



York County's First Print Shop Turns 40

John Henry Printing Combines Latest Technology with Time-Honored Customer Service

By Melissa James, York County Contributor

Listen to your customers, then shift your services to meet their needs. It's the foundation of business success—and has carried John Henry Printing from the days of burning plates in a darkroom to the digital age.

"In 2009, I was a press man. Had been for 30 years. I was not a computer geek. Ten years later, I have more computers than presses," said Randy Stanaway, who co-owns the business with wife Charlene.

It's a level of technology he could never have imagined back in 1979, when Randy's father and brother-in-law broke away from the family printing business in Newport News. After working for years at Stanaway Printing, they decided to start the first print shop in York County. John Stanaway still wanted a family name for the new business, and since his surname was already in use, he and son-in-law Henry decided to combine their first names. Soon, John Henry Printing opened its doors.



But Randy was not interested. He was in college at the time, studying to be a school teacher. After spending his childhood inside a print shop, Randy thought he wanted something different. But only a few years later, he began working at John Henry part-time while also managing a job with Anheuser-Busch. Then father made him an offer he couldn't refuse: "If you come work here full-time, I'll give you my part of the business." Randy calls it "the best decision I ever made."



Four decades later, John Henry Printing has come full circle. The business recently moved right next door to the very shopping center where it got its start. Randy has worked hard to change with the times, as technology provides both challenge and opportunity in the printing world.

"We were all offset [printing] here," he said. "I bought out my brother and sister in 2008, and said to my wife, look, everything is changing to digital. Customers want things like color copies, and when we can't do it, they walk out my door. And they're not coming back. We need to change with the times or shut the doors."

In the past 10 years, the company has spent over \$1 million on updating equipment. One of the biggest investments was in March 2009, when Randy purchased his first big color copier.

"I said to my wife, 'If I can do 2,000 copies a month, I can break even.' By June, I was doing over 20,000," he said. John Henry Printing now boasts four color-copier machines. But that was only the beginning. Randy also was fielding requests for blueprints, so he invested in a high-end blueprint machine that can print full-color. He now prints 12,000 to 15,000 blueprints a month.

Then there was signage—customers kept asking for yard signs and banners, and John Henry Printing would farm out those jobs to a sign company.

“But the guy I was getting them from would promise a date, and it was not showing up. It made me look bad. So I decided to buy a banner machine,” he said. “We also do foam boards—everything in house. We have binder equipment for spiral-bound books. People came in wanting laminations, so now we have a machine that does big 2x3’ laminations. Then I had customers wanting peanut labels, which needed to be 22” long. So I invested in a machine that can do that. If we didn’t change, we would have to close the doors.”



In fact, that’s what happened to many of Randy’s competitors during the recession.

“Print shops were closing left and right. People would ask, ‘How are you still open when the big boys are closing down? Well, God let me be here, and also, I take walk-ins. The other guys don’t. You want a quick copy, sure! My dad instilled that in me. He had a customer come in one day on a Saturday for a couple of copies. He did it for him, and it led to \$150,000 that year [much more in today’s dollars] printing for Avon. The big guys don’t want walk-ins. But I take them. If I do good for you, you’ll remember that. The big guys had only a few big accounts, and in the recession they lost it all.”

As much business as the company does in a year, you’d think there was a massive staff working behind the scenes. But its high-end machinery can do the work of multiple people. Booklets that were once hand-collated now self-collate. Stapling and folding and binding are automated. He gets it all done with three full-time employees and three part-time... accomplishing more work than when his staff numbered 15.

That technology investment has continued to help the business thrive. Each year, Randy reads a listing of the top 100 small print companies in America, and notes that he beats out half of them man-to-man.

“They’ve got someone doing \$3 million a year, but 30 people working. Three million is impressive until you see how big their staff is.” Though Randy keeps a small staff, he makes sure it’s a strong staff. He only hires people who are knowledgeable in their job description and are team players. He said all his employees are people who will come in early if needed, or go out of their way driving home to drop off print jobs to a customer.

With low staff numbers and a high volume of print jobs, the company is able to keep prices down for customers. But Randy says people often assume he will be more expensive than the big-box stores and take their business there instead. When he insists that they price compare, he nearly always has the lowest price. Educating potential customers has been an ongoing process.

“Places like Vistaprint get it all through being a loss leader,” Randy said, “and the quality is not there; it gets nice when you upgrade to better paper or features, but by that point the price skyrockets. I can’t match their price for cheap 67-pound matte paper, but customers say, ‘Wow, you were \$25 cheaper per order once I upgraded’ to good paper, or coating both sides, etc., on business cards. And I didn’t have to pay for shipping!”

There’s also the buy-local element, where customers reap many other benefits come from supporting a family-owned York County business.

“VistaPrint is not going to give you referrals, or donate to your kid’s soccer team. Someone looking for a painter or plumber, Office Max is not going to refer you out. You help me, I am going to help you,” he said.

Randy himself enjoys patronizing other York County businesses—especially Body by D Gym, where he spends many hours training with D'Shawn Wright so he can compete in arm wrestling tournaments. Randy has traveled to five countries as an arm wrestler, even making it to the world championship in Virginia Beach after two strokes in 2017. But he and Charlene still find time to spend with their sons, Adam and Jason Brousseau, and 5-year-old granddaughter, Adrina.

Whether his arms are working to slam an opponent or greet a customer, it's safe to say Randy Stanaway likes a challenge.

"It's different every day. I like meeting deadlines," he said. "Someone comes in and says, 'I need this done, and by last week,' and I say, 'Yeah, we can do it.' And we do. That's why we're set up with this technology. Customer service is No. 1. You can have the best prices in the world, but without the customer service, it won't matter. I want them called by their first name when they come back the first time. I want to make them feel welcome. And my word is the best thing I've got."



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