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Dave Zwang - Grounded in the past, heading for the future

Starting his career as a commercial photographer gave Dave Zwang the eye to identify the opportunities presented. But shifting his focus to the graphic arts industry in the 1970s provided the knowledge to make the right decisions. Coupling a love for technology with an entrepreneurial spirit, Dave Zwang is Someone You Should Know.

Dave is founder of Zwang & Co., a consulting firm that specializes in process analysis and strategic development of firms in electronic publishing, design, prepress and printing. He also works with hardware and software manufacturers on product development and marketing. Recent projects include re-engineering creative, print and publishing systems; distributed electronic design workflows, new production processes and training. The consultant's background in offset, flexo and gravure, as well as prepress operations, has stood him in good stead during his long career in the graphic arts.

So why did Dave change his course from commercial photography to printing? "In 1973 I wanted to leave Manhattan and move to Connecticut where my family was," he recalls. "So I went to a printer who happened to have a photo studio and asked for a job. The printer advised me to learn prepress and color separations. If I did that, I'd make a lot of money. At that time he offered me \$160 a week, which was a lot of money to me. So I started out as a color camera operator and learned the businesses sort of with my pants on fire."

After this grounding in the industry, Dave's entrepreneurial tendencies took over when he started a printing business of his own in 1977. "We began on a wing and a prayer doing short-run color printing and prepress," he remembers. "Basically we had a big storefront with nothing in it. But it got filled with equipment and the customers seemed to like our service. I built the business, lived in the same space as the shop and worked 24 hours a day. That's what happens when you're an entrepreneur."

Dave sold the operation in 1981, but continued to run the shop, transforming it from a commercial enterprise into a label and packaging business and then back into a commercial printer. In 1986, the entrepreneurial bug hit again when he started an all-electronic prepress company. "That was at the beginning of the desktop revolution," he recalls. "It didn't matter what the customers brought in, we made it work. It was crazy but also a lot of fun."

Then in 1991, Dave again launched a new company, taking the consulting and integration business and finding success ever since.

Since his entry into the printing industry in 1970, Dave has seen it move from a craft to a true manufacturing process. "Successful companies have understood that printing is manufacturing and have transformed their business. Some companies are still in that process. But for companies that aren't well on their way in that transition, things can be tough. They have lower margins and will continue to have difficulty competing in the marketplace."

There have been some interesting developments in the past few years, according to the consultant. "We



worked with Seybold a few years ago and laid out the way production (output) manufacturing should be. We divided the processes into production, production management and business management. Two years ago, production had already become manufacturing process. Within the past year, many of the holes in production management and business management have become enabled. Today, our technology is moving into the new economy. An economy in which we deal with Internet purchasing, tracking, and facilitating the process globally and across process partners via the Internet.

"The day is almost upon us when a designer can hit `command P' and print to a Heidelberg sheetfed press somewhere in Europe, then automatically bind, finish and have the job distributed. The tools are being developed every day," asserts Dave.

Based on these observations, we asked Dave to share some of his tips for success. His advice to graphic arts companies is three-pronged.

1. Understand that your customers also are your process partners and your relationships will continue to change as clients become more empowered.
2. As a result of the next wave of the digital evolution, printers will need to find ways to use technology to facilitate their relationships with all process partners--both customers and vendors.
3. The new economy that is evolving as a result of all the enabling technologies is based on developing alliances with other companies that offer complementary products and services. Ensure that you are properly poised to ride the new wave into the 21st century.

If you want to get to know Dave Zwang better, he can be reached by email at info@zwang.com or check out his website at www.zwang.com. Dave also can be reached at (203) 743-2275; FAX (203) 792-7497.

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