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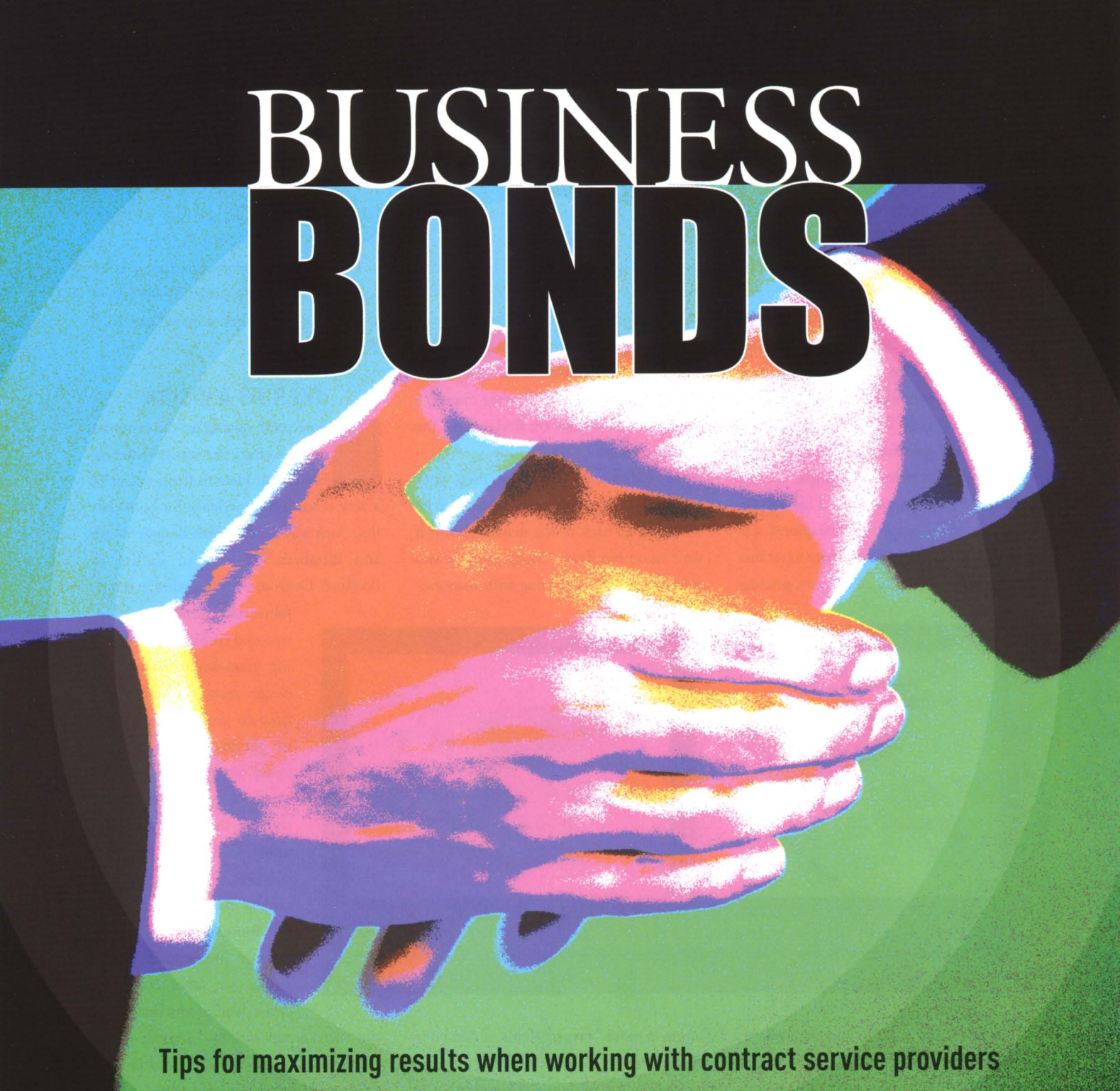
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EXECUTIVE INSIGHTS

*Paul Barker
on Development and Change*



BUSINESS BONDS



Tips for maximizing results when working with contract service providers

For many jewelry manufacturers and designers, working with contract service providers is essential to bringing an idea to fruition. Contract services can give you a way to offer new products to your customers without having to invest in costly technology, systems, and training outside your own realm of expertise.

If you are a small manufacturer, using contract services can make your company seem larger, increase your capacity, cut overhead, and bring in additional business and new cus-

tomers. If your company is large, it might make sense to shop out some processes so you have more time and resources to focus on your core.

Working with a contract service provider is most beneficial when both parties communicate well and understand each other's goals and expectations. This article outlines the basic steps for ensuring a good working relationship between a business and a contract service provider, with advice from companies on both sides of the partnership.

GIVE AND TAKE

Good two-way communication can mean the difference between a successful relationship and one that results in lost time and money when the product isn't right. When beginning work with a contract service provider, you should have a clear idea of what you would like done. In return, your service provider should be able to explain their abilities and limitations.

Bob Staley of B. Staley Inc., a laser welding and goldsmithing service bureau located in Cartersville, Georgia, ensures that his customers understand his policies before starting work on their pieces. He supplies them with an agreement letter that outlines his terms and conditions, pricing,

explanation of what needs to be 'fixed,' as well as no indication of the object's makeup, nor its value for insurance purposes."

This lack of information not only leaves Staley in the dark about what the customers' expectations are for the piece, but also puts the customer in jeopardy in the event that loss or damage occurs while the piece is in Staley's possession. (The agreement letter states that Staley will not be responsible for more than \$75 per item if no values are declared on the repair envelope.)

In addition to communicating your expectations for a job, you also need to be willing to go back to the drawing board if your vision has flaws. "Many jewelers who come to us aren't designing with manufac-

expecting to pay for the design renovation."

To those folks who refuse to bend, Kenik suggests trying another service bureau. "There's nothing wrong with getting a second opinion, but the bottom line is: Can your piece be manufactured? If the answer is no, you need to solicit the help of someone who can get it there and heed their advice."

SHARING A VISION

Sometimes, relying on the expertise of a contract service provider to bring your ideas to fruition can be a very rewarding experience for both parties. Such was the case with designers Jack and Elizabeth Gualtieri of Zaffiro in Portland, Oregon, who specialize in hand-

fabricated limited production and custom work featuring granulation. When the design team decided it was time to develop a cast line of granulated jewelry that could be marketed at lower price points, they knew they had to find a caster who understood their mission.

"Our intention was to achieve the look of granulation from our original designs in cast pieces that would reduce our labor costs, decrease our production time,

and increase our output—without giving up high quality," says Jack. "We knew that we needed to find someone on the cutting edge of high-tech casting who would understand our expectations of quality. We did some research online and looked through past issues of *AJM*, and that's how we found Linus Drogos."

The Gualtieris contacted Drogos of Au Enterprises in Berkley, Michigan, and proposed their idea. Although he had never attempted to mold and cast a granulated piece with as much detail as the



Some delicate designs would be impossible without a laser welder. Manufacturers who don't own lasers can contact service bureaus to complete their visions. Here, Bob Staley used a laser to assemble this ring for a client. Using a torch to solder the components would have damaged the pearls.

payment requirements, and procedures. The customer must sign the letter and return it to Staley before he will perform any work for them.

What he requests in return is a thorough description of the piece to be repaired (metals, stones, measurements, shapes, etc.), a detailed description of the repair requirements, and a declared value for the item. "I can recall a few times that I've received very expensive pieces—pieces worth thousands—with a note attached that says, 'Fix it,'" he says. "There is no

turing in mind," says Jill Kenik of Acropolis Studios Inc., a CAD/CAM service provider located in Providence. "No matter how pretty the design is, it has to work!"

"People bring us designs with prongs that are far too small to hold a stone, or they'll design a piece with 200 diamonds and not enough metal to keep them in place," Kenik continues. "But when we tell them the prongs are too small or the walls are so thin that the piece can't be rubber molded or cast, they are either not willing to alter their original vision, or they aren't

Gualtieri's "Flora" line, he agreed to do some research and development to see if he could produce a product that met their expectations—but the R&D was going to cost them.

"If you are asking a contractor for something that is truly unique, you have to be prepared to incur some costs for the research and development stage," says Drogos. "Jack and Elizabeth were willing to do that, but many customers are not."

Drogos and his staff spent time developing the proper high-pressure injection molding technique that would produce the best quality waxes for casting. Once the molding process was fine-tuned and the initial castings were produced, Drogos sent the first samples to Zaffiro.



When designers Jack and Elizabeth Gualtieri decided to launch a production line of their granulated designs, they weren't sure the pieces could be cast to their standards of quality. After some initial R&D, Linus Drogos of Au Enterprises impressed the Gualtieris with his services—and dedication to quality.

"I think we were all surprised at how well they turned out," says Elizabeth. "The only problem we had with the first batch was that the pieces had been sprued near a granule, altering the perfect round shape of that granule. It was an easy fix to switch the sprue location. Other than that, the granules were defined and the original

integrity of the design was retained."

Based on their successful experiment, the Gualtieris would offer this advice: "Don't sacrifice quality. We were willing to scrap the project if we didn't get the caliber of product we wanted. Find a service provider who not only understands the project, but also shares your ideals of quality."