

APDSP Today

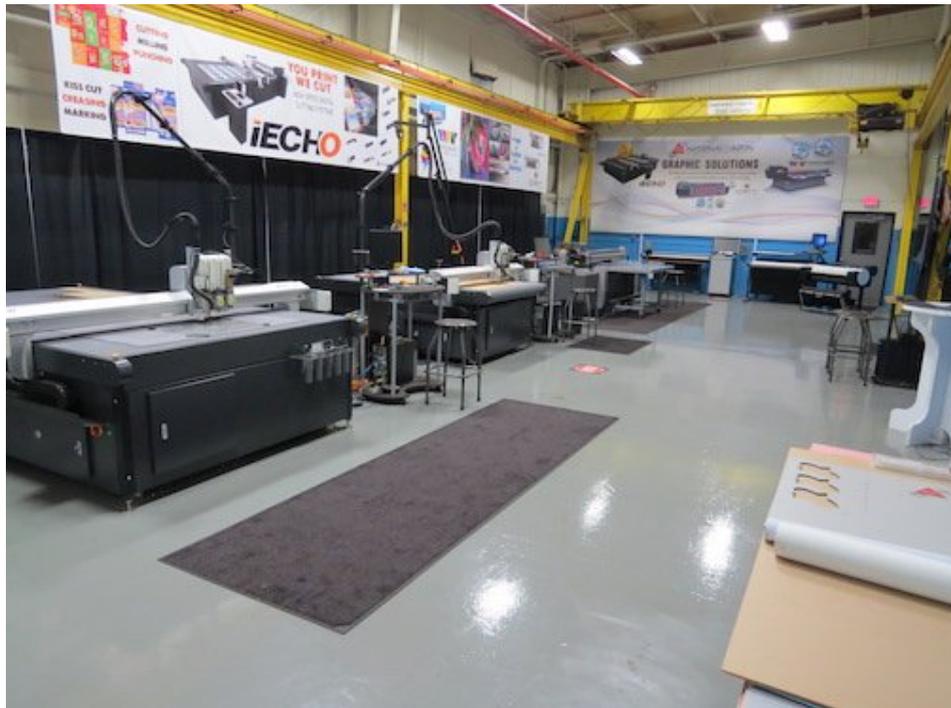
Association of Printing and Data Solutions Professionals ♦ Formerly IRgA

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Q&A: Rich Gigl – National / AZON Thrives Post-Media

January 17, 2019

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National / AZON's demo area can be used to replicate customer situations and develop solutions.

Editor's Note: National / AZON is a familiar name to people in the reprographics industry, but the company is a long way from its roots as a media supplier. In this Q&A, National / AZON Senior Vice President Rich Gigl explains that the company has truly hit its stride as a large-format printing equipment supplier.

APDSP: People know National / AZON for its media roots, but now you're all about equipment. What happened?

Gigl: Yes, historically National / AZON was a media manufacturer and vendor. But most of our media business was east of the Mississippi, so we weren't a national vendor, per se. To be a player in the media business these days, we would have had to expand our operations and start manufacturing out west. But the media business has become cutthroat and the margins are dropping; we would not have made back that investment. So, when Dietzgen came to us in 2017 with a good offer to buy our media business, the time was right. We sold the entire media division and all of our manufacturing capability to them.



APDSP: And what did your customers think about that move?

Gigl: We didn't know exactly how our customer base would react. But back in 2010, we started an equipment division and each year we steadily built that business by offering new programs and new products. The good news is that our existing customer base became the core customer base for our equipment division, so when it came time to sell the media division our existing customers were familiar and comfortable with National / AZON. Plus, at the time the media division only represented one third of our total business. Today we are the number one Canon distributor in North America. And we are the number one distributor of Contex large-format scanners in the world. We are truly a national player in equipment.

APDSP: And today you have expanded beyond technical printers and scanners, right?

Gigl: Yes, while technical printer equipment is still our bread and butter, we also sell a lot of graphics printing equipment, and we are becoming known for our flatbed printer and cutter sales. We started selling Mutoh and CET UV digital printers and flatbeds, and we recently added Vanguard flatbed printers. Then we picked up the best-selling large-format digital cutter in the world, iEcho.

It took a while to get our people trained on the equipment and understand how it all works, but everything came together in 2018. We've added more support staff and more field technicians, and we sold dozens of machines last year. It was a phenomenal year for us.

APDSP: There are several national suppliers of large-format graphics equipment. How do you distinguish yourselves?



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Gigl: We are extremely customer-centric. Many of the people who work here got their start in reprographics, so we have long relationships in this industry. There's a high degree of trust built up between us and the customer base.

As you know, so many reprographics firms today are looking for other sources of revenue, and high-quality, large-format color – such as from flatbed printers – is one avenue for them. But it's kind of scary for some of these companies to invest \$150,000 in a piece of equipment that they're not familiar with. They trust us to help them find the best value equipment, and we come out and install it and train them on it. They know we will be there for them.

We also sell a lot of refurbished equipment, and it's a very good value. When we get a used machine in on trade-in, we can completely update it with new print heads, new pumps, new filters – we literally take it apart and update it and put it back together again. And then we warranty it, so the buyers know we have their back.

APDSP: What kind of training do you provide shops that invest in a flatbed?

Gigl: There are a couple varieties of training programs. For example, in key operator training we train them how to completely operate the printer, including the daily calibration and nozzle tests, understanding the process of the ink and pressures involved, cleaning the machine...basically all those things that make the machine operate successfully.

Then we train them on how to use Onyx software, and how to operate the software and printer together to create various high-margin applications like double-sided prints and day-night backlits. We even help them with pricing models – 'If you're going to print on acrylic, your price should be between X and Y.' And we can hook them up with non-competing shops in other areas who are happy to talk about the business.

The training is a full week – there's a team for equipment and then a team for software. We always start an install on Monday, and we're there for as long as they need us. And of course we're available to come back.

APDSP: What about support after the sale?

Gigl: We recently put in a big technical lab in our offices in Troy, Michigan, so now we can do a lot of remote web-based training and troubleshooting. For example, if someone is trying to cut a particular substrate and having trouble, we can replicate the situation with the same cutter here in our demo floor, then do a video demonstration on how to cut that substrate. Or if someone is having some technical issue, they can call us and our technicians can go online and be on their machine using TeamViewer in 10 minutes to look at their settings and cut files and suggest a solution.

APDSP: So what's new for 2019?

Gigl: One interesting thing is that we put in a big inventory of cutters before they were subject to the 25 percent tariffs. So now we're able to offer those at what amounts to a reduced cost. And we've expanded our inventory of refurbished equipment.

We also have a larger dedicated sales staff on board now. My national sales rep, Rick Haste, has been on board for about six months, and he's really built up a pipeline of sales. He formerly worked for Oce, and is

Fall in December, Says ABC

Construction input prices declined 1.7 percent in December on a month-over-month basis yet are 3.5 percent higher than the same time last year, according to an Associated Builders and Contractors analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data relea [Read more](#)

RSA Announces Three New Board Members, and 2019 Board of Directors

The Reprographic Services Association (RSA) announces the appointment of three new members to its Board of Directors, as well as the full slate of officers and board members for 2019. Joining the Board this year are John Davis, Jr. from Alabama Graph [Read more](#)

ReproMAX Announces Board of Directors For 2019

ReproMAX announces the appointment of two new members and new co-chairmen of their Board of Directors for 2019. Ken Hildebrand, President of Commercial Digital Print and Wade Sparks, President and CEO of Riley's were named to the board. John Bingham, [Read more](#)

Contractors Lose Confidence in Q3 but

dedicated to display graphics. And we've really added to our hardware and software support staff here in our office. We now have a really good, qualified, trained staff.

January 17, 2019

Comments

Remain Upbeat

While construction industry leaders remained confident in the third quarter of 2018, optimism slipped relative to the second quarter, according to the latest Construction Confidence Index released today by Associated Builders and Contractors. [Read more](#)



Hackworth Acquires

Copico

APDSP member Hackwork Graphics & Printing has acquired the Suffolk, Virginia based copy shop Copico. [Read more](#)



ABC's Construction Backlog Indicator Sinks Below Record

Highs in Q3 2018

Associated Builders and Contractors reports that its Construction Backlog Indicator contracted to 9.04 months during the third quarter of 2018, down 8.4 percent from the second quarter and 4.3 percent lower than the same time last year. [Read more](#)



Archimedia Acquires Imtek

APDSP member Archimedia Solutions Group has is expanding. The company has acquired Imtek, a supplier of wide-format printing equipment and supplies located in Nashua, NH. [Read more](#)

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