

SMART CHANGE STARTS HERE.

BMS DIRECT, INC.

A former toner shop embraces change and empowers new transactional printing success and commercial printing potential, thanks to Canon Solutions America's production inkjet.



The BMS Direct executive team includes Doreen Flint, director of marketing; James E. LaPrade, Sr., CEO and president; and Bob Hansen, vice president of sales, marketing, and client services.

Success for BMS Direct, Inc. (BMS) has always been about its people and the printing. As a result, the company has created a culture dedicated as much to individual growth as it is to exceeding the expectations of every customer. For nearly 50 years that approach helped build a company now on the leading edge of transactional printing capability and capacity — thanks to a pivot to Canon Solutions America production inkjet. Read how Canon collaborates with BMS to deliver a solution that prioritizes training and empowering personnel while providing innovation that drives business growth.

During a pandemic that tested so many American businesses, Lynchburg, VA-based BMS Direct survived and even flourished, thanks to its adherence to a pair of essential business principles: cultivating a healthy company culture and embracing adaptability.

It's something baked into BMS since its founding as a family business in 1973. Now, nearly 50 years later, it is exemplified by the company's decision to partner with Canon Solutions America in 2020 as BMS evolved away from toner-based cutsheet technology. Instead, it is going all in on Canon's leading-edge production inkjet solutions.

"I took over company ownership from my parents in 1998, after serving for five years as HR director," explains CEO



BMS Direct welcomes visitors to its Lynchburg, VA, facility.

and President James E. LaPrade, Sr. He recalls his promotion with fond amusement. James explained how his parents called on their way out of town to inform him of their spontaneous retirement and departure from Lynchburg.

"At that point, I grew up very quickly. So I surrounded myself with the smartest people I could," said James. "While I knew the printing business, having grown up in it, I wanted people who could help the company grow from sales, marketing, and production perspectives."

The company's focus on organic growth and adapting to a constantly shifting business landscape kept the company healthy for many years. For example, at one point, BMS acquired a presort bureau. This equipment expanded its services to include multiline optical-character reader (MLOC) sorting—making it one of the few companies still offering sorting onsite. But James and his team were tired of weathering the "frustrating peaks and valleys" of being a marketing mail shop exclusively.

BMS leadership concluded that expanding its transactional printing services was the best way forward. It allowed them to meet the considerable output requirements and monthly volume spikes of industries such as utilities, healthcare, and municipal governments. The decision was a smart one, and the company grew exponentially. Then, two years ago, they recognized that maintaining their equipment's status quo would no longer cut it.

THE CHALLENGE

Before allying with Canon Solutions America, BMS faced obvious operational



As a competitive advantage, BMS offers highly secure sorting on site.

challenges. The 15 toner printers on their shop floor were approaching antiquity, with the equipment prone to breaking down. At times, half of them would be offline or need maintenance. This scenario hindered company productivity and performance. With the lease on their legacy equipment about to expire, it was time for BMS to ask an obvious question: Do we want to remain in the toner world, or do we want to further our growth with inkjet digital?

"We needed to figure out a better way to get faster and more efficient," James said. "To compete on a larger scale and continue to grow, we had to go inkjet."

THE SOLUTION

For BMS, production inkjet was the obvious choice. In addition, Canon Solutions America offered speed, quality, consistency, and commitment to customer success to support and accelerate the company's evolution.

Today, BMS boasts two Canon varioPRINT i-series+ sheetfed inkjet presses and a ColorStream 3900 web-fed inkjet press. Combined, these constitute an inkjet printing capacity for BMS that delivers distinct advantages.

Excellent Uptime

An immediately evident benefit of inkjet printing delivered by Canon production inkjet is increased uptime. Idle printers



Production inkjet has helped BMS expand its extensive transactional and direct mail business as well as pursue more commercial printing opportunities.

mean lost profits, and BMS had felt the pain of close to half of its printers being offline at a given time. The reliability of the Canon presses has meant more throughput, uptime, and revenue.

Streamlined Workflow

Along with the hardware investments BMS made as part of its inkjet transition, the company also committed to optimizing workflow. BMS invested in Racami's Alchem-e™ platform, a robust, third-party software with a Canon business partnership already in place, to meet that goal. Enabling a seamless BMS integration saves valuable time and more straightforward conversion to the new workflow. It also allows BMS to move work from equipment to equipment as needed, minimizing disruptions and maintaining production pace.

Color Quality

One of the significant trends BMS has seen is the use of highlight color in printing bills and invoices. Utility companies, for example, recognized that

customers were receptive to promotions and delivered service offerings along with their statements. As a result, eye-catching, consistent color printing has become the new normal for many of the company's transactional customers. Canon inkjet technology helps make the use of color in these applications easy and cost effective.

Print Consistency

BMS also can depend on consistent quality over the long haul. Bob Hansen, BMS's vice president of sales, marketing, and client services, explained, "In describing this evolution to prospects and current customers, the biggest thing for us is the high quality from start-of-run to end-of-run that inkjet brings."

Bob is candid with the comparison. "Over time, toner degrades. This degrading is because there's constant calibrating, stopping, and restarting. In contrast, Canon's inkjet technology takes us to a new level of operational efficiency and smoother workflow. As a result, we're no longer worried

about any ink quality loss over a job's duration. That's a huge selling point."

Operational Redundancy

Being a dedicated Canon shop deploying identical inkjet press units also has given BMS reassuring operational redundancy. As a result, if there's any disruption on a print job, it's possible to move to another press with seamless efficiency. In addition, the compatibility of the Canon equipment and interconnectivity facilitated by Canon's PRISMA software helps minimize job interruptions, optimize workflow, and help maximize bottom-line performance for BMS.

CUSTOMER SUCCESS — A 360° PERSPECTIVE

With the desire to transition to production inkjet, it was paramount for BMS Direct to ensure a smooth installation and production ramp-up. With that in mind, BMS took advantage of Canon Solutions America's Project 360, a cost-free advisory service designed to accelerate onboarding and operator proficiency and provide professional business consultation. That decision reflects BMS's vital mission to provide professional learning and development for their employees continually.

"I'm glad we participated in Project 360," James said. "The team mentored our employees on the best approach for grasping the new Canon presses and workflow." He described how an initial look at the new BMS press room, full of advanced equipment and computer interfaces, might appear complicated. But with the proper introduction and guidance, it is very user friendly. "Project 360 gave our team much more confidence to work with the new technology. Our people embraced it by opening paper drawers, dryer units, and embracing technical support."

The Project 360 engagement was so beneficial that BMS took advantage of an additional round of coaching. As a result, production staff initially skeptical of the innovations were soon celebrating the presses' ease of use and speed.

Director of Marketing Doreen Flint echoed James's assessment, adding that the training provided by Canon also strengthened BMS employee confidence. "Having their skills honed through straightforward instruction helped them realize the transition would not be difficult," she said. "It built team spirit and forged a strong desire to share newly gained knowledge with others. In addition, it allowed our newer employees, with less printing industry experience, to understand the full capabilities of BMS."

In addition to Project 360, the BMS client services team takes advantage of thINK Academy online and live class training on thINKForum.com — one of the benefits available to all thINK members. thINK is an independent community of Canon Solutions America production inkjet customers, thINK Ahead partners,

and print industry experts designed to provide a forum for members to network, gain knowledge, discuss common challenges, and share best practices.

"I wanted our people to get a new perspective," James explained. "We've been in business for fifty years, and if you do the same thing day in and day out, you only see things one way. So Canon was able to give our people training and tools that helped us think outside the box."

It's a continuous process for the BMS team.

"Job-specific training is mandatory as part of our yearly evaluations at BMS," Doreen said. "The online modules via thINK Academy provide a tangible benefit for our employees. People here are excited to learn, and the company is eager to reward their increasing expertise."

Bob sees enough value in thINK Academy offerings that he makes sure his monthly sales meeting ends

in time to take in the latest Sales Academy presentation.

"It's fun because they cover a wide variety of topics, but everything points back to inkjet technology," he said.

"Having my amazing team watch live training allows our sales team members to come out of those sessions with new ideas every time."

EMBEDDED EXPERTISE

An on-site Canon tech at BMS is perhaps the most powerful representation of Canon's commitment to helping BMS realize every ounce of potential from its new inkjet capability.

Being located hours away from the nearest airport means getting someone to BMS HQ for the proper fix can be a challenge.

"Where we are in southwest Virginia, there's not a lot of service coverage, and no company wants to endure the drain of downtime," said James. "Canon stepped up to the plate by putting a technician and trainer in our midst, which made the implementation much easier."

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— James E. LaPrade, Sr., CEO and President

Bob agrees. "When we said we were going to expand and be a full Canon shop, we knew maintenance response times were important," he said. "One of the big reasons we migrated to inkjet in the first place, and Canon in particular, is that our previous toner setup remained constantly plagued by equipment being more offline than on. So having somebody right here is great.

"In addition, the training they've helped provide has been fantastic. Having an expert at your disposal is a true advantage. Even for the sales team and other service reps we work with, the Canon people have become part of the BMS family."

EDUCATED, ENGAGED CUSTOMERS

The BMS team is incredibly excited about what might be the most customer-centric aspect of the new Canon inkjet production process: how easy it is to inform and involve customers from beginning to end.

"It's also allowed us to educate our customers," Doreen said. "Our sales and budget management teams have learned alongside everyone on the shop floor so they can explain our new capabilities."

According to James, this approach has led to "unprecedented transparency" for customers.

"Our customers have total visibility into how their work is processed on site. They can upload data files and handle all the proofs and reprints seamlessly through a virtual dashboard," he said. "Of course, we never want to lose our human touch, so we are doubling down on efforts to keep customers informed and easily interact with us as people. We know that the changes at BMS might initially be intimidating to our customers, which is why we want them to be part of the process. The tools Canon provides to BMS make that possible."

PRESSING TOWARD GROWTH

In what is likely the most welcome outcome of becoming a Canon shop,

inkjet innovation reveals new business channels for BMS. They are pursuing more commercial printing opportunities, like brochures and marketing collateral, as well as organic opportunities with existing clients.

BMS's evolving over to inkjet relieved them of relying on preprinted shells and moved them to an all-white paper workflow. Now statements with highlight color and promotional messages can ultimately be created cost effectively at BMS, even when they involve proprietary branded color logotypes or municipal seals.

Being a production inkjet shop also allows BMS to offer customers expanded applications. Again, Bob offered a direct example.

"Previously," he explained, "customers would send us preprinted buck slips, flyers, or other inserts to stuff into whatever we were producing on a transactional basis. Our inkjet capability allows us to produce them right in our



Colorful face cover on the Canon ColorStream 3900 web-fed inkjet press makes the shop floor look as dynamic as the work BMS produces.



Two Canon varioPRINT i-series+ sheetfed inkjet presses help BMS pursue more commercial printing opportunities as well as new organic opportunities with existing clients.

shop. And we can show customers new options they may not have realized were possible that we can print.”

WHAT’S AHEAD

“I’m excited about our future,” James said with straightforward optimism. “We are well positioned with our team, technology, and software. Partnering with Canon is having an exponential impact on our capabilities. Taking the reins back in 1998 was a big change, but I was up to the challenge.

Now I’m the one helping to usher in the change, and I’ve never felt a stronger sense of potential for BMS.” James qualifies his optimism with the understanding that there’s ongoing work to get his people the most out of the Canon inkjet capability. “We have yet to see everything that this inkjet technology can do, that we can do, but we’re already making it happen. BMS boasts a 90 percent customer retention rate, and we are confident

that we’ll keep that record intact, even as we grow.”

Working with Canon Solutions America, BMS is preserving its enviable ability to focus on both talent and technology while honoring its origins as a successful family print business. It continues to cultivate growth as a standout transactional printing leader — one well-equipped, expertly staffed, and ready to enjoy another 50 years of excellence.

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ABOUT US

Canon Solutions America recommends forward-thinking strategies to help achieve the highest levels of information management efficiency for your unique business needs. Using superior technology and innovative services, we then design, implement, and track solutions that help improve information flow throughout your organization while considering the environment, helping to result in greater productivity and reduced costs.

Canon Solutions America Provides End-to-End Solutions Like These:

- Paper Program
- Media and Solutions Lab
- TrueSupport
- Training and Experience
- Escalation Procedures
- Preventive Maintenance
- Canon PRISMA Workflow Software
- Resource Center Website

As a company that is dedicated to your needs, we support our solutions with highly skilled professionals and advanced diagnostic systems to maintain peak performance. And with ongoing consultation, we can further your document management capabilities to help ensure the highest level of satisfaction and productivity.



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