

Premedia Leaders Focus On Customers

A common denominator for premedia leaders is that they consistently focus on clients' needs and evolve business offerings and services resulting in a positive impact on their businesses and on their customers' businesses.

Today's financial challenges combined with rapidly changing technologies and consumers who control how they get their messaging are creating unprecedented demands on graphic solutions providers, marketing executives and agencies. However, with the demands are coming exceptional opportunities. Panelists at the IPA Premedia Leaders' Luncheon, held in conjunction with Graph Expo, discussed how they have achieved success in face of extraordinary changes occurring in the industry.

Opening the discussion, Barbara Pellow, Infotrends, stated, "Companies are being forced to redefine their businesses. What were formerly prepress companies have embraced non-traditional services to not only survive but also thrive in these challenging times. They are providing services that include everything from onsite project management and consulting to conceptual design and production art development, from creative strategy and digital asset management to print production management."

Pellow moderated a panel composed of Matthew Gonnering, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Widen Enterprises; Damien Gough, president and CEO of Platinum Imaging; Alex Sarkisian, executive vice president of Schawk, Inc.; and Michael Shannon, senior vice president of global operations for SGS (Southern Graphic Systems) International.

A resounding theme from all the panelists is how they have changed not only their service offerings but how they have become customer centric. The focus has shifted from selling what their organizations do to

understanding what clients need and then developing solutions based on those needs. Success has resulted from moving beyond the commodity mentality to that of adding value for the client. Sarkisian said, "The days of one size fits all are past for us and for our clients as well. We are much more in line with clients' needs and how they are changing from day to day.

Gonnering agreed, insisting, "You need to understand the customer and what they are trying to accomplish and pair that with your expertise."

Platinum Imaging, an established prepress company, provides advertising production services, which Gough contends is definitely not a commodity business. The focus is on high-end services, not price!

Project management has become an important part of the solutions-selling equation. In a tight economy many companies are outsourcing jobs they had been doing in-house, thus creating opportunity for service providers who often find themselves managing jobs from concept through delivery.

Variable data is also becoming an important part of the service offering mix. Gough noted that with more advertising going variable, there is the need to study marketing trends and the behavior of customers' customers in order to know how to reach them. "Print isn't dead but it is more targeted and customized," Gough said.

Sarkisian agreed, noting that the needs of their clients are more aligned with variable data and require an understanding on the part of the graphic solutions provider to be more aware of changing demographics and regional requirements.



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Gonnering noted that their focus is on the information life cycle with their prepress expertise being the foundation for moving Widen Enterprises into the software-as-a-service industry with digital asset management as the flagship offering. By effectively managing and distributing assets from a central repository, they are able to streamline their clients' marketing and advertising processes.

Others agreed that asset management will become even more important in the future; companies will not only have to have the capability to distribute variable data materials but also have to be able to version it as well as measure and track results.

SGS has positioned their organization around life-cycle management—from design to print—with clients choosing all or part of the service offerings. Noting it can be a costly approach, Shannon said it is possible because of the company's lean, green approach to manufacturing. In the packaging arena, content certification allows them to eliminate rework and mitigate errors. "It's not about price but what adds value," he said.

For SGS, putting color management tools at the customer's site has proven highly beneficial. Soft proofs have replaced hard-copy proofs and are saving the client time and money. Although providing new services can be expensive, Shannon said it is critical to survival. He cautioned, "Just be careful how you do something to make sure there is a return on investment."

A common denominator for all panelists is that they have consistently focused on their clients' needs and evolved business offerings and expanded services resulting in a positive impact on their businesses and on their customers' businesses. Adding new services, going global, and adding value are just a few of the challenges facing today's graphic solutions provider. Yet, panelists were passionate in their endeavors to turn challenges into opportunities and thrive in a time of turbulence and change.

This is just a brief overview of the luncheon presentation. Readers may download a video of the complete program at www.ipa.org/O8LUNCH. Special thanks to **Presstek** for sponsoring the luncheon.  **IPA**