



Few words captivate the business environment more than the word “change.” At one level, all of us would like to avoid change. But our businesses simply can’t. Anyone with even a casual understanding of the technology marketplace, for example, recognizes that change is constantly afoot. The same can be said for the window-fashions industry—companies, both small and large, are continually reinventing themselves to stay ahead of the game.

CORPORATE CHANGE

Businesses Reinvent Themselves to Stay Competitive

By Maura Keller

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

While some companies note that technological advancements are at the core of their company’s evolution, others say customers also play a vital role in how some businesses adapt their business.

Rowley Company, a manufacturer and distributor of decorating supplies and more, has built a solid reputation over the years for delivering great customer service, listening to customer needs and offering a broad selection of quality products to meet those needs.

Founded more than 50 years ago by R.H. Rowley and his wife, the Rowley Company was recently acquired. “Mr. and Mrs. Rowley were ready to slow down a little, and we saw this as a wonderful opportunity to carry on their legacy by continuing to introduce new and innovative items that our customers desired,” says Bill Taylor, chief executive officer at the Rowley Company.

As Taylor explains, operationally, things have remained unchanged from a customer’s perspective as a result of the acquisition. “However, we are making significant investments to make it easier to do business with Rowley,” Taylor says. “We are installing new operating systems to improve efficiencies in our customer service call center, the warehouse and order packaging.”

Most visible to customers are Rowley’s advertising initiatives and new website, which now provides video demonstrations on how to use its products and to help with troubleshooting on more complex projects. The company has also introduced pricing promotions on its website.

Taylor explains that, during a time of uncertainty, the new company leaders ensured that the employees continued to be empowered to service the customers and manage the business.

[above] Designer: Amanda Dean. Photographer: Mark Ehlen. Workroom: Warren Steven Window Fashions.



Designers: Sheree Vincent, fusion designed, and Carol Boyles, Carol Boyles Interiors. Workroom: Warren Steven Window Fashions.



Rowley Company: Jeff Denny (left), COO and Bill Taylor, CEO.

"Beyond that, we have to blend the core values and legacy of the Rowley Company with our new efforts, leveraging our value proposition into new product lines and business channels," he says. "We work diligently to stay true to and focused on the value proposition that made the company successful."

Without a doubt, the biggest reward for Taylor and his team is hearing positive feedback from their customers and others in the industry. "It is truly eye-opening to see how passionate people in this industry are," Taylor says. "Everything from sharing their creative ideas and best practices to their generosity and willingness to educate us. Just about everyone we have encountered is open to new ideas, and helping us continue the legacy that defines Rowley."

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

In the early stages, most mergers and acquisitions are about dollars, cents and legal issues. But after the lawyers, accountants and other intermediaries complete the deal, it becomes very clear that mergers and acquisitions are also about people.

Take the recent merger between Warren Shade and Steven Fabrics. Beginning in 1910, Warren Shade operated as a porch shade manufacturer, eventually becoming an independent fabricator. Likewise, Steven Fabrics, founded in 1946, also was a leading independent fabricator. Both were in Minneapolis.

"These were two companies within 10 miles of each other," says Mike Mann, principal at the renamed Warren Steven. "Everyone wanted a stronger, more efficient company,

and combining the two gave us the ability to take the best practices."

As Mann explains, because Warren Shade and Steven Fabrics were strong competitors for so long, getting Warren Steven Window Fashions to work as one cohesive unit was difficult at the start.

"Anytime you have two different companies, you have different corporate cultures," Mann says. "Policies, procedures and even computers that were different need to be one new working unit. We were able to look at the practices of both companies and decide what was the most efficient way of doing things. Not only were we dealing with merging our employees, we also moved into a new facility, so were working on getting four buildings into one larger facility."

Keeping both companies' dealers in the loop and happy was also one of Warren Steven's top priorities. "Many of our dealers were very loyal to either Warren Shade or Steven Fabrics, and we wanted to assure them that Warren Steven Window Fashions would be a fabricator that they could trust," Mann says.

For companies considering consolidating their efforts, Mann recommends you expect the unexpected. "The better prepared you are for things, the smoother the merger will go," he says. "Having a plan as to your employees, practices and how you will deal with your customer base and the questions they have is the key to a successful merger."

DIVERSIFICATION AND GROWTH

While some companies have changed product lines, renamed their companies or merged with other entities, others define their evolution through their diversification and growth. Take Debbie Green, co-president of Minutes Matter Solutions and president of Dandelion Interiors. For nearly three decades, Green has been a key player in the custom window-fashions industry in the Nashville region.

Known for her streamlined processes and attention to detail, Green created a second company, Minutes Matter, a provider of digital solutions and organizational systems for the industry, a few years ago.



Debbie Green, co-president of Minutes Matter and president of Dandelion Interiors Inc., and Casey Green, co-president of Minutes Matter.

"I was always eager to systemize our processes within our interior design company," Green explains. "When you have systemization, you have less error, it is more efficient and you can make more money." After integrating a series of measuring systems for her window-fashions design business, she was asked by others within the industry if they could purchase these systems for their own use.

As Minutes Matter has blossomed, so has Green's interior design company. Originally named Debbie's Designs, Green and her husband, Jerry, who joined her enterprise in April, renamed the design arm to Dandelion Interiors.


"When you have your name on the door, everyone wants to work directly with you," Green explains. "But as our interior decorating side of the business grew and Minutes Matter expanded, we embraced a new name change to allow for further growth."

Today, Jerry works alongside Debbie and Casey, their daughter-in-law and co-president of Minutes Matter, overseeing the efforts of both entities. Owen Green, Jerry Green and Lee Green, as well as Casey, are all key players in the business.

So what does Green attribute to her success? "I believe in staying current with information in our industry, which means education," Green says. "I always made it a practice to attend seminars, courses and major conferences every year. After attending a conference or seminar I always implement some of the new things I learned. ... I want to be the best at whatever I do and I realize that requires an effort on my part and I am willing to do whatever it takes to see it through." **WF**

Maura Keller is a freelance writer and editor based in Minneapolis.

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Dandelion Interiors
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Minutes Matter
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Rowley Company
rowleycompany.com
800/343-4542

Warren Steven Window Fashions
warrensteven.com
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Designer: Debbie Green. Workroom: Dandelion Interiors Inc. Installer: Fred Bebe. Photographer: Myra Godby.