

20 GOALS FOR 2020

Follow this curated list to build a better future for your shop.

> MARSHALL ATKINSON

Well, it's that time of year when we naturally begin to take a look at the next. Hopefully, way back in 2018, you set some goals that came to fruition by now ... at the end of 2019.

I thought a good exercise would be to create a list of 20 goals for your business that you could achieve by the end of next year. These are the ones I think can have a dramatic impact on your company, but if a few don't make sense and you want to insert your own, that will work, too.

The end result should be to close out 2020 with a fantastic sense of accomplishment, financial strength, and a solid foundation for your company. These are not in any priority order, as some may be more relevant to you than others. Head to screenweb.com/2020goals to print your own version of this list and track your accomplishments throughout the year.

IDENTIFY YOUR BEST CUSTOMERS

I've spoken with a fairly large set of shop owners this past year, and most shops rely on luck more than anything to bring in the business. Why? It turns out they haven't stopped to figure out exactly who their best customers are. What do they order? When do they order?

Do yourself a favor and do an 80/20 deep dive into your sales history. Go back a few years. What you will find is the top 20 percent of your customers will give you roughly 80 percent of your sales volume. This means the bottom 80 percent of your customers are making up about 20 percent of your sales. AKA you're working really hard for not much money.

Go after more customers like those in the top 20 percent. Stop the work you're doing with the 80 percent.

Goal: Do the 80/20 assessment and work out a plan to go after more potential clients like the ones in the top 20 percent. Identify and land one new major account a month.

STAFF IMPROVEMENTS

Think about your team. Is there anyone who isn't quite cutting it? Why are they still working for you? Don't just keep people around because you need warm bodies to do the work. That's not going to give you a competitive edge.

Instead, look to replace them with people who can grow into different positions or be cross-trained to help out when you need an extra hand somewhere in the shop.

If you aren't already doing performance reviews, start. Personally, I like doing them twice a year with a 360-degree approach. The employee, their supervisor, and anyone who works with them fills out a simple, 10-question survey that asks them to rank their performance on a scale of one to 10.



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The scores are compared in the employee review meeting, with goals assigned for improvement for the next six months.

Goal: Take a critical assessment of your team. Develop tools to strengthen your team, or weed out the ones who don't fit in and replace them with better staff members.

100-PERCENT PAYMENT UPFRONT

Cash is king. However, the prevailing method of serving customers in this industry has been to basically lend them money in hopes they'll pay it back. That's right. We're a bank.

But it doesn't have to be this way. There's a huge movement in the decorated apparel industry – sparked by the success of Amazon and Custom Ink – to get 100 percent of the money up front for orders. When this happens, the shop is in an incredible financial position, as they can pay for the labor and materials for the order without putting stress on their credit line. Think how much better your business would run with zero receivables?

Goal: Stop taking deposits, billing net 30, or any other method of payment. Charge for the full order upfront, and when payment is complete, that's when work begins.

GET 'PROFIT FIRST' SET UP AND RUNNING

One of the best ideas that has transformed companies in this industry is the *Profit First* financial framework. *Profit First* is a best-selling business book by Mike Michalowicz that flips the script on how profit is derived in a business.

The traditional formula for profit has always been (Sale \$\$) - (Cost) = Profit. The trouble with that is quite often there are too many mouths nibbling at the profit total. What's leftover sometimes isn't that much.

Profit First says to take the profit out of the sale first, forcing the company to run on what's left. The book has a system for making this happen that works wonderfully.

Goal: Read Profit First, and adopt the system for your shop. By the way, this tailors beautifully with the 100-percent payment upfront plan.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

They say you "can't manage what you don't measure," and I know this to be absolutely true. Yet, when I talk to shop owners, many don't know the basic information about what's

going on in their business. They make decisions on what they think they know, but in reality, they're just guessing, simply because of a lack of sound data. Does this describe you?

Building and tracking Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is a standard business practice for any industry. If you don't know your numbers, you don't know what's going on in your business. This is the starting place for improvement. While there are literally dozens of things you could track, here are the ones that might make the most sense initially:

- The total number of leads or quotes in the pipeline. Total cash amount, too.
- Average order. Dollar amount per sale. Quantity. The number of colors. The number of decoration locations.
- Sales per week, month, quarter – compare those to established goals.
- The total number of screens imaged per day. Bonus if you are segregating by mesh count.
- Average setup time per screen, in minutes.
- Average speed for each press, calculated by impressions per hour. (Final shirts printed, not what the press gauge reads.) What's on the table is the only thing that counts.
- Error rate percent per press.
- Downtime percent per press.

Goal: Decide what metrics matter to your shop. Build a platform to track them and a process to gather the data. Obtain the numbers consistently to make better decisions.

IMPROVE YOUR BENCH STRENGTH

In sports, when one player needs a rest or gets hurt, having a skilled backup who is ready to be used can be the difference in a win or a loss for the team. The quality of that reservoir is called the team's "bench strength."

A common problem in this industry is the frantic phone call from a shop owner looking for a replacement press operator, embroidery machine operator, artist, or someone else with a key skill. Where do you find these people?

Their replacements are already working for you. All you need to do is get them trained before there is a problem. Remember, try to have at least three people trained for every core task in your shop. I call that the "Rule of 3." This is an on-purpose, planned training activity that is continually worked on.

Goal: Implement the "Rule of 3" and have all of your core tasks covered with trained employees.

GET OUT OF YOUR OFFICE

Have you heard the phrase, "you should be working *on* your business and not *in* your business?" When you're buried in the day-to-day operations, it's difficult to get clarity and observation from another point of view. To really understand the macro view of things, it's crucial you go on some fact-finding missions.

For starters, go see your customers. Don't talk about your business; instead, ask about their's. What problems or challenges are they facing? Is there something huge they're

trying to pull off? How can you help? Next, you should go to at least one tradeshow and one brain-stimulating event a year. You need to network and understand what's going on in your industry. Pick up a new skill or idea.

Goal: Plan to get out of your office at least once a month for the entire day. This time will be spent visiting customers, suppliers, tradeshows, or educational events.

SET SALES GOALS

Lots of shops set sales goals. I'm sure you do. But are they based on what type of ideas or efforts you're going to put forth in the coming months? Simply pulling a number out of thin air and "hoping" you can hit it usually won't work.

Instead, using some metrics and your identified best customers, create a plan that's based on your shop increasing the growth with planned activity. Be aggressive but realistic. Set a goal, work backward, and break it down into total sales needed by month, week, and even day.

For example, if you added another \$500 per day to your shop sales, that would equal roughly \$120,000 per year in sales growth. What would it take to do that? Is that one order of \$500 or getting other orders to increase in size by that much?

This is the discussion and thinking process you should have so you can determine what you need to do with your marketing.

Goal: Set an average sales goal per year, month, week, and day. Build a plan to achieve the goal, and consistently monitor and tweak the plan so it works.

CONDUCT A BRAND AUDIT

What is your brand? It's more than your logo. It's everything that encompasses your business.

These days, it's important to remember your brand isn't what you say it is – it's what your customers say it is. So that begs the question, "What are they saying?" Or, even thinking? You need to hear why your customers spend money with you. What do they cherish? Better, what do they dislike?

There are plenty of ways this can happen. The best is a one-on-one conversation. If you have discovered the top 20 percent of your customers, go see each of them. Be open to things that might be hard to hear. This is valuable stuff. Use this information to change your company for the better.

Goal: Conduct a brand audit once per year. Talk to your top customers and get their feedback. Use the info to strengthen your business and be in alignment with their expectations.

CREATE A MARKETING PLAN

For many shops, marketing is a last-minute, thrown-together affair. And looks aren't deceiving. What is the purpose of it anyway? Think of sales as existing in a cycle made up of four concepts. Know, Like, Trust, and Buy.

Know: Potential customers at a basic level have to know who you are. Call that step one.

Like: This means they grasp what you are about and generally have a good opinion of your business.

Trust: A great way to build trust is with customer testimonials or videos showing your processes. Trust is your reputation. Without trust, few people will buy from you.

Buy: If I know your company, like what you do, and trust you can do a good job, when it's time to buy, I'm about 75 percent of the way there and we haven't even spoken yet.

Your marketing plan needs to build out examples for potential and current customers to know, like, trust, and buy from you. Plan your marketing a month or a quarter out. What are you highlighting? What will educate or enrich a customer's experience? What shows trust? Don't wait until the last minute.

Goal: Build out a marketing calendar that features outbound messages that will help you with the Know, Like, Trust, Buy sales cycle. Use a calendar. Assign people to handle tasks with due dates. Create a template to make social media posts easier.

CHALLENGE YOUR NORMS

Ever wonder why you do the things you do in your shop? Often, "We've always done it this way" rules the roost. Instead, I want you to consider challenging the status quo on why you do anything. Why are you using that ink? That emulsion? That computer system? That xyz? Is there something better out there?

Sure, it's easy to be complacent and have the "don't mess with what's working" mentality. But, there may be a product, system, technique, method, or idea out there that could impact your business for the better. What if something existed that could save you a step or two in a process? What if it eliminated the need for that process completely? Would you be interested?

Goal: At least once a week, ask "why" regarding a process, consumable, method, piece of equipment, technology, or training. Is there something better out there? If so, what do you need to do to try it out? Once a week means you are improving 52 things a year.

USE VIDEO IN MARKETING

I was reading some marketing stats and I came across this nugget: By 2021, 80 percent of the content online will be video. Are you currently using video in your marketing? You should.

Think about the power that customer testimonial video has for potential customers when they rave about your awesomeness. Video can be used for education and to show off how a customer's idea is created into a printed shirt. This may seem scary, but it's doing the scary things that help us grow.

Goal: Create at least one video per month and share it on social media networks. Envelop this into your overall marketing strategy. It will be incredibly awkward and scary. Do it anyway.

CLEAN AND DECLUTTER YOUR SHOP

Let me guess. Right now, on some racks in your shop, is a skid or two that has boxes of shirts from some order from two or three years ago. There's some junky equipment in the corner. Boxes of forms and paper from 10 years ago. Parts from machines you don't even own anymore. A five-foot-high

stack of film that you don't use since you switched to a CTS exposure unit.

You get the idea. Junk. It's everywhere. In the front office. Under the dryers. Behind the building. How did all this stuff get here? Who cares? The problem is that it's in the way. Your crew has to walk around this stuff every day, which wastes time. Your customers see this, and it creates a definite opinion on your craftsmanship in their mind. Immaculate shop = craftsmanship. Junky shop = carelessness.

Goal: Clean and declutter your shop at least once per quarter. Label anything you think you might want to keep with today's date on it. If you haven't used it six months later, discard it. Free up your space so you can work more efficiently.

WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN

One go-to question I have for shop owners is, "Do you have a business plan?" About 60 to 75 percent of the people I speak with say "no." They've been getting along so far on sheer luck and determination. That's great, but it will only take you so far.

Here's what a business plan does for you: It focuses your intent on exactly who your best customer is in the marketplace. When do they buy? What do they buy? How frequently do they buy? What are their problems you can solve? Is this in perfect alignment with what you can provide or offer?

Your biggest challenge running your business is time. There's never enough of it. A well-written business plan helps you articulate exactly who your best customer is so you can devise strategies to go after them with laser-like focus.

Goal: Write a business plan that focuses on determining your best customers, how to find them, and the problems you're solving for them. Define your "Unfair Advantage" that you have over your competition. Hint: It cannot be about price, quality, or customer service.

RETHINK YOUR WEBSITE

What service does your website provide for your business? Are you making money with it, or is it a business card?

- Does it work on someone's phone?
- Will it load in fewer than three seconds?
- How are you linking sales to your website?
- Is your website built so it shows you can solve your main customer's number-one problem?
- Is it up-to-date and savvy? Is it optimized for Voice Search?

The absolute first thing someone does when they hear about your company is look up your website. What does yours say about you? Even if your website doesn't have a store platform, it's still crucial to keep it updated and current. Do you use Google Analytics? Are you tracking numbers?

Goal: Take some time and assess your website from a customer's perspective. What do they see? Is it in alignment with what they are looking for? How do you know? One of the best questions you can ask is, "How are we getting eyeballs on our website?" That's lead generation.

RAISE YOUR PRICES, RAISE YOUR MINIMUMS

This one is scary to a lot of shops, especially ones that cater to markets that are commodity buyers instead of value buyers. Earlier in the article I mentioned doing an 80/20 deep dive into your customer base. What you can find there is the bottom 80 percent of your customers only give you about 20 percent of your revenue. Who are these customers?

That lady who only wants six hoodies. The company that bird-dogged you for weeks, pestering you about different garment choices and art, and then placed that 18 shirt order. That guy who threatened to go somewhere else because he could get it “a nickel cheaper.” These customers can be an anchor that slows you down and clogs up your schedule.

In January, raise your prices on these folks. Increase your minimum order, too. Send these folks to your competition and let them deal with them. The cost of business is going up. There is zero shame in increasing your pricing.

Goal: Take a close look at your numbers and data. Evaluate how a price increase could impact your business. Use the 80/20 deep dive to help with this reflection. Raise prices and minimums to help drive better orders to your door, while blocking ones that are less profitable.

INNOVATE

This one is all about research and development. R+D. But, that can also stand for “rip off and duplicate.” Am I advancing the notion of plagiarism? Of course not. What I am suggesting is keep an eye out for trends and new products you can offer your customer base. These ideas don’t even need to be that new. They just need to be different to your clients.

For example, have you noticed more people wearing colored heather shirts? What about trendy decoration techniques, such as a monochrome embroidery treatment with a dimensional color outline, like the NFL is currently doing on their garments? Maybe even a rhinestone bling heat transfer? Take your cue from what is currently trending in the marketplace, and suggest that to your clients. New to them can equal more sales for you.

Goal: Don't wait for your customer to suggest ideas. Find something that is trending and suggest it yourself. Spend a few minutes creating a mock up and forward it to them with a time to chat.

BUILD SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS

Your supply chain is a crucial part of your success, but are you actively engaged with them on a regular basis?

I know you hate when your customers shop around for the best price. Are you demonstrating loyalty to your own vendors?

Do you know someone there on a first name basis? Have they been to your shop? Have you visited them?

Sure, first and foremost their goal is to increase their sales. Just like you. However, they want to ensure you’re using their product correctly, that their system is working, and you can place orders easily. Your happiness and success matters to them,

because when you grow, they grow. So, think before you spend.

Goal: Develop better relationships with key suppliers. Get to know your account reps. Invite them into your shop at least once a year. Go see them either at a tradeshow or their nearest location. Discuss your plans with them and find out how they can help you achieve your goals.

READ

It’s no secret, I’m a book lover. I’ve been consuming about a book a week for as long as I can remember. Why? Because I want to grow. Reading helps unlock the secrets that aren’t normally shared or simply found by bumping into things. I keep a journal and jot down a quote or passage to remember.

I also subscribe to numerous article services, magazines, and websites. In fact, I’m happy you’re reading this in *Screen Printing* magazine. That shows a lot about you.

I just finished *Call Sign Chaos* by Jim Mattis. In it he says: “Reading sheds the light on the dark path ahead.” Exactly.

Goal: Purchase and read at least one book per month. About anything. Any interest you have is worth exploring. Also, if you aren't already a subscriber, get Screen Printing on your list for incoming information-based knowledge by visiting screenweb.com/subscribe.

MISTAKES

Someone, somewhere, at some time is going to make one. Of course, nobody wants to do that. However, with the thousands of variables that are part of any order, there’s bound to be some along the way. So, what do you do about them?

First, you need to track these on a simple spreadsheet. What happened? How much money did it cost your business to correct? Who was responsible? Keep updating this as the year goes on. You may notice some trends. It’s the same employee. Or, maybe it’s the same garment. It’s your older equipment. Something keeps happening. But if you aren’t keeping track, you may not notice this.

Second, learn from them. Sure, it happened, but are you putting a plan in place to avoid that same mistake again? For example, maybe a certain brand and style of shirt is prone to scorching under a flash unit on press. Can you use a higher mesh screen to drop the dwell time on the flash unit? See if you can engineer a way to avoid the challenge.

Goal: Keep a running tab on mistakes, what caused them, the financial burden, and other relevant bits of information for each one. Learn from each and see if you can develop methods to avoid that mistake again. Documentation and training will play a big role here.

20 GOALS FOR 2020

Are these the only goals you can set for your business? Of course not. They’re simply the ones I think might be impactful to you. Which of these do you think your shop could implement? Use this article as a tool for discussion and start your 2020 improvement planning today. 📌



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