

Successful Promotion *of your* **Custom Bullet Business**



A Guide

To Greater Sales

With Minimum Expense

by

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What You Need To Know For Success...

A custom bullet business is a very special enterprise, which can yield amazing returns on a relatively modest investment, with far less risk than most other new businesses. Typical AROI (Annual Return On Investment) is about 500%.

Compare that with your present savings accounts. Likely there is a decimal in front of the interest rate. If it is as high as 1% and you put \$1000 in that bank account, a year later you will have made \$10. And inflation, or the drop in buying power of those dollars, will likely be the same as it has averaged for decades: about 3%. So you actually lost 2% which means your \$1000 is now only “worth” \$980 in real buying power. What a deal!

Suppose you put that \$1000 into a custom bullet business and it generated only a fraction of the average return, or 100%. Well, now you have made another \$1000 or doubled your investment value, less inflation of 3% which means the \$2000 on the books is only worth \$1940. But you still made \$940, instead of losing \$20 on your savings to inflation.

In reality, the average AROI is based on having the business in operation about five years, because it may take two or three years to get the word out and get enough income flow to break even, as with almost any business. And the high return is only true for moderate investments, usually under \$20,000. Once you start moving into higher production for larger markets, the return on investment drops sharply. You probably can't put \$200,000 into the business and get a million dollar return.

That is because custom bullet making works best in niche markets, with small market size, lower cost of equipment, and higher margins on smaller volumes of sales. It does not scale up like a commodity product might. Beyond a certain investment, the returns level out and become closer to typical mass market margins. Which is exactly why so many people miss the greatest benefit by looking toward high volume instead of high margins.

The people who want special bullets are far fewer than those who buy mass produced bullets. But they really need exactly what they want and they are willing to pay far more per bullet to get it. There really is no interest from the rest of the shooters. Only the modest number of people who need a special bullet from you will ever be customers, no matter how much more you spend on higher speed production equipment. If there are only about 10,000 people in the world who want or need a special weight, shape and caliber of bullet, you can fill their desire with simple, hand fed presses. Buying million dollar plus high speed equipment would only flood your small market, and you would have to pay for the equipment sitting idle for the rest of the year.

But buying equipment that is priced in line with the demand, and with what it can produce per hour, day, or year means your production can stay

up with the demand just by adding another press if and when your market grows beyond what you can make on one press. It is the balancing of investment cost with the potential return which produces such high rates of return. Some shooters will pay a high price to you for just the right product, but most are happy with whatever the factories make. So concentrate on the ones who pay well for what you do, and don't worry about the ones who only want what is already available.

The custom bullet market is far from being taken: there are vast numbers of handloaders, custom reloaders, law enforcement agencies, manufacturers of special firearms, and various defense sub-contractors who have yet to be approached by any custom bullet maker. An estimated 3,000,000 or more customers are being served today by about 300 custom bullet makers, or about 10,000 potential clients per bullet maker!

Most handloaders fire an average of one box of ammo every couple of weeks, which means about 20 rifle rounds or 50 pistol rounds. That means 520 to 1,300 bullets every year for every client, on the average. Some shoot over a thousand a month, some only a few boxes a year. There are generally more handgun reloaders than rifle reloaders, so an over-all estimate of 1,000 bullets per handloader per year is reasonable.

The figure of 3,000,000 handloaders (world-wide) is based on industrial intelligence gathering from sales of handloading supplies, and may be low because not every supplier publishes enough sales information to make a valid estimate of new clients. Even if that is the true figure, it means that there are an average of *3 billion* handloaded bullets being shot every year, and only 300 custom bullet makers offering products.

A custom bullet maker can produce about 150,000 bullets each year with one press and three sets of dies. With 10,000 potential clients per bullet maker, each firing about 1,000 bullets a year, this is a market potential of 10 million bullets per bullet maker per year! And what better sporting goods product to make than a bullet: inert metal, with an unlimited shelf life, the sole purpose of which is to be used up in one shot?

Making your product line unique isn't difficult. Unusual weights, special purpose designs, odd calibers (over 537 calibers have been chambered in modern times with less than 90 being currently offered by custom bullet makers), and just plain good marketing can make your product unique. Corbin specializes in designing unique bullets for our clients.

Not every handloader will buy custom bullets, but the important consideration is that every handloader is a *potential client* for custom bullets at some time. The secret of successfully launching your business depends on *reaching* and *convincing* a small portion of the potential clients to try your bullets *just once*, without spending your profits away in the effort.

Success Secret #1. Good marketing is vastly more important than any aspect of the product design or choice of caliber.

It is far less important *what* you choose to make than *how* you market it. Any reasonably good bullet can become your key to financial security, independence, and an enjoyable retirement. But you must know and diligently follow a proven marketing plan in order to turn the bullet into a steady stream of income. About the same number of people will buy special airgun pellets, shotgun slugs, big game bullets, defensive handgun bullets...it doesn't really matter what you choose. What matters is how you sell it.

A good portion of this plan can be built on your background and interest in handloading, by concentrating on one particular segment of the firearms field. You must specialize to eliminate competition with the mass producers and maintain a highly profitable price. You must offer a product that other handloaders cannot easily duplicate without investing time and money equal to yours. And you must know your product and the narrow segment in which you plan to specialize better than anyone else, so that you will be seen as an expert -- in fact, you WILL be an expert!

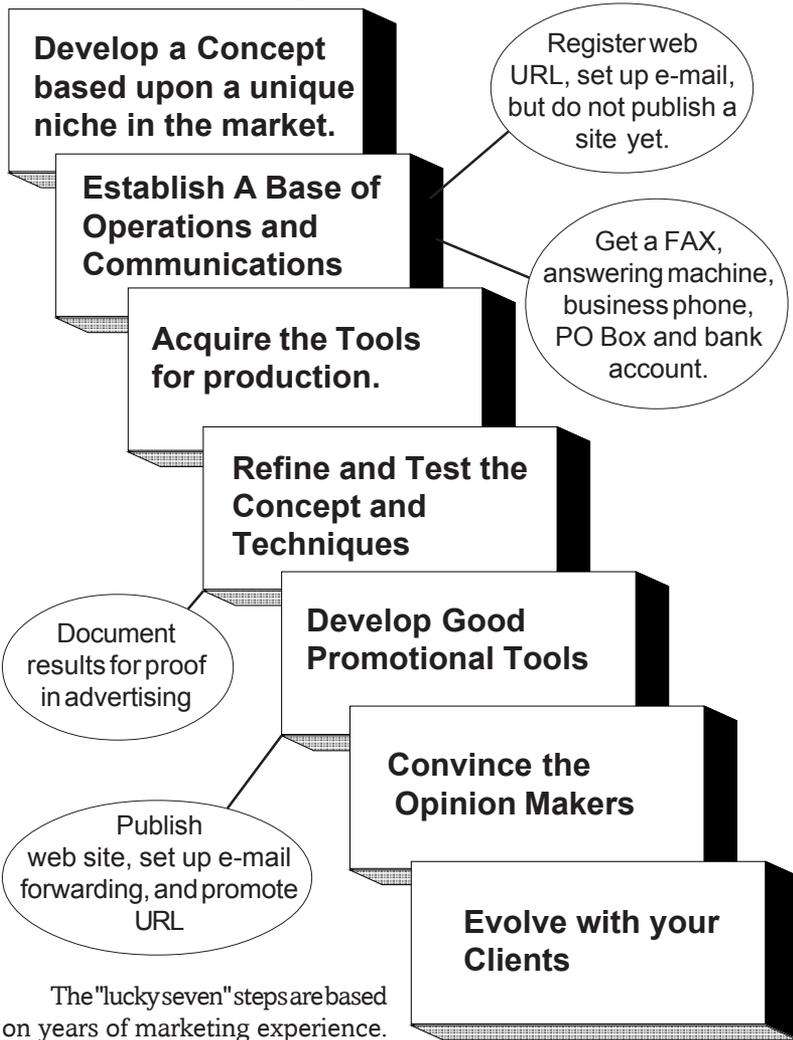
You are *not* selling just a bullet—you are selling confidence! Client confidence comes from a careful series of steps that you must take to generate a special feeling of pride toward your products, both in the firearms press and ultimately in your potential clients' minds.

Falsehoods and exaggerations will bring about the downfall of nearly any enterprise. If you only want a "quick profit", you are in the wrong business. But if you want security, friendship with your clients, a sense of having done a good deed by providing an answer to other people's desires, and the income that allows you to continue doing it, then you must master a few, simple techniques which form the marketing plan given herein.

If you do not let the world know about your best ideas, then the best ideas will be lost to the world. It is not bragging to inspire confidence in a good product, nor is it unseemly for a business to place its products in the correct light, so that the impression is the most favorable. A photographer would not fail to position lighting so as to present the best possible rendering of his subject, simply because it might appear that his talent was being showcased immodestly. Just as the photographer wishes to practice the very best techniques of his craft, so you should practice the finest known techniques of marketing your product: that is as much a part of your craft as making the bullets.

Success Secret #2. A good business plan, followed to completion, is more important than product itself.

There is no "magic bullet" that automatically sells better than everything else. People think so, because of good planning! Corbin has developed a proven 7-step plan for successful custom bullet sales. It has never failed in over two decades. *These steps are:*



The "lucky seven" steps are based on years of marketing experience. They are also just good "horse-sense".

A good plan, consistently followed, is the most likely method of being successful. If you develop and work a good plan, then good luck is more in your favor while the effect of bad luck is minimized. Setbacks happen: you create advances.

Develop a Concept

A unique product idea is not difficult to come by in the custom bullet field. The books published by Corbin are filled with ideas. Start with something of personal interest, that you know about from first-hand experience, and talk with Corbin about that field.

Overly-complex bullet designs are difficult to produce at a profit. Simple ideas with excellent promotion will always outsell and, more importantly, will produce more profit for you than ideas so complex that you constantly struggle to get any useful production. Your clients won't be any more impressed with a difficult design than a simple one, if you use the right marketing technique.

If possible, your design should have one major feature that makes it different from other bullets. Don't worry about other bullet makers. They have enough to do just filling their own orders. If you want to make more than one caliber, make bullets that have something in common. Your advertising will work harder for you if you specialize. Trying to make "all the popular calibers" puts you right back in the lion's den with mass producers: why compete when you can *own* a special market?

Success Secret #3. Concentrate on the value of being unique: do not try to sell a cheaper bullet than your clients can buy from the mass producers, or try to duplicate another bullet maker's product.

Custom bullets are *not* designed as competition for mass produced bullets. They are superior products at a premium price. They are for people who want the best bullet, not the cheapest bullet. At some point in their lives, nearly every handloader wants the "best" bullet available. The price is not an obstacle. Most custom bullets cost over \$1.50 each.

Be prepared to know who is *not* your customer: the 99 out of 100 shooters who scoff and walk away as soon as they see the price were never your clients! You didn't lose them any more than you lost the business of those who don't like guns and never buy anyone's bullets. The people who are looking for cheap bullets will find them somewhere else. Some other bullet maker can work much harder for a fraction of the profit that you will make. Recognizing the one person out of 100 who is your potential client will more than make up for all the others who walk off shaking their heads at the price.

A big game hunter who is spending \$10,000 on a guided hunt isn't going to worry about spending another \$37.50 for a box of 20 of the world's finest bullets for his particular gun. The man who just read about a break-in and near-death of a neighbor at the hands of a drug-crazed felon isn't too worried about spending \$15 for a box of 10 of the world's most highly effective defense bullets. Is your family worth \$15?

Establish a Base of Operation and Communication

Now it is time to get a permanent address *other than your home*. Rent a post office box. Get a separate business telephone installed. Think ahead: you do not want to publish information that may soon be incorrect. Plan for permanence. Get your literature and web info planned out, but don't publish it until you have a safe address, the URL you will use "forever", and email that really is your own, not subject to another company staying in business.

You are going to build a path for money to flow in, and you don't want it built on a weak, moving foundation that will crumble and have to be rebuilt over and over, losing all the ground you have gained. Do it right, the first time: don't try to "get by" with temporary measures. You don't want tots and teens answering your business phone, or calls from Europe at midnight: the answering machine/FAX combo will handle it.

Foreign orders are easy to get when you publish your FAX number. Connect your fax to an answering machine, set it up to auto-answer, and leave it on 24 hours a day, so that people always send orders. Not doing so will cost you sales. Later, you will want a separate phone line for FAX only.

Your email account should also be well considered and strictly for this business. Nothing is less attractive to clients than having you ignore their messages. You'll need to look at your email at least a couple of times a day, and set aside some time to answer questions.

Set up a business checking account with your assumed business name. Corbin can help you develop a good business name with an effective logo. Your sales can be cut in half by poor choices. Ideally, the name should describe the product line so well that it alone tells people what you have to offer, and the logo should scale and reproduce well.

The worse possible name is something like "Joe's Enterprises". Joe could make anything: the name is useless as advertising. He must buy more space to explain his name! Better would be "7mm Specialists" or "Lead-Free Bullets, Ltd." because they convey some sense of what is being offered. You can have as many trade names as you like, one for each related product! You can even compete with yourself to draw business, at some future point!

Set up a merchant VISA and Master-Charge service through your bank, if possible. Some banks are reluctant to do this for a new, home-based business. It's worth the effort: you can double your sales by taking bank cards for payment. And you need this for sales over the internet, which is a huge misused asset for many small businesses. There is so much to tell about it that it will take another book. Most "web design" services have no clue about bullet sales, and you may waste money and worse, have to do it all over again later. Done right, it is highly profitable. Otherwise it is just a waste.

Acquire the Tools

After you have decided on an initial bullet line that should have strong appeal in a selected market, then you should acquire the tools to make them. The reason you need tools now is because you need samples for firearms writers, photographs and drawings for your web site, brochures and press releases, and you need to become an expert in the operation of your equipment before you take on the burden of filling orders or training others to fill them.

Decide how to capitalize this investment. The safest method is with savings that you won't need back for at least two years. Loans from home equity, insurance, relatives and friends are the next best source. The last choice should be a commercial loan, because it requires regular repayments during a time when you will have little income from operations. Be sure any commercial loan is servicable with other income for at least 18 months, and that your lifestyle won't suffer unduly because of loan payments. Hint: home equity loan interest is usually tax deductible.

Because of the world-wide demand for high quality bullet swaging equipment, delivery may seem agonizingly slow for some custom products. Be prepared for this and do not make any promises to clients. This isn't a good time to sell. It is a good time to research your marketing resources and get your technique honed to perfection.

Begin by subscribing to the major gun magazines, and looking through the library index to periodicals for special interest gun magazines that might like to have articles about your bullet. Build a file of gun writers, and note their interests by the kind of articles they write and the comments they make. Find out who would best like your kind of bullet.

Call the magazines and ask the advertising director to send you the address of staff writers. The magazines want to sell you advertising space when you have the money. Most of them will help you now. Use them to build your knowledge of who influences opinion in your chosen segment of the field, and get to know them from their work. Resist buying ads just because there is some big special issue or great deal in the works: there always is another just around the corner. You need to hold out the possibility that you will become a paying customer later, but for now, you have to build a steamroller marketing machine based on free publicity.

News is the steam that runs your machine, because all the writers want news. It sells columns to editors, and magazines to the public. Your product will be news if you make it news. If you don't, it will be unknown and you will have to pay for advertising to announce it to the world. Later, when it is not news, you will need to fuel your marketing machine with cash, but by then, the cash will come from your sales and not your start-up capital. For a while, you have news value. Make the most of it!

Refine and Test the Concept and Techniques

As soon as any of your tools arrive, start getting familiar with them. Try making jackets, cores, bullets. Find out where the easy and hard processes are, and develop techniques to make the operation smooth. Test the bullets in various weights and slight variations of style. Find out what is easiest to make, what works best, and how to make it look as professional as you can.

Don't worry *too* much about cosmetics: it is one thing to have a nice looking, polished bullet and quite another to spend months getting the last little fold mark or slight roughness out of the jacket tip. Few people will fail to buy your bullet a second time because of appearance as long as the bullet lives up to its performance claims. If you think cosmetics are *that* important, look at the custom bullets on the market and notice how much worse in appearance they probably are compared to yours, yet how little the clients or the bullet-maker seem to mind as they continue to exchange bullets for dollars!

Performance is the key, but again, do not put such high expectations on performance that you overlook reasonable results while searching for spectacular ones. You should always look for improvement, to insure that you can offer "new and improved" in coming years, for repeat sales. If you spend those years searching for the perfect bullet, think of all the lost opportunity to finance your work by selling a good bullet, then a better bullet, while you work toward the perfect bullet!

Refine your technique for manufacturing, iron out any rough spots, make any necessary tooling changes, find out your maximum and minimum weight ranges, pin down good sources of material, and continue to collect information on gun writers who can help you. Don't let sales get lost while you are searching for perfection!

On the other hand, remember always that you are selling quality and confidence in the performance of your product. You can't allow the first materials, whether it be packaging, advertising, or the product itself, to be shoddy looking. You don't get a second chance to impress anyone with their first look!

There is a fine line between being so picky that you nit-pick yourself out of business, and allowing quality to slip below its level of competitive advantage. The secret is to define quality clearly, so you know what you are trying to achieve. Quality isn't just "prettiness" or "perfection in appearance". It is the consistent delivery of the promised performance. An implied part of the performance is that the product looks as if it can perform to expectations, but bullets don't have to be jewelry.

Acquire Promotional Materials

Acquire—not *develop*—is good advice unless you have strong marketing, copywriting, and artistic background and a good knowledge of the firearms market with particular emphasis on handloading sales. But there's a problem, besides the obvious cost involved.

Most agencies are strong on cars, beer, and cigarette advertising expertise and woefully short on knowledge of bullet marketing. They get big money for tasteful art and skillful copywriting that won't sell many bullets. Often a local printing firm may know a local graphic designer who can offer suggestions or do some or all of the work for you. Sometimes a local college will have a graphic design department with opportunities to get help from students.

Or maybe you have a friend who can do reasonable page and graphic design, even if it isn't quite up to the level of a professional agency. However, it probably works better, since it is economical to reproduce and mail in sufficient quantity to do some good. The best material is worthless if you can't afford to reach enough people with it. The logos must be bold and stick in one's mind. Writers and handloaders remember them. They reproduce well in nearly any media, and don't use expensive color separations.

You *must* have a powerful brochure ready before you start sending information to writers. Your press releases, brochures, and even your price list will make an impression that says "amateur" or "professional". No matter what else you do to get the attention, it is all wasted if you can't close the sale. Custom bullet making is primarily a mail order business. You need "paper salesmen" because potential clients will want "information" at about 100:1 order ratio.

Success Secret #4. Sow the seeds for future sales by realizing only one percent of all mailings result in immediate orders.

If you know this, you can plan enough mailings. The one thing that seems to shock most new bullet makers is how many mailings it takes to get an order. Some bullet makers have sent out as few as one press release to one writer (along with lots of bullets and other completely counterproductive materials), and then waited for something to happen. Nothing will, most of the time. You can build an invaluable mailing list of gun writers and editors, which is a starting point (you add to it as you research, and as the writers move and change magazines over time).

It takes several months of consistently mailing a press release every month, with slightly different emphasis and different pictures or slides each time, to at least 75 to 100 writers, to have good results with free publicity. Sending out 100 to 500 mailings to potential clients is like going to Las Vegas with a dollar. You might get lucky. But it's better to know the odds and play accordingly. A direct mailing list to clients needs at least 5,000 names to have reasonable returns. Mailing to writers can get results with fewer stamps! But it can take a while before you see those results.

Influence the Opinion Makers

In the firearms field, the opinion makers are the gun writers and editors, top shooters, and to some extent the makers of firearms and suppliers of ammunition. If you can get an article in print mentioning your bullets favorably, it is worth a year's advertising. If you can get a new product release published, it is worth a full page ad. If you can get popular writers to just mention your bullets when they write about the sport, firearm, or caliber of your specialty, it is worth tens of thousands of dollars in promotion.

If you are a photographer, and can create high resolution digital images (usually TIF or JPEG or PDF files) with good composition and contrast, and also can write reasonably well, you can promote your own products through articles that you might also be able to sell. But in any case, you need to enlist the help of gun writers. There are perhaps 95 who are worth your efforts. These should be contacted monthly, for as long as you wish to sell bullets, or until your sales are so great that you don't want any more.

The contact can be one-way. Send a press release. Next month, send a brochure. Constantly scan the magazines for articles that have the slightest connection with calibers, activities, or firearms your bullets could fit. Write letters to the editor complementing the article and mentioning the connection to your product. Write polite letters to the writer, suggesting that the (much enjoyed) article could be expanded in the future with a test of your bullets. Do not send bullets unasked!

This process continues until you desire to quit growing. You don't do it once and sit back to see what happens. Nothing will happen. Writers will get your press release, glance at it, and think "Another nut thinks he can make a living in firearms." Into the trash it goes. Next month, they get something else from you. It looks familiar. Your logo sticks a little in their mind. Next month, another piece of mail. That really looks familiar. Where did they see that before? Next month...

It won't take too many months before a deadline is due, and a column needs two more inches to fill it. For one out of the 95 writers, your press release happens to be the one on top of the mail stack. He picks it up, and it is well written enough so that little or no editing is required to fill the deadline. You've just made one writer happy.

So, your first press release hits the pages of *The American Rifleman*, or *Shooting Times*, or *Gun World*. Make a photocopy. Include it next month with every brochure you mail out. That shows the other writers someone else took a chance and printed your name. They won't be so concerned that if they do it, you'll be out of business already when the magazine is printed (which certainly makes a writer look foolish). You've just grown the first of what marketers call "whiskers"; the white hairs of experience

and age in the market that tell people you might be around next year. Your products are now newsworthy.

This process normally takes from six to eighteen months to bring positive cash flow to your business. The minimum time is three months, because it takes that long for a writer's work to appear: most magazines are made up about one quarter year in advance, and last minute columns and ads put into blocked-out spaces around the finished work.

If you want more speed, buy ads. Don't be surprised if they cost as much, or more, than they produce in sales. Smaller ads, repeated often, do better than one big splash. The minimum effective size seems to be about 1/6 of a page. Eventually, when the writers have set the stage, your ads will direct people to your web site, email, phone, FAX, and address, and alert them to the fact that they can use their bank cards to purchase your bullets.

Don't neglect the gun makers and the ammo loaders who might buy your bullets. Contact reloading tool firms, also. Call your congressman and ask how to get on the GSA bid list. Offer bullets to top shooters. Give bullets as match prizes sparingly, however. Check with catalog publishers who make or sell the guns that use your bullets, or could benefit if they did use them. Sometimes, another manufacturer or vendor will write something about your products just to be helpful to his own customers. Maybe someone has been looking for your bullet for years, and didn't know you existed!

Today, the internet can provide you with tremendous ability to reach thousands of people at minimal cost. But few people understand how to do this effectively. Putting up a web site is useless unless your clients and the people who influence your clients know about it. You have to promote the web site just like you would any other product. It won't promote itself. Most of the money spent by commercial on-line operations is for advertising in other media! Magazines, TV, radio, billboards, and similar conventional media are still the way most people learn about new websites. And that is too expensive for most new bullet makers.

So, your alternative is to spend some time every week letting writers, editors, and potential business associates know about your site. The benefit of a website and e-mail account is that you can direct people to it and then let it handle the repetitive details of explaining what you offer and how to get it. A good website should be interactive, in the sense that it tells the potential writer or client all they need to know—product pictures, downloadable specification sheets, instant communication with you by direct e-mail forms and links. Check for messages: nothing is more frustrating than the broken promise of instant response).

A person should be able to order directly, with no further communication, from the info presented on your website. Having a useful web site is a commitment to using it every day. Far too many people “buy” a web site, and then let it rot. Keep your site current, or it works against you.

Respond to and Evolve With Your Clients

First comes response to the writers' articles and press releases. Inquires. Phone calls and letters ask for information. The plan is working. Your direct response brochure and price list must now do their part. If you obtained the best professional help, they will work in most cases without modification.

What if you get lots of inquiries, but few sales? This means you need to fix an obvious lack of power in your presentation material. Call Corbin. Explain what is happening. Send samples of your material for evaluation. In most cases, it will be found that there is too little excitement in the material, and too much of the same old routine: *"My bullets are the best. They are made really well. They are the most accurate in the world. You can't get better bullets at any price."*

Sure. But why should anyone believe that? What is so different about your bullets from the ones they always buy off the shelf? What is the benefit to them for spending \$37.50 for a box of your bullets (25 bullets, at that) when they could get ordinary mass produced bullets at \$15 for 50 or \$25 for 100?

You must respond to your clients. If your design is unusual, you have to explain it more clearly and boldly. No one will want to read a page of fine print to discover the benefit. Show them with a drawing or imply with a logo that says it all. Far too often, the only reason sales are not high enough is the low impact of the material being used to present the sale. A typewritten page or mimeographed flyer is not sturdy enough to support the confidence that you are actually selling in the form of a better bullet. All too often, a bullet maker spends months perfecting his product and a few minutes on a computer dashing off the material to try and explain all that work. The advent of low cost color inkjet printers and desktop publishing software has brought about a flood of poorly designed, poorly written promotional materials. It is better than nothing, but barely.

You need a potent bridge between the client's mind and your concept. A professionally designed brochure, price list, logo, letterhead, and envelope can each contribute to your improved sales. If all else fails, change the concept. But don't make that your first concern. Nearly any concept can be sold if it has any merit. Some people jump the ship just because it hasn't caught the wind yet, thinking it must be sinking before it even gets out of dry-dock! If an idea obviously isn't selling, work on it. Pay attention to winds of change, but don't change direction with every individual puff of air. Better marketing is almost always the answer.

Business Tools, Liability

Your bullet making equipment is a capital asset: tools which form a part of your "net worth" and which are depreciated each year on paper, both for a tax deduction and to determine a cost of doing business over a period of time. Computers can be an important tool in your success. This cost can be a deductible business expense also.

FAX machines have already been mentioned. A chronograph, and of course the firearms that you use in testing your bullets, are also deductible business expenses that you can depreciate to provide some income tax relief. Be sure to talk to your accountant about setting up a legal, effective depreciation plan for all your business tools, or read both the IRS and your own state's published brochures on depreciation procedures. Check out the "Section 179" provision for "expensing" new equipment deductions. This provision changes yearly but generally allows you to take the full price of new equipment, up to a limit, as a deduction instead of depreciating it over several years. Get professional help for tax planning.

A major benefit of custom bullet making is that you don't need a building other than your own home, for annual sales as great as six figures. The low overhead really cuts your risk compared to that of most businesses. Because you probably will want to work at home, you'll want to discuss deducting a part of the cost of maintaining your home for a business expense with your tax advisor.

Product liability is a concern in any business. The risk with loaded ammo and firearms sales is tremendous. With custom bullets, it is negligible. Someone else puts the powder and primer behind your bullet and fires a gun bought elsewhere. Most custom bullet makers do not carry product liability insurance, because the history of this field for at least the past 45 years has been free of any significant litigation.

Usually, the threats of lawsuits have been noisy egos bellowing their insecurity to the world about some patented idea that probably would not stand up to a test of validity. Few if any such threats have ever come to court. But that isn't "liability". The issue of liability is in a defective product that causes injury to someone due to your negligence.

What you say in your advertising can affect your liability. If you claim a bullet will "stop a dangerous beast", you really ought to have tried it to make sure it will, and then document it. If you claim a bullet "stops a fellow in his tracks" and it doesn't, you might be liable. You can say a bullet is designed to do these things, but it is something else to claim it always will! Talk this over with your attorney. Everything in life has some risk. Rewards in business come from taking reasonable risk. If you can't handle it, work for someone who can. Be aware, not afraid.

Licensing Requirements

The sale of ammunition components in the U.S.A. is controlled by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, a unit of the Department of the Treasury. Fortunately, nothing that goes into the making of a bullet is considered a component until it is actually formed into a bullet. You can buy all the tools, lead, jackets, copper tube, and supplies freely without a license, and you can make the bullets for your own use without a license.

It is only when you offer the bullets for sale that you need the Class 6 FFL (Federal Firearms License). If you obtain a Class 1 FFL, for dealership in firearms and ammunition, BATF agents have indicated that this is considered adequate for selling bullets that you make. The Class 6 covers manufacture and sale of ammunition, which is taken to also mean components of ammunition. It does not cover firearms, so you have less record-keeping liability.

The license is quite inexpensive, and easily obtained (assuming you are a typical good citizen). Look in the phone book under **Federal Government** for **Department of the Treasury**, and find the nearest BATF field office to you. (If you can't find it, call your congressman's office.) Write or call, and ask for FFL licensing information. It's free. You get a lot of information about both federal and state laws (most of which are not about bullet making).

A person who uses reasonably good record keeping methods will have no worries regarding the BATF. Chances are good you'll never see an agent, anyway. The chance for difficulties is greater for the dealer in firearms than the maker of bullets. Basically, all you need is your normal sales records (clients, orders, sales completed). For the IRS, you need your profit and loss information, as with any business venture. Ammo makers (not bullet makers) pay an I.R.S. excise tax on sales. At this time, there is no special tax on components.

You may need a local business license, depending on your location. In general, a home-based business that doesn't have a sign outside and doesn't attract large numbers of trucks or walk-in clients is invisible. Since most sales are by mail or at trade shows, there is hardly any reason to be visible except in the magazines and on the Internet. A clue to dealing with uninformed bureaucrats is to refer to your business as a "custom metal forming" operation instead of a bullet works! Until someone puts powder behind it, it's just a piece of pretty metal. No point stirring up a hornets nest based on misunderstanding.

You can make a nice bass fishing lure in a point forming die, by the way. Is this too subtle a hint? Remember, you can't stop a runaway train by standing in front of it. The way to stop them is to get at the controls, something you can't do if you are squashed flat! Meanwhile, staying clear of the tracks is probably the best advise.

Market Research and Pricing

Knowledge is key to success. If you have not studied swaging, get the Library of Swaging (BP-7) and skim through the info, stopping to read details where they interest you and apply to what you want to do. An additional book you should have is the World Directory of Custom Bullet Makers, for hundreds of sources for bullet materials, as well as the names and addresses of other custom bullet makers.

You can do a little market research by looking for names too close to the one you might want to use, and by studying products on the market now that might be similar to the ideas you have in mind. It is easy to find out what others offer: just send for their literature, ask some questions about delivery time, and see how hard or easy it is to reach these people. Pretend you are a buyer: are you satisfied with the experience, or have you learned some things that you could do better in your own business? You might want to buy a box of bullets from each of your potential competitors and check the quality, packaging, delivery, and service.

Then you will see where you can offer improvements. You should, load and shoot some of their bullets and devise tests, using the guidelines in the World Directory, so you can compare your products with the performance of others. However, don't become discouraged if you find that someone makes a very fine product similar to your idea. There is always room for improvement, even if it is only in packaging.

Even if your only improvement is in how easily people can buy from you, that may be enough. But more than likely you will see room for actual product improvements, such as offering different weights, or perhaps a different caliber or shape of bullet. If you should ever become discouraged because someone "already did it", remember the huge beer industry. By and large, a beer is a beer. There is slight variation, but the biggest change is perception, not the actual products. Advertising and packaging make 90% of the difference in beers to most people (there are a few true connoisseurs, of course). In bullets, the differences are greater, but marketing is still the biggest thing you can do to insure your success. Corbin is here to help you. Just ask.

And pricing: don't forget that people buy French water in a bottle at twice the price of a domestic brand, and a hundred times what it costs out of the tap (even with a filter that makes it taste just the same). Most custom bullets are sold at prices from eight to ten times the price of mass produced bullets. But you have an advantage because your bullet actually can outperform standard ones, and will offer benefits over other custom bullets in some way. Most business failures happen to people who only sell by cutting their price. Successful people sell by pointing out performance benefits so the buyer understands the value of paying more. The view is clearer and farther at the top. Go there!

The next step...

Where do you stand, in the seven blocks toward success? Have you started yet? *Why not?*

Have you begun, but missed one or more steps? Contact Corbin, evaluate your equipment, product, and plan together. Good marketing can turn nearly any product into a winner.

Do your ads and mailings generate poor return? Most people do not place enough value on the design of their materials. Do you have a good web site? Is it advertised in print media? Do potential buyers know it exists?

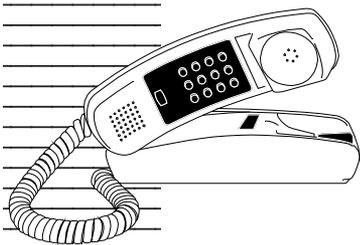
Do you regularly contact gun writers and respond to articles every month? You *can* do it, if you are persistent! But you must make the effort today! *Nothing ever starts tomorrow.*

Have you read Dave Corbin's book "*Turning Ideas Into Income*"? It goes into detail about every step, explaining how to turn your ideas into income, and your income into both wealth *and* happiness.

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