



DELTA PRESS INC GRAPHIC FINISHERS

by Kym Conis

Traveling Miles an 'Extra Step' at a Time

In Chicagoland, home to one of the Nation's most concentrated areas of commercial printers, operates a trade finisher that has built a reputation among the graphic arts community for uncompromised quality and true craftsmanship – no matter how difficult and diverse the job. That company is Delta Press Inc. Graphic Finishers in Franklin Park, IL.

For over half a century, Delta Press has operated with a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of taking that *extra step*. Whether expanding capacity; tackling intricate, multi-pass stamping and embossing jobs; or being 'the first one on the block' to test new technologies, that 'go the extra mile' attitude has fueled both co-owners and employees alike for the past five decades.

A Printer by Trade

Originally founded in 1945, Delta Press got its humble beginnings like many in the trade – in a garage in Chicago, IL. A printer by trade, founder Paul Masciola successfully operated letterpress equipment from that space until 1957 when he purchased a 4,000 square foot building on the Northwest side of Chicago. In the mid 1960's when offset printing began to hit the market, Delta jumped on board with the installation of a one-color Heidelberg 18"x 24.5" KORD offset press. "Back at that time, we were already foil stamping," explained Co-owner Michael Naselli. "The company converted a 13"x18" Heidelberg windmill with a Liepelt conversion unit to foil stamp and emboss stationery, invitations, and corporate report covers." In addition, Delta operated a cross-section of other smaller equipment including a few letterpress vertical presses, two windmills, and a Miele horizontal 29" flatbed letterpress, which the company utilized to imprint real estate posters. Along the way, Delta also added several smaller offset presses including a Chief 15.

By the late 1960's and early 1970's, Delta was utilizing a combination of letterpress and offset printing to complete work that many other printers had to, in part, job out. "We would offset print letterhead shells and then print the individual names via letterpress," Naselli explained. "We had the type cases so we could actually set our own type and run the entire job in-house without the added expense and turnaround time of outsourcing typesetting."



In addition to printing, foil stamping and embossing, other finishing processes such as diecutting, scoring, perforating, and numbering were also part of Delta's daily operations, as these were all letterpress processes.

In high school, Michael Naselli and John Masciola (Paul's son) took a printing class together and Naselli joined his schoolmate, part time, in his father's company, running the Heidelberg KORD. Throughout high school and continuing through college, Naselli continued with Delta Press. Although asked to join the business upon graduation, Naselli decided to pursue his major and worked as a CPA for the next six years. In 1983, Naselli approached Masciola about buying into the business. "Both of Paul's sons, John and Mark, also worked in the business; they had a lot of printing experience but little experience in business," explained Naselli. "The idea was that I would take care of the front end and John and Mark would take care of the production end. And that's how it worked: Paul retained half ownership and John, Mark and I owned the other half equally."

Separating from the Pack

It was also at this time, in 1983, that Delta decided to emphasize its finishing capabilities by becoming a printer that 'specialized in finishing'. "It was a natural transition for us because we had always done foil stamping and embossing in smaller capacities," stated Naselli. So Delta began to add letterpress equipment for foil stamping, embossing, and diecutting. In 1984, the company added its first cylinder diecutter, a Heidelberg SBB 22"x32". This was Delta's first entry into larger sheet format and larger job runs. "We did have a Krause hand-fed platen 20"x26" press that was modified to foil stamp and emboss, but it could only do smaller runs," explained Naselli. "We could also diecut presentation

folders, etc. on our Miele horizontal press, but that also was very difficult." At this time, Delta purchased its first Kluge press and added a second cylinder diecutter, which was retrofit with a Liepelt foil unit in order to run presentation folders, annual report covers and multiple-up stationery.

"A lot of times, we were the first ones on the block to install new technology. This was good and bad," explained Naselli. "The foil

conversion unit was the first one in production, so in essence, we were the guinea pigs, and consequently, faced a lot of challenges.” On a cylinder press, the chase moves back and forth and Delta’s biggest challenge was what to do with the wiring. “We ended up hanging it from the ceiling and the wires would move back and forth with the chase...it wasn’t pretty...but it worked!” But taking that *extra step* to bring in new technology enabled Delta to stamp larger sheet sizes automatically and better serve its primary customer base – the printer.

Around the same time in 1985, Delta purchased a brand new 2 color Heidelberg GTO, which was the company’s first orientation into printing on multicolor equipment. “Our specialty was being able to do jobs that required all of the processes (printing, foil stamping, embossing, and diecutting) while controlling registration, and thereby quality, throughout the entire job,” explained Naselli. “Back then, this was a great advantage.” This specialty was one reason that it was so important for Delta to acquire high quality printing equipment with great registration. “It was important for us to buy ‘new’ so that we could achieve the type of tight registration necessary to produce all the high quality finishing techniques that went along with it,” stated Naselli.

To that point, Delta had groomed some pretty significant accounts such as Amoco and McDonald’s; however, with the quality and speed that Delta was now able to achieve, the company attracted other major accounts such as Hyatt Hotels. Starting with stationery, both letterhead and envelopes, Delta ran the individual hotel identities across the nation. “Originally we were a second source, then ended up not only producing all the stationery business but also, the check-in booklets as well.” The check-in booklets were very intricate, requiring printing, stamping, embossing, diecutting, and saddle stitching. This grew into a presentation folder program, again for all hotels across the nation – all with individual identities – and all produced from the 4,000 square foot facility!

The late 80’s also brought the installations of a Saroglia 20”x28” platen press in order to produce embossing and combination work in a larger sheet format (work that was limited on the cylinder presses) and a Moll folder/gluer, which enabled Delta to auto glue presentation folders. “To that point, we were gluing them by hand,” recalled Naselli. “We glued them any way we could – often taking them home with us at night so that neighbors and family could help out in the evenings. We’d bring people in, but we just didn’t have the room for more than two or three.” Moll was fairly new at that time and is another example of taking that *extra step* to work through new technology. The end of the decade, Delta also did a lot of work for American Express through a distributor, foil stamping and embossing logos on letterhead, envelopes, and reply cards. By this time, the ownership of Delta Press was divided equally among its present-day owners, Michael Naselli, John Masciola and Mark Masciola.

By 1991, Delta was bursting at the seams so the company

purchased a 15,000 square foot facility in Franklin Park, its current home. Up to that time, business was good – very good. “My biggest worry was what to do with the profits,” stated Naselli. However, as the nature of the industry would have it, Hyatt changed its corporate identity just prior to the move and eliminated foil stamping and embossing, replacing it with 4/C process on everything it did. Within a six-month period, the business had completely disappeared. Plus, right after the move, American Express decided to go to a continuous form format to improve efficiencies. So, in order to keep the work, Delta installed a continuous form stamping press – a Kluge WFE. “Fortunately, with the recession of late 1991, we were able to weather the storm through our conservatism – we always invested back into the company,” stated Naselli.

Even with the recession, Delta continued to add machinery to increase market share, keep existing customers and add new ones. In 1993, a 25”x35” SBD Heidelberg cylinder stamper (one of only a handful ever built by Heidelberg to be a stamper) was installed to give Delta greater sheet size capacity with less foil waste and more foil pulls. In 1994, a second folder/gluer (a Haskin) was installed to enable Delta to do significantly more complicated gluing such as reinforced folders, video boxes, three-panel folders, and CD sleeves. In 1995, Delta decided to get out of printing altogether. “The offset presses were running less and less and we were doing more and more finishing,” stated Naselli. “The distributor we had been working through for American Express lost the job and so that business went away as well.” So Delta sold off its printing equipment and dark room, etc. and purchased a new Sugano 29”x41” in order to do large format stamping/embossing and diecutting.

Unique to Delta’s operation is the wide variety of machinery it operates. “We built our operation by having at least one of every kind of press, because each had its strengths,” explained Naselli. For example, the cylinder presses could run very lightweight stock extremely well and could do very detailed work with fine lines. Pigments also stamped very well on the cylinders. “The cylinder presses enabled us to do a lot of things that we could not do on the platen presses – or do them better,” commented Naselli. In addition, the cylinder presses helped ward against air entrapment issues on sheets that were heavily coated or sealed. On the other hand, the platen presses were better for embossing and combination work, and they ran faster than the cylinder presses. The Sugano enabled Delta to run jobs with bigger volume. “We were looking for a quality press that could be easily converted from diecutting to foil stamping; it could also strip in-line,” stated Naselli.

In 1997, a Bobst 1260 was purchased from Cooke Berger Embossing (who had gone out of business) and Delta began to do work for some of Cooke’s customers. That same year, a Gietz 22”x29” vertical platen press was purchased for its versatility and speed and eventually replaced the Saroglia. Most recent installations include an Iijima 29”x41” in 2003

and a Kluge folder/gluer in 2004. “We installed the Iijima because we needed a large format press that would run quicker and that would easily convert from diecutting to foil stamping,” stated Naselli. “Registration, speed, and convertibility were key factors in our purchase.”

Weathering the Tides

Delta’s diversity in equipment has helped the company to enter into new markets. Both the Iijima and the Sugano have helped Delta to enter the plastics market with the stamping of credit cards. “This is a very risky and difficult market,” explained Naselli. “Risky because the material comes to us already printed, so if something goes wrong, you have a lot of upfront exposure; difficult because you are dealing with material that is 30 mil thick so if you get a jam up, you can do significant damage.”

The diversity of products produced ranges from high end, intricate foil stamped and embossed jobs on folders, stationery, boutique greeting cards, book covers, and invitations to stamping on plastics (as mentioned above), diecutting for the packaging industry and producing high-volume ‘down and dirty’ direct mail pieces. Whatever the project, Delta Press has the reputation for being the ones you can trust with the difficult jobs. “That’s good and bad,” stated Naselli. “We are set up to do a variety of things and do them all well - from simple large-run diecutting to complex short-run, multiple pass jobs. However, we are often considered for the tough jobs only, which can be limiting.” There have been many jobs over the years that began at another finisher only to end up in Delta’s plant because they were unable to produce the job. One job, a complicated presentation folder, involving foil stamping and embossing that had to register to a diecut window on another panel, was at a competitor for three weeks. “The customer finally pulled the job and sent it to us to rescue. Not only did we complete the job in short order but also won a ‘Best in Category’ Benny Award for the piece.”

So how has Delta managed to ‘weather the tides’ for more than half a century? “First and foremost, Paul (Masciola) never skimped on quality and never took a shortcut – even at the expense of making a profit; he was a true craftsman,” stated Naselli. “The three of us (partners) were brought up with this philosophy of always taking that *extra step*, and it’s how we still do business today.” Second, since Delta was initially a commercial printer and all three partners grew up in that environment, the company understands the printing process very well and therefore, is able to help its customers (mainly printers) better design their jobs so that the entire process, from printing to finishing, goes more smoothly.

Third, Naselli attributes much of the company’s success to its employees, who he labels as the ‘backbone’ of the operation – the core that defines Delta press as a company.



“We have extremely good employees. Everyone that runs a press is a skilled pressmen,” stated Naselli. “We have a lot of longevity with our employees basically because we respect their opinions. We acknowledge that they know their presses best and they are given the responsibility of producing quality work without the pressure of getting it done quickly. We know how we want things done and they have the experience and skill to do it – a combination that has worked really well.”

Finally, a truly successful partnership can greatly aid in the survival of an organization, as each partner brings certain strengths to the table. The sum of three, in Delta’s case, has had more impact than one. “We’ve been successful for over 20 years of partnership because we trust each other; we’re all fairly conservative; and we have very defined areas of responsibility,” explained Naselli. John Masciola runs production from the administration end of things and Mark Masciola runs the technical end of production, from problems on press to machine modifications. “We all work many hours, each pulling our own weight at different stages of the business and we all believe in reinvesting in the company,” stated Naselli. This ‘conservatism’ in wise investments has been key in carrying the company through industry’s ‘lows’.

This year, things seem to be going better and Delta Press is hopeful that as supply and demand starts to balance out, the strong will prosper and the weak will perish. As Delta works to bring volume back to where it was a few years back, it hopes to continue with future expansion goals to increase its capabilities through the addition of different finishing processes and perhaps, a move to a new facility. Whether expanding into new technologies or continuing in its mastery of the old, Delta Press Graphic Finishers’ reputation for uncompromised quality and true craftsmanship has enabled Delta to travel miles - an *extra step* at a time. ■

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