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SOUTH SHORE INSIDER

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DENNY and JACK WESTON



Denny Weston and his brother, Jack, co-own Westongraphics, the family business in Hingham they took over when their father died several years ago.

Brothers find blueprint for success

Family printing business turns 50, and brothers continue to adapt

By Shina Neo
THE PATRIOT LEDGER

Denny Weston credits everything he knows about business to his father, Alden Weston.

Denny and his brother, Jack, co-own Westongraphics, the family business they took over when their father died several years ago.

In 1964, the company started as The Copy Center in downtown Hingham on South Street. Alden Weston saw the need for a blueprinting facility on the South Shore.

The company, which specializes in color and black-and-white large format printing, went through several changes in the decades to follow.

The name changed to Weston Reprographics and was eventually shortened to Westongraphics. The family also acquired a new property in the South Shore Industrial Park and built a 7,000-square-foot facility.

Celebrating 50 years in the family business, Denny discusses the challenges of maintaining a printing operation amidst digital innovations and Web domination.

What are some things you've learned from your father about how to run a business?

When I came into the business, I didn't know the first thing about finance. He

taught me the financial aspects of business accounting, but not complicated accounting. He taught me how to read a balance sheet, how to read a profit and loss statement. He taught me how to synthesize that information down to the most basic elements that you need to make a decision.

He ran it like a large corporation. But the point of it was to pay attention to what was happening.

What is the biggest challenge owning a business that's competing with the Web?

We have to find a niche to be successful. We have to offer personal service, we have to offer custom service. If there's a problem, we have to respond instantly and I have to show up and take care of it. If we can be successful in our niche, and it's a real struggle right now, I think we'll be OK. But if a young person came to me, I don't know if I'd encourage them to continue in the printing business.

How have economic cycles affected your business?

We're like a litmus test for the economy. If the economy starts booming, we're a little ahead of the curve. Before a building is even built, we're already printing the plans.

The last recession we got a double hit because you had the recession, which directly affected the amount of building

going on. And then the increase and explosion on the Web and what people can do on the Web.

What are some things printing businesses are doing to survive?

The goal of all reprographics people is how can we replace lost printing dollars? What we're trying to do is manage documents now. We scan the documents, we distribute them, we keep track of who's bidding and who isn't. It's harder to put a dollar figure on management as opposed to paper where you can charge by the square foot.

What's the secret to working with family?

We both have a really strong sense of family. We will butt heads. I miss my dad because he could side with one of us. It just works so well as a triumvirate. It's not easy as a partnership. We never talk enough.

All I can think of is ways to improve our relationship. Maybe being cognizant of that makes it work. One solution is to create defined roles for each person in the family in the business and respect their decision making within that role.

What advice would you give to people interested in starting their own business?

You can't lose sight of your customers. You have to create a product that you know a customer needs or wants.