

AT LABELS & DECALS INTERNATIONAL

Some label manufacturers have platoons of sales personnel working the area around their plants, or even nationwide. Others have elaborate websites describing their equipment and how they take care of customers. A few promote their expertise and knowledge of specific industries or label types. Cliff Bode has a dog.

Bode, who owns and operates Labels & Decals International in suburban Chicago, is anything if not a promoter. Together with Duma—his incredibly talented Jack Russell terrier—Bode is fast becoming a fixture at trade shows and other events across North America. Duma draws traffic to the Labels & Decals International booth at shows staged by the Advertising Specialty Institute, as well as conventional printing shows such as the Graph Expo and PRINT shows in Chicago. Bode (aided by Duma) is the only salesperson at the company, which sells exclusively to print and advertising specialty distributors and to offset printers for resale. Duma is featured in direct mailings and responses to customer inquiries. Bode may run the place, but to both customers and prospects, Duma is the company. Think the GEICO gecko or the AFLAC duck.

Duma became part of Bode's business when he made a fundamental decision. "I had wanted a dog for some time, but it did not seem right for any animal to spend as much time at home alone as I spend in the business. Then it occurred to me that if this is my business, I could bring my dog to work." Today, visitors to Labels & Decals International are routinely greeted by a very



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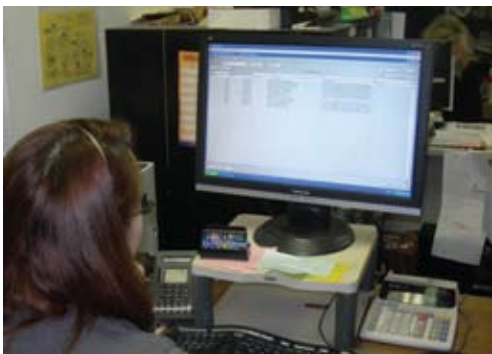
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friendly Duma, who insists upon providing a dog-guided tour of the operation, including her favorite backroom location—the loading dock. Duma charms everyone in the process, and regular visitors such as UPS drivers and postal workers look

forward to the occasion. And Duma is by Bode's side regardless of the hours—even when he stays late at night to run a press and get out a last-minute job.

Jack Russell terriers, of course, are widely known for their intelligence and desire to please their masters. This set Bode—an accomplished water skier who at one time was ranked third in the nation—thinking: "I saw a video of a squirrel water skiing, and it occurred to me that Duma probably could do that. So I trained her to not only water ski, but to steer the boat as well." As a result, Duma has her own website (thewaterskiingdog.com) and a highly rated YouTube video on which she demonstrates her skills. Visitors to Duma's website are invited to send her a message or request a photo. Duma has been a featured attraction at the Toronto Boat Show, drawing literally thousands to see her perform, and has been seen nationwide on cable superstation WGN-TV.

Training Duma and traveling to various gigs takes a bit of time, but Cliff Bode is as focused and diligent about running Labels & Decals International as he is about teaching Duma tricks. The company has been a family-run operation for more than 50 years—it was started by Bode's grandfa-





ther. By the time Cliff finished college, the family operated several businesses and running the label operation became his responsibility. Some years ago, when Bode found that his estimates were inconsistent from job to job and had an unattractive format, he installed Label Traxx—a label and converting business management software suite developed by Tailored Solutions of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. “Label Traxx is very easy to use, and we were



attracted by the fact that it runs equally well on both Macs and PCs,” says Bode.

“Our customer service representatives literally taught themselves how to use it, and when new office personnel come on board, they are up to speed quickly and make very few errors in estimates. I personally look at every estimate, but Label Traxx is reliable and consistent enough that generally no modifications are called for.” Labels & Decals International Customer Service Representative Lisa Ryan told us: “Label Traxx was a very easy program to learn. I have never even been to a Label Traxx seminar or training session, and the program gives me no problems whatsoever.” And Customer Service Representative Crystal Baker added: “When I came on board, I was able to begin using the software almost immediately. Within a week, I had it down pat.” Bode is still toying with the idea of letting Duma enter orders.

At Labels & Decals International, Label Traxx is used only in the front office, although Bode says he plans to add additional modules as business picks up. In addition to preparing estimates, Label Traxx is used to generate job tickets and do accounts receivable. Purchasing and accounts payable functions rely on QuickBooks. Because the company is small and because Bode is involved in its every aspect, inventory is done manually and press operators do not use the system to log in and out of jobs. Still, Bode indicates that his reliance on Label Traxx estimates gives him confidence that things are on an even keel.

Says Bode: “About half our business is local, in the Chicago area, and the other half is from all across North America.” The nationwide aspect of the Labels & Decals International business is largely due to Bode’s (and Duma’s) promotional efforts at trade shows and in direct mail. Talking about his canine partner, Bode says: “People now look for us at trade shows, and come by the booth specifically to see the dog and her videos. We have found that people who are at shows miss the dogs they have left at home, so they come by and get their ‘dog fix’ from Duma. While they

are focusing on the dog, I can usually find out whether they buy and resell labels, and can get their contact information for our prospect database.” Bode and Duma were doing their routine at PRINT 2009, the big trade show in Chicago, for the entire time—six days in a row. A real trooper, Duma was as excited to see people and to demonstrate her ball retrieving skill on the last day of the show as she was on day one.



Owner Cliff Bode

Cliff Bode has an excellent formula for promoting his label business, and Label Traxx helps him manage the business once he and Duma land the orders. At Labels & Decals International, the partnership makes for a doggone effective combination.



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