

Graphix Products: A Full Circle Of Family

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Making customers feel like family is the mission of the Tews' family-owned distributorship, Graphix Products Inc. (asi/212959).

Yet despite this intimate goal, the business is no "around the kitchen table" operation. Even though it began in the Tews' home (specifically, their garage) 33 years ago as a printing firm, today Graphix Products is a \$9 million business, approximately \$1 million of which is promotional products. And the garage has morphed into a state-of-the-art facility in West Chicago with 55 employees and several two-, four- and six-color presses.

Graphix is a full-service operation, offering clients everything from design and printing capabilities to mailing and fulfillment of promotional products and direct mail campaigns. Its client list is impressive, topped by recognized names such as Motorola and Allstate. But the family still provides the anchor.

Family Leadership

Tews family members are as diverse in their leadership skill as is the firm's list of clients and services. Diane Tews took over as president when her husband and business partner, Henry, left the firm in 1989 to found a halfway house for recovering alcoholics. Their eldest son, Henry Jr., joined the firm right out of high school at age 18 in 1979. Today he's chief operating officer. Brothers Chris

and Jason signed on in 1990, now serving as vice president of sales and vice president of marketing, respectively.

"We each have very different personalities – and yes, they do conflict," admits Jason. "However, we all have a mutual respect for each other that far outweighs any conflict. The fact is, each of our different personalities is essential to our success. How often have you had a boss that was too stubborn or too nice? Our differences



'We all have the same philosophy - to do whatever it takes to take care of our customers.'
- Jason Tews

allow us to balance our management styles....Diane is our rock and voice of reason and experience. Henry Jr. is the operations guy, handling everything behind the front office. Chris manages five sales reps as well as our front-office operations. I handle our marketing and sales support efforts, in addition with our lawyers, bankers and any purchasing negotiations."

The common denominator is the company's philosophy and practical business structure. "First of all, we all have the same philosophy – to do whatever it takes to take care of our customers," Jason

explains. "Secondly, we keep our chain of command very open and clear amongst ourselves, and it simply goes by seniority. On issues, we vote with all votes being equal and ties going to seniority."

Client-Focused Strategy

This simple strategy has served the family well, slowing management and employees to focus on satisfying clients. "To us, that means offering any product or service that our customers need from us, to be an extension of our customers' staffs and to be one person to handle several campaigns for them as if they were delegating to one of their managers," notes Jason.

As a result, Graphix Products has not only weathered the down economy, it's managed to grow. Not content to rest on its laurels, the plan is to reach \$15 million in overall sales. "We're accomplishing this through the addition of sales reps, recognizing other services that we can provide to our clients and the acquisition of other companies to increase our sales base," Jason adds.

The goal isn't merely for the family's benefit. There's a bigger picture involved here. "We are all very grateful for all that we have," says Jason, "and we work to satisfy our customers so that we can do our best to support our employees and help them provide good and fruitful lives to their families and prosper.

"It's all full circle."

- Tonia Cook Kimbrough

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