

Print Suppliers Group Is Coming Into Its Own

Originally formed to increase purchasing power, members are now aiming to become a national ink supplier.

By David Savastano
Editor

At a time when powerful pressures are impacting small businesses, some companies are combining some of their operations in order to survive and even thrive.

One such example comes from the printing industry, where the Independent Carton Group (ICG), a consortium of 20 carton manufacturers, have banded together to increase their purchasing power. As a result, these companies are better able to ensure that they can meet the needs of their customers.

Some ink manufacturers have studied the ICG's model, and have decided that it fits rather nicely for the ink industry as well. The Print Suppliers Group (PSG), a consortium of eight regional ink manufacturers, is quickly piling up savings and looking to expand efforts into new areas, including potentially forming their own ink line.

The PSG has a strong network of committed companies, and this idea may very well succeed in the coming years.

The Beginnings of The Print Suppliers Group

The beginnings of the Print Suppliers Group date back to 2000, when leaders of Press Color and Pertech Printing Inks, two K+E distributors and ink manufacturers, watched as some of their own customers started to



From left, Randy Robinson, Doug Chesley, Fiona Cummings, Edd Butch, Dennis Curtin, Peter Reissig (behind Dennis Curtin), Marlon Tusche, Frank Butch (behind Marlon Tusche), Debbie Nylund, John Toigo (behind Debbie Nylund), John Stewart, Larry Nylund (behind John Stewart) Fred Medley, William Curtin and Jim Stanley.

form groups. Peter Reissig, president of Pertech Printing Inks, and Bill Curtin and Dennis Curtin of Press Color

started looking into the idea that they could save on costs and perhaps get a better deal from K+E if they pooled their purchasing power.

"Peter Reissig and I began to put this together back in 2000," said PSG president Dennis Curtin, senior vice president of Press Color. "Peter had watched his customers on the East Coast band together, and he saw how it worked for them. He wondered if

that could work for ink companies as well. At Graph Expo 2000, we sat down and talked about this, and a year later, we decided to go ahead."

"Peter came up with the idea of selling inks through ink manufacturers rather than distributors since we can provide service," said Marlon Tusche, vice president of sales and marketing for Pertech Printing Inks. "By working together, our purchasing power is much stronger, plus we can also share our knowledge, which makes us stronger technically."

"We're a group of independent ink manufacturers, blenders and distributors," said Edd Butch, president of Farbotech. "We met at distributors meetings, and we found that we had



Print Suppliers Group

similar needs and wants. The Print Suppliers Group was started as a way for us to get more clout in purchasing.”

Indeed, technological development was another area where the companies could pool their resources together. Since PSG was formed, the group has been able to work with suppliers in the areas of new product development, logistics, planning and cost containment.

“We are not competitors,” Mr. Butch said. “Because of that, we can discuss manufacturing, equipment and methodology, and it has been a free, positive interplay between us.”

Mr. Curtin’s father, Bill Curtin, served as the first president of the fledgling group.

“Bill was very instrumental in getting the group on its feet,” said Mr. Butch.

“The idea was to band together and buy our supplies together,” Dennis Curtin said. “We were all K+E representatives, and they would meet with each of us individually, and by working together, we could negotiate. My dad, Bill, was our first president, and Gary Lee, president of Mallard Ink, was our second president.”

“Combining our purchasing allows us a much better price point,” said John Toigo, president of Grand Rapids Printing Ink.

“We try to negotiate everything from pigments to pails, and metallics to ground shipping,” Mr. Curtin said. “Some manufacturers offer rebates based on volume. There has been huge savings.”

In the past year, American Printing Ink, Graphic Ink Company and Miller-Cooper Co. have joined the Print Suppliers Group. American Printing Ink president Doug Stanley looks forward to the savings created

by pooling the companies’ purchasing together.

“The driving force is the buying power we can group together,” said Mr. Stanley. “They get their supplies from the people we do, and together, our group’s purchasing power is so much stronger than by ourselves.”

Creating a National Brand

The group formed as a way to negoti-

up, we want to be in position to supply nationally.”

“The next step is to be able to go after nationwide corporate accounts, which is why we have come out with our Print Suppliers Group brand name,” Mr. Butch said. “We’re all small entrepreneurs who differentiate ourselves with high quality products and tremendous service, and our ink will be a top-line product available nationally, backed by excellent service nationwide.”

“We’re all similar companies spread across the country, and this allows us to service the entire country,” said Mr. Toigo, president of Grand Rapids Printing Ink. “We have products with the Print Suppliers Group label on it. We’re all friends in the group.”

“We’re all service-oriented companies, and we are working on capturing national accounts,” Mr. Tusche said.

The Future of PSG

PSG members meet three times a year at various locations throughout North America to discuss their plans. The last meeting was in Las Vegas on Jan. 28, and before that, the group met at Print 05 in Chicago. The group is interested in adding new members.

“There is strength in numbers, and we are hoping to vote on more new members in early 2006,” Mr. Curtin said.

“We have gentlemen’s agreements not to compete in each other’s territory. Our top goals are to develop our private label ink, and perhaps hire a purchasing agent to centralize our purchasing.

“We can see the forest through the trees and this is really something special,” Mr. Curtin concluded.

For more information about the Print Suppliers Group, contact Dennis Curtin at (920) 687-1313 or treasurer John Stewart at (704) 232-7617. ■



The members of PSG are:

- American Printing Inks, Chattanooga, TN
 - Farbotech Color, La Verne, CA
 - Grand Rapids Printing Inks, Grand Rapids, MI
- Graphic Ink Company, Salt Lake City, UT
 - Mallard Inks and Offset Blankets, St. Anthony, MN
 - Miller-Cooper Co., Merriam, KS
- Pertech Printing Inks, Elizabeth, NJ
 - Press Color, Inc., Appleton, WI

ate better prices from vendors, but it now is heading into a new direction that looks just as promising – ink manufacturing.

“We have combined sales of \$45 million, and we are now going to have a national brand of ink we will manufacture,” Mr. Curtin said.

“We compete against the big fellows, who can buy in bulk and have big networks,” Mr. Curtin continued. “They have a price advantage. Our advantage is that we can move faster than they can, and when big contracts come