

OEC Graphics I.T. keeps its Image intact

Officials of new company says merger allows it to offer more services than most prepress operations

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When Image I.T. was founded in the Appleton flats in 1993, it was a state-of-the-art prepress operation with four employees. Thirteen years and one acquisition by Oshkosh-based OEC Graphics later, the company, now known as OEC Graphics I.T., has 70 employees and offers its impressive client roster a range of prepress, display graphics, and data asset management services.

"The added capabilities that OEC offered made the ability to further grow the business a reality. This has been a win-win for both companies," said Tom Running, one of the creators of Image I.T., which was sold to OEC

in November 2004. Running is now general manager of OEC Graphics I.T.

Acquiring Image I.T. offered OEC Graphics a way to differentiate itself from competitors. "OEC Graphics was much more manufacturing-based," said Brad Vette, corporate business development manager for OEC Graphics. "This company (Image I.T.) really came out of the photo studio and advertising world."

That distinction meant the opportunity to reach out to customers earlier in the buying cycle.

"To a certain extent, our primary focus had been on converters," said Vette. "We wanted to capture those prepress dollars at the actual consumer products company, distributor, or retailer, before they got to the converter."

Vette said the Image I.T. opportunity was "perfect" for OEC Graphics, "because there was very little overlap in what we were doing, and we only had a few similar customers, so there was not cannibalization."

OEC Graphics wasn't the only company interested in buying Image I.T. "The companies that were looking to acquire this organization were much larger than OEC," Vette said. "I guess because of the personal fit and the logistics, it made it a good fit for both parties."

"It was great selling to a locally-owned business," Running said.

One of OEC Graphics I.T.'s goals is raising the general public's awareness of what, exactly, the

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company does. Its two primary functions are traditional prepress operations and data asset management, said Vette.

"We take a design and convert it into something that can be printed, whether it goes to a printing plate, digital format, or other printing technology," Vette said.

"The misconception is that we only handle information that is pertinent to printers," said Vette. "But it's a much broader offering than a typical prepress organization. It's marketing materials, sales materials, distribution information, and supply chain management."

OEC Graphics I.T. also handles screen printing on thick materials, including "everything

from foam core to plastics to corrugated," Vette said, "and we can do large format digital screen prints up to 10 feet wide."

To facilitate communication with customers, the company developed its own data asset management interface. The Web-based system allows "a significant amount of work to be done in a much shorter period of time," Vette said. "The benefit for the customer is speed to market."

Saving time means saving the customer money — a competitive advantage for OEC I.T. "It's a strange combination of getting more done at a higher quality for less money," he said.

The system will also be used at the company's other four locations in Oshkosh, Appleton, Chicago, and Greensboro, N.C.

While not everyone is familiar with the prepress industry, most people have encountered

OEC Graphics I.T.'s work, especially in catalogs and product packaging.

"Whether it's catalogs for sweatshirts, backpacks, school supplies, or clothing, we manage everything from the photography to how the images are organized to how the copy appears," Vette said.

With packaging, the company makes sure different items across a brand's product lines have visual continuity on the store shelf. "It's our job to maintain and match, no matter how it's printed and what it's printed on," said Vette.

It's a task the average consumer will never know to thank them for. "Those are the things no one is supposed to notice," he said. "If you don't notice it, it's because we're doing our job well."

The transition from Image I.T. to OEC Graphics I.T. has been smooth, according to

Running. "It has gone extremely well," he said.

Vette agreed. "Our goal was not to change this organization at all, but to have its products and its people complement the other parts of the business and vice versa," he said. "We didn't try to change the homey touches that make this such a wonderful place to be."

Katie Running, sales representative, agreed. "The culture that was here has definitely been maintained," she said.

When the change was first announced, only two employees left to work for competitors. "We haven't lost anybody since," Vette said.

The staff has grown more than 20 percent since the transition, and continues to expand. "We have huge opportunities in the next year for a variety of levels, from operators to sales to customer service," he said.