A will and a way

How Imagine Charlotte went from 600 sq. ft. to every corner of the country.

IMAGINE Charlotte

Imagine Charlotte
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Country: US
Segments: General Commercial
 Printing & Direct Mail

Imagine Charlotte, formerly known as Classic Graphics, was founded in 1983, with a $15,000 borrowed from the partners' families, in a 600-square-feet space behind a convenience store. Now it is 350,000 square feet in Charlotte and Concord, North Carolina. The important components of that growth were their customer focus and a fearless willingness to invest. They are fortunate that they have had impeccable timing in almost every case, and they've backed that up with an incredible company culture. By joining the Imagine Group and Oakhill Capital, Imagine Charlotte expanded the company's reach to other existing group locations in Minnesota, Illinois, and California.

HP: Bill, what's the secret of success for Imagine Charlotte?

BK: I think I can answer that in two words: people first. People like working here, and we've always been the place in the Charlotte area that they want to work for. Even though we were acquired in 2013, we want to maintain that people focus.

HP: Your four locations cover the whole country, strategically.

BK: I think we've got really solid leadership and great direction for the business. We're enthusiastic about where we're going, because of our unique mix of services. We're much more than a production facility or a fulfillment operation. We're also a creative agency, engaged in graphics, retail, direct mail, and corporate marketing. You've got to break some molds to accomplish that.

> "When we started out, we had the will to completely meet our customers' needs, but we didn't have the technology solution. That's changed with the T230."

HP: How was HP able to partner with you? What's it been like?

BK: We've had a long relationship. We've always been a heavy HP Indigo user, but when it was time to consider a high-volume digital press for our growing direct mail business, we explored HP PageWide, and we were able to build some cost savings into our T230 contract.

HP outperformed the competition for our demonstration and press samples. They pretty much did everything they said they would do flawlessly, which wasn't the case everywhere we went. And I liked HP's lower-cost head-replacement model, as we only had a single point of failure; instead of longer-lasting, more expensive heads that required a technician to come in and replace. The other thing I liked was the availability of the priming unit. We found a good niche for that device in a product we run a lot of, and nobody else was offering that at the time, so it made a lot of sense. Its ability to do so much variable content so fast has been a money maker, no question. We're much more focused on variable content than static.

HP: Can you share what other kinds of variable content you're doing?

BK: Store-specific signage—that's a very productive way we took a lot of work off our Indigos. And it's opened up some markets for us and some options for our clients to drive down the cost of full-color variables such as posters and shelf labels. That's very attractive to retailers.

HP: Do you see yourselves as innovators?

BK: We've used technology to provide unique solutions for our clients, fully customized multi-marketing sites and things like that. We've combined strong data/content management with custom application development.

HP: What's your situation today and how has HP contributed to that?

BK: Today, we're a full-service provider that can do it all in the PSP space. When we started out, we had the will to completely meet our customers' needs, but we didn't have the technology solution. That's changed with the T230. The machine's versatility, its ability to match offset for print quality, the lower cost of ownership and the speed of turnarounds, all helped us broaden our reach for complex variable content work and improve our cost structure.

But, as I said, we couldn't have done it without our people.

To learn more about HP PageWide Web Presses and introducing the new HP PageWide Web Press T250 HD with HP Brilliant Ink, please visit hp.com/pagewidewebpressT250.