

# Cost-Effective (and Fast) Solutions

*A distributorship's online ordering system saves clients time and money, and has helped the firm boost sales.*

**By Mark Fitzgerald**

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**R**alph Folino doesn't consider himself a salesperson. His job is to inform clients, not pressure them—to listen rather than pitch. The rest, he says, takes care of itself.

“Our products and services sell themselves,” says Folino, president of Advanced Printing Services Inc. (APS), a distributorship in Bristol, Conn. “I just go around telling people about them.” Understanding customers' needs, he says, is the key to establishing profitable and long-lasting partnerships.

Folino is busy spreading the word about how APS uses innovation and technology to enhance print distribution. With an online ordering system that caters to large-quantity procurement, the distributorship has made ordering easy and efficient. “We're doing high-volume, low-margin stuff here,” Folino says. “So we've automated just about everything we can--right down to the expense codes.”

## **Growing with Technology**

APS has come a long way since its founding in 1989, when Folino began operating a small press in his parent's basement. The distributorship's direct mail operation, for instance, has increased from 500 mail pieces daily to more than 5,000. The distributorship also has secured long-term printing contracts with several Fortune 500 companies. Last year, APS' sales grew 22 percent, it hired seven new employees, and it moved into a new facility approximately 100 miles from New York City in Bristol. The new facility is twice the size of the previous one and easily accommodates APS' 45 employees as well as its production and warehousing needs.

APS' online ordering capabilities have driven most of the company's growth during the last few years. Launched in 1999 to meet the increasing demands of the company's customers, APS' online technology makes it easier and more cost-efficient for clients to place orders. It also cuts processing, tracking and billing expenses for APS. “Before we went online, there was just too much paperwork and too many people involved in the ordering process,” says Kevin Corbett, the distributorship's vice president of sales and marketing. “So we've eliminated 90 percent of the busy work.”

## **Customizing Service, Lowering Costs**

Developed in house by a team of IT engineers, APS' online system minimizes data entry and guarantees reporting and accounting accuracy. Because clients' business units, design styles, expense codes, and shipping and billing instructions are preset and fully integrated into the system, ordering is virtually error-free. "As long as you can spell your name and know your title, there's little that can go wrong," Corbett says. "From order entry to distributing, it's all automated through our shop."

With password protection and secure access, the online ordering system offers easy navigation for proofing, order tracking, purchasing, electronic billing and reporting. For instance, a user ordering business cards clicks on a drop box and selects a quantity and price. The next page asks for the name, title, telephone number and email address of the person receiving the cards. After clicking "Continue," the user views an image of the card exactly as it will be printed. If the proof meets the user's approval, he or she clicks on "Add to Cart" to proceed with the order. To make changes, the user clicks on "Edit" to return to the previous order page. At checkout, a drop box with the recipient's address facilitates the shipping process, which ranges from two to five business days.

"Clients love the convenience," Corbett says. "Repeat customers can send their orders to print in under one minute." The online system also can interface with other systems designed for shipping fulfillment, expense reporting and record keeping, saving customers time and money, he says.

This system may explain why APS is winning such lucrative contracts. Recently, the distributorship beat out eight other vendors for a deal with the University of Connecticut. Not long after winning the contract, the university's athletics department asked to demo the system and promptly signed on with APS. "People see what we have and they want to start using it," Folino says. "This means big money for us, but also big savings for them."

### **Sound Advice, Fast Solutions**

Elaine Richardson, president of advertising and marketing firm Building Markets, has been an APS client since 1992. The distributorship has helped the firm on numerous projects involving direct mailings, brochures, pamphlets, folders, posters and a number of design-related decisions. Recently, APS helped the firm meet a deadline for an important marketing campaign it was launching for a high school.

"We were in the middle of the design process when the high school was offered a display table at a trade show," Richardson says. The trade show was only two days away, and Building Markets was under pressure to come up with a recruitment package. It seemed unlikely the firm would meet the deadline, so Richardson considered asking the high school to skip the event. That's when APS suggested printing a short run (about 100 copies) of its 4-color mailer and poster. Building Markets quickly agreed, and APS turned the mailers and posters around in a day.

“APS’ printing consultants offer excellent recommendations for meeting your goals,” Richardson says. In addition to listening to the needs of her firm, Richardson says APS strives to give her the most for her printing dollar. “Through the years, APS has been consistent at providing cost-effective solutions in a hurry,” she says.

Now that Building Markets uses APS’ online ordering system, Richardson says she feels more at ease with ordering large quantities of product because of the site’s online proofing capabilities. “You just see it, click on it and send it to your shopping cart for purchasing,” she says. “You don’t have to worry about any codes or making a mistake--you know exactly how your order will be printed.” Users also can print order information and track shipments online, eliminating much of the clerical tedium associated with traditional ordering methods. “APS has simplified the purchasing process,” Richardson says. “They continue to save us time and money without compromising their service.”

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