

INTERVIEW

For those of you who do not already know him, I would like to introduce you to Greg Williams, who, during his career in the reprographics business, operated in the Florida and Georgia market areas. The name of his company was National Graphic Imaging (“NGI”). NGI was sold to ARC in December 2007. Greg was the President and Chief Operating Officer of NGI.

From Joel to Greg, I very much appreciate your decision to participate in our “Masters of the Reprographics Business” interviews. Without further adieu, let’s get on with our questions and your responses:

1. When did you first get involved in the reprographics business, and what was the first position you held?

1977 at A.R. Cogswell Co. in Jacksonville, Florida. I made autositives, at the time the cheapest way to make a reproducible from a blueline print

2. How many different reprographics firms did you work for during your career in the reprographics industry?

4

3. For how many years were you in the reprographics business?

33

4. Did you start a reprographics company from scratch, and, if so, how did you capitalize the company and how much capital did the company start out with? Also, did you start that company with partners, or, if you did not, did you add partners later on?

Yes, we started Bay Reprographics in Tampa from scratch with \$40,000, which came from Nick and Martha Korman (who were my partners) they had taken a 2nd mortgage on their home. We also took a loan from my father Bill Williams to purchase a process camera. My dad later joined the company as the 4th partner. We started several other companies in different markets as we grew, and in each we made sure we had someone with ownership either from the original partners or a new partner (or both) working in the market.

5. If you did not start a reprographics company from scratch and joined an already existing business, how did you end up being the owner (or *one of the* owners, if there were other owners)? (Did you “acquire” a company? Did you move into an ownership position in a family-held company?)

n/a

6. If you had “partner owners”, how did that work for you? What are the good points have having partner/owners and, if there are any, the bad parts?

Yes, I was very fortunate to have several “partner owners” who were very talented in different aspects of the business. Together we became a powerful force. Certainly there were rough spots, we were all different people but we managed to work through them because we were stronger together than separate.

7. When you retired from the business, did you retire from the company without selling it, and, if so, did you continue on as an “absentee” owner? Any thoughts you’d care to share with us about being a retired “absentee” owner?

We sold the company.

8. If you sold your company (or more than one), when did you sell your company, and why did you sell your company when you did? Do you regret selling your company when you did?

We sold in Dec. of 2007. There were many reasons we sold when we did, probably the biggest one was the prospect of having the value of company begin to go down because of the changes in technology and problems with the economy. Having started the company with two partners and one employee and growing to multiple locations with about 180 employees when we sold, there will be regrets but none at the time or since then that are big enough to derail the sale. As to timing, I don’t think it could have been much better, thank you Martha.

9. At the time you sold your company, how many locations was your company operating? (not including “FM”-sites locations)

8 (all of which were in Tampa, St Pete, Orlando, Jacksonville, Ocala, Atlanta markets)

10. At the time you sold your company, how many people were on your company's team?

Approximately 180

11. When you sold your company, did you agree to stay on with the company for a period of time after the sale? And, if you did stay on for a period of time after the sale, how was it different for you, if it was different?

Yes I agreed to stay on and help with the transition. It was very different because of two factors. 1. It was the beginning of the "great recession" which required steps that were unprecedented within our company. 2. The philosophy, expectations and goals were very different with the new company. I lasted two years of a three year employment agreement before I retired.

12. Would you briefly share with us your frame of mind during the first year or so after you *retired*? Was it a difficult transition? Did you go through, or not go through, *withdrawal*?

I don't think I went through any "withdrawals" except to say that I did miss the interaction with the team. I worked with some of the best in the business. I think the process of the separation of the team started at the sale, so by the time I retired it was largely done.

13. Did your company ever "merge" with another company, and, if your company did, did the merger benefit your company, and, if it did, how so?

We did a partnership with David Meeks who owned University Imaging in Gainesville, Florida to create NGI Ocala. David brought a different perspective, which helped bring focus on streamlining and simplifying processes along with a strengthening of focus on the customer.

After we sold there were several consolidations; the only location not effected was Ocala.

14. Different from a "merger", did your company ever "acquire" another company, and, if you did, did the acquisition benefit your company, and, if it did, how so?

We bought a small company in Orlando mostly for the location but did see some minor increase in business.

15. Regarding any acquisitions or mergers you completed during your time in business, did they accomplish what you expected they would accomplish? With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, what are the key issues to be aware of to ensure success with an acquisition or merger?

Most, if not all of my experience with mergers are consolidations, which at the time were really damage control. Had the economy been strong I believe many of them would not have happened. Certainly there were cost savings from elimination of redundancies across the board. Customer retention must be top of the list of priorities followed closely by integration of the team.

16. What's your definition of "success"?

Being the best at what you do.

17. Given your long experience in business, how did you, back when you were still in business, rank the importance of these issues, from the eyes of customers you did business with?

- a. Price
- b. Service
- c. Quality

Almost always Service and Quality were our focus. If you perform those well there are ways to work with price. That said there are times when price is the most important criteria to the customer and times when that can work for you, but you need to be judicious. Nick used to say "pick two of the three, you can't have all three." Another powerful person in our company found ways to make the price less painful for the customer.

18. In your opinion, do customers rank those issues differently today, and, if so, how do they rank these same issues, nowadays?

I really don't think they do although they want you to believe it is different. At the end of the day quality and service are key; because we package and deliver their work and talent to their world. Pricing is important; so long as you stay realistic in the market you should be fine.

19. What's your philosophy regarding "team building"?

I always tried to follow the golden rule "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I tried to surround myself with people who were smarter than I was. I also tried my best to help them grow and succeed. The phrase "no man is an island" comes to mind. You have to surround yourself with people

better than you, who complement each other's talents, so that the "team" is as strong and powerful as possible.

20. What was your approach to communicating with team members and encouraging/motivating team members to really get engaged?

I probably over-communicated at times, but my door was always open to whoever needed me. When people are and feel empowered to make decisions it's amazing what happens. Yes by doing that you are exposed to failure but the reward far outweighs the risk. I always tried to listen, get all the facts and guide, not dictate, unless I had to. Most times they fueled their own fire; I just gave them a fan.

21. How did you retain key team members?

I think having a great team, that are fun to work with, who are successful, who are driven and empowered, is a place almost everyone wants to be. Add great financial rewards and in some cases stock options and you can't lose.

22. What was your basic business philosophy?

Externally, do what is right for your customers and everything will fall into place. Internally, do what is right for your customers (employees) and everything will fall into place.

23. What are your thoughts on; collections, savings, borrowing, growth, owners role in business, delegation, profit

You need to be paid for what you do in a timely manner but be prepared to work within the customer's processes and cycles. Carrying good customers when they need it is not forgotten. There are many forms of savings, all are important and a little cash tucked away is good too. We only borrowed when we had to and then paid it off as quickly as we could. Owners should be involved in the business every day and work harder than anyone else, if you want to grow. Divide and conquer. Profit is the result of working hard and smart and the reason you are in business, don't get greedy for if you do everyone will see that.

24. Kindly estimate the percentage of your sales that came from customers involved in the A/E/C Industry.

Around 95%

25. How did you communicate with customers?

I was mostly internal; I went to see customers whenever asked to join a meeting or whenever needed. In the early years I dealt with customers at all levels all day long, as we grew and developed I was blessed with two senior team members who were very, very good at hooking them and bringing them to the boat. It then was my job to serve it up and keep them happy. We also had a strong sales force, a strong production group, and a strong accounting group that were very interactive and focused on the customer's needs. Customer is always number one.

26. How did you get feedback from customers?

Mostly from Sales staff and Customer Service personnel. We did attempt mailed surveys but the response was somewhat weak. We also had a consultant speak to some customers to expose strengths and weaknesses.

27. What factors led to your company's success in its geographic market area?

We were in many markets but success was always related to finding out the customers' hot button, pushing it in a way others were either not willing or able to or both, then providing an outrageous experience for them. Consistent follow up and tweaking what we did for them kept us hard to take out by our competitors.

28. If you did attempt to do so, how did you differentiate your business from your competitors?

We were blessed to have one of the masters of FM and business strategy on our senior team. Our approach was very different than most; we looked for ways to help the customers bottom line which also helped ours.

29. Were you able to expand into new services / business segments? And, if so, what services / segments did you add during your career and were your expansion efforts successful? If not, why not?

Our company early on was what people called "a burner" meaning we focused on the printing portion of the business, we never really sold supplies, or equipment; we just did a lot of printing. We tended to stay with the AE portion of the AEC industry we served. We felt the C segment was too price driven. In later years the AE segment had less influence over the volume of printing; it shifted to the C segment. That at times caused us a problem due to our reputation from earlier years of catering to the AE portion. It turned out that many of the things we did for the AE segment were also somewhat effective in

the C segment if presented slightly different, but not always. Always make sure you understand your customer's needs and goals and figure out how to support theirs and yours at the same time.

After 1997 we went heavy into the FM programs with the guidance and efforts from Joel Salus, which expanded quickly and was very, very successful. We, like everyone else, went into color but never in a really big way, which was a mistake, we should have had a larger more progressive color operation. A few years before we sold we also started an equipment sales and service arm which was also very successful. Almost every time we found success it had to do with having the opportunity to bring really good talented people into our team and then let them run with what they did best. The task then became providing them the support they needed to ensure their success and ours.

30. Did you expand your company's reach geographically, and, if so, were your geographic expansion efforts successful? If not, why not?

We did and for the most part yes it was successful. When you can put together the right team of people for the task in front of you, you can accomplish most anything; if you do not, you won't.

31. What were your best sales techniques/tools?

We looked for the best people in our markets and tried to get them to join our team, because of the skills and relationships they could bring to the table. Because of other members of our team we could then enhance their relationships with creative approaches, further strengthening the relationships. Then add in people who can create relationships at almost any level because of who they are, what they are best at and the passion they have, complemented by the best customer service and production staff topped off with accurate billing and reporting services, you create the ultimate customer experience.

32. Did your company offer "Facilities Management" (FM) services? Staffed? Unstaffed? And, if your company was in the FM business, how did being in that business help - or, to the opposite extent, hurt - your overall business?

Yes, both staffed and unstaffed. Staffed were always good for business at least while the economy was good. Unstaffed were always intended to be good and for the most part were, as long as the customers business trended as it had in the past, again these were also hurt when the economy faltered. FM sales or should I say sales from the FM customer base accounted for 40+ percent of our total sales, quite significant and mostly locked in; it was huge in our company.

33. What business books, if any, would you recommend reprographers read?

Any of them that educate and motivate you

34. Did you have a mentor (or more than one) when you started in business or later on, and how did having a mentor (or mentors) help you?

I think that is one of the most important things someone can have. I was fortunate enough to have had several throughout my career. They seemed to arrive when I needed them the most. I learned from all of them, which in the end helped me to be well rounded. Mentors come from all over; some with more impact than others, but I believed I could learn from all of them and use that knowledge to make myself and our company better. In turn I hope that I was, and perhaps still am, a mentor to many I worked or was associated with.

35. Would you share with us two or three of the most significant “good decisions” you made during your career?

Marrying Janet, going into business with Nick and Martha Korman and working through the differences, bringing Joel Salus and Craig Hubbard into our company and selling when we did.

36. Would you also share with us two or three of the most significant “bad decisions” you made during your career?

Not expanding into the color market in a more significant way throughout the company, our efforts in Baltimore, and our efforts in Atlanta. In all three I should have put more effort into their success, worked harder to find the right people to lead them and empowered them to do so.

37. If you could go back in time and start (or acquire) your business again - with the same tools available then but knowing what you know now - what would you do differently?

I'd have done a lot of things differently. In the beginning while we were focused on service and quality we did not focus on doing things financially that set the business up for fast growth, had we done that sooner I think we would have been larger than we were at in the end. I would have learned to delegate and empower sooner than I did, setting someone up for success and helping them accomplish that is a very powerful motivator, and motivated team members can accomplish amazing things. I would have surrounded myself with people smarter than I am much sooner than I did. There is so much I could have done better in hindsight, which is always 20/20. That said, I also believe

that if you are doing the best you can, while learning and growing you will likely do just fine. My dad used to tell me you don't have to be smarter than your competitor you just have to out work them. But if you're smarter and work harder....

38. What's your view of the importance of networking with other reprographers (competitors *and* non-competitors)?

That wasn't real high on my list, maybe it should have been. I knew most of my competitors; some I liked some I did not. I never thought I could learn anything from them except for what I was getting through the normal course of local business. I don't mean that in an arrogant way, I simply knew they would not share anything with a competitor nor would I. Non competitors were a little different, but not something I did a lot of. I tended to stick with and learn from the ones I trusted and not really expand from that group much.

39. Is "branding" important, and, if you think it is, how so?

I think it is and I think it happens in your local markets without a lot of effort, as you work within the customer base. It's not like the repro industry is a McDonalds or Coca Cola, not everyone uses the services provided but those who do definitely know you. They all talk to each other; sharing the good and the bad so the most important "brand" is reliability, consistency and trustworthiness. As we grew into multiple markets it became more important from the aspect of regional customer recognition. At one point we had several different names which came from a desire to be seen as "local" when we started and when we decided to operate under one name, branding ourselves became very important.

40. Which reprographics industry associations, organizations and/or affinity groups did you or your company participate in? Did your involvement with these associations or groups help your company's success, and, if so, how so?

We were in the US Repro Network and then in ReproMax. Yes they helped especially when the lines between local, regional, national and global became blurred. It was a huge sales tool for the distribute then print business model. It was helpful to be able to learn from others in the group in a setting that typically was not competitive in nature, and the suspicion of "misinformation" was minimized.

41. What common thread do the following businesses/industries hold in common: newspaper industry, map and atlas industry, magazine industry, publishing industry, phone book industry, reprographic industry? And, can we learn something through that common thread; can our industry apply the 'lesson of

the common thread' to our current circumstances?

All distribute information. I think it can be done, but for most it means reinventing themselves. For the larger companies it will be and has been bloody trying to “right size” themselves, and adjust from previous business models. It may be easier for the smaller companies or startups provided they have the right ingredients and outlook. When I look back I see that the industry went through many changes some more significant than others, this is by no means an insignificant change, but I do believe some will make it and prosper.

42. How do you view the future of the reprographics business and industry, five years from now, ten years from now?

I think it will be very different but those who can adapt to the needs of the customer will be fine.

43. In your opinion, what are the key issues that reprographers should be concerned with, now and as time marches on?

I think most importantly you have to get out in front of the customers, listen to their needs and figure out how to address them. They will always have needs and providing creative solutions that address them will always make you a winner in their eyes. Don't overdo it keep it simple, easy and to the point. Never get greedy.

Greg, thank you for participating in our series of interviews!