

Savvy Marketer Began as Savvy Print Businessman

By George Miller

WILTON, Conn.—June 27, 2006—Mark Kolier has a few ideas for print service providers who are bemoaning the state of their business. He's worth listening to because he has traveled their path, beginning his career as an account manager for a web printer and then finding his way to a successful marketing business.



Kolier

"Realize that when you create a piece of communication with your customer's name on it, you're in the direct marketing business," and not the printing business, said Kolier in an interview. He is president of Canterbury Graphics Strategic Marketing.

"Printers are no longer in the print business," Kolier said. From a manufacturing standpoint, printers understand that their customers need to make money. "But what they have difficulty coming to grips with is that their customers need to make their marketing more efficient, more effective," he said. Doing so involves tailoring communications to customer subsets, which involves getting your hands dirty with customer data in variable-data print projects.

Back in 1996, according to Kolier, marketing departments still had specialists on staff for every phase of print production. Print salesmen took orders and put ink on paper. That was before every business had a website and the printing industry was blindsided by the digital age.

Today, print production and all the other activities involved in direct marketing campaigns are integrated into a strategic process. To facilitate that process, Canterbury Graphics, under the new name Canterbury Graphics Strategic Marketing, has been redesigned to provide the breadth and depth of skills required for every piece of the direct marketing supply chain, from design to execution

A decade ago the company name was just Canterbury Graphics, a company that Kolier describes as a print manager, providing print production services for clients (and as opposed to print brokers, whose function is to put together print deals). He began as an account manager at a web printer in the 1980s, and then moved on to a more diversified print shop that did both sheet-fed and web printing. He has done print estimating, layout, and sales, and then worked in a business like the one he's in now—contracting jobs to printers, buying paper, and keeping inventories in manufacturing facilities.

Kolier said he recognized that the business model that had made Canterbury Graphics successful wouldn't work in the future. "Print production used to be a separate component in direct marketing," he said, "tacked on the end of a chain of related activities." Managing print production wasn't going to be enough anymore.

His company today provides skills and services needed to exceed the expectations of its direct-marketing customers. It even offers email marketing and web initiatives. As part of its direct-marketing commitment the company hired Peter Stein as director of business development. Stein is responsible for helping clients acquire new customers and retain existing ones through the use of data modeling and analytics and the development and execution of targeted marketing programs.

Such terms are unfamiliar to many in the print business. Kolier explained that in direct marketing, a company is trying to capture a sale on a one-to-one basis. Direct marketers need to understand the difference between customer acquisition and customer retention. Along these lines, digital print combined with variable data is going to work much better in customer-retention efforts.

Kolier acknowledges that the technology of direct marketing can push some print service providers out of their comfort zone. But there are a number of ways to get someone on staff with the necessary expertise. "Younger people are studying this in school—looking at numbers initially, then tendencies, and then rules," he said. "Data modeling is a pretty standard course offering in college. These are the folks we want to bring into our organization."

Kolier also notes another benefit of working with customer data: once you have it, "you're in a much stronger position to keep their business."