

# Graphix Products: educating customers

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You'll see its handiwork at most gatherings, meetings or conferences. Those ubiquitous "Hello My Name Is" labels are the trademark of Graphix Products,

Inc., a 50-employee commercial printer in West Chicago, IL. Founded 28 years ago as a label printer by president and CEO Diane Tews, Graphix Products has since expanded into four divisions: offset, adhesive labels, promotional incentives and product fulfillment. Tews is joined in running the \$9 million business by her sons Henry, vice president of operations; Chris, vice president of sales; and Jason, vice president of marketing. (The family patriarch left the company in 1989 to found a nonprofit organization.)

Graphix Products' motto is "Personalized Service and Customized Solutions"-the company prides itself on its dedication to customers, and offers digital printing courtesy of its Canon and Xerox color monochrome printers. Jason notes that Graphix Products' run lengths are "custom and varied, from 100 five-color 8.5 x 11-inch sheets to one million." It outputs the longer-run jobs on its stable of Heidelberg, Shinohara and Mark Andy perfectors and A.B. Dick presses.

Recently, Graphix Products began a foray into customer education. The printer offers yearly seminars that discuss its services-such as specialty finishing-and how clients can use them in future projects. A "CTP vs. Conventional" seminar, for instance, set out to demonstrate how a CTP workflow compares to traditional prepress. Attendees were walked through the platemaking process from both perspectives, and shown the differences in both time

and quality. Invitations were sent out on real printing plates, imaged by Graphix Products' Agfa Galileo Lithostar Ultra-V platesetter.

We asked Jason more about the seminars and Graphix Products' way of doing business.

*When and how did the educational seminars begin?*

The educational seminars grew out of our own employee-education philosophy: An educated employee is a better employee. We thought if we could offer classes to our clients that show what happens to their jobs after they are handed over to us, they might get more out of what we have to offer. The seminars have just grown from there.

*What are the benefits of the seminars?*

The benefits are endless, and we find new ones every week. They include files coming in ready for press, clients scheduling more accurately now that they know what is involved, and designs that are created with an eye toward saving money and time. The clients trust our ability to get their projects done right, which has decreased the amount of press sign-offs.

*Who conducts the seminars? What are the most popular topics, and how many people attend?*

The seminars are conducted by one of the Tews brothers, staff and suppliers. The topics have all received glowing reviews from the audience in attendance. Anything to do with prepress, however, seems to draw an extra five to 10 people.

We started with 25 people per session a few years ago; now we do two classes of 30 people per session. The sessions are free, and participants get free food and usually some sort of giveaway.

*Is it a challenge to separate personal from professional issues in a family business?*

No-in fact, that is what makes it fun. We can have a business meeting at the office and then mix it up with [family talk such as] "David is going on a field trip at school" or "Did you see Evy's new painting in my office?" It's a nice break sometimes.

*How has Diane fared in a male-dominated industry?*

Diane has done very well keeping the company grounded. We are not an aggressive presence in the print community. We are not buying presses to have capabilities to sell, but instead we sell and then add the capabilities. We measure our success on the satisfaction of our client base and the amount of referrals and growth that come from our clients' needs and we do not waver.

*How is Graphix Products coping with a slow economy?*

Very carefully. We are watching every penny and keeping a focused, conservative eye on our investments. We have evaluated every expense and renegotiated everything from cleaning contracts to our real-estate taxes-it all adds up. Our business, however, is up slightly from 2001-2002 fiscal year. Client spending is down overall, but we are getting more work from those clients.

*Which printer do you most admire and why?*

Jais Inc. (Lisle, IL). The Jais brothers are good guys, and they stand true to their word and their product. You have to admire anyone who is trustworthy.

*Where's the best place to eat in West Chicago?*

The Sandpiper.

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