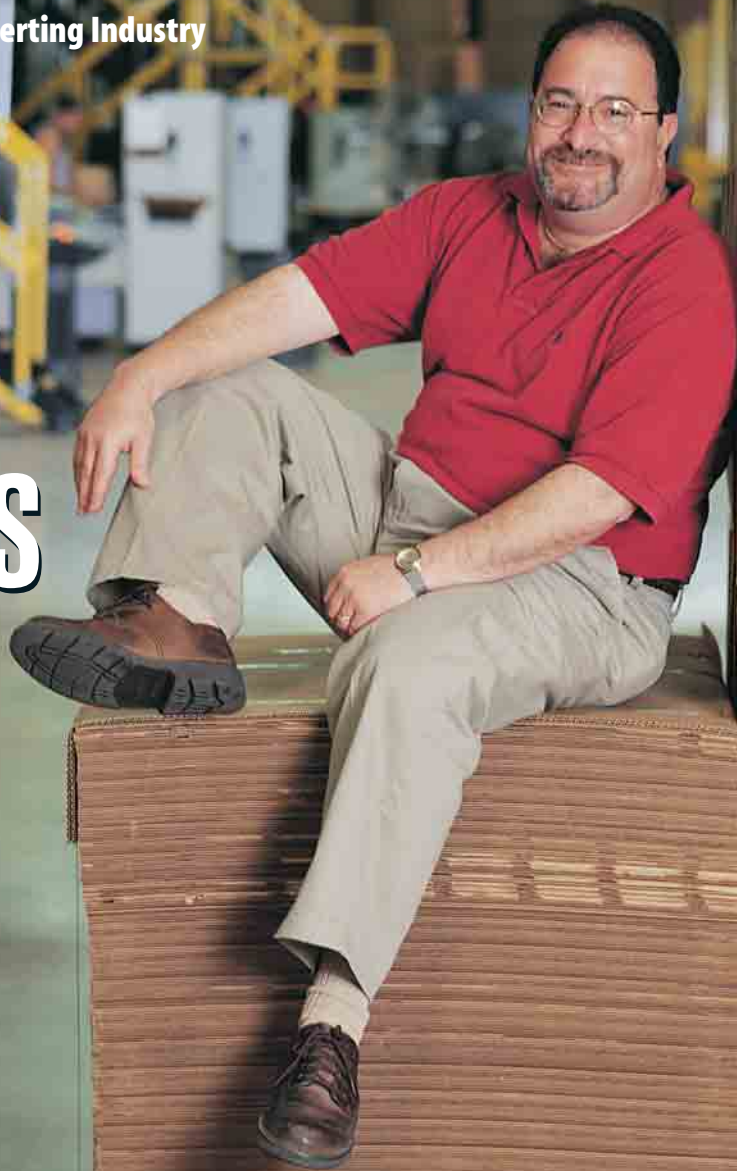


APRIL 2002

PAPERBOARD PACKAGING

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Three
Sheets
to the
Win



Boutwell, Owens' 'Total Package'

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The Total Package

Boutwell, Owens & Co. can be anything to its clients.

BY NEIL BRETT

Contributing Author

F M. Boutwell founded his one-person print shop in Leominster, Mass., in 1887 on the principle that service and quality would always be his benchmark. When his daughter Louise took over, the print shop had grown. Knowing that she needed help to run the operation, she sought a partner who would understand her father's devotion to excellence. She found that partner in Harvey Owens, an inventor-entrepreneur who eventually incorporated the ever-growing company in 1920.

Returning home after World War II, Harvey's son-in-law, Jack Such, joined the firm, and ultimately, Jack's son Jay assumed the presidency of Boutwell, Owens, & Co., Inc. In 1985, Jay sold the firm to the McLaughlin family out of a desire to see the company continue to reach its potential.

Although no members of the original family remain as shareholders today, F.M. Boutwell's principles of service and quality persevere. The current

and future direction of the company lies in the hands of four managers: President Ward McLaughlin, the majority stockholder; Brian Jansson, vice president of finance and administration; Larry Kelly, vice president of operations and systems; and Bill Hodges, vice president of sales and marketing.

The four have steered the company to significant growth in recent years. Today, the company is well-known for its printing and packaging capabilities and has won recognition from its clients and the industry at large for its quality work. It received a "Vendor of the Year" award in September from Garrity Industries, one of the world's leading makers of flashlights. Compaq Computer awarded Boutwell the Americas' Software Manufacturing Business Supplier Excellence Award for the printing and packaging company's outstanding contributions in customer satisfaction, quality and delivery performance, technology improvements, and quality programs.

The continued recognition for its fine work has helped the company grow steadily. Industry publication *Printing Impressions* ranks Boutwell, Owens, & Co. the 283rd largest printing company in the country in 2001 with estimated sales of \$22.94 million. The company's ranking in *Printing Impressions'* list of the largest 400 companies for 2000 was 288th with annual sales of \$21.3 million. Boutwell, Owens employs 170 people.

Boutwell, Owens manufactures custom printed paperboard packaging including custom and combination blister cards, skin packaging sheets, stretch pack cards, folding cartons, insert or clamshell cards, point-of-purchase displays, diecut specialty items, printed lithographic sheets, and store headers.

The company offers computer-aided design and samplmaking, multi-color printing, offline and in-line coating including blister, barrier, ultraviolet, and aqueous gloss, windowing and gluing, hand assembly, and contract packaging.

From Soup to Nuts

To that end, Hodges touts Boutwell, Owens & Co. as the "complete package" company offering an array of services from printing to inventory management.

"Without a doubt, we are about service and we

One of the company's three Mitsubishi presses.





The current direction of Boutwell, Owens and Co. lies in the hands of (front, left) President Ward McLaughlin, Bill Hodges, vice president of sales and marketing, (back, left) Brian Jansson, vice president of finance and administration, and Larry Kelly, vice president of operations and systems.

want to take care of those who we do business with,” he says. “We offer the ability to bring a customer from concept to finished production and beyond. I think it’s a constant challenge to provide as much value as you can.

“When I do a presentation, I try to articulate: ‘What are your needs, and how can we custom engineer a solution to meet those needs?’ When you look at business from this perspective, you truly discover the meaning of the word, ‘partnership.’ We consider our client relationships to be an important component in our strategic plan,” he says.

Hodges also wants to remain focused on the company’s areas of core expertise: printing and packaging. “As an ISO 9001 registered company, it is critically important to stick to the knitting, and focus on developing systems to ensure consistent and reliable levels of quality,” he says.

“We are very committed to maintaining our core focus, while striving diligently to be a total packaging solution to our clients. Our manufacturing operations are structured and managed to produce printed paperboard packaging, yet our market demands much more. Therefore, our core expertise of our plants is by virtue of its design, different from the core expertise of our sales team.

“We have focused our energies on developing a sales team whose knowledge and capabilities allow them to transcend all areas of retail packaging, allowing them to manage projects that go beyond the scope of our printing plants. Every Boutwell sales professional has in-depth knowledge of all aspects of packaging, providing a consultative offering to our clients.

“I really refuse to allow the core competency of our plants to get distracted by meddling around in the thermoforming business or co-packaging, because

both of them are very specialized businesses,” he continues. “Each requires intense management focus and a different level of expertise, but they are both very important to our business. One of the things we excel at is looking at client needs. Sometimes that crosses the boundaries of our core expertise.”

The solution, he says, was to develop strategic partnerships.

“We have two thermoforming partnerships, one being Capco Plastics, the other Lion Plastics,” Hodges says. “We have partnered with both companies to supply thermoforming as well as paperboard packaging to our customers. By teaming up with these two firms on key accounts, we have the ability to work together to bring a total packaging solution to the client through a single point of contact. We can then offer as an added-value to a customer the benefit of one-stop shopping.”

However, there are times when it is more advantageous to purchase companies and move a service in-house, Hodges continues.

“We decided six years ago to bring our electronic prepress operations in-house in an effort to streamline the workflow and enhance our competitive position,” he says. “That strategic move followed a three-year strategic partnership with an outside firm. We originally went on the outside to secure those services due to the enormous learning curve with the advent of the new electronics graphic age, and we took our time to make an informed decision on the most advantageous workflow and technology migration to suit our needs.

“In the case of electronic prepress, we decided that the out-sourced service was rapidly becoming a part of our core product offering and it was strategically important to internalize that capability.”

A Basic Philosophy

Staying true to its philosophy of maintaining its core focus, Boutwell, Owens & Co., Inc. purchased the Providence, R.I.-based SP Harris Co. last year.

“We bought them and moved them into our fa-



“One of the things we excel at is looking at client needs. Sometimes that crosses the boundaries of our core expertise.”

-B. HODGES

An employee works on one of the plant’s two Bobst Autoplaten diecutters.

cility," Hodges says. "They were a blister card and folding carton manufacturer. Today, the long traditions of quality and service that were a cornerstone of the SP Harris Co. are an integral part of the Boutwell, Owens offering to its clients. Both companies had similar histories and complementary value structures, resulting in a very smooth acquisition."

The acquisition of the SP Harris Co. pushed Boutwell, Owens & Co. sales into the \$25 million range.

Hodges says the company's basic philosophy is very simple: to find customers who attach a quantitative value to its services. "We have to be brave enough to say to a customer, who only wants low price and doesn't want the design expertise and ancillary services, that they would be better off going somewhere else," he says.

"Sometimes, the margins get to the point where you just have to let a piece of business go, and usually it will come back to you with a newfound respect for the value that your firm provides.

"On the other hand, you had better be doing everything in your power to leverage your strengths to stay as competitive as possible within your core expertise, and consistent with the position of your key competitors. Today's market is not for the faint of heart."

To meet those changing needs, the company purchased an Agfa Galileo computer-to-plate system last October and is currently in the process of implementation.

"We need to be on the leading edge of technology and computer-to-plate is the current horizon," he says. "This means we are probably going to go through a five-year migration of moving our customers from conventional film into totally digital imaging."

Hodges also knows that technology is only as good as the people who use it. "We had many of our pre-press staff away at Agfa for training," he says. And keeping staff current with technology is vital to the success of the company; also critical in retaining them.

Perhaps the most telltale sign of the allure of this company is the presence of two people in its employee ranks. Jay Such, the grandson of Harvey Owens, returned to the company five years after selling the firm to its present owners and he now serves in a senior sales management capacity.

"Jay could have gone anywhere he wanted but he chose to return to where he started his career, and he has been very successful as an integral part of our team," Hodges proudly states.

Ken Hatch, the former president of SP Harris, was retained by Boutwell following the acquisition of his firm and he too serves in a senior sales management capacity.

"Ken was faced with a similar choice to Jay's and he too decided to join our team. The entrepreneurial spirit that these two guys have brought to my team is incredible and a considerable factor in our future growth plans," Hodges adds.

"When I am in a presentation, I tell a customer or potential client, 'Look, I am not speaking to you on behalf of myself only, but on behalf of my employees, 170 of the finest packaging experts in our industry. Value speaks louder than price every day of the week, if the client needs what you have, and you have what they need.'" **PBP**

Neil Brett is a freelance writer living in North Grafton, Mass. He can be reached at ndbrett@aol.com. This article was originally printed in the January 2002 issue of New England Printer and Publisher Magazine.

Boutwell, Owens' Equipment Mix

CAD Design

- Artios CAD from Barco
- 12 Interactive Work Stations
- Kongsberg CM1309 Plotter and Sample Maker

Prepress-Conventional

- Two Misomex Step and Repeat Machines
- Dupont Film Processor
- Dupont Plate Processor
- Numerous Light Tables
- Four Vacuum Frames

Electronic Prepress

- High-end Macintosh Work Stations
- Agfa 2400 dpi CCD Color Scanner (11" by 16")

- HP Laserjet 4 mv (600 dpi, 11" by 17")
- Agfa Galileo® Digital Proofer
- Agfa Accuset Imagesetter
- X-Rite Densitometers
- X-Rite Spectrophotometer

Finishing Equipment

- Two International Speed King Gluers
- Two International Speed Queen Right Angle Gluers
- International 6 FX Gluer
- Bobst Baby 20-inch Miniature Gluer
- International 5A Window Machine
- Kohmann 1350-4 Window Machine
- Bestronic Shrink Film Sealer
- Woodward Jogger Aerator

Sheeting and Trimming

- Clark Aiken Board Sheeter
- 42-inch Lawson Programmed Cutter

- 42-inch Polar Programmed Cutter
- Strachan Menshaw Board Sheeter

Pressroom

- Mitsubishi 6-color 28- by 40-inch sheet-fed press with inline Dahlgren coater
- Mitsubishi 6-color 28- by 40-inch sheet-fed press with inline Dahlgren tower coater
- Mitsubishi 8-color 28- by 40-inch sheet-fed press – print 7-color and inline over 1 UV cure with Dahlgren Tower Coater and GMI Color System

Diecutting

- Two Bobst 102E Autoplaten diecutters
- Iberica Autoplaten diecutter with full blanking capability
- Offline pre-makeready for stripping and blanking units