

« Incorporating QR Codes on business cards allows users to quickly pull up contact and company information and view companion a mobile-friendly personal landing page.



Driven By Technology

To keep pace with a changing industry, here's how one company changed itself. **BY JOHN P. PALEN**

BUSINESS PROFILE

Corporate Graphics Inc.
Owner: Glen Taylor, Taylor Corp.
President: Dave Gahn (since 2006)
Employees: 332
Location: Mankato, with branches in Mexico and China
Description: Leading services in corporate identification technology and printing for the largest corporations and most recognizable brands.

IT'S OFTEN EASIER to look outside an organization for answers when the way you do business doesn't seem to work anymore. Many industries are experiencing sweeping change, and the printing/graphics industry is no exception.

If maximizing the investment in equipment isn't challenging enough, the very nature of graphic design and printing is shifting from ink on paper to digital. Keeping up with the speed of technology has become a large part of the CEO's brain trust when strategizing for the future.

But what if the whole way of thinking about your industry had to change?

In 2009, Dave Gahn, president of Corporate Graphics Inc.

(CGI, a Taylor Corp. company), saw a shift happening from traditional printed collaterals for the mass market to virtual, permission-based, context-relevant messaging to individuals. All this fueled by mobile devices. Since then, the company has pursued a lead position in corporate identification methodologies and technologies.

Before they could communicate this vision and direction, Gahn and his leadership team had to invest in training and development. Here's what they learned:

A **Accept that your traditional business isn't static.** Some CGI employees and customers embraced technology quickly. Most were resistant. So Gahn and his team



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—DAVE GAHN, PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE GRAPHICS INC.

became evangelists, of sorts, about the use of two-dimensional bar codes to add interactivity to print.

2 Combine sales with technical experts, and get a wider audience.

Because of the educational component, CGI has changed the way it presents opportunities to customers. Sales people are paired with the technical experts on sales calls for the new technology.

CGI also had to convince the print buyers to invite marketing and technology departments to these presentations. It was important for brand managers and IT leaders to connect how technology can embellish communications with printed sales or marketing materials.

3 Anticipate client reluctance and varied adoption cycles.

CGI understands there is a predictable adoption cycle for this or any technology. It takes an enormous amount of energy to shift mindsets. They have 5 percent of customers using the technologies, and another 10 percent in active decision cycles. The 80 percent left will take time to adopt, and some will never embrace the shift in communication.

“We are trying things that might not work, or scale. Some customers just don’t have an interest in that,” Gahn says. “Still, we’ve trained folks on the technology and are committed to using the applications with those customers that are stepping up to take this forward.”

4 Run with early adopters and learn from them.


Leaders are looking for an edge and don’t wait until an idea is “fully baked” to embrace it. It was the same shift required

to go from mainframes to mini to networked PCs, or from photographic film to digital. Early adopters are critical. They take chances early and quick, then help to build the use cases and ROI models the rest of the market needs before they’ll move.

For example, CGI has developed a set of applications that work with a business card deck that has a unique QR Code on each card. A user, such as a college recruiter, can click the code on a card before handing it to a prospective student. She can then make quick notes about the discussion: interest in golf, the pharmacy program and overseas studies. The recruiter can then personalize a landing page, so that when the prospect opens the page by clicking the code, he will get a personalized greeting, reference to their specific interests that were discussed, and easy way to opt in for future communications.

For a recent wedding, codes were added to the invitation to allow guests to use their mobile devices to access RSVPs, calendar reminders, menus, directions, bridal registries, even load photos of the new couple. The bride then had an application set that let her manage who had responded, where to have them sit, what they wanted to eat, even queue up thank-you cards for their gifts.

“Our customer relationships are built on what we print, but if we want to stay relevant, we need to make a paradigm shift,” Gahn says. “It’s not been comfortable, but we are finding some cool new ways to add value, and now realize other printers probably are not our biggest competitors.”

Could your company benefit from a mind shift? Consider the possibilities if you began to think about technology, sales, customer service or even your competition differently. 

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