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# Creating the market

Mimeo.com, Inc. has an impressive track record after only a decade in business. April Terreri learns more about the company's innovative, high-tech model to print, manage and distribute documents

Anyone who has ever helped their company print, collate, bind and distribute any kind of document knows the agony involved. If you are working with a local printer, you usually need to make multiple trips there to outline the job initially, and then interim visits to preview the work to make sure it's absolutely perfect before it goes to print. After all, some of those documents could be soliciting

big business for your company. But this isn't even considering the headache of distribution and getting documents where they need to be when they need to be there. The founders of Mimeo.com, Inc. in New York City know the drill, which interestingly led them to conceive a better and more innovative way.

It all began in 1998, when the founders—Jeff Stewart (Mimeo.com board member and first Mimeo.com CEO) and David Uyttendaele

(Mimeo's chief technology officer) asked themselves why the printing industry wasn't using the Internet to move digital information from the desktop to one giant print center, from which documents could be distributed where they needed to be. As current CEO Adam Slutsky says: "This was the basic concept of the company."

But it wasn't until 2000 that the company went into production creating documents for customers throughout the country. "Mimeo created the market for online printing and overnight delivery of documents and marketing materials," Slutsky says. "As long as the customer submits an order to us by 10pm, we will deliver it as early as 8:30am the next day. We commit to delivering your documents to one or a thousand places, in units of one to many."

The company's strategy to make this kind of promise is brilliantly simple. Each of Mimeo's production facilities is located adjacent to FedEx distribution hubs. "Executives can sit at their desks and simply upload their documents, in any file format, use our online tools to create the finishing touches such as inserting tabs and selecting the type of binding," explains Slutsky. "As they enter their selections, the online image of the document will change to reflect the requests so they can actually see their document in its finished form, such as in a white three-ring binder with several tabs. Then all they have to do is review the online proof of the document and indicate how many they need and where they need to be sent." Mimeo takes over from there. "As a customer recently told us," Slutsky adds, "Mimeo is like the Jetsons, and all the other printing companies are the Flintstones."

Mimeo operates two of the largest printing facilities in the country dedicated to digital document printing. Between the two facilities, Mimeo prints an average of up to four million pages every night. Its 140,000-square-foot Memphis production facility and its 75,000-square-foot Newark facility are located in FedEx hub areas, providing the company the opportunity to accept orders very late into the evening and still get them into the FedEx network for immediate delivery. The company's error-free rate, as reported by its customers,

is 99.7 percent. Its Net Promoter Score, a true measure of determining customer satisfaction, consistently runs in the high 60s to low 70s, far exceeding the national average.

But all of this does not just happen. There is a surprising amount of technology involved in online, on-demand document printing and distribution. In addition to deploying its proprietary technology, Mimeo also uses six sigma and lean manufacturing practices to eliminate errors, create value for customers, and produce high-quality products.

"Part of our 'special sauce' is our ability to take thousands of customized orders a day, each very different from the others, and put them through an assembly-line process to create standardized high-quality outputs," Slutsky says. "We have several mechanical and process engineers on staff, trained in six sigma, who make this happen. They are maniacal about making sure we eliminate variances in output to assure the highest quality. In the printing industry, it's reported that only about 85 to 88 percent of jobs submitted to digital printing companies are error-free. That leaves our competitors' customers with a problem 12 to 15 percent of the time."

Utilizing strict production and assembly six sigma processes and disciplines, Mimeo operates nine quality-assurance stations with 31 QA checkers. Each document is checked as it is uploaded to assure that the content is what customers expect, and subsequent QA checks examine the printed document, the collated document and the bindery. Documents are then proofed, packed, and shipped. Nearly 15 percent of the company's annual revenues are funneled back into R&D.

Another added fail-safe service is the company's request for clients' reach numbers should there be a problem with an order in the middle of the night, hours before the documents need to be at their destination. "We've called clients at 1am to let them know there was no page two in their document," reports Slutsky. "All they had to do was go online from their home computer and log into their account to make the change so we could get the order delivered without errors. These clients became our most loyal customers after an incident like that."

The company has enjoyed average annual growth of 36 percent over the last eight years. In 2008, it had nearly 20 percent growth, despite the global economy. It already serves over 5,000 corporate accounts, including Fortune 1000 companies. Many clients are household names, such as Burger King, CitiGroup and Bank of America. "Out of the gate, we realized we had a great value proposition that could save companies time and money," Slutsky says. "Our sales people quickly identified key groups within companies where there is a big need for the services we provide. HR, marketing services, sales ops, and learning and development professionals are among our biggest users."

Slutsky notes the digital printing industry is approaching \$40 billion in the US, and

the company is eyeing the European market for further expansion. Mimeo anticipates a European presence by 2010 and will begin selling and marketing in the United Kingdom this summer. It plans to build a production facility in Western Europe, probably in Leipzig, Germany, in 2010 to handle that market. "This will be a huge organic expansion for our business. The Western European market is about 70 percent the size of the US market. There are significant opportunities there for us to explore." – *Editorial research by Kevin Foss* ■

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