

PRINTING GREEN

ColorMark collates technology with profitable niche

BY DAVID MITCHELL | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Kathryn McDaniel started her printing business 18 years ago, she didn't have enough money for a press, but she found a manufacturer willing to sell her one on credit.

She also lacked a single business contact in the city where she and partner – and then-husband – Michael McDaniel had recently located.

“Michael handed me the Yellow Pages and said, ‘Do your stuff,’” said Kathryn McDaniel, president of ColorMark Printing. “They were scary times. I knew we were doing the right thing, and we were going to make it. It’s been a great ride.”

She handled sales, while Michael McDaniel – now a board member at Cornerstone Bank – handled finances. Their marriage didn't last, but their company has flourished. After taking in a modest \$210,000 in its first year, ColorMark had \$6.3 million in revenue last year. Kathryn McDaniel said she expects to top \$6.5 million this year.

McDaniel was living in Dallas working in sales, and her husband was living in Tulsa and working as a vice president for a relative's printing company before they moved to the Kansas City area.

“We looked all over the United States for some place that we would want to live and start our company, from Chapel Hill, N.C., to Portland, Ore.,” Kathryn McDaniel said. “When we came to Kansas City, we said, ‘This is the spot.’ People at the time said, ‘There are so many printers in Kansas City already,’ but we loved it here. We thought Kansas City would be a good place to raise kids.”

RAPID EXPANSION

After opening in a 2,500-square-foot rental space on Shawnee Mission Parkway, ColorMark expanded first into an adjacent 2,500-square-foot space and then another.

Within five years, the company's revenue had topped \$3 million, and the



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Kathryn McDaniel, president of ColorMark Printing, says she believes in a heavy emphasis on using green processes in the company's printing projects. For example, ColorMark uses vegetable-based inks (inset), which help prevent air and water pollution.

niche was a key factor,” she said. “There were quick printers and big printers, but there was no one in between doing high-quality, short-run, two- and four-color work for the agency market here.”

Today, the company's client list includes American Century Investments, Bayer Animal Health, Embarq Corp., HNTB Cos., Silpada Designs Inc. and Sprint Nextel Corp., McDaniel said.

“They're terrific when it comes to customer service and more complicated projects like books or magazines that require a certain level of expertise,” said Anne-Marie Silvas, HNTB's graphics and print production manager. “Sometimes we need a printer who can think through projects from a graphic designer's point of view and understand what the designer is trying to accomplish.”

HIGH-TECH

McDaniel said that keeping up with technology was another key factor in the company's success. Early on, ColorMark bought a Linotype 100, which generated film directly from a client's disk.

“Most printers at that time shot and developed film of camera-ready art boards,” she said. “They had to strip it up and make plates the traditional way.”

By 2001, ColorMark was filmless, generating plates directly from disks.

“We have continued to invest in technology for our customers,” McDaniel said. “It speeds up time for the customer, lowers the cost and improves quality.”

ColorMark bought a Kodak NexPress in March, expanding yet again what the

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COLORMARK: Technology tracks responses

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company can offer.

Digital software lets the company offer cross-media campaigns, using e-mail, the Web and text messaging, said Tiffany Edwards, variable printing manager.

"We're trying to utilize all the different technologies," she said. "Before, there was no way to track how your printed piece did. With technology, you can send people your piece and direct them to a Web site. Our customers can keep better tabs on what their customers are responding to and what they're not responding to."

GOING GREEN

ColorMark has been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, which assures that companies follow sustainable printing practices and offer paper from certified forests and merchants to minimize habitat destruction and pollution.

The green initiative has helped land new accounts, including McCormick Distilling Co. in Weston, McDaniel said.

But it isn't cheap being green. McDaniel said FSC certification is a five-year, \$12,000 effort that includes yearly audits. That cost doesn't include time spent putting procedures in place for handling the material and record keeping.

Certified paper doesn't cost more than



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ColorMark employee Tiffany Edwards (left) discusses a project with President Kathryn McDaniel, who leans on a pallet of paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. The agency assures that companies follow sustainable printing practices.

conventional products, but McDaniel said some certified printers charge markups to cover certification costs. ColorMark, she said, absorbs that cost.

Silvas said HNTB sometimes requires that materials printed in high quantities use certified paper by a certified printer.

"We just printed a magazine for our architecture company, and that absolutely had to have high content of post-consumer waste, and it needed to be FSC-certified," she said. "It's something that's good for the environment, but it's also good for how we present our company."

ColorMark's green effort isn't limited to certifications. McDaniel said the new digital printer limits paper waste. For example, she said that a two-page brochure with 3,000 copies printed on the digital press would use 60 pounds less paper than a conventional four-color press, which needs time to get its colors adjusted when a press run starts.

She said more efficient lighting cut the company's energy use in half in the summer. It uses toilet paper and paper towels made from recycled paper and also switched to a cleaning service that uses green products.

CLEARING HURDLES

McDaniel almost makes her success sound easy, but she has faced obstacles. She's a rarity as a woman owner in the printing business. During an event at Kodak, she got on a bus and found herself alone with 50 men.

"That's always a challenge," she said. "They look at you like, 'What are you doing on the bus?' Once you start talking business, it's fine."

Edwards said McDaniel's success, green initiatives and her tendency to

COLORMARK PRINTING

Description: ColorMark prints a wide range of products, including brochures, labels, posters, pocket folders, postcards and annual reports. A Kodak Nex-Press, a digital color press, allows ColorMark to print in smaller quantities and with less waste than a traditional four-color press.

Founded: 1990

Top executives: President Kathryn McDaniel and Vice President Michael McDaniel

Employees: 47 full time, 14 part time

Revenue: \$6.3 million (2007)

Address: 3525 Roanoke Parkway, Kansas City, MO 64111

Telephone: 816 931-7900

Internet: www.colormarkprinting.com

print things free for local charities make her a good role model.

"She's always willing to do that, probably too much sometimes," Edwards said. "We look out there sometimes and say, 'Um, all your jobs right now are pro bono.' It's nice to work for someone who cares about the community and is willing to help out."

ColorMark also survived the divorce of its founders 10 years ago.

"Everybody was nervous about it at first, but we work together really well," said McDaniel, whose ex-husband remains an owner and vice president. "We live within a block of each other. We're still very good friends. We both excel at two very different things. I like the sales part and working with employees. He loves the financial end of things, which I'm not that fond of."

David Mitchell | Mitchell is a freelance writer in the Kansas City area.

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