

# Cts MHPG meets the Millennium

**MHPG**, textile printers, of Whitinsville, Massachusetts, USA, has built the company to become one of the largest contract printers in the United States. The company has recently opened a factory in Mexico, as well. **David Hurowitz**, President, awakes each morning with the same questions and this has become predictable to his staff. **Chuck Nail**, Vice President of **Richmond Graphic Products**, tells the story.

It's always the same questions: "How can we do this better? How can we do this more efficiently? How can we provide our customers a superior product?" He admits that this was fatiguing to his staff at first, but now, they actually see creativity and freedom in making their job more efficient.

"The staff now comes to me with ideas more frequently than I can ask my questions. After all, they know each of their jobs better than I do and can understand solutions to that job faster than I can. It is this teamwork that allows this to become our process of continual improvement. The product we produce can only be improved if we standardise each process. From that benchmark, quality control and product consistency occurs.

"This corporate philosophy is where we seek out automation opportunities. Screen making was an area of difficulty in process standardisation. Hurowitz says: "We were attracted

to the Direct Jet CTS (computer-to-screen) from Richmond Graphics for this very reason. Our film was completely eliminated from the process saving several steps and a large cost (film and chemistry) to us."

Hurowitz has seen his company grow to 20,000,000+ prints per year from a college dormitory business in 1986. "We have experienced many false starts with many products, but these are now fewer and further between because capital expenditure decisions are based on new productivity levels, increased process speeds, and cost reductions.

"All these items are important to us, but not any one single item. We have to become not only a better provider, but a low cost provider to our customers each day whether they ask us to or not. Things like NAFTA, GATT, dramatic currency devaluation like Asia is experiencing, and our current competitors all require improvement just for us stay in this marketplace.

"We must provide essentially an R & D department for our customers. This is because they have competitive demands in a market that has too many choices and over supply of production capacity."



# MHPG



Focusing on providing a better product faster, more efficiently, and at less cost has allowed us growth in a part of the United States that has been hit particularly hard by imports and higher labor rates. Hurowitz believes these market conditions have also made them more competitive.

Finding suppliers that share our belief has not been as easy. Hurowitz continues: "Of course, we all want products cheaper, but not too many suppliers are interested in helping us analyse our systems so that together we can grow through continual improvement." MHPG has found that most suppliers don't understand that they want to be an early adapter of new processes that ultimately will improve quality and reduce cost each day.

"Sometimes fate plays a role in enlightenment. We met Hugh Neville (of Richmond Graphic Products, Cranston, Rhode Island, USA) Richmond Graphic Products, of Cranston, RI by accident on a golf course.

"We soon discovered that we were in the same industry, and that they were developing a new technology to replace film in the screen making process. Richmond was focusing on a technology go directly from art disk to coated screens, eliminating film, art time, storage and retrieval from the printing process."

Hurowitz informed him that MHPG was a company driven by quick response to customer art and samples. Although our film was smaller in size, the quantities of film, chemistry, thermal output, screen touch up time, file folders, and storage space was an area that was in need of revision and complete overhaul. After a demonstration Hurowitz knew MHPG could eliminate almost 90 percent, if not all film costs.

The film cost alone would pay for the machine in less than 18 months, not counting additional savings in art labour, elimination of film folders, faster sample production, and a total elimination of the film storage area. At this same time Richmond was changing its company mission, and had recently developed a new philosophy in product development.

Hurowitz states: "It was amazingly similar to our outlook. Richmond simply wanted to reduce costs, reduce labour, and reduce the footprint (area) of the pre- and post-press areas of screen-printers. I knew we were thinking alike when I heard that!"

MHPG now believes it is the first T-shirt company in the world which is completely 'film-less' in screen making. "The cost benefit for us was obvious, but the sense of security that the DirectJet CTS gives us with a complete back-up system of art outside the

main facility, digital transfer of art information between our customers and our new facility in Mexico was better than we anticipated.

"We also realised that the Direct Jet CTS would be the best for us with multiple plants and the need for quick, cost-effective movement of art files."

MHPG started when the business climate was quite different and has changed a great deal, but the approach to the manufacturing process in textile printing has changed very little, with the obvious exception of computers in the art room.

Hurowitz says: "Our art is produced faster and is more creative than ten years ago, but the rest of the processes seem to be 'theme and variation' of systems and machines from 20 years ago. The Direct Jet CTS was a fresh approach to old systems in the art and screen room. Several costly steps in our manufacturing process were eliminated. MHPG has older print machines mixed with new machines, but yet they run the same speeds."

Hurowitz finds that the contrast between computer and software companies take in developing and marketing products and traditional screen companies a paradox.

The old days of engineering temporary solutions rather than engineering solutions to establish continual improvement, remain in many screen process manufacturers create more problems. Hurowitz states: "We are seeking suppliers that are exploring continual improvement, just as we are in the printing process at MHPG.

"Not every new product works for every shop. We look at products more closely when we can produce faster, or with less labor time, or with less cost. Many products can do one or two but we still see very few product developments that address all three. When that happens for us, then we look at a change very closely and most times react quickly."

Hurowitz continues: "We are glad to be involved with Richmond Graphics on the Direct Jet CTS (computer-to-screen) because it addressed speed, labour, and a dramatic cost reduction. We have told Richmond please to let us know when you have other products that will create more competitive advantages for MHPG.

"This has been an ideal supplier/customer partnership, a true win/win situation that we strive for everyday with our customers."

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