

Posted: 8/3/2009

## Image Consultants

### ***On-Site Laser Medic Considers Itself Customer Caregiver***

**By Mark Madler**

San Fernando Valley Business Journal Staff

On-Site LaserMedic Corp. has many big, nationally known clients for which it provides managed printing services.

But it is the smaller clients that chief executive Gail Solomon has a soft spot for; the clients that helped get the business going when she and business partner Ellen Dee started in 1992.



CEO: Gail Solomon tries to make sure that her customers are getting the most out of their particular printers.

“When they are down I want to get them up and running,” Solomon said in her Chatsworth office.

Hardware is of less interest to Solomon and the employees at On-Site as much as assuring companies they are getting the most of their printers. This they do with a detailed assessment of all the devices a company uses and with sophisticated software that notifies the On-Site call center of problems ranging from low toner to a complete breakdown.

The “Medic” part of the company gets taken seriously.

In the early years, technicians answered service calls in lab coats with stethoscopes around their necks.

The preventative care for laser printers is equated with going to the dentist – regular checkups will prevent more serious problems down the road. Except that it’s not periodontal disease or a root canal a business owner has to worry about, it’s the printer going down at a time when it’s most needed.

After all, when the cost of printers can add up into thousands of dollars keeping the machines in working order becomes a priority.

“We make sure anytime someone clicks on print it will print out a piece of paper,” said Morris Bekas, vice president of sales and marketing.

Competitors have bid to get a managed print service contract with the Writers Guild of America in Los Angeles but always come in higher than what On-Site offers, said Jose Edwards, a senior desktop analyst.

The Guild had about 45 printers that On-Site manages and Edwards rarely has to worry about the machines except for when they break down. On-Site is usually out the same day or the next day, Edwards said.

“Any kind of little problems I have that are unique they have resolved them in a timely fashion,” Edwards added.

From the Chatsworth headquarters, Solomon oversees a large swath of the western U.S.: from San Luis Obispo in the north to San Diego in the south and into parts of Nevada and Arizona.

The rest of the country is handled through the Partner Service Group, a network of affiliates many of which were handpicked by Solomon herself. She wants the same quality work as if On-Site were going on the call itself.

“Our qualifications are stringent,” Solomon said. “They are going in representing me. I must have consistency and professionalism.”

### **Different business**

Solomon and Dee were in the word processing supply business for more than a decade when they switched gears after hearing complaints from clients about problems toner cartridges could cause in printers. The large national chains supplying the cartridges, however, weren't servicing the printers and those firms that did required the printers to be brought to them.

Solomon tells of one company (no longer in business) that loaded its 40 printers onto a truck for servicing in Venice.

With an initial \$10,000 investment, Solomon and Dee started On-Site LaserMedic, with an emphasis on going to the companies to maintain the printers. Solomon herself is a certified technician, wearing a pink lab coat when she went out on service calls.

The preventative maintenance business model worked well for On-Site until about the summer of 2007 when the first signs of a faltering economy began to appear. As conditions worsened, Solomon decided to take the company in a different direction with managed printer services and consulting.

It was at this time that Bekas joined the company to keep the focus on what helped it grow: providing quality service and following through in an efficient and timely manner.

Cost savings plays into that as well, the difference between printing for four cents a page versus a penny a page adding up to thousands of dollars for a large corporation.

Printing out documents, both Solomon and Bekas explained, is a lifelong uncontrolled cost. It is also what they term a “rogue expense” in that executives will often buy their own toner cartridges for stockpiling and charge it to their employer above and beyond what is already budgeted for such supplies.

And then there is the, uh, less legitimate use of printers.

The On-Site monitoring software uncovered for one client that their printers were being used heavily on weekends by non-employees to put together color brochures.

With the economy still struggling and companies making budget cuts, On-Site staffers find themselves giving more presentations to chief financial officers whereas when the environment was better they never made it past the IT department.

What this means is that On-Site will take from two to four weeks for a complete assessment of a company's printing needs in order to come up with a concise financial presentation for the finance chiefs.

The company recently went before executives at an Orange County hospital with more than 600 printing devices with an annual cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000. On-Site calculated they could reduce that cost to \$6,000.

“The savings is there,” Bekas said. “We need people to listen and the opportunity to present.”

### **Variety of industries**

Those who do listen to On-Site and hire their services are spread across multiple industries – banking, medical, legal, the federal government, apparel manufacturing, and entertainment. Just before tax time, accountants come calling to make sure their printers are up to the task.

“Real estate was wonderful while it was peaking,” Solomon said. “It will come back.”

When these clients have equipment break down, On-Site can consult on the replacements and make sure that the old stuff gets disposed of in an environmentally-friendly way.

There are plastic and metal parts in printers that can be recycled and other parts that can be used in refurbished machines. Bekas said.