

Brother International Corporation

Dealer Counts Education & Fresh Thinking As Her Primary Strategies for Success

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Karen Schimpf, president of Main Factory Sales & Service in Buffalo, NY, which carries the full line of technology and machinery from Brother International Corporation, was asked recently what she got from all her years of higher education besides her MBA and an almost-finished Master's degree in a related field.

The rigorous studies taught her to think differently, she says, and the ability to analyze business challenges from a fresh perspective has played a critical role in the success of her sewing machine dealership.

Because of her strategic analysis and management abilities, not only has Main Factory diversified—and thrived—in a time of upheaval in the sewing industry, but it has also expanded, opening a second location recently about 60 miles away in Rochester, NY.

Main Factory has operated in northwestern New York for more than 40 years, representing one brand primarily. The dealership draws customers from far beyond the Buffalo city limits, including such far-flung locales as Ohio and even Toronto,

Ontario, Canada. About five years ago, Schimpf and her partner, Bob Miller, purchased the dealership and one of their early decisions was to expand the product line to include Brother.

Customers were curious about this change, she says, but it was easy to explain.

“The handwriting was on the wall,” she says. When you’re competing with machine brands that are sold in discount chains for less than dealer cost, it’s time to find a company that also values fresh thinking, and that led her to Brother.

“Sales is education,” she says. “A customer is not going to purchase something if they don’t feel comfortable with it and how it fits into his or her life.”



“It’s a great product line! They invest heavily in R and D, and you can tell,” she says. “Brother is constantly innovating with new technology and staying current with what’s out there.” Schimpf believes in keeping her customers current, too. Main Factory offers a full array of in-store educational opportunities, ranging from clubs to classes on embroidery, sewing and software. She also started a series of basic computer classes to teach customers how to use their computers more fully with their

sewing and embroidery machinery.

“Basic computer classes don’t teach you how to go out on the Internet and download designs and unzip them,” she says.

Plus it’s rewarding to see those students grow in

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their skills, she adds.

For example, she remembers an elderly customer who, a few years ago, stepped up to a Brother 4000D from her previous machine and took some classes. Before, all she could do was embroider on towels. In fact, that was her standard gift to family members. This lady came in some time later to show off the new family gift: sweatshirts she’d learned to embroider in her Main Factory classes. Her son (and erstwhile chauffeur) was almost more thrilled than his mom. Reports Schimpf, “He said, half-jokingly, ‘Thank God, I couldn’t deal with another towel!’”



Schimpf has also taken her mission for education to the halls of higher education. For several years, she has taught for the Fashion Design Club, a State University of New York (SUNY) program affiliated with the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. The program encompasses several degrees in fashion and fashion design. Schimpf has taught embroidery specifically but from a business perspective,

i.e. how it can be incorporated into a business. She’s taking a hiatus from the SUNY classes this year, however, while she gets Main Factory’s new Rochester location running smoothly.

Schimpf will have some new classes for her dealership as well; specifically, a special club program for her Brother PR-620 customers and others who want to start a business with their embroidery and sewing skills. Schimpf and Miller will talk about their areas of expertise as well as involve experts from the community at large.

So many small business owners open their doors and know nothing about running a business, she says. That’s the point where she was 27 years ago when she opened her first business, a fabric store. “I had no idea. I thought you got a phone line and that was that!”

Main Factory also puts a lot of effort into its off-site, special educational events, bringing in 75 to 100 people to hear such sewing and embroidery luminaries as Linda McGhee, Mary Mulari and John Deer, who were featured recently. Schimpf says her dealership is well known for these events, which are packed with lively lectures and conversation, lots of fun and big buffets. “We enjoy what we’re doing and when you do that and it’s fun...the rest follows,” she says.

It all comes back to how Schimpf values education and infuses everything she does with the twin desires to teach and learn. “Sales is education,” she says. “A customer is not going to purchase something if they don’t feel comfortable with it and how it fits into his or her life.”

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Innov-is 4000D