



# ON TRACK!

Patterns  
Interviews  
Book Reviews  
& Much More



Innovative Custom 1st Place ~ MQS® 2008  
*Greensleeves* by Marilyn Badger,  
pieced by Claudia Clark Myers

## Articles on...

- Making your own stencils
- Blocking your quilts
- Lighting for photography
- Business plan basics
- Hiring a speaker



Dear IMQA Members,

I love to piece quilts, how about you? Finding the time to do it is the problem for me. Make time in your schedule to do the things you enjoy.

Quilt tops are the basis for the longarm quilting industry. Make it a priority to teach someone how to quilt. Teach a class at a local quilt shop or community education setting. Bring samples of your quilts to show these new quilters how machine quilting enhances a quilt top.

If your interests are in garment making or you know of someone who makes quilted garments you will be interested to know that we are bringing back the Fashion Show to MQS<sup>®</sup> 2009. We are opening up the competition to include garments quilted on domestic machines and we have added two classifications to the competition. For those who have not won a ribbon before we have the Novice division and for those who have won ribbons we have the Masterclass. Encourage anyone you know who is a quilted garment maker to enter the Fashion Show competition.

New in this issue you will find **Block Party**. Keryn Emmerson is our first contributor to this new feature. We will be asking other pattern designers to contribute their seasonal designs in future issues. You will also find two interviews with award winning quilt artists and an interview with one of the industry's well known ruler manufacturers.

I am pleased to announce that the IMQA board has appointed Mary Hibbs to the position of president of IMQA. Since the resignation of Fred Hill I have filled in as acting president. Mary has been very active in the organization and will be a great leader for us. Contact Mary with your thoughts and ideas regarding your trade organization.

Enjoy the fall season and...

Happy Quilting!



## On Track! Magazine

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### Editor

Linda Hamson

### Managing Editor

Martha Heimbaugh  
editor@IMQA.org

### Layout

Linda Hamson

### Marketing / Advertising

marketing@IMQA.org

## IMQA BOARD MEMBERS

Mary Hibbs, President  
president@IMQA.org  
816-797-5698

Linda Hamson, Vice President  
vpres@IMQA.org  
507-421-2818

Janiece Cline, Treasurer  
treasurer@IMQA.org  
913-894-2702

Val Hill  
quiltlady@epix.net  
570-746-3304

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IMQA  
PO Box 419  
Higginsville, MO 64037-0419

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# BUSINESS PLAN BASICS

## A Continuing Series

By Patricia C. Barry

### Time to figure out how to do a business plan!

Part 1: Business Plan Basics.

Part 2: Formulating your ideas.

Part 3: Products and Services

#### Part 4: Who is your (potential) customer?

Part 5: But How? Logistics & Marketing

Part 6: Financing the dream

Part 7: Timelines and Executive

Summary.

Part 8: Updating your Business Plan.

A well written business plan will define how your Product/Services will deliver value to your customer and help you attain your goals profitably. There are three key elements in that sentence; Products/Services, Customers/Value, and Profit. In a previous issue, Products/Services were discussed. The importance of product differentiation was emphasized but differentiation doesn't mean anything unless the customer thinks it has value. In this installment, try to look at your Product/Service offerings from the customer's perspective, and keep in mind the customer relationship must bring value to them and profit to you.

#### Who are your (potential) customers?

While working on the Products/Services section of your plan, you probably learned a lot about your potential customers and the competition. Some customers are price sensitive, some need fast turnaround time, some insist on show quality, and some are looking for innovation and artistry. Who do you want to work with? Or more importantly, what group of customers would perceive value in your products and services?

#### What do they want?

Customers that are price sensitive will always be looking for a good deal. If you offer quilting services that are fast and easy, you should be able to suggest a service that fits their budget. Remember that these customers want more information about the *price/service* relationship, so offer to show them samples for several price brackets. Their perception of a "good deal" may shift if they know and value what they will get for their money.

Fast turnaround time is very important to some people. They are generally very busy people and when they make a quilt for a special occasion, they rarely can finish it months before the occasion. These people may be interested in getting a commitment from you in advance, that you will get their quilt done in time. If you take reservations, you are providing value to the customer. You will also be able to plan your workload easier.

The term *heirloom quilting* applies to quilts made for special occasions. These are intended to be family treasures that can be passed from one generation to another. The term might also apply to competition quilts or commission quilts. Either way, the quality is the most valuable product feature. Developing the skills that lead to a reputation for *show quality* normally takes a long time. If you are seeking this group of customers, it might be wise to write your plan so you start with a different group of customers, and work toward earning the trust of this group in the future.

Innovation and artistry are talents

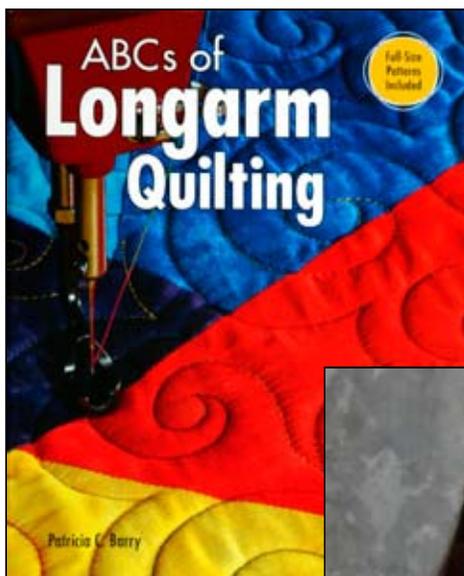
more than skills. Some people have them and many of us don't, but we *can* recreate an impression we have seen elsewhere. Artistry (and imitation) needs time to bloom, so again, start with a different group of customers and develop your reputation over time.

#### Sometimes there will be a secondary tier of customer –

like a quilt shop. Your primary customer is the person who made the quilt top but the shop can make the connection between you and them. The shop hopes to benefit by attracting more people into their shop and selling to them. If you provide samples to display in the shop, both of you will benefit. If the shop does any of the administrative work (taking in quilts, doing customer worksheets, doing price estimates, processing payments) be prepared to pay for their services. Remember that they need to value their relationship with you too.

#### How will you satisfy your customers?

Now that you have identified your potential customer base, re-visit the product section of your plan and redefine



“A” About Longarms

“B” Basic Techniques

“C” Customer Confidence



#### Pat Barry

Professional Quilter,  
Author, Lecturer,  
Quilting Instructor,  
CreativeStudio™  
Certified Trainer &  
manual author

[www.ByDesignQuilting.com](http://www.ByDesignQuilting.com)

your products in terms of the value they bring to the customer. Look at it from the customer's perspective and see if there are ways you could enhance your Products/Services to increase the value to your customers.

## Contacting your (potential) customers

All successful businesses need customers – hopefully repeat customers – but all customers were prospects at one time. Prospects are more likely to become (and remain) customers if they feel like they will be treated well. One way to treat people well is to listen to their needs and remember them. So develop a plan for contacting prospective customers and include a log for your notes on people, events, and conversations.

Your contact log doesn't need to be complicated; it could just be a loose-leaf binder with a page for notes by person. Make up your own form if possible, to remind you of the type of information you might want to collect and save about your key contacts. Name, address, and e-mail are obviously useful, but also consider recording the name of their company and web site (if any), and how you got their name.

Personal information is sometimes very useful too because it will help you suggest ways that you can be of service to them. For example, a customer that has a career may need you to have evening hours. If you know they have a career, you can mention that you offer evening or weekend hours as a convenience to them. You need to make it easy for your customer to do business with you!

Log all contacts with each key person if possible, and include a brief reminder of what the contact was for. Examples might be an entry for each

promotion or mailing you sent them (by e-mail or snail mail), each quilt that you completed for them, each **Thank You Note** you sent to them.

## Summary

The Customer Section and the Product Section of your business plan are very closely related. You wouldn't look for customers if you can't offer the Products/Services they want. Similarly, you wouldn't offer Products/Services if nobody needed them. Put yourself in your customer's position, and re-evaluate your Products/Services, looking for ways to enhance them and make them (and you) more valuable to your customers.

Also think of how you like to be treated when you are the customer. Even if you don't write official Customer Service Policies and Procedures, you will want to think about how you will handle any

customer service issues. A good idea is to keep a customer log to help you remember the individual wants and needs of your potential customers. The goal is to move people from the *potential customer* group to the *repeat customer* group.

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*Patricia C. Barry is a professional quilter, longarm quilting machine sales rep, lecturer, teacher and author of the book, ABCs of Longarm Quilting, published by Krause Publications. Copies of her book are available from Krause, [www.Krausebooks.com](http://www.Krausebooks.com) (Retailers contact 800-289-0963) or her web site, [www.ByDesignQuilting.com](http://www.ByDesignQuilting.com).*

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