

P O Box 421  
515 PRIVATE ROAD 3001  
BIG SANDY, TEXAS 75755  
PHONE: (903) 636-5200  
SUPPORT: (800) 452-2502  
FAX: (903) 636-4605

# ADVANTAGE

BUSINESS COMPUTER SYSTEMS, LTD

## Newsletter

APRIL, 2005

# ADVANTAGE ACADEMY

## H i g h l i g h t s

### •Class Highlights:

*Advantage  
Academy class  
notes*

### •Versyss

**Transition:**  
*Transition going  
according to plan*

### •New Customers:

*Welcome to our  
newest customers*

### •Outsmarting the Competition:

*Moving beyond  
price wars to meet  
customer needs*

### •Trade Show Schedule:

*Latest schedule*

### •Hardware Maintenance:

*Procedures for your  
server*

The March 2005 Advantage Academy was a great success. Those who attended had relevant questions and intelligent responses, and enjoyed the group interaction. At these classes everyone learns, not only from the instructors but also from each other. Users found that they shared many of the same business practices and issues, and they learned from each other new ways to utilize the system to its full potential.

The classes cover a range of material, from the simplest applications to features that many users did not realize were available in the software. Participants learned how to use the Report Generator and received in-depth information on how to accomplish specific tasks. The hands-on classroom environment gives each participant the chance to work with the applications and procedures that are being discussed. The camaraderie found during the classes is exemplified when a newer user is helped by a more seasoned veteran.

If you have never attended a session of Advantage Academy, or if it has been a long while since you were last here, make plans to attend the next session. It will give you a better understanding of the software and improved skills to complete your daily tasks. The dates for the next session will be announced in a future edition of the newsletter. Thank you to all of those who attended the March class for making it a success.



# Versyss Transition

In our last newsletter we announced the exciting news about the Advantage acquisition of Versyss. The purchase is now complete, and the transition is going as planned. Feedback has been very positive. We want to ensure you can continue to run day-to-day software or support. As a part of business tools are more readily available only a phone call away.

**Versyss transition going according to plan.**

stability in your business so that without any interruption in your the Advantage family, numerous available to you. These tools

Our Support Analysts have been the feedback from our Versyss customers has been very positive. With the focus now on the single vertical market, customers can look forward to a higher analyst/customer ratio which translates into faster callbacks and problem resolutions.

making outreach calls, and the

The Advantage acquisition has also already translated into tangible savings for Versyss users. The Vision pricing has been slashed by as much as 50%. For example, prior to the purchase, a 10-user Vision license cost a minimum of \$5937, and today that same software is available for \$2995.

**Versyss Phone Numbers:**

800-837-7977 - General Info/Sales  
 800-966-4031 - Software Support  
 888-469-6940 - Hardware Support

**Advantage Phone Numbers:**

800-452-2502  
 903-636-5200  
 (Follow the instructions to be connected to the desired person or department)

**Fax Numbers:**

903-636-4674 - Office & Software  
 903-636-5434 - Office & Software  
 903-636-4605 - Sales, Hardware and Programming

During the month of April the last part of the transition will take place. This involves moving phone lines and servers that are used for the web services, e-mail and support to our Advantage headquarters. This is tentatively scheduled to take place between April 8 and 13. Advantage will make very effort to minimize any inconvenience to customers during this phase of the transition. The toll-free Versyss support number will not change. However, after the move, that number will be answered at our corporate office in Texas. Your call will then be dispatched, as it was in the past, to the same support people with whom you have been accustomed to working.

If you have any questions about the transition or product pricing, you now have two options. Call Versyss as you have always done, or call the Advantage corporate office and we will direct your call accordingly. We are glad to include our new Versyss customers as a part of the Advantage family and look forward to providing your business with the tools it needs today, tomorrow, and well into the future.

## New Customers Welcome

We are happy to welcome to the Advantage family the following companies:

Hammer Lumber

Guido Lumber

Russell Car Wash, Inc.

M. L. Lumber



*Hammer Lumber*

# MOVING BEYOND PRICE WARS: OUTSMARTING THE COMPETITION

Condensed from <http://www.sba.gov/gopher/Business-Development/Success-Series/Vol6/pricewar.txt>

## **D**iscover Your Company's Image:

Are you offering customers something different than your competitors? Do clients feel your prices are too high, your quality inferior, or your service impersonal? Do your customers have needs you are not adequately meeting?

Talk to your customers, prospects, suppliers and employees and find out what they think. These are the people who best know you and your competition. In asking them, not only will you get needed information, but you also convey that you care about meeting their needs. Whether you conduct a formal research survey or casual interviews, the data collected is invaluable.

Your sales force is ideally situated to gather information from clients and prospects. Anyone who has personal contact with customers can find out how they feel about your product and how they perceive your competition. In addition, management on all levels should become involved, and make themselves visible to customers.

Some of the most useful information is collected by asking customers about their best and worst experiences in dealing with your company, and what they would like to see changed. Set up a procedure for recording their responses and have them available when deciding what your image should be.



Another approach is to survey potential buyers in your market. Telephone surveys, if conducted quickly and simply, are usually more effective than similar efforts by mail or through company newsletters. A successful survey is succinct, easy to complete and asks questions relevant to important marketing issues you face. In addition to including your own customers and prospects in the survey, be sure to question those people who have abandoned your business, product or service for that of a competitor.

Selecting the questions for your survey is perhaps the most difficult task. Since you are trying to learn what mix of attributes can favorably position your product or service in the market, the questions will vary from industry to industry. If time or space allows, ask open-ended questions about your product's reputation and what additional types of features would be appreciated. It is important to gather information about your competition as well. If they have a stronger image, find out why. Discover exactly what is needed, such as improved packaging or better accommodating customers, for you to surpass them. Also check with trade associations and other industry groups to obtain current, and sometimes free, market research.

Enter your survey results and market information into a database, and use this versatile source of information as a constant guide in your marketing efforts. Try to form a good picture of how the market rates your product or service on the most important qualities. Is your image one of good quality and moderate price, or high quality and high price? How do you rate on durability, availability and reliability? Compare this to the images and strategies of your competitors. If there are already several other companies with products perceived as similar to your own, you might consider revising your current strategy.

Also review the ways other companies are advertising. Looking through the Yellow Pages will identify your competition, the messages they are sending, and what niches can yet be filled. Once you've identified your competition, visit them and pretend to be a customer. Discover what they have to offer and how they treat their customers. Let their strengths and weaknesses help you better formulate how to distinguish your company in the marketplace.

## **F**inding A Market Niche:

A market in its entirety is too expansive and diverse for all but the largest of companies to tackle successfully. The best strategy for a smaller business is to divide the demand for products such as its own into a series of more finite and manageable market niches. Small operations can then offer specialized goods and services that are attractive to a specific group of prospective buyers.

There are undoubtedly some products or services you are specially suited to provide. Study the market and find your opportunity. When searching for your company's niche, take into account the results of your survey and the areas in which your competitors are already situated. Put the information into a table or a graph to illustrate where an opening might exist for your product. Try to find the right configuration of products, services, quality and price that will pit you least directly against competitors.

If you do begin targeting a new niche market, be sure that this niche does not conflict with your overall business plan. For example, a small bakery that makes cookies by hand cannot go after a market for inexpensive, mass-produced cookies, regardless of the demand.

### **R**efining Your Image:

Once you have chosen one or more new market niches to which you would like to cater, you must convey your refined image to potential customers. There are two primary concerns involved in changing your image. The first is the possibility of alienating existing clients. Make it clear that your efforts to capture a new market are in addition to, and not at the expense of, your current business. The other is that you will appear as if you are being forced to change your strategy due to competitive pressures. Your customers and prospects might feel this is symptomatic of an unhealthy organization, and be hesitant to start or continue doing business with you. The best way to counteract this possible negative perception is by emphasizing that you are now able to provide a new product or service with superior value for your chosen market segment.

**Successful marketing  
and operating depend  
upon effective  
communication**

Successful marketing and operating depend upon effective communication both within your firm and to your customers, especially if embarking upon an active campaign to capture a new market or reaffirming your existing position. Employees should be thoroughly aware of where the company is headed. Any employee who comes in contact with customers, from telephone operators to salespeople, represents your firm. You want all personnel to see the company in same light and to convey this shared sense of purpose when answering customer questions and providing services totem.

### **S**erving Your Customers:

Companies today are realizing the importance of good customer relations. Meeting the needs of your customers goes beyond simply offering a product or service that benefits them. If you spend all of your time improving the quality of what you offer and no time developing customer relations, failure could easily be the result. After all, repeat business and customer loyalty, rather than product attributes alone, are the true determinants of the success of any venture.

It is commonly known that everybody who walks into your business has the potential to boost or break your image by subsequently talking with seven to 10 of their friends and acquaintances. If you can impress people with your superior service, you are well on the way to building a strong customer base.



The telephone operators to salespeople are also carrying the burden of responsibility when it comes to customer service. Even if your sales force is spectacularly knowledgeable and helpful, a blunt or misinformed telephone operator may inadvertently undo any positive impressions that have been made and dissuade a prospect from buying from you. The importance of providing quality customer service and training on all levels cannot be overemphasized.

In addition to instilling and reinforcing a service culture, it is important to ensure your employees are working under favorable conditions. Employees who are overworked or underpaid are not likely to go out of their way to devote extra time and energy to help customers. And tired employees or ones who are obviously unhappy with their job also reflect badly on the business. Make sure to commend or reward personnel for outstanding service, and insist that staff members working long or hard hours take ample breaks or are given some other form of compensation.

Also remember that good customer service extends beyond a warm greeting and a helping hand. Some of the most important service opportunities arise after a customer first visits your company. Following up with customers will reinforce the positive impression that is so important in guaranteeing their return or recommendation.

In short, the extra effort you and your employees extend to meet customers' needs and make their experience with your business a positive one will only come back to you in the form of a stronger customer base and increased sales. Keep in mind that low prices are definitely not the deciding factor for all consumers. Quality service, more often than not, outweighs other business features, and might even make an ideal crux for your niche design.



**Getting the Word Out:**

The most reliable way to relay your new image to existing and prospective customers is to target them directly. Vast quantities of information concerning consumers' tastes, spending patterns, occupations, incomes and other demographics are easily accessible. List brokers, who are specialists in obtaining and using this information, sell both customized lists and the flexible, more comprehensive databases or "information systems" that produced them. Trade publications, such as American Demographics, are good sources of information on list brokers, and are available at many public libraries.

The key to using this type of detailed market information effectively is to have clearly defined your goals in advance. Based on these goals, create a profile of the sort of customers who are likely to be most receptive to your new image and who have needs you are specially equipped to meet. List brokers will then be able to provide you with segmented lists of prospective customers based on your specifications.

How you wish to reach these prospects is a matter requiring careful judgment. A direct mail campaign, for example, may work well for a retailer but prove disastrous for a law firm whose success depends on projecting an image of professionalism. Whatever methods you choose, be sure to track the effectiveness of the promotion and enter any relevant results into the database you have created.

Additionally, do not be afraid to position yourself against the competition in the promotional materials you develop. Prospects need to know what particular attributes make your product or service superior.

**Keep Refining Your Strategy:**

Using market information to refine your strategy should be an ongoing process. You can use information from previous marketing efforts to guide future ones, giving you foreknowledge of what is in demand and which niches are responsive to your image. After each marketing campaign, assess your competitive position again, and make sure that is where you want to stay.

Put salespeople on site where your products are being used to get feedback, and ask customers how you can adjust or position your product differently to better benefit them.

Remember to make your customers part of your refinement process. Giving them the products and services they need will contribute to their well-being and they, in turn, will contribute to your success.

**Remember to make your customers part of your refinement process.**

**Trade Show Schedule**

*Look for the Advantage booth at the following trade shows.  
We always enjoy seeing our customers and having some time to visit with them.*

Show	City/State	Booth	Show Dates	Show Location
Kentucky Lumber	Sparta, KY	46	April 28-29	Kentucky Speedway
Do-it-best Market	Indianapolis, IN	LE10	May 14-17	Indiana Convention Center

# Hardware Maintenance



To keep your vehicles operating at their best, you perform regular maintenance on them. For the same reason your computer system needs regular maintenance also. Here is a basic list of maintenance items that need to be done to keep your computer system running efficiently.

## SCO-Unix

- Perform monthly Boot 'n Root procedures from "single user mode" ONLY.
- Keep at least one set of your monthly Boot 'n Root media off the premises in a safe place. Making two sets of Boot 'n Root media is even better. Always use new media for Boot 'n Root.
- Test the monthly Boot 'n Root media periodically.
- Perform a weekly shutdown procedure on your system.
- Clean your system, at least, monthly. Shut down your system properly first and use canned air to blow out the dust.

## SCO-Unix or Linux

- While your system is down for cleaning, don't forget to check the fans in the CPU. Typically, there are at least four, at the back, in the front, on the processor and in the power supply. If a fan is wobbly, slow or not working, get it replaced immediately. If all of the fans are not working properly, your system can overheat.
- Test your battery backup at least once a month. Shutdown server to the "Safe to Power Off Position" and remove the battery backup's connection from the wall to force battery usage. The battery backup should be able to run the server down. After completing the test reboot server.
- Periodically test some of your
  - For tapes:** put the tape in the Administration-> Operating menu-> Data backup options restore data from cdrom-> **For CD's:** put the CD in the Administration-> Operating system utilities-> Tape and cdrom menu-> Data backup options tape and cdrom-> Examine or restore data from cdrom-> Check Date on Cdrom. After the date and time appears, read the data on the CD to make sure there are no errors.
- If you use a CD as a backup media, clean the CD drive weekly. Place the CD cleaner in the CD-ROM drive and the drive turning the CD will clean the lenses.
- If you are copying data to a CD or DVD once a month, you should use the System Administration-> Hard drive space management-> Size of current area utility to check the size of the End-of-Day and History files that will be backed up. CD's hold approximately 6 to 7 gigabytes of data.
- Create a company equipment list with all devices i.e., workstations, printers, etc. Indicate manufacturer, model and serial number for each item. Also indicate from whom you purchased each item. Make sure a copy of this list is available to all employees who are responsible for trouble shooting problems on your system.
- If you have Ethernet devices, please DO NOT add devices unless you know precisely how to do it. You can literally shut down your whole system by entering the wrong information.
- Always schedule equipment upgrades with the Advantage Hardware Department.
- Create a Hardware Documentation folder. Print out all pertinent documents for your operation from the documents found in Other Options-> How to reference files-> Hardware. If your system is down, you will not have access to the documents you might need if you do not have a hard copy.

## Maintenance Procedures For Your Advantage Server

daily data backup tapes or CD's. drive. Then go to System system utilities-> Tape and cdrom tape and cdrom-> Examine or Determine date/type of backup tape. drive. Then go to System

Advantage also offers a preventive maintenance program. This program can keep your system running smoothly by finding problems before they start. This can be offered to you at a great savings by servicing a group of customers in the same geographical area and splitting the cost of the service call with each participant. If you would be interested in having your system examined by one of our technicians, please call 903-636-5200, extension 505 for information about the maintenance plan and scheduling.