

## BEN MacDONALD

### The Ad King, Inc.

My grandfather purchased the Ad King in 1974, and it has been in the family ever since. When I started working for the business at the age of 19, my grandfather always reminded me that relationships were more important than getting orders. He, my uncle, and father always viewed clients as friends before customers. This emphasis on relationships is what I have tried hard to embody as I have worked to grow the business and as a salesperson over the last 13 years; and it is precisely this way of operating that has enabled me to keep business going throughout this pandemic. By recognizing our customers as individuals with families and lives outside of their business, and investing in learning about them and continually building that personal relationship, our customers grow to trust us, which keeps them coming back...even in the midst of crisis. Because of the relationships we work hard to build, our customers are often eager to refer us to other businesses and friends, which also keeps our business active and growing. Throughout the pandemic I have made an effort to reach out to customers to check in- not to push a product, but rather to just say hello and see how life is going. By doing that, it has taken the pressure off of my clients during an already stressful time, but has continued to lead to orders and sales.

The pandemic and shut down forced me, like most other people, to adapt my life and business in many ways in order to keep functioning. In this business I have always had the ability to do some of my work from home. However, in order to go fully remote, it required a financial investment in order to get a makeshift home "office" (dining room table or desk in the corner of the living room) functional. Adapting also looked like meeting customers and suppliers via Zoom, being more flexible about the hours I was responding and communicating with clients, and learning about PPE, which is new to me and so many in our industry.

In the midst of adapting myself and my business practices, my home life was also changing. During the shut-down my wife was also working remotely from home, and my daughter's pre-school was shut down. This meant all three of us were sharing a very small space (not to mention our 1-year old dog running around!) In the spring we also found out my wife is pregnant (social-distancing fail!). Thankfully, my daughter has been able to return to Pre-K full time, and my wife is also back to work full time. We are anxiously preparing for the arrival of our son, who will be named Peter after my late father.

### A Day in the Life

**6:45am-** My day starts when my daughter wakes up, and I make her pancakes with peanut butter for breakfast. I then get myself ready for work, and get her dressed and ready for school. I drop her off at Pre-K at 8:30am, then head to the office, stopping for my morning Dunkins coffee on the way.

**9am-** After arriving at my office, the first thing I do every morning is check all my flagged emails from the night before, which can include customers looking for quotes, orders being placed, and proofs needing approval.

After this, what I do tends to look a little different every day. Because we are such a small family business (just my uncle, aunt, and myself), I have many different roles and "hats" that I may be wearing each day.

As a small family business, we try to hand deliver all clothing orders in order to keep the relationship-based business model intact. So, some days I am out making deliveries of t-shirts, polos, hats, or various other clothing products. Other days, I put on my "accountant" hat and am in the office handling things such as the bank statement, balancing the checkbook, and various other tasks to keep our accountant happy. And some days I am busy doing order entry and quoting orders, which involves compiling pricing, pictures, and item mock-ups, and getting them out to my client as quickly as possible.

Throughout the pandemic, it has been essential for me to be flexible and adaptable each day. Even on the days I had nothing planned or nothing to do, I was making sure I was available to my customers, and not just tapping out for the day. I spent a lot of time, often daily, researching and learning about the new PPE that was becoming available in the industry, and after educating myself about the products and availability, then educating my customers. This also included learning the new laws and regulations in MA and NH, where most of my customers are based, and making sure they knew how we could help them meet these new requirements for their business, and determining which products would be the best fit for each customer.

I also made a strong push on social media to increase our presence- I knew there was untapped business potential with the new PPE, both with current customers and potential new clients. During this time, we have actually managed to acquire 8 brand new clients. I spent a lot of time creating customized fliers for various clients which advertised various PPE products we had available; each flier was customized to meet each clients' individual company needs, and included product mock-ups so they could visualize what the products would look like with their logo on it.

Some customers still were having events and business anniversaries that we were planning for before the pandemic, that we then had to adapt and find all new product proposals for to accommodate the new circumstances of the event. Because they didn't always know what the event would now look like, there was a lot of pressure on me to find new products for them.

**9pm-** Check my email for last time of the night. Going back to our philosophy of relationship-based business and customer service, I find it important to reply to emails, even if they are coming in "after hours." Even if I just send a quick reply acknowledging that I received the email, it gives the client trust and reassurance knowing that I have seen their message and will be actively working on their order or request the next morning.