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At Frankston Packaging, ‘No Is Not An Option’

by Len Prazych

There are mantras and there are mottos, mission statements and vision statements, philosophies and promises. The five words by which a culture and a business have been transformed at Frankston Packaging, however, are a living testament to the importance of true customer-driven service: “No is not an option.”

Customer-driven service not only means delivering a quality product at a competitive price. Today, that kind of service is not only expected, but required, to simply stay in business. The kind of customer service Frankston Packaging delivers means that if they don’t have a piece of machinery or the equipment to satisfy a customer’s request, the company will buy it. While this business philosophy may fly in the face of any business consultant’s advice, one can’t argue with the results: Frankston Packaging has grown 11 percent a year for the last 15 years, remarkable results in an industry that has been essentially flat over this period.

Customer Driven

“We’ve done it by really focusing on the customer,” says Kyle Eldred, Frankston’s co-owner, emphasizing the word really. “In fact, customers drive the business decisions that we make.”

Eldred and his partner Norm Bullock, purchased Frankston Packaging in 2000. Bullock runs operations, Eldred runs sales and marketing in the Frankston, Texas based folding carton company that services customers in the food, electronics, nutraceutical, pharmaceutical, and garden segments. At approximately 70

percent, food represents the lion’s share of its business. It does no corrugated.

The company is independent and privately held, which it has been since its founding in 1957. Frankston Packaging continues to be a full-service manufacturer of custom and stock paper-board folding cartons and rigid/set-up boxes, with product distribution throughout North America. Its product line will continue to



Frankston Packaging partners Kyle Eldred, left, and Norm Bullock have grown the business 11 percent a year for the last 15 years.

grow as long as its customers continue to request new products.

It was customers, for example, that got Frankston into the tray-forming business, which the company wasn’t doing before Eldred and Bullock purchased it. Now tray-forming represents 25 percent of its production.

“Our philosophy is that you have to do a few things really, really well,” says Eldred. “You have to get the customer service part right, that is, you have to over-serve

the customer and help them to grow their business. Then there has to be some operational excellence, which means you have to buy the fastest and most efficient equipment in the world. Finally, quality has to be the best in the industry.”

That equipment includes a Heidelberg Speedmaster XL 106-6+LX with Prinect Inpress in-line color and register control and AutoPlate Advanced plate-changing; a Bobst Expertcut 106-LER; a Bobst Masterfold 110-A4 folder gluer; a Bobst Expertfold 110-A2 folder gluer; and a Maxson MDH Sheeter. The company also purchased a Geitz tray former and a Heiter + Schroeder tray former, which when combined with world-class production speeds and capabilities, increased throughput and enhanced business growth.

“It took a little while to get our arms around the combined benefits of the automation and the 18,000 sph running speed,” says Norm Bullock. “For example, we’ve had to adjust our workflow procedures to han-



From left, Phillip Roach, Pressroom Manager; Aubrey Underhill, Lead Pressman; and Norm Bullock, co-owner and Vice President, in front of Frankston Packaging’s Heidelberg Speedmaster XL 106.

dle the output of the Speedmaster XL 106. Otherwise, we can absolutely drown our facility with work-in-progress. Installing a new press and driving up productivity also required change.”

The high speeds of the Heidelberg required that diecutting be faster also. The Bobst Expertcut allowed Frankston to more than double the speed of its diecutting line, but installing the Expertcut wasn’t all about efficiency, says Bullock. “Many of the jobs we run require very tight registration. The register and transport systems on the diecutter have given us the ability to maintain precise registration, cut consistency and diecut quality even when running wide open at 9,000 sheets per hour.”

Growing Responsibly

Frankston’s formula of customer-driven service and operational excellence has had the desired effect of progressive growth, but the growth has been well managed. “We’re not trying to double our business in a year,” says Eldred. “We’re trying to grow responsibly.

We’ve not had to add any more square footage, but we’ve have made better use of the square footage we do have.”



The installation of a Bobst Masterfold has allowed Frankston Packaging to quickly convert increased production output of the Heidelberg.

Frankston Packaging operates out of an 85,000-square-foot facility and a 7,500-square-foot facility. The company ships coast-to-coast but the majority of its product ships within a 300-mile radius of its Frankston, Texas headquarters. Unlike most of its competitors — and again, against the advice of consultants — Frankston stocks board and finished goods for their customers. “When a customer calls with an order, we have the board on the floor and we’re producing, we’re not waiting for board,” says Eldred. “Few others will do this because they want to keep their money in the bank instead of in their warehouse.”



Eldred, left, and Bullock believe in operation excellence, which means buying some of the fastest and most efficient equipment in the world.

Eldred shares another example of how “no is not an option” continues to pay dividends: “We’d been calling on a prospect — a supplier to Costco — for more than a year. The buyer finally called us...on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving because the two other suppliers she was using laughed when they heard she needed

her product on the Monday after Thanksgiving. Because she was a brand new customer, we didn't have dies, artwork or the board to do the job. And our employees were on vacation for the Thanksgiving holiday. We called in the employees we needed to do the job and the customer had her product on Monday morning when she needed it. We turned that prospect into a regular customer. That's how we have grown our business."

'We transformed Frankston from a command and control culture to a customer service culture and gave power back to the people who knew the most about the business, the people who worked there.'

— Kyle Eldred

Leap Into Flexible

Frankston recently made the decision to include flexible packaging among its product offerings. Helping Eldred and Bullock make the decision was an existing folding carton customer who realized that the colors on its packaging did not match its flexible packaging when sitting side by side on the shelf. After some analysis and discussion, the partners bought a new NilPeter 8-color flexible press and launched their new flexible packaging business in December of 2014.

"Basically, we talked to our current customers and discovered they were eager for us to jump into that segment of the business," says Eldred. "They already know us, what we stand for and they love our customer service. They urged us to do it and are now supporting our decision." Eldred admits that the company is still in the "front end of the learning curve" but

expects to achieve results similar to that of its foray into tray-forms.

Embracing The Culture

Frankston Packaging's transformation did not happen overnight but over a period of years. Says Eldred, "It was a production driven company that had a command and control culture. We transformed Frankston from a command and control culture to a customer



Former PPC Chairman Stephen Scherger of GPI, left, inducted Kyle Eldred of Frankston Packaging Co. as PPC's 45th Chairman last year.

service culture and gave power back to the people who knew the most about the business, the people who worked there."

Many of the 80 employees who work at the company were there before Eldred and Bullock purchased it in 2000 and over the years have come to embrace and champion the "no is not an option" attitude and philosophy, says Eldred. "It took us a long time to change the culture but now our employees really understand that without the customer, we simply don't exist."