

PROFILE

Printer: Going 'green' creates greener bottom line

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Business Journal Correspondent

Not many companies use more paper than a printer does, so when a printer chooses to go green it can have a big impact on the ecology of the planet.

When George M. Ruth, president of Reading's Offset Impressions, made the decision to obtain certification from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), he did it because it was the right thing to do. He was the third company in the state to obtain the certification, which is world-wide. When Ruth first began, in January 2006, "The paper cost was just a little bit higher. Today, the cost is the same."

"We did it because we wanted to operate a responsible business, but the big surprise was that it actually has brought additional business our way," Ruth said.

The FSC program involves tracking wood from the forest to the recycling center and beyond. Ruth said that furniture manufacturers were among the early participants in large numbers.

The FSC program is administered by the Rainforest Alliance, which is headquartered in Bonn, Germany. Ruth said FSC enjoys a larger European participation because it began there.

To obtain certification — anyone can buy the paper, but not everyone can use the FSC logo — involves periodic audits and a change in the way printers operate their businesses. Offset Impressions has switched to soy and other vegetable-based inks, which has also enabled them to discontinue the use of alcohol and other solvents.

"We buy paper that has been certified through FSC, and carries their logo," said James J. Federico, vice president. "Additionally, we send proof to the certifier, and each use of the logo is individually approved."

When approved for a particular print job, a logo is used on the work. FSC also provides a computer program that enables Offset Impressions and other certified printers to calculate (and disclose on the document) the favorable environmental impact of that printing job.

Ruth said that when Offset Impressions began the program, there was only one certified paper manufacturer available, but the program is gaining traction, and now there are several. He said the FSC logo is attractive to his customers because companies can demonstrate environmental awareness without adding cost.

Federico said companies such as Wal-Mart that insist on green policies from its vendors drive additional business to Offset Impressions. By using paper that is eligible for the FSC seal for their packaging and instruction manuals, they demonstrate to Wal-Mart their compliance with the company's policy. This option is especially important to manufacturers of products that by their very nature may be in an unfriendly environmental area but are none-the-less necessary items.

Ruth said that consumer pressure also drives interest. He cited the instance of a

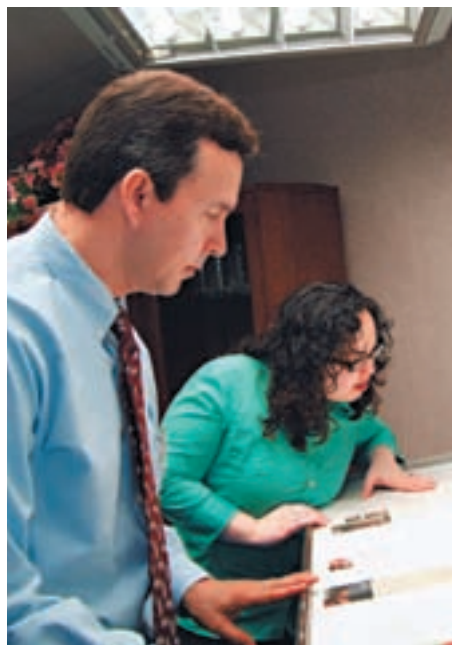


James Federico, left, vice president, and George Ruth, president, look over work just off the press at Offset Impressions, which participates in the Forest Stewardship Council program of recycling and tracking paper.

large lingerie retailer who frequently mailed catalogs, all printed on new paper. After an initial period of resistance lasting several years, the company has responded to consumer and environmental group pressure and switched to 85 percent recycled material for its catalogs.

Offset Impressions operates from a 32,000-square-foot building, and operates on a three-shift schedule. Federico said the company markets and ships to an area bordered by Harrisburg to the west, and includes Baltimore, Lehigh Valley, Manhattan and Northern New Jersey. The company also maintains additional sales offices in New York City and Lancaster, Federico said.

Ruth said Offset Impressions still gladly accepts non-FSC certified work, but he sees



James J. Federico, vice president at Offset Impressions, and Michelle Boehm, a graphic designer at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, examine a proof. The university is a customer of the printing company.

the pendulum swinging in the green direction.

"Some of our customers request FSC-approved paper, but don't want to use the logo," he said.

Offset Impressions makes good use of its Web site, he said, and maintains an FTP site for clients to transfer larger files. Federico said a typical customer might be a design studio, publisher, direct mail user, agency or university. There is also a password-protected client area where they might view proofs of their pending work, and obtain scheduling information.

Ruth said he didn't fear the proliferation of Internet printers, because they tend to "cherry-pick the easier, less complicated work, and cater to the smaller client. They tend not to be full service, and they are not set up to provide the kind of service (and services) our clients seek. Client retention and relationship-forming does not seem to be a priority with them, as it is with us."

Ruth said he doesn't anticipate any major changes or shifts in his business over the next five years or so.

"We will continue to investigate and adopt emerging technologies as they become viable, both to stay current in the market and to provide our clients with the latest advantages. I wouldn't rule out an acquisition, if it would present itself and if it would prove to be a good fit for us strategically, but I don't have an eye on any particular company at this time."

Since becoming certified, Ruth said he and Federico have answered several invitations to present seminars in New York and other places, including some universities. He is happy to explain the advantages of the program, he said, because doing so encourages more printing consumers including universities to seek the FSC seal on their printing work. That, of course, drives more business to Offset Impressions.

Eventually, more printers will obtain FSC certification, but by being among the first,

Business basics

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- E-mail: gruth@offsetimpress.com
- Number of employees: 65 full-time, on three shifts
- Locations: one
- Years operating: 31



Offset Impressions can itself do a bit of cherry picking by attracting the early-adopter client. Since client satisfaction is a strong priority at the company, the company tends to hold on to a client when it gets one, so those who follow may have a tough time recruiting new clients to their green programs.

If you would like to have yourself or your business considered for the Profile tell us what makes you or your business unique, what you have done to create a niche in your particular industry or what you have done that has made a difference. Send information to John L. Moore, Editor, EBPJ, 65 E. Elizabeth Ave., Suite 700, Bethlehem, PA 18018. You also can send an e-mail to john.m@epbj.com.