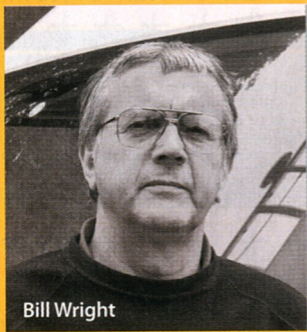


Pro Talk

How to survive the analogue switch-off. Bill Wright has some offbeat ways to drum up trade



Bill Wright

A lot of installers have told me recently that they're still having a pretty lean time.

Digital switch-over is a worry, with fears of high digital transmission powers spelling the end of the aerial trade.

I've heard it all before. Cable TV was going to kill the aerial trade. Then it was satellite TV, then internet TV. The average household spends far more now on the acquisition of TV signals

than ever. When I was a lad we would see a customer every 20 years (that meant twice because in the Middle Ages people died when they were 40). Nowadays, there's so much domestic technology, it might be every couple of years.

Flexibility is the strength of the small trader, so diversify! Get trained up so you can offer a good service in the allied trades – CCTV is one, and there's a lot of IT-based technology that needs an installer. Make friends with the local IT firms. They need CAT5 pulling in and terminating, Wi-Fi bases in hotel lofts, and fancy outdoor Wi-Fi aerials on tall poles; you need your IT sorting out – the relationship could be symbiotic bliss.

With God on your side

It may sound *infra dig* and old-fashioned, but try advertising in the local church magazine and on its website. It's cheap, you don't have to believe in God, and while it's not quite the *Yellow Pages*, the 'calls per quid' figure will be as good or better. It's manna from heaven. The calls are local, which matters with diesel at a fiver a gallon. The sort of person that reads the church mag is typically an archetypal good customer – middle-aged or elderly, thrifty and not poor, and with a good personal ethic. And you know how people bizarrely imagine that everyone in the *Yellow Pages* is trustworthy? Well, the church mag has that same effect plus 12dB! It's as if you have the vicar's personal blessing! Who knows, your contribution to the church roof might just – if you haven't done too many bad things in your life – swing your passage to heaven.

Put yourself about

In rural areas it pays to take an active part in local affairs. Use the local shop and pub, and volunteer for things, especially if it involves the conspicuous use of your sign-written van.

The van is a cost-effective form of advertising. To exploit it, keep it clean and smart and, at home, park it where passers-by see it. When you go to a local event – be it a cricket match, the school sports day, or the drowning of a suspected witch – use the van. I know you want to show off your Porsche, but load the kids, wife, and dog into the van and leave it at the front of the car park. People often have little thoughts buzzing in their head – 'Must get that bloody aerial fixed' – and they might just scribble down your phone number.

Make it stick

It's infuriating when you drive past a previous customer's house and you see a shiny new aerial on the roof that you didn't put there. It glints in the sun and mocks you. Dammit – how did you lose this business? Usually, it's simply because the scatty customer has forgotten about you (I'm assuming that you didn't seduce anyone inappropriate or vomit behind the TV set last time).

How do you change this? The answer is to do something unusual and memorable (no, not the daughter and the carpet). Keep some sticky labels handy. At the end of the job when they're convinced that you're a good chap, take them out with a flourish and say, 'This is for your address book, and I'll put a label on your wallplate so you really can't lose it.' It's simple psychology, and it works.

More from Bill Wright at: www.wrightsaerials.tv