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OMAHA PRINT

History in the Making

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WHEN OMAHA Print (OP) opened its doors as *The Nebraska Republican* newspaper on May 5, 1858, Nebraska wasn't even a state. It was a territory. Many of the historic American routes, like the Oregon Trail, started in the regions nearby, and the rural town of Omaha had all the flare of the era. Cowboys, wagon trains, saloon poker games, and people scurrying here and there, mostly heading West, in search of the American Dream.

Then came the Civil War, The Great Depression, World War I, World War II and the rest of the 20th century. As the new millennium ticks away, Omaha Print (name change circa 1885) continues to be a model Midwestern company, employing nearly 100 townsfolk who still produce a much-needed commodity: sales catalogs for the breeders of cows and pigs.

The 150-year-old printer also produces a lot of other things, including a wide range of commercial products, catalogs, magazines and marketing collateral, as well as providing finishing, mailing and fulfillment solutions. Even during these uncertain economic times, the company is on track to generate sales of \$21 million in 2008.

But wait. Let's not fast forward too quickly. Here's a neat little ditty out of OP's past...The company's 1927 baseball team won the Omaha City Champi-

onship and, on October 28, Omaha Print hosted Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig for an historic charity exhibition game.

Yes, much has changed since the good old days. But for CEO Steve Hayes, the good old days are still here, as OP continues adding milestones to its proud history.

He estimates that over the past 20 years, Omaha Print has reinvented itself every four or five years to meet the evolving needs of customers, adapt to changes in the marketplace and keep pace with emerging technologies. Hayes believes that OP's ability to adjust and adapt is at the heart of its long-time success.

"Midwestern people have that hard-working, farming ethic. No matter what the weather or conditions, you find ways to make your crops grow. We find ways to make our business grow," he explains. "And, we mean what we say. If we say we'll do something, we do it. If a customer has a problem, we'll help them resolve it. It's all about re-



OP's executive team pictured here (from the left) includes Chuck Kinzer, president; Gary Smith, executive VP-Manufacturing; Joe Sequenzia, VP-Sales; and Steve Hayes, CEO.

lationships, building trust and doing what's right. We're still in business because our clients are still in business."

Omaha Print has clients that have been with the company for more than 100 years. Union Pacific is one example. The printer produced its time tables when the company was just getting into the passenger business, and the printed material promoted visits (by train, of course) to the Grand Canyon when it first opened as a national park. Today, OP is still printing material for the mega train carrier.

Originally a newspaper publisher, the printer spun off into commercial work in 1885, after selling the newspa-

A Picture's Worth...

During its year-long 150th anniversary celebration, OP employed the theme "Looking Back, Moving Forward," and celebrated the historic milestone with various activities and events.

One included a "traveling" photo exhibition, tracking the history



of the company and the city of Omaha, which was available to the public in various locations throughout the city.

Pictured here are two especially memorable photos. Above is the 1927 Omaha Print baseball team, which hosted a charity exhibition game that included baseball greats Lou Gehrig and Babe Ruth (back row center). At left is a vintage shot of OP's original location in downtown Omaha.

per. Omaha Print continued producing small jobs, like hand bills and invoices, but its main source of revenue was selling office supplies and furniture.

When Hayes took the helm of OP in 1991, office supplies accounted for 60 percent of the business and 75 percent of its profit. However, when the company started seeing the proliferation of big office supply stores like Office Depot and Staples in the early '90s, it became difficult to support two totally different businesses. Ultimately, the office supply side was sold, and OP concentrated on printing.

"We refocused and decided not to try to be everything to everybody," Hayes explains. "Our equipment was all over the board. So, we decided to focus on the 40" sheetfed format and phase out our smaller presses. A year later, we added a six-color, 40" Heidelberg, then, within four years, five-color, four-color and two-color Heidebergs."

Hayes' strategy was to narrow the product line, focus on more profitable products and sell to a 75-mile radius. While there were a hundred printers in the Omaha phone book, most were small, local shops, and OP became the go-to company for new technology, al-

lowing it to grow at a manageable rate.

However, even as the business grew, Hayes was in dire need of employees, so he recruited family members of employees to create the OP talent pool—fathers and sons, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, aunts and uncles.

Hayes is the second generation to run his family business, and three generations are still actively involved in the operation. His father, Harvey, 82, is chairman of the board and routinely visits the office. His daughter, Hilary Shank, 30, heads the company's sales office in Dallas.

In 2001, OP invested in a Zirkon half-web. But then 9/11 hit and businesses suffered across the country. OP's executive team knew it was time to reinvent itself again. "We reconfigured the business, let some people go, sold two of our presses, and we managed to survive," Hayes says.

By 2005, the printer was back on the road to profitability. Its heatset web printing capabilities were now accounting for nearly 40 percent of revenues, with a majority of those sales coming from outside the 75 mile radius, explains Chuck Kinzer, president and COO. "The same customer focus and

fundamentals developed in the Omaha region translated well to our national customer base." So well, in fact, that OP's execs decided to add a used Baker Perkins G14 full-web press.

Today, more than 60 percent of Omaha's business comes from outside the state. It expanded its product offering and capabilities, which allowed it to compete nationally.

Although Hayes is contemplating adding more high-speed finishing equipment and a digital press sometime in the near future, he's content for the moment. Because, as Hayes explains, he doesn't want his beloved Omaha Print—with its delightful Americana heritage—to get *too* big.

"We don't need to become huge or mega successful. We're a Midwestern printer with Midwestern values. We want to see healthy growth for our business, make reasonable profits and stay close to our customers," he reflects. "We want to keep helping them grow their businesses and continue building on our relationships. We're just happy to be here after all these years." **PI**