

Graphics NETWORK

SouthernGraphics

BusinessProfile

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Some companies market themselves by sponsoring local Little League teams. The pint-sized players then sport the company's name prominently on their jerseys for the entire season, to be seen by every parent sitting in the stands.

Franklin/Trade Graphics in Miami, however, has entered a whole different ball game.

The company's president, Peter Dunne, got to throw the opening pitch of one of the Florida Marlins games for Franklin/Trade Graphics night at the ballpark. It's one of the perks that comes with taking on the demanding role of official printer for a sports franchise.

Franklin/Trade handles work not only for the Marlins, but for the Florida Panthers and the Miami Dolphins as well.

In the beginning...

The company was formed with the July 2002 merger of Franklin Graphics, Trade Litho and Little River Press. All three firms had been owned by San Francisco-based consolidator Kelmscott Communications. The firm's current partners had put together a group to purchase the companies and merged them into one facility, creating one of the largest printing firms in Florida, with 115 employees.

The merger enabled the company to take excess equipment, sell it off, and purchase newer models. Franklin/Trade Graphics now has four sheet-fed presses, including two six-color Mitsubishi with coaters, a Man Roland four-color perfecter, and a four-color Komori. The company also has two cold-set webs, an Atlas and a Royal Zenith.

Dunne says each of the companies had particular niches that they brought to the table in the merger.



Franklin Trade
GRAPHICS

"Both Franklin and Trade were high-profile, high-quality printers in our marketplace," says Dunne, adding that both companies have coveted a number of Printing Industry of Florida awards and Franklin/Trade Graphics has continued to win more awards than any other large sheet-fed printer in Florida for the past five years.

It was Franklin that dominated in the area of printing for professional sports teams, as well as serving as a financial printer. Little River Press has been a small religious book and publication printer for years in the marketplace and the company continues to service that niche with its web presses, Dunne notes.

Franklin/Trade Graphics offers a wide range of products through a complete servicing from design through fulfillment and mailing. "Our goal is to fully service our customers for their one-stop shopping," Dunne says.

Play ball!

Cornering the market on sports printing began 15 years ago when Franklin Graphics had the opportunity to print for the Miami Dolphins' football team.

"We put a complete and total effort into making sure that we locked up that opportunity," Dunne says. "It spawned from our ability to turn jobs quickly and efficiently through our financial and pari-mutuel printing that we did some time ago."

The company's near flawless record with the Miami Dolphins opened the door to work for the Florida Marlins' baseball team and the Florida Panthers' hockey team when both began operations in 1993.

"We were the obvious vendor of choice because of our experience with the Miami Dolphins," says Dunne. "We have been their printer since the inception of those two organizations."

A testament to the quality of work Franklin/Trade Graphics does for its sports clientele is the fact that their contract lasts only for two or three years. The company must then prove its worthiness again in what is a very competitive situation.

"Everybody would love to be the printer for the Miami Dolphins or the Florida Marlins," Dunne points out. "So it's very tough for them to get a fair price from our competitors. People will give unreasonably low pricing for the opportunity to get in and hope that somewhere down the line they can make back some of the money that they are giving up. We have never taken that approach – we have always bid on jobs at a fair dollar and met the extreme turnarounds the sports teams have demanded of us."

Perhaps no turnaround is more extreme than printing for a team that unexpectedly goes into a world championship, as was the case with the 2003 Florida Marlins.

Dunne says as the end of the regular baseball season approached, it became

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apparent to the company that the Marlins were most likely going to be in the playoffs.

"We were able to get preparatory work done, to start preparing and planning, and commit to some printing that they didn't want to have to rush," Dunne says.

But the team's design staff could not speculate beyond each stage as it progressed and thus the time frames got shorter and shorter as the playoffs continued.

Thus, Franklin/Trade Graphics would come upon a situation such as when, at 11 a.m. on a World Series day, the company was asked to print 65,000 four-color post-cards for the game that night.

"We're a 'can do' attitude company and we were doing our best to see how we could get it done, yet they hadn't even designed it yet," Dunne says. "Our response to them was as soon as they could get it here, we would start printing it.

"When we came to playoff time, although the Marlins had finished playing Saturday night for the end of the regular season, the playoff scenario would not be in place until after the final game was played on Sunday. We were informed that we would be given statistics Monday morning at 11 and would have to produce a 220-page post-season media guide and have it in San Francisco by 11 o'clock Tuesday morning," Dunne says.

"That was a monumental task. We had to produce 350 copies of it. It was a perfect bound book with a color cover, which we produced overnight, flew out and personally delivered to the stadium 15 minutes early, as required. That was the kind of demand they were expecting of us, which we would always come through on.

"We were immediately put behind the eight ball," Dunne says. "The files were not nearly as complete as they were supposed to be. So we put in a super-human effort to get it accomplished. Along with that, with every playoff game, we were printing 2004 schedule cards and various give-aways that were handed out at the stadium. Those were printed almost the same day that the game was being played."

That's typical of the print performance this company executes on behalf of its sports clientele.

"Typically on a Dolphins game day, we will get copy on a Wednesday and deliver 10,000 game programs on Friday to the stadium before the afternoon," Dunne points out. During the regular season, Franklin/Trade

Graphics' printing runs the gamut: schedules, player posters, player cards, programs, score cards, ticket brochures, season ticket holder packages, promotional pieces, give-aways, All-Star posters, business cards, letterheads, and media guides.

While the Marlins have an in-house design team – though Franklin shared in some of the designs – other teams don't. Franklin does all of the design work for the Florida Panthers; for the Dolphins, it's also done in-house and outsourced to Franklin.

Being a printer for a professional sports team has its perks, marketing and otherwise. On its sponsorship night, the Marlins invited the printing company and its family members to the ballpark. One of the give-aways was an All-Star poster with Dontrelle Willis, Mike Lowell and Luis Castillo.

While there were definite marketing benefits to the sponsorship night, the morale booster it provided to the employees was of even greater value, Dunne says.

"In our business, we don't feel that a radio advertisement or a sign on the road is going to motivate someone to print with our company, but we do feel that the morale boost for the whole company, with their families being at the ballpark being entertained by the Marlins, was a real plus," Dunne says.

The perks of printing for professional sports teams also provide benefits for Franklin's customers.

"We pass out a lot of ticket opportunities," says Dunne. "Our seats for the Marlins games were on field level, four rows off of first base and were really spectacular seats to watch a baseball game, nonetheless a World Series game. Customers and employees get the benefit of going to those kinds of events."

And as part of its sponsor package for the Panthers, the company has a suite in which it entertains customers.

"Our suite at the Florida Panthers is adorned with lots of award certificates for the printing we do for the Florida Panthers," says Dunne. "We get to showcase our product every night when we go to the games."

Sports teams comprise 10 percent of the clientele of Franklin/Trade Graphics. The remainder is in such sectors as the cruise industry, manufacturing, financial, and marketing, all of which have taken a hit in the past couple of years.

Consequently, the company has been aggressively seeking other markets against the backdrop of its 'right-sizing,' Dunne says.

Over the past few years, the company has engaged in downsizing. The three merged companies had individually been affected by the 9/11 tragedy to a certain extent and the bad economy was salt in the wound.

"The merger allowed us not only to combine the best equipment from the operations and upgrade the rest of the equipment we needed, but it also allowed us to do the same with the staffing," says Dunne. "It allowed us to keep the cream of the crop and 'right-size' the staffing as well."

Aside from the challenges that the professional sports clientele toss at the company, there have been other challenges for Franklin/Trade Graphics.

"One of the bigger challenges we have is that in the overall market, the volume of business seems to be shrinking," Dunne says. "There appears to be an excess of press cylinders in our region. We've been faced with some very difficult price competition from companies that are struggling to keep their heads above water."

It's a battle that Franklin/Trade Graphics is waging on the field of presenting a top-notch facility, equipment and fast turnaround. The company woos customers and potential clients through open houses featuring team mascots from the sports teams for which it prints.

Dunne attributes his company's overall success to the quality of the staff.

"We've got a very dedicated group of individuals, some of whom have been with the company more than 30 years, and we feel we've instilled the proper work ethic and need for customer satisfaction," Dunne says. "Everybody works hard at that goal to make sure the customer gets a timely and quality product as it was intended to come out."

Dunne says that for the future, Franklin/Trade Graphics is targeting a growth in market share.

"We feel we have the best product in town and the word is slowly getting out to all the larger companies out there that have big print buyers," he says. "We will continue to aggressively market the company. We have excess capacity we are ready to put to use. We anticipate strongly we'll continue our partnerships with the sports teams and our other market customers that we've been doing business with for so long."

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