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Up & Coming

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FOXFIRE PRINTING

Digital system prints signs of the times

By GARY MULLINAX, Staff reporter

Foxfire Printing has seen significant growth due to three main factors - technological advancement, acquisition of competitors and a partnership with a major international corporation.

The combination has made Foxfire an important player in the printing of point-of-purchase signage and unit price labels - what the product is, how much it costs, special features - for companies nationwide. Foxfire provides signs and labels for retailers such as Eckerd Drugs, Giant Foods, Acme, Happy Harry's and Toys 'R' Us.

The Newark-based company's advanced technology is its proprietary software Rapidsign, a digital printing system it acquired when it bought LSW Inc., a Maryland printing company, in 2000. The purchase was paid for by the Delaware Innovation Fund, a nonprofit that continues to be a Foxfire investor.

Foxfire operates in Newark, where it was founded, and Upper Marlboro, Md., where the former LSW operations are located. Foxfire also bought Baltimore Sign in late 2002, and will incorporate Rapidsign into operations there.

In buying Baltimore Sign, Foxfire gained access to more customers and added about 60 employees. Foxfire now has 162 full-time employees in two states, up from the 26 it started with in 1997.

"[Baltimore] didn't have the technology we had with Rapidsign and Xerox," Ferretti said, "so they were producing all their signs on offset printing presses. We're converting it to an all-digital process."

In addition to its acquisitions, Foxfire has entered into a corporate partnership with Xerox. The international company chose Foxfire as one of five businesses to beta test its new iGen3 color digital printer, which is driven by the Rapidsign software.

The combination allows Foxfire to print color signs and labels and to increase the flexibility of its services. The company can customize signage for each store in a chain and provide a detailed plan of where the material should be placed. It also can print pictures of products, as well as words and numbers.

"There's no need for preprinting inventory," said John Ferretti, 41, Foxfire's founder and chief executive. "Everything is on demand."

Xerox chose Foxfire because of its innovative approach, said Robert Moore, DocuColor iGen3 program manager for Xerox.

"Foxfire is doing a lot of innovative things. They're a very strategic customer for us," Moore said. "They have the right attitude and the best applications for us to highlight this new producer."

Foxfire rented the iGen3 during the test period last fall and bought the machine in January for \$500,000.

"Xerox is betting a lot of its future on this iGen3 product," Ferretti said. "To have bet on Foxfire as one of the five beta sites in the United States was a pretty good endorsement of us."

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Photo Caption:

The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG

Improved technology and a Xerox partnership have meant new opportunities for Foxfire Printing founder John Ferretti.

PROFILE

Address: 750 Dawson Drive, Newark

Web site: www.foxfireprinting.com

Full-time employees in Delaware: 53

Part-time employees in Delaware: 6

What it does: Foxfire is a full-service printing and graphic design company.

Annual sales: \$14 million

What panel members said: "Investments in technology have positioned Foxfire to better compete with much larger companies and achieve rapid growth."

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