

BY LAUREN OXNER

Sometimes a change in game calls for a change in name. Which explains why Yuletide Office Solutions, formerly Yuletide Office Supply, made the switch in late 2009 — it had changed their game by expanding services and product lines.

The family-owned company, started in 1972 by Paul Miller Sr., has worked its way up to become one of the largest independent dealer of office supplies in Memphis. Though competition from big-box players like Staples and Office Depot is stiff, the folks at Yuletide say they couldn't feel better about

the direction their business is headed.

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The name Yuletide might cause some to mistake this company for a type of holiday decoration supply shop, but the name actually reflects the season during which

the business originated. Miller opened his doors in December of 1972, and in the spirit of the season began wrapping delivery packages in holiday paper and put a candy cane in each one. Though an increase in business didn't allow him to continue giving such personal care to each delivery, the tradition of including a candy cane remains to this day, as it has found its way into the gift bag that all of Yuletide's potential clients receive, along with literature about the services Yuletide provides.

While this tradition has remained the same over the years, much has changed for Yuletide in terms of logistics. Since Miller's son Chris Miller took over the business in 1982, Yuletide has expanded its product line beyond basic office supplies to include computer/IT supplies, office furniture and janitorial products. Salesman Todd Miller says this expansion motivated the name change.

"We now offer anything needed in an office, so our movement to the name 'office solutions' reflects our diversification," says Todd Miller, nephew of Chris Miller.

Marketing manager Robert Phillips says Yuletide's decision to align itself



ALAN HOWELL | MBJ

Chris Miller and Quenton Campbell check an outbound shipment of office products.

Storing up profits

Yuletide warehouses inventory to keep prices down in competitive office products industry

with \$13 billion national purchasing cooperative TriMega Purchasing Association has kept costs down significantly, a decision that has reflected positively on Yuletide's bottom line.

"People have a big misconception that it will cost them more to bring their business to an independent local supplier," Phillips says, "but since we purchase items directly and store them in our warehouse, we cut out the middle man."

In 2008, Yuletide produced \$6.49 million in sales. And while that number is projected to be down slightly in 2009

to between \$6.2 and \$6.3 million, a 4.5% decrease is much lower than the industry average decline of 10%-18%.

Phillips says Yuletide sets itself apart from other independent suppliers because most of them don't maintain stock and only purchase inventory from a wholesaler. Yuletide, which stores roughly 1,500 different items in its warehouse, is able to make deliveries to its customers much faster because of this, he says.

Another boost to business came when Yuletide chose to add employees during an economy that has led most

Challenge: Compete with both big-box and independent retailers.

Solution: Align with a national purchasing group and store inventory on-site for quick delivery.

Challenge: Get the company's name into the community at a low cost.

Solution: Implement online marketing campaigns to target customers and get involved in the nonprofit sector.

businesses to do the opposite, says Miller.

"We felt that we had to grow within before we could grow without," Todd Miller says. "We've expanded our number of employees to 30, a large number of those being new members of our sales team. More feet on the street have gone a long way in getting our name out into the public."

Yuletide's e-commerce and e-marketing campaigns are allowing the company to better identify and target customers. Along with radio ads, Yuletide has assumed an unwavering commitment to the nonprofit sector, sponsoring and participating in local charity organizations like the Church Health Center, Memphis Oral School for the Deaf and the Memphis Food Bank.

"Committing ourselves to nonprofit initiatives is great in two ways. First, of course, it gets our name out into the community," Phillips says. "But we also love being involved with local charities."

Yuletide is also a member of the Lipscomb & Pitts Breakfast Club, a team of local businesses that work together and hold events to encourage business success in the area. In addition to networking, the club events offer enrichment and learning opportunities for businesses as well. Lipscomb & Pitts Insurance happens to be one of Yuletide's biggest local clients.

"L & P is known for having high expectations, and Yuletide Office Solutions exceeds those expectations with their high level of customer service," says Brenda Gregory at Lipscomb & Pitts.

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