and turn more dollars.”

“Like many shops I like to offer 'custom services' but it is necessary to balance the time the service takes in relationship to the money it generates. I offer custom services to attract customers if I feel it is necessary to make a sale, however I try to minimize its use overall. It is important to read the customer and if offering a custom service is the only way to get the business I pull that trick out of the bag. Otherwise I try to sell what satisfies the customer and involves the least amount of time. This approach gives me the greatest return on my invested time which in turn increases the bottom line.”

It took a minute for what Higgins said to sink in. Let's assume you make a custom string for a customer and it takes an hour and a half to make. Do you make more money from the custom string or a quality production string that you simply pull off of the wall when you take your time into consideration? Could you have used the time spent making the string more efficiently to generate a greater return? As you can see each case must be decided on its own merits and there is no one answer for every shop or all conditions. The trick is to think about how to make the best use of your time as well as the time of your staff and to work smarter not harder.