

Patting Yourself on the Back

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Congratulations to all the industrial and specialty printers who have not only made it through the recession, but have also prospered during it. While much of the printing industry at large is treading water (at best), many of you have found innovative ways to grow your business by double-digit margins. Many commercial printers are currently green with envy.

Best of all, it looks like greener pastures await. According a recent study on printed electronics from Electronics.ca Publications, the global market—valued at \$3.5 billion in 2011—is expected to increase to \$12.6 billion by 2016. That’s a five-year compound annual growth rate of 29.4%. That’s amazing growth, but don’t spend too much time patting yourself on the back.

I’ve seen too many printing companies take the leading edge on a technology or market and then find themselves swallowed up when they start to rest on their laurels. It’s a global marketplace.

Here are a few examples on how some of your peers are keeping their foot on the gas, and also share some three strategies for continued growth to consider as you move forward.

STILL GROWING STRONG

You may have heard of these companies. You may even compete with these companies. They’re all moving forward, making sure their growth outpaces the growth of this red-hot sector:

- Technomark (www.technomark.com): Making EL lighting and membrane switches, Technomark engineered an aggressive growth strategy using a merger and acquisition to acquire a local competitor. In the process, they added talent, technologies, capacity, and expanded their customer list.

- Ellumilite (www.ellumilite.com): This electroluminescent lamp manufacturer

divested from its membrane and electronics business to focus on EL. They’re now specializing in the development of new power sources and new manufacturing capabilities, and expanding into untapped markets.

- Emerald Corporation (www.emeraldcorporation.com): Engineering and manufacturing products for medical, appliance, and automotive markets, the Emerald Corporation decided to pursue growth by hiring top executive talent to form new business strategies. They’re now looking to grow through M&A expansion.

- Duratech (www.duratech.com): This provider of identification graphics is attacking on multiple fronts. They added talent, new technologies, new capabilities.

All of these businesses have one thing in common: They acted strategically and decisively and took a risk. Unfortunately, many companies decide to sit tight, and be happy to keep making money and pleasing customers. You see, businesses can’t stand still. You’re either moving forward or you’re moving backwards.

Here are a few examples of growth that may involve stepping outside your comfort zone, but they’re ideal ways to avoid standing still. Align yourself with your top accounts: Many executives feel like they’re going to the well too often when they explore new opportunities with their top clients, but you shouldn’t. These people are your top clients for a reason: They trust you. Show them you can help them even further.

Strategically partner with a key supplier: Can you complement the offering of a key supplier? For a long time Vomela Specialty Company served as a testing-ground for innovative products from the 3M Company. Can you establish a similar relationship with one of your suppliers?

Consider a merger and acquisition. If

you can’t beat ‘em, buy ‘em. Or be bought by them. Opening yourself up to an M&A is one of the fastest ways to accelerate your growth, and you don’t have to give up the farm to do it.

Okay, so you choose to move forward. The big question is when should you act? It’s kind of like having a baby. There is no perfect time to have a child. It’s more a case of how prepared you are to become a parent and how you’ll progress moving forward. The same holds true for growing your organization. Is your company based strictly on a new technology? Are you less of a marketer and more of an operations person? Do you like to delve into the financials of your situation, or would you prefer to leave that to the experts?

These are all important considerations to make because your weakness may need to be bolstered by someone else’s strengths. That may mean hiring new internal talent to pursue organic growth strategies, or enlisting the help of a team of outside advisors to pursue a merger and acquisition.

I’ve listed just a few of the many examples of fast-track growth opportunities that are available. Remember, there is no right or wrong time to engage in these methods, only a right and wrong way to execute them. Move wisely, but most importantly, move. ●



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