

# Success Amid the Mess

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**G**IVE THE editors at PRINTING IMPRESSIONS a little bit of credit. It takes a lot of chutzpah to go door-to-door (so to speak) in the printing industry, asking America's leading printers to provide their sales figures for the latest fiscal year completed in order to compile the annual *PI* 400.

Sure, a few doors were slammed in our faces. And some irate executives pointed us toward a warmer climate. But, in the end, we were able to get our 400 companies. Enjoy the tipped-in insert, but don't linger over the percentage sales changes from year to year, as it is a bit depressing.

The economy is still moving at a pace that one might expect to see in a foot race between Mr. Magoo and Droopy Dog. But it's not all doom and gloom. A number of firms have bucked the downward trend via innovation, hard work, investment in technology and a willingness to be bold and different.

The following printing company profiles underscore the notion that there is hope for the industry and a clear vision toward success—and prosperity—for those firms unafraid to plan for success in an environment that calls for fear and inactivity. These three profiles offer more than a little hope that 2011 could mark a return to the “old normal” for companies daring enough to defy the economy.

## Classic Graphics

Charlotte, NC

**MOST RECENT FISCAL YEAR SALES:**

\$34.35 million

**PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR SALES:**

\$30.63 million

**CHANGE:** 12 Percent

IT IS a far cry from the day Bill Gardner and David Pitts opened shop in 1983 with just \$600 in working capital. The company generated \$65,000 that first year and has blossomed into a formidable digital, wide-format and offset printer, with sales that were projected to approach \$40 million by the end of this year.

There have been many changes over the years at Classic. A second facility in Morrisville, NC, was established in 1996. Classic also started a fulfillment and mailing company (Opus Direct) in 2003, and bought its first color digital press, an HP Indigo 5000, later that same year. The company celebrated 25 years in business by instituting an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) and, in 2011, Classic plans to consolidate its operations into a 180,000-square-foot facility.

“Years of investment in technology are starting to pay off,” notes Pitts. “2008 was our toughest year, with sales down 10 percent, so our rebound in 2009 was welcome. We added a couple of key new custom-

ers and were fortunate to be positioned well with a few accounts that emphasized the kinds of promotions that we were doing for them to combat the tough years they were having in their businesses.

“The trend continues and sales in 2010 will finish at \$39+ million, and we are adding 70 percent to our Charlotte footprint with a move in early 2011.”

Classic Graphics hasn't added any significant gear in the last 18 months, but Pitts says that an eight-color press will be added shortly. Its mailing and kitting capacity will be expanded through automated collation systems, while some digital wide-format capacity will join the fold in early 2011. Overall, capex is slated to be upwards of \$5 million.

“We have changed our approach to new business development, separating it more and more from account management,” Pitts remarks. “Ask me in a couple of years if it was smart.”

## Midland Information Resources

Davenport, IA

**MOST RECENT FISCAL YEAR SALES:**

\$31.90 million

**PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR SALES:**

\$20.20 million

**CHANGE:** 58 Percent

MIDLAND Information Resources began life in 1982 as Midland Press. Despite the more elaborate moniker, print is still the center of its business universe. Just keep in mind that a universe is unimaginably huge. Midland made the jump to 100 percent digital printing in 2007, and its other services include software, CD/DVD duplication, enterprise content management, transitional warehousing, fulfillment and distribution.

One of Midland's largest client verticals is the manufacturing sector, but it has also seen growth in the publishing and testing markets. New manufacturing and testing clients have provided some of the company's 58 percent increase in sales. The company has also targeted Fortune 1000 companies with its total package solutions, according to Mary Gehrls, senior vice president.

Midland has certainly augmented its manufacturing capabilities in the past year. It installed an Océ 6250 earlier this year, a three-knife trimmer/drill combination and spent money on its systems infrastructure. Gehrls reveals the company is likely to invest in new color digital printing gear in the near term. Future growth will also be propelled by the Midland's membership in the International Printers Network.

“Several years back, we came up with the strategy of really looking for that short-run, total solutions package,” she concludes. “We are now seeing the fruits of our labor coming through.”

## PrintPlace.com

Arlington, TX

**MOST RECENT FISCAL YEAR SALES:**

\$25 million

**PREVIOUS FISCAL YEAR SALES:**

\$19 million

**CHANGE:** 32 Percent

AS A new generation of print buyers replaces the old guard, it brings with it different ideas regarding the procurement of print. Some of those views ruffle the feathers of the old guard but, for some printers, it represents an opportunity. Included in that group is online printer PrintPlace.com.

PrintPlace.com promises high-quality, full-color offset printing



PrintPlace.com has continued year-over-year growth by marrying ease of ordering and job management with complete dependability.

with a quick turn time. Its online ordering model boasts an instant quote tool and proofs at no extra cost, with real-time order tracking capabilities. Its customer pool comprises graphic designers, print resellers, corporate in-house creative departments, publishers and small businesses with in-house graphic designers.

Some of the astounding 32 percent growth can be attributed to PrintPlace.com taking share away from the more traditional procurement outlets, notes Shawn Petersen, president and CEO.

“As new print buyers have entered the industry, they have become more conditioned to look online for needed products and services,” he says. “For a professional print buyer, the focus has shifted to estimating, ordering and proofing online. PrintPlace has continued year-over-year growth because we marry ease of ordering and job management with complete dependability by guaranteeing quality, turnaround and pricing.”

While Petersen would not provide specifics, he did note that PrintPlace has made “significant” equipment investments over the past 18 months in half- and full-web offset presses, traditional sheetfed offset gear and bindery equipment. Petersen vows the company will continue making necessary investments to enable PrintPlace to maintain its status as a growing online print provider.

“We will continue to emphasize our commitment to both quality and customer service, which have been key in our growth thus far,” he says. “Our aim is to continually improve all facets of the business with an eye toward making a significant contribution to the printing industry as a whole.” **PI**