

Print Solutions

MARCH 2011 | VOLUME 49, NUMBER 3

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Educating Customers About
Your Sustainable Business Practices
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Agile and Adaptable

Under Jon Sooy's leadership, California-based distributorship Golden Pacific Systems has built a substantial book of business by leveraging its staff's vast knowledge and implementing innovative solutions for clients in changing times.

BY AMIE SHAK

You never know when it's going to hit you. Jon Sooy was designing T-shirts for tourists when he fell in love with print and the endless possibilities it brings. He quickly went from printing T-shirts to running a screen printing company in Silicon Valley.

"I was completely unprepared to manage a staff of 20, but I figured it out," he said of the company. "We became known for doing high-end, four-color process print, and eventually did shirts for Intel, Sun Microsystems, Wells Fargo, PeopleSoft and many other tech giants. By 1994 our sales had grown from 1 million to 3 million. I was officially a print junkie."

Sooy's life path briefly took him away from print industry, but he eventually returned, joining PSDA member distributor Golden Pacific Systems in 2000.

"I left the print world briefly to help with my father's business (he owned service stations) and began to consider what I wanted to be when I grew up," Sooy said. "I fell in love with a woman who lived north of me by about 45 minutes in Sonoma County, so eventually I left the family business and moved north for the woman who is now my wife.

"Living in a new area with no job and no prospects, I started cold-calling print and promotional products distributors in the area," he added. "I figured that my print experience would help me land a job in an industry that I understood. I landed interviews with three companies and eventually joined Golden Pacific Systems."

Sooy was hired in as a salesperson whose initial focus was on growing promotional product sales. Founded in 1977 by Kevin Austin, Golden Pacific's motto was simple:



Jon Sooy

Golden Pacific
SYSTEMS, INC.
Your Vision. We See It.

"Give Us Challenges and We Will Provide Solutions." As the years passed, Kevin and his business partner, Cal Popken, gradually developed a larger product mix in an effort to become a true one-stop shop for local businesses. They also had the foresight to embrace technology early on as a strategic business opportunity.

Golden Pacific entered the Internet age with a goal of using new technologies to better serve its clients. Sooy quickly learned that there was a lot of competition, and that if he was going to succeed, he would need to differentiate. He began to tinker with the company's online order system (Quantum Net) to build order sites, and he identified many

areas where he could customize the system to fit a customer's needs. Some of the sites didn't work out, but from those failures came wisdom and a new focus. It was clear to the Golden Pacific team that moving customers online created efficiencies and cost savings for Golden Pacific and its customers.

Sooy was promoted to vice president of sales and marketing in 2005 and immediately went to work on changing how Golden Pacific would do business. He started an internship program to attract young energetic employees who were eager to interact with technology. Soon he had a small team of talented, forward-thinking individuals whose main focus was not products, but rather technology.

"I didn't teach my sales team about print, I taught them how to sell websites," he said. "As I suspected, our customers viewed much of what they were consuming in terms of business forms, marketing collateral and promotional items as commodities. So we took the focus off of the products and put it on the online order system – or, as we like to call it now, a 'high-tech supply chain management system.'"

For Sooy, even challenging economic times in recent years presented opportunities for growth.

"There has been so much doom and gloom in our industry over the past several years, but for me it has been a very exciting and rewarding time," he said. "In times of change there are those who gravitate toward the conservative and those who gravitate toward innovation. I see this as a time when I get to 'color outside the lines,' and I was fortunate have been given the freedom to challenge conventional thinking."



Jon Sooy, vice president of sales and marketing for Golden Pacific Systems, is also quite handy outside of work, having recently built a golf putting green and a cabana in his backyard.

Sooy's focus on unconventional thinking extends to his approach to hiring print professionals.

"Once as a guest at a Business Networking International meeting I was asked to stand up and tell the group what I did for a living," Sooy said. "I stood up and said, 'I hire crazy people.' People laughed, and then I explained further that I want to work with people that would go on TV shows like 'Survivor,' 'Big Brother,' 'The Amazing Race' or 'The Apprentice.' Not only do many of the people I work with have the guts to go on one of those shows, but they also have the intelligence, talent and determination to win. The key to Golden Pacific's success is its people and their discipline and determination."

With its people driving its success, Golden Pacific has mapped out and implemented highly effective solutions

for many clients. Calling itself a "Supply Chain Technology Company" and an "Efficiency Enable," Golden Pacific says its internal procurement e-commerce system "serves as a transparent arm of your communication, document management and marketing efforts, ensuring your brand integrity and the fast and efficient distribution of your marketing collateral, uniforms, training and operational material and supplies." Its signature solution is GPnet™, a fully integrated, end-to-end e-commerce system that aims to revolutionize how companies with multiple locations do business.

Sooy says one key to doing business now is realizing how the print distribution industry continues to evolve.

"The most interesting thing I have learned about the industry is how agile and adaptable a company can be," Sooy

said. "We can sell virtually anything. We actually have one client for whom we distribute wallpaper."

Outside of work, Sooy enjoys home improvement projects, as well as taking time to work on his own cars, building computers and tinkering with Linux. Last summer, Sooy found time to build a cabana by his swimming pool after finding some reclaimed pillars and railings online from a winery in Napa. Sooy powers the area with a solar power system he installed.

Sooy also built a putting green in his backyard, but not because he's great at golf.

"To me, art is not the residue or final outcome; it's the act of doing art. The physical painting created by a painter is not the art; the real art happened as the painting was being painted," he said. "When people see the putting green or the cabana I built, they usually say 'wow' or 'that's so cool' and I smile and say 'thanks,' but in my head, I'm already thinking about the next art project."

In business and in pleasure, Sooy is always thinking ahead.

"I see strong parallels between projects I do in my personal life and running a business," he said. "A business is like a machine made up of parts working together. The machine's purpose is to generate revenue. The parts are the people, processes and procedures. If all are working together at maximum efficiency, the machine will generate revenue. If a part breaks, replace it. I actually like it when things break because it gives me the opportunity to fix it and make it better than before."

Learn more about Sooy and his company at www.jonsooy.com and www.goldenpacificsystems.com. **PS**

Amie Shak is managing editor of Print Solutions. Know of a PSDA member who should be featured in an upcoming PSDA Profile? Contact Shak at ashak@psda.org.