

'5S highlights the importance of Workplace organisation and trains your staff to implement best practice' Ryan O'Neal, BPIF Product Manager

- Improves working conditions
- Improves employee productivity
- Makes best use of available space

Navigating dangerous waters

How Benham Goodhead Print Group has weathered more than its fair share of adversity – thanks to the commitment and vision of its people

BGP had been sailing along in favourable trading seas for 33 years. But as so often, an unexpected iceberg appeared out of nowhere – and plunged the company's very existence into doubt.

The iceberg in question was the giant BT phone directory contract, which had come to dominate the company's work. It's often difficult to avoid becoming complacent in this sort of situation. It's also true that servicing a large and demanding customer can divert attention from other sources of business. Whatever the reality, BT ended the contract in March 2006. BGP lost half its revenues at a stroke.

Such a catastrophe could have capsized many a company. In any event, it was clear that it was a crunch period. If disaster was to

be averted, immediate action was needed.

Belief in action

Fortunately, the owner of BGP is the charismatic and larger-than-life Sir John Madejski. The self-made millionaire who founded Auto Trader is the Chairman of Reading FC and is definitely a "glass half full" personality, whose optimistic take values British manufacturing and grit. There was also, he felt, too much at stake to simply walk away. As he put it, "You don't just gamble with five to six hundred people's lives."

So he took the immediate action that was required. His first move was to bring in David Holland as the new CEO. The next month, the entire existing executive team was ousted. BGP was under new management. It had clearly learnt its lesson.

"We decided on a strategy where there was no dependency on a single major contract," says Holland. "We have invested in the sales and marketing strength to deliver that."

Massive investment

New blood in terms of personnel and management skill sets has certainly been instrumental in the turnaround of the company. But so too has the investment made by Madejski, who has personally bankrolled over £60 million to transform the company – thought to be the largest single investment in a printing company by a private individual.

The results are dramatic. Today, thanks to its state-of-the-art equipment and the sheer scale of its operations, BGP can claim one of the best heat set web offset printing facilities in Europe.

Even the severity of the recession failed to dim Madejski's fervent belief in the company and its people – despite paper companies withdrawing £8 million worth of credit lines in 2009. For him, the company has the right kit at the right time in the right place. Given those circumstances, success is inevitable. "Whatever anyone else is doing, we can do it better."

The tide turns

The efficiency of the revitalised operation is winning a steady stream of new orders from new customers such as DC Thomson as well as from organic growth from Bauer Media, Northern & Shell and others. This complements its long-standing relationships with such names as Private Eye and The Big Issue – and vindicates the strategy of not being dependent on any single contract.

After a few torrid years, the tide definitely looks to be turning in the company's favour. Although it's made losses since 2007, it's now running over seven web presses, became ebitda positive a year ago, and Holland predicts that it will be in 'real profit' by the end of the year.

When BGP does get back into the black, it will be a cause for celebration: not only for all the hard work and effort and belief in the company that's paid off, but also in confounding the doomsayers who had predicted its demise.

People power

As well as the investment injection, the company has also gained momentum by bringing new people on board. Mark Guyer, formerly with the BPIF, is heading up the Performance Improvement section of BGP and, amongst other initiatives is helping to implement 5S, which is all about people taking ownership of areas of a business and is the foundation stone of world class manufacturing. It also improves communication, so that everyone knows what they are responsible for – something particularly useful for BGP with its 24/7 operation.

Another key appointment was Jim Mellon who currently is Director responsible for the DC

Thomson outsourcing project having developed and initiated training programmes for a new customer service resource within the business. Jim is recognised as one of the most experienced managers in the industry. His hire underlined the importance the company attaches to both getting the right people and providing the best training.

To enhance that aspect, the BPIF has been working with BGP for the past six months. BPIF Training's Kathy Woodward and Dominic Wing have worked with the customer service teams to define what this means to BGP. This process began by getting David Holland's thoughts, and this has then spread throughout the company to foster a culture of mutual learning.

Kathy Woodward comments: "Our approach at the BPIF is to adapt to a company and work with its vision and mission. That's exactly what we've done at BGP. In fact, it feels like we're really part of the company; we understand the vision and help them to make it more focused, to help them win more new business in the future."

→ For more information contact BPIF Training on 01676 526 039.



BGP AT A GLANCE

Founded in 1973, BGP is the largest single-site web offset facility in the UK. Based in Bicester, Oxfordshire, it operates in the magazine, catalogue, commercial, directory and financial markets, providing a 24 hour service, seven days a week.

In 2009 it completed the major phase of an investment programme which has resulted in an array of new equipment spanning all departments from Pre-press, Press, Finishing, Packing and Despatch. It has however continued to invest the most recent addition being a state-of-the-art 35,000 cph Ferag Rotative Gathering Stitching and Inserting System for £3m, due for commissioning in December.

Its mix of technology through all departments enables it to offer the flexibility of 4pp increments and improved efficiency, with wide ranging run length capabilities even on the larger format 72pp presses.

BGP is accredited to ISO 9000:2000, 14001:2005 and OHSAS 18001, and has completed part of the audit process for ISO 12647/2. The company aims to reduce energy consumption as far as is practically possible.