CHARTING SUCCESS

KENYA MCCULLUM GETS CALIBRATED TO RECORD

THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF A GRAPHICS LEADER,

WHICH HAS FINE-TUNED ITS INGENUITY,

PUT IT IN A BOTTLE, AND SOLD IT.

MAKING THE LEAP from charts and markers recording supplies to casino slot machine tickets and industrial inkjet inks and equipment has proven a lucrative jump indeed for Buffalo, N.Y.-based Graphic Controls.

The company as founded was a manufacturer of replacement papers and pens for industrial recording instruments that monitor information, such as temperature, pressure and specialty papers for machines that measure oceanographic and meteorological activities. As Peter O'Loughlin, Graphic Controls' Director of Sales and Marketing, explains, "These are specialized products: the wrong pen and paper combination can ruin data if the pen bleeds or the paper smudges. One of Graphic Controls trademark features is matching the right pen and ink with the proper paper type." Despite the fact that recording devices are slowly being replaced by digital equipment, this has remained the company's primary source of business over the years because analog recorder's results are as accurate as digital, but cannot be manipulated.

Graphic Controls next used its ink expertise to produce inks for use in industrial coding and marking applications. The ink products can be used for a variety of specialized functions such as printing graphics, bar codes, and packaging codes. Graphic Controls' inks predominantly serve the food and beverage, health and beauty aid and construction markets. Graphic Controls has been successful in supplying inks for a number of different printers. This reverse engineering allowed the company to make ink that is compatible with the printers of most OEMs..

Leveraging the strong sales of these inks and Graphic Controls' industry reputation, O'Loughlin said that ink sales needed to be combined with equipment sales to provide a total solutions package to end users in the markets served.

Graphic Controls' printers have been created by evaluating the technology that already exists, making an assessment about what end users like and what they dislike and making the printing systems more efficient with higher quality print. Graphic Controls offers the Sure Code® family of printers for drop on demand printing needs. The 1500 may be used for simple human readable messages or to apply barcodes, or both. The 5000 may be used for ultra high resolution barcoding and logo applications, allowing the practice of print on demand case graphics versus preprinted cases. This has allowed for reduced inventories of cases. Graphic Controls also offers the Sure Mark™ series of continuous inkjet printers for non-porous surfaces. The 6100 unit does not require factory air pressure, which makes it a very versatile printer. Air driven printers, pigment based ink systems and dual printhead systems are also available.

TICKETS, GET YOUR TICKETS!

In 2000, Graphic Controls ventured into the world of ticket printing, which is all produced at the 275,000-square-feet Buffalo facility. The company's tickets are made from durable and moisture-resistant materials, which O'Loughlin said is particularly useful for its theme park clients, because as patrons walk around on the hot grounds and enjoy themselves on attractions such as waterslides, the ink on regular paper tickets tends to wear off. Graphic Controls' Sharkskin™ tickets are not only colorful and attractive to the patrons' eye – and an excellent advertisement for a theme park – but are also made to withstand exposure to water, making the theme park experience more enjoyable by alleviating the frustration of standing on long lines for new tickets.

Not only has Graphic Controls created durable and attractive tickets for the theme parks market, but it enjoys a leadership position in the "Ticket In-Ticket Out" casino slot machine market. Customers can choose from a variety of inks and graphics, including UV light visible, fluorescent, or thermochromic inks, and can have the perforations custom made. Graphic Controls' unique security features guard against fraud and counterfeiting.

In addition, whenever you go to a casino and use an electronic gaming ticket, Graphic Controls is right there in your pocket.

Pictured opposite: The company has years of experience making recording charts and disposable markers;

left: Sure Code® 1500 printer.

O'Loughlin said that Graphic Controls became the leader in the casino market by developing strong ties to the printer OEM's and a dedicated field sales organization. The company's tickets act as a colorful advertisement for the establishment and have security features to protect the user. They are also approved by the equipment manufacturers (such as International Gaming Technology and Sierra Design Group) for use.

SHARING IDEAS, SHARING SUCCESS

Casino patrons are not the only ones who win with Graphic Controls. The business was built on a corporate culture and philosophy based on teamwork. Employees of the company are encouraged to draw upon their own experiences to contribute to new ideas and problem solving, which has helped make the company a well-oiled machine. "The more efficient we are, the more profitable we are," said O'Loughlin.

Part of this teamwork comes because the company gives back to its employees and gives them a sense that Graphic Controls' success is also their own. There is an employee incentive program,

which gives each employee a personal stake in the company's bottom line. This is a win-win situation that has kept the employees actively involved in the growth and accomplishments of the business.

But financial gain is not the only bonus that the company has to offer. Graphic Controls' employees are rewarded for their hard work in the form of camaraderie, which has helped keep its team motivated. Whether it be casual Friday, a lunch celebrating an employee's years of service, or the social exchange club that ventures on recreational outings like a family picnic or holiday parties, the people who work at Graphic Controls are treated like a family. O'Loughlin said that this contributes to the company's extremely low turnover rate, and employees tend to remain there for decades.

INKLINGS OF COMPETITION

O'Loughlin said that one of the keys to Graphic Controls' success, which sets the company apart from its competition, boils down to its ability to listen.

"We have listened to our customers and what they like and dislike about other systems or service levels," he said. By paying close attention to what its competition is doing, Graphic Controls has created the opportunity to use that information to take its products and services to the next level.

Because of its customer-oriented mentality and its new venture into printer technology, Graphic Controls is positioned to become the one-stop supplier of inks, service and equipment. Unlike most if its competition, Graphic Controls has a professional, direct sales force and dedicated customer service center, in lieu of a distributor network, so that customers may deal directly with Graphic Controls for placing orders and information on its inks, service and equipment, effectively providing the shortest communication chain with a link of one.

When it comes to finding new customers for these new products, O'Loughlin said, "We feel we have both ends of the spectrum covered. We may go in to a prospective end-user with our own printer line and inks, and if the time is not right to replace equipment, we have a full line of replacement inks for other equipment OEM's."

PACKAGING INNOVATION

"Packaging is our future," said O'Loughlin when discussing where the company is headed, and how it has been able to leverage its printing expertise in innovative ways to service new markets. And based on the variety of products that Graphic Controls manufactures, all designed to look good and act as an advertisement with a company's logo, the future is bright. These products include point of sale register rolls for large chains, like Home Depot and the Hard Rock Café, as well as specialized labels for products like Bud Light. This is a small niche market for Graphic Controls right now, but it plans to continue to look for ways to provide packaging engineering solutions, taking the end-users needs into consideration, rather than supplying a generic, "one size fits all" approach.

Graphic Controls has begun using these relationships with its specialty packaging customers to become a single source supplier many packaging and production needs.

It is this attention to its customers' needs that has given Graphic Controls a steady stream of possibilities for its future. And after years of service and innovation, it's clear that Graphic Controls' success is not just an inkling. 🌐

Pictured above (left to right): Sure Mark™ 6000 continuous inkjet printer for primary product identification;
Graphic Controls is a leading manufacturer of coin-less slot machine redemption tickets.

Pictured above (from left): Sharkskin™ water-resistant theme park tickets;
Sure Mark™ 6100 continuous inkjet printer operates without the need for factory supplied air;
below: Sure Code® 1500 printer operates both Large Character and Trident® high resolution printheads;
state-of-the-art, 250,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Buffalo, NY.