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INSERTS EAST

Flying Under the Radar

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SOMETIMES A simple plan can be made to look brilliant when it is backed by hard work and dedication to quality customer service. But perhaps what has really helped Inserts East, a free-standing insert printing specialist based in Pennsauken, NJ, is its ability to lay low in a niche populated by some large, national printers.

Make no mistake about it. Inserts East—though coined a boutique printer by company President

Nick Maiale—is not a small potatoes establishment. At \$50 million a year in annual sales, it is the envy of many smaller, mainstream commercial operations.

But Nick and his father Gino—who managed the company from its inception in 1972, when it was known as Able Printing—have expanded the company backed by old-fashioned values since acquiring it in 1996. In the beginning, the facility existed to produce coldset web/shopper's guide-type prod-

ucts. In fact, the primary title it produced was called the Shopper's Guide.

Keeping Jobs Local

The senior Maiale left the company in 1988 to start his own print brokerage, G&F Graphic Services. But in 1996, when Able Printing and the Shopper's Guide were sold to Newport Media, which planned to move printing operations to its Long Island facility, the Maiales came to the rescue, saving a couple dozen jobs while vowing to grow the company.

And grown it has: when the elder Maiale acquired the plant, there were only 24 employees and revenues of \$2 million. Today, there are 200 employees in the 110,000-square-foot facility generating \$50 million in annual sales. G&F Graphic Services, separate but located on-site with Inserts East, brokers out work such as direct mail, large signage and specialty items for large, national retailers.

"We are successful because of the faith customers have in us and the fact that we never let the grass

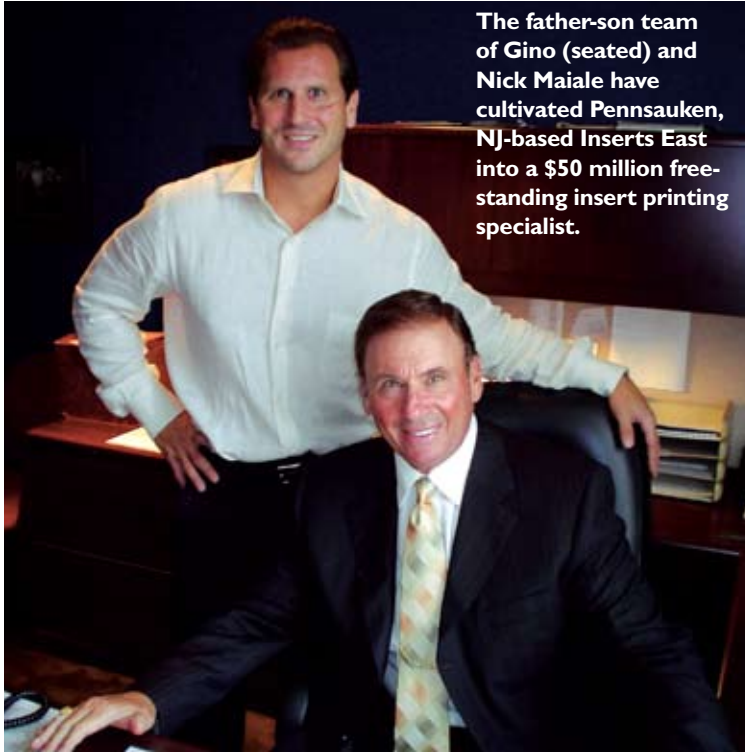
grow under our feet,” Nick Maiale says. “We’re constantly investing in technology to do a better job in prepress and the pressroom. We’re very much in touch with our customers, we listen to them and we grow with them. We’re always trying to do a better job.”

One step the Maiales have taken to accomplish this goal is by acquiring a new eight-color, 50” Goss C550i insert web press equipped with a C700 folder. The press, which was slated to start up by the end of last month, replaces an old eight-unit model, but it is hardly a straight swap. Inserts East has traditionally thrived in the four-page realm and has done well in that regard, but the C550i will allow it to venture into uncharted waters.

“The speed capabilities of the press and the web width will enable us to produce the same products much faster, plus go after the eight- and 16-page markets that we were competitive in before,” notes Nick Maiale, who anticipates the press will generate about \$15 million in additional revenues annually.

The 50” model joins three 36” Goss V-30 machines at Inserts East. Maiale was quite familiar with the C550i press, but since it had previously been made in a 40” configuration, it didn’t suit the printer’s needs. Should the press deliver—no pun intended—as advertised, he feels there is a good possibility Inserts East will add another model in the next year or so.

Along with the new web press, the printer picked up some other needed



The father-son team of Gino (seated) and Nick Maiale have cultivated Pennsauken, NJ-based Inserts East into a \$50 million free-standing insert printing specialist.

gear including four Gämmerler four-knife trimmers, which address customer needs for trim-to-bleed work. A large-format Kodak Magnus platesetter was also obtained to image the 50” plates.

Inserts East prints heatset offset newspaper insert products in the free-standing format—tabs, broadsheets, flexys and single sheets. A lot of the work walks a fine line between the commercial and insert markets, and Maiale runs a good deal of high-end commercial jobs. Grocery, carpet and furniture retailers are among their biggest customers, along with arts and crafts and fashion industry clients.

“We’ve carved out a real good niche,” Maiale says. “We’re situated in a good part of the country for freight, and for retailers in the Northeast corridor. We just want to build upon the successes we’ve had with the single-width presses, apply the same philosophies to this new line and bring higher volume customers into the plant.”

Inserts East needs every advantage it can garner. It locks horns, pricewise, on a regular basis with insert printing giants such as Quebecor World, Vertis Inc. and American Color. But Maiale believes his company isn’t even a blip on their radar screens.

Stacked With Talent

Still, Inserts East enjoys quality name recognition among its customers. It is through them that the printer’s legend grows.

“We’ve got talented people working here, and

they deserve plenty of credit,” Maiale says of company growth. “Much of our growth is also through word of mouth. My turnarounds are good, as well. Customers can call me on a Monday, I can get their job on-press by Tuesday and have it delivered to them by Thursday.

“Some of the big guys aren’t nearly as fast. We’ve been able to capitalize on that. There’s still room in the industry for a mom-and-pop type shop.”

While remaining a viable, profitable enterprise is important, Maiale is more concerned with fostering a business in which employees are proud to work for and in continuing the work that his father began. “I’m not going to revolutionize the printing business,” Maiale asserts. “I just set out to be a good printer and make a couple of dollars.

“I’ve got two daughters, ages 12 and nine, and my hope is that maybe one of them will say, ‘Dad, I’d like to work with you,’ ” he adds. “I’m only 40 years old, so I hope to be stirring things up for a few more years.” ■■