

International Competition and Lessons of the Pandemic

Do you ever encounter low-priced competition from companies outside of the United States? It's certainly likely to happen for longer-run applications in which low per-unit prices are highly valued by print purchasers. These might be books, brochures, calendars, catalogs, educational materials, greeting cards, labels or packaging.

The trick for the print purchaser is in balancing the advantage of the low unit cost with the additional turnaround time required for production and shipping. Issues like this clearly stood out during the pandemic and have given print purchasers additional reasons to think twice about using international print partners.

The impact of the pandemic

One of the immediate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic was that it made it more difficult to use international print service providers due to transport and supply chain issues. Demand for local print service providers increased as a result, putting strains on overall market capacity for some print applications (e.g., books). Some printers increased their use of overtime to meet the demand, and some went to three-shift seven-day-a-week schedules.

Even with these strategies, many print service providers were unable to provide pre-pandemic turnaround times. As this pandemic-driven dynamic abated, turnaround times returned to normal levels, but the shift toward the use of national (rather than international) providers has presented an interesting sales opportunity. Local print service providers can now promote services that are difficult or impossible for international competitors to offer.

An opportunity to sell value

The pandemic enabled print service providers to shift the focus from low unit cost to a broader view of cost that includes the impact of inventory, warehousing and distribution. It also put a spotlight on turnaround time. Print service providers are using the

lessons from the pandemic to promote services to their customers like true print on demand, just-in-time manufacturing (combined with efficient warehousing as needed) and distribution capabilities.

The first thing that became apparent during the pandemic was that local providers were not as limited by transport issues. They could provide more reliable turnaround times. In today's post-pandemic era, print service providers can build on that turnaround time message while also strengthening it with factors that are appealing to print purchasers:

- **Time** – You will have additional time to work on content, thereby enabling greater timeliness with what you say in print.
- **Cash flow** – You do not have to tie up cash in inventory that you may never end up using.
- **Flexibility** – You will have the flexibility to print in reasonable quantities, knowing that you can easily reprint to meet market demand as necessary.
- **Shipping** – You don't have to be concerned with the delivery delays and insurance costs associated with long-distance shipping.

None of these features are particularly new, but they have gained strength due to the pandemic. When tied to services such as document repositories, fulfilment capabilities and just-in-time manufacturing, the appeal of local service providers grows. The arguments in favor of such benefits have a better chance of succeeding when your sales team is able to reach those who control profit and loss centers rather than the print buyers, who may care only about unit price without considering the impact of shipping, warehousing and other related costs.

Eco-friendliness is another point of consideration in relation to international competition. The ecological impact of print production is on the minds of



many print purchasers. Sustainability, paper sourcing and carbon neutrality are all topics that are likely to come up in sales meetings. Long-distance shipping adds an ecological burden. In addition, some international print service providers may not have the same dedication to eco-friendliness.

The bottom line

There is much that can be learned about the pandemic's impact on international competition. Here are some recommendations:

- **Leverage automation whenever possible.** Profitability depends on this, but automation also improves your ability to act quickly and offer market-leading turnaround times. Making it easy to place orders, check inventory and re-order as necessary is essential for applications like books, brochures, promotional materials and any other items ordered from a document repository.
- **Promote automation in finishing.** One aspect that has often lagged in automation is finishing. This will likely be a prime area for improvement for many print service providers.
- **Focus on eco-friendliness.** Today's print purchasers are often very environmentally conscious, particularly when it comes to issues of carbon neutrality. Consider how you can use this to your advantage.

- **Promote the advantages of production digital print.** In an odd way, the pandemic forced print purchasers to see some of the important advantages of production digital print by taking away access to cheap international book printing sources. Will these purchasers be tempted back to a price-dominated focus, or will they see how they can fully integrate production digital print services into their business models? The answer to that question will depend on print service providers' ability to promote and sell their services.

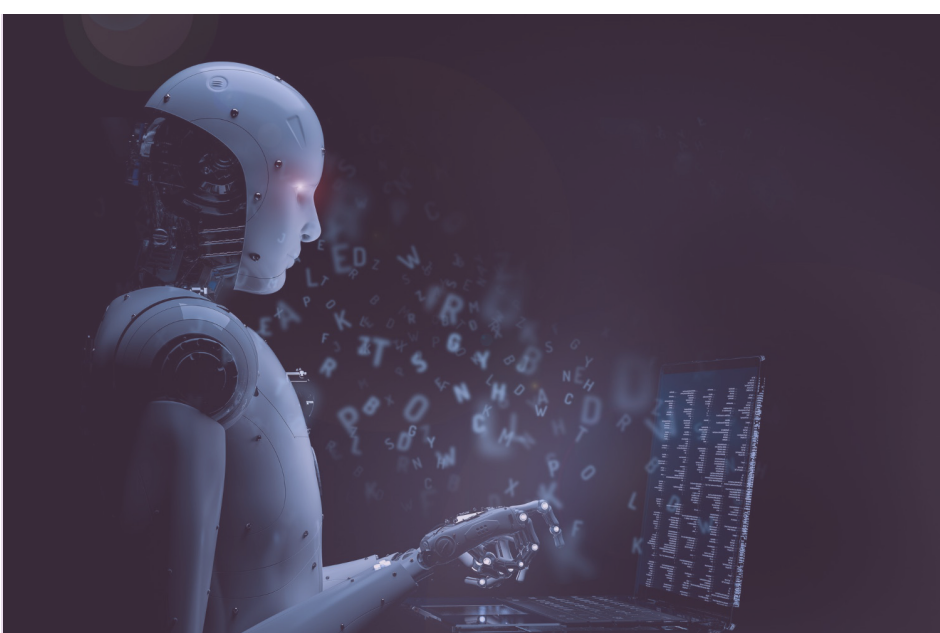
Print service providers must have the foresight to build for growth post-pandemic. In a market that has experienced significant technological and end-user changes over recent decades, it is encouraging to see how many have streamlined their operations and expanded their services, facilitated in large part by their ability to automate through software and digital processes. Today's print purchasers are the beneficiaries of capabilities that build on efficient short-run, on-demand, and just-in-time production with document repositories that enable efficient ordering and fulfilment.

Source: Jim Hamilton, Consultant Emeritus at Keypoint Intelligence

TECHNOLOGY

The Bad Bot Takeover Is Here

There is one extremely common threat to our security that nearly everyone has witnessed but hardly anyone talks about – bad bots. These silent attackers are often thought of as annoying spam accounts posting computer-generated comments online. They are so common that most of us tend to scroll by them without noticing, but in reality, bad bots are much more dangerous, particularly for business owners.



What are bad bots?

Bad bots are software applications that are programmed to run automated tasks with malicious intent, such as brute force attacks, data mining, ad fraud and more. These stealthy assailants are the tireless, automated “employees” of cybercriminals that help them wreak havoc at scale. And they are everywhere. A study by Imperva revealed that of all Internet traffic in 2022, 47.4% was made up of these automated bots.

What can bad bots do?

The activities of these bad bots can range from annoying to outright malicious. The most common ones we see that can affect any business are:

- **Reputation attacks:** Bots can be configured to leave comments on your social media or website with malicious codes and links, post provocative or spammy comments, leave scathing reviews and so on, all of which affect consumer trust.
- **Web scraping:** Bad bots can scrape your website for valuable data, such as pricing information or customer reviews, which they might use for

various purposes, including undercutting your prices or selling your data to competitors. They could also use it to duplicate your website and set up phishing scams to trick visitors.

- **Brute force attacks:** These bots attempt to gain unauthorized access to your systems by repeatedly guessing passwords, making your accounts vulnerable to breaches. This is a popular tactic against financial services companies. If cybercriminals get access to accounts that contain sensitive financial information, they can open up new credit card accounts.

- **Distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks:** Bad bots can be used to launch DDoS attacks, overwhelming your website or online services with traffic and causing downtime.
- **Ad fraud:** Some bots engage in click fraud, repeatedly clicking on online ads to deplete your advertising budget without delivering real human engagement. This will skew analytics and often lead to poor decision-making for the marketing department.

How can you detect bad bots?

Detecting bad bots can be challenging, since they often mimic human behavior. The hardest ones to identify are evasive bots, which get their name from their ability to sidestep security by cycling through random IPs, rapidly changing their identities, mimicking human behavior and defeating CAPTCHA challenges.

However, there are a few methods to help you identify bad bot attacks:

- **Watch traffic patterns:** Monitor website traffic patterns for irregularities, such as high traffic from a single IP address or a single region.
- Monitor all comments sections: Check in regularly on social media sites for spam comments or fake bad reviews, and delete them.
- **Use CAPTCHA challenges:** Implement CAPTCHA challenges or bot detection tools to filter out automated traffic automatically.
- **Implement anomaly detection:** Use anomaly detection algorithms to spot unusual behavior, like rapid data scraping or suspicious login attempts.

- **Track bot signatures:** Maintain a list of known bot signatures and compare incoming traffic against it.

If you notice repeated issues, there are a few actions you can take, such as:

- **Educate your team:** Train your employees to recognize and report suspicious activities, as humans are often the first line of defense. Create a process that includes who to notify and what steps to take when each issue is noticed.
- **Use bot detection solutions:** Invest in bot detection software or services that can help identify and block bad bot traffic.
- **Maintain regular updates:** Keep your software and security systems updated to patch vulnerabilities that bots may exploit.
- **Implement rate limiting:** To thwart scraping attempts, limit the number of requests an IP address can make in a given time frame.
- **Hire an IT professional:** Bots are tricky. IT companies deal with them regularly and have advanced solutions that can help eliminate these annoying and dangerous issues for you.

The impact of bad bots on business owners can be significant and lead to financial losses, reputational damage and legal complications. If you're worried about bad bots causing a problem for your organization, contact Shield IT Networks, a PIA preferred partner, at www.ShieldITNetworks.com/contact-us to learn how they can help you protect your business.

Source: Shield IT Networks, www.ShieldITNetworks.com.

Put It On the Calendar



As 2023 winds to a close, now is the perfect time to reflect upon your marketing efforts of the past year so you can move forward with creating a plan for 2024. What worked and what didn't work? Just as importantly, what great ideas either did not get properly implemented or never made it off of your "to do" list at all?

Creating a plan is only the first step

One thing I've seen is that we all have the best intentions when we create our marketing plans. What we tend to forget is that creating a plan is just the first step. It's not enough to establish a list of goals and plans. If you want to meet these goals you also have to make time to implement your plans!

The best way to ensure that this happens is to schedule it. Literally. Put your plans on your calendar.

Make the commitment

Putting things on your calendar makes them concrete – a commitment. It also stops you from putting your marketing plan away and forgetting all about it. You should add your marketing plans to your calendar and schedule automated reminders to pop up at all the appropriate times.

Don't just schedule the final due dates

This is another trap that people fall into. Say you want to send out a newsletter on the first Monday of each month. Don't just put "send monthly newsletter" on your calendar on the first Monday of each month. You also need to schedule time to do the work.

Working backwards from the final due date, you need to schedule time to:

- Create a list of topics that you will be writing about during the year.
- Write the articles.

- Find and purchase stock photos to illustrate the articles.
- Get the articles set up in your newsletter template.
- Have the appropriate people on your team review and approve the newsletter.
- Schedule the newsletter to be sent out.
- Also recommended: Post the newsletter article on a "blog" page on your website, and then post "teasers" on your social media pages that entice people to click through and read the article on your blog.

In short, if you want to ensure that your marketing plans get implemented in 2024, you must schedule time to make things happen.

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UPCOMING WEBINARS

WEBINAR: California Legislative Update and New Laws for 2024

Date: December 5, 2023
Time: 11:00 am – 12:00 pm PT
For: PIA Members Only
Cost: FREE

Over the past year our industry lobbyist, RJ Cervantes of Resilient Lobby, was very busy tracking a variety of bills as they made their way through the California legislature. Now that this year's legislative session has ended, RJ will be providing an update on what was signed into law and what to watch for as we move ahead.

Join us for this informative webinar to learn:

- The impact of the 2023 legislative session on the printing industry
- What you need to know about the new laws that come into effect starting on January 1, 2024
- Potential challenges on the horizon with the 2024 legislative session
- The 2024 elections and the key candidates and races that will shape the political universe
- The answers to any questions about legislative and regulatory activity that you may have

Don't miss this FREE members-only webinar! Log in and be prepared to ask questions.

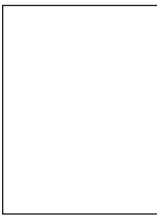
Register online at www.piasc.org/events.

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For more information contact Nadine Mora at 323-728-9500 ext. 262 or nadine@piasc.org.



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Events
CALENDAR

Webinar: CA Legislative Update and New Laws
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5
11:00 AM – NOON PT
Via Zoom
bit.ly/legislativewebinar23

O.S.T.S. Free Webinar: Planning Your 2024 Safety Program
MONDAY, DECEMBER 11
10:00 AM PT
conta.cc/45tykRH

Ben Franklin's Birthday Celebration
SATURDAY, JANUARY 20
10:00 AM – 4:00 PM PT
International Printing Museum
Carson, CA
bit.ly/FranklinsBirthday2024

12 December

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FOR FULL LIST OF EVENTS,
PLEASE VISIT
WWW.PIASC.ORG/EVENTS

Paper and Substrate Show
THURSDAY, MARCH 28
5:30 – 9:00 PM PT
Irvine, CA
www.piasc.org/papershow/

Save the Date: Graphics Night
THURSDAY, MAY 2
Yorba Linda, CA

WEBINAR: CALIFORNIA
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
AND NEW LAWS FOR 2024

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THE BAD BOT TAKEOVER IS HERE

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION AND
LESSONS OF THE PANDEMIC

Feature

Technology

Business
Management

Upcoming
Webinar

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