

The printer people



(Top) The Cannon IV headquarters in Indianapolis. (Bottom Left) Cannon IV President Jerry Jones explaining the company's history and its origins in the Kee Lox company. (Bottom Right) Cannon IV's showroom located in the company's Indianapolis-based headquarters.

Though based in Indianapolis, Cannon IV is developing a significant presence in Fort Wayne's printer sales and service market.

article by Jennifer Timpe • photos by Kathleen Haley

Cannon IV's emphasis on same-day service will mean an even stronger local presence for this Indianapolis-based company specializing in printer service and computer supplies.

Cannon IV distinguishes itself from its competition by making a commitment to quality service unlike any other. The plan keeps customers happy, and has resulted in a significant increase in business along the way. It is also the impetus that is driving the company's continued growth up the I-69 corridor to the Fort Wayne market.

Cannon IV's President, Jerry Jones, and his father Richard co-founded the company in 1974, as a spin-off of the Kee Lox office supply company. By the time of Richard's death in 1978, "business had quickly evolved from carbon paper and ribbons to the computer, so we decided to stay away from office supplies," recalls Jones. "We decided to focus on anything from the large computer room to the desktop."

By the mid-1980s, Richard's dream of all four Jones brothers being involved in the business came true, when Jeff, John, and Jim joined brother Jerry in the front office.

It was also around that time that this small company started to make some big waves. "In 1987 we were IBM's Dealer of the Year," says Jones. "We were a small company competing against giants. When that happened, it put us on the map locally and nationally."

It also got the attention of Hewlett Packard, who courted Cannon IV to become a dealer. Today, Hewlett Packard is the dominant presence in the company's product line, representing about 70 percent of its business; the rest is split between smaller brands like Lexmark, Okidata and Imation, and Cannon IV's office supply catalog.

Traditionally, the core of Cannon IV's business was its supply and printer presence in Indiana, Ohio and Illinois, with other customers scattered nationwide. But with the company's acquisition in January, 2003 of Texas-based Print Assist, that circle has widened. The cost-per-page provider brings with it a solid presence in 13 states and a strong reputation in the printer service industry.

Cannon IV officials are quick to point out that the company has been able to successfully navigate several growth stages and acquisitions through the

years because of its strong sense of values. "We created a value statement before a mission statement," says Jones. "When you find the right group and you can build a strong culture with strong values, the product really isn't important, and consequently I think the company can go through any number of evolutions and it doesn't become as catastrophic as it does with some businesses that are product focused."

Essentially, the system allows for a great amount of individual responsibility and decision making. "Most importantly, it means when you hit a fork in the road, you know you are empowered to do the right thing. You don't have as many problems then," says Jones.

Three years ago, the company moved its headquarters from an old schoolhouse on Fall Creek Parkway in Indianapolis to a brand new building just east of downtown. Half of the 40,000 square-foot facility is devoted to sales and service, including accounting and customer support; the other half is a centralized distribution center.

The service department in particular is very active, with no less than 20 out-bound technicians on call at any given

time. It is this side of the business where the company differentiates itself from its competition.

For a mid-sized operation like Cannon IV, competition runs the gamut, from multi-billion dollar companies with strong distribution models like Corporate Express and Boise Cascade, to small mom-and-pop shops. In reality, Cannon IV is one of the larger independent resellers that fit into the model of Hewlett Packard's printing solutions. "We're certainly not close to the big guys, but we're still a significant player, certainly regionally," says Jones.

The service side is also where the company is hoping to see the most growth in the near future. "The product is very easily replicated," says Jones. "You can buy Hewlett Packard products from so many other areas and there are so many knock-offs so it's hard to differentiate."

Hard doesn't mean impossible, however, and Cannon IV has devised a service system unlike any other. Not only do they make a commitment to fix a printer, but 95 percent of the time, they can answer the call and repair the printer within four hours. The secret lies in giving almost complete autonomy to the outbound technicians. Each is equipped with a mobile inventory supply system consisting of the most popular and commonly used parts, toner cartridges, etc. When they leave for a job in the morning, there's a pretty good chance they'll be able to fix the problem without having to come back.

"No one else in the city is doing anything close to that," says Jones. "That's what's really separating us. Our business is almost doubling every year as a result of that."

The momentum built from gaining a quality service reputation in the Indianapolis metro area is leading Cannon IV up the I-69 corridor to Fort Wayne. The company has had a sales presence in the market from day one, and current sales representative John Fazio has been establishing computer supply customers in the area for 15 years.

Now he and Cannon IV are ready to take those customers to the next level. "John felt that some of his customers could benefit by having printer service to go along with the supplies he was already selling them," says Mark Wyrick, a service consultant working with Fazio to establish new printer service sales in the Fort Wayne area.

Some of those existing clients are already warming up to the idea. Label manufacturer Fasson-Avery Dennison has over 50 printers on full-service contract, while Insurance & Risk Management uses Cannon IV as their service provider. The company also just landed a large printer service contract



photo by Steve Vorderman

John Fazio is Cannon IV's sales representative serving the Fort Wayne market.

with the statewide Indiana University campus network, which includes the IPFW campus. "The entrée is hardware, but with that we'll also be able to do service and supplies," says Jones.

With such a large customer base to work with, the biggest obstacle Cannon IV currently has in the Fort Wayne market is not being able to do business locally. For the few clients they do provide printer services for, they are currently working on a next-day response. For the most part, they don't seem to mind the wait, but the opposition is there.

"Timeliness is sometimes more appreciated than effectiveness," says Wyrick. "A local person can be there the same day but not do as good a job as we might do the next day." Eventually, the goal is to establish enough of a customer base here to justify employing a full-time technician in Fort Wayne. When that happens, it would be the first market outside of Indianapolis to provide full-time same-day service.

In the meantime, customers based in Fort Wayne or elsewhere have access to a wealth of information and help through Cannon IV's e-commerce platform. By logging onto the company's Web site they can order supplies online, track invoices and back orders, and place service requests. The company also is one of the few of its kind in the Midwest to provide a complete online asset management program. Once their printers are tagged and in the system, IT directors can create a complete, cradle-to-grave report allowing them to see how much they spend on repairs, supplies, etc.

So far focusing solely on printer service has paid off financially, but Cannon IV is about more than just the bottom line; giving back to the community is equally important. In the early 1990s, the

company embarked on a massive effort to recycle its customers' printer cartridges. The result has become an award-winning, environmentally friendly recycling effort that amounts to virtually no landfill waste.

"We are not a company that is going to take on networking solutions, we're not figuring out how to sell you laptops, we're not trying to sell you copiers," says Jones. "We're going to focus in on that printing solution — whether it's color or ink jet or wide format — because we are the printer people." •

for your information

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NO. OF EMPLOYEES:

100

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

28

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:

Providers of printers and printer service, and computer supplies