

The Customer is Always Wrong!

Spiel Associates has been selling the right bindery equipment for 50 years.

By Howard Riell

Spiel Associates, Inc. is celebrating its first 50 years in business this year. Since 1963, the family-owned and operated company has been helping printers find the perfect piece of equipment to meet their bindery needs.

The New York City-based firm manufactures many pieces of bindery equipment, but also sells and services equipment from other manufacturers. The philosophy of the three Spiel brothers—David, Michael, and Saul—is to match printers with the bindery equipment that will make them most productive—even if it isn't what they think they want. They learned that concept from their father, Norton Spiel, who founded the company.

"The fact that we sell both new and used machinery gives us experience with our competitor's machines. Most of our competitors only sell new machines and machines of their own make," states Michael Spiel. "We take in our competitor's machines in trade or purchase them outright. There are, however, some troublesome machines we won't handle. This expands our product knowledge and helps us steer our customers in the right direction."

On This, Customers are Right

Apparently, the business model that has led the company



Brothers David, Saul, and Michael Spiel are the godfathers of customer service at Spiel Associates.

through 50 successful years has produced some very satisfied customers.

"We started buying from the Spiels in the early 90s," reports Tim Tully, president of Southwest Precision Printing, a 38-year-old company based in Houston, TX. "The first thing we bought was a punch and we've bought four or five pieces of small bindery equipment from them in the last two or three years.

"Over the years we've bought a lot of pieces of equipment from them, and their bindery products are good quality. They always do a lot of training and their service is good. We just always know that they will do what they say," Tully concludes.

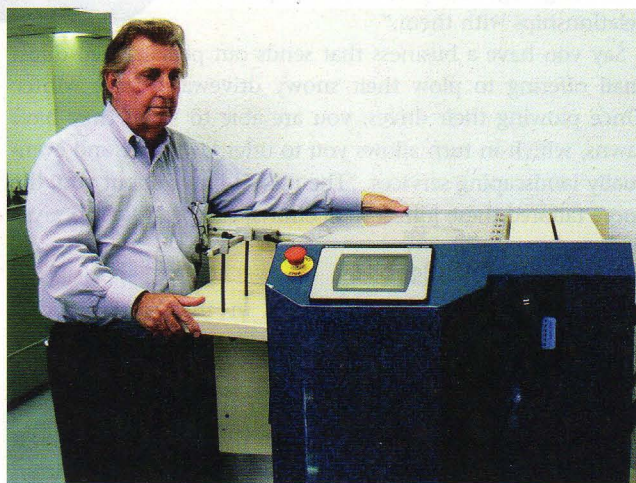
"They are very pleasant to work with, they are very accommodating, and they make very good equipment," notes Frank



Fred Tenorio, the owner of Digital World Solutions Inc. in New York City, with his Sterling DigiMaster.



Frank Markasovic of Graphic Image Corp. shows off his two Coilmaster Jrs.



Tim Tully, president of Southwest Precision Printing, with his Sterling DigiPunch.

Markasovic, the principal of Graphic Image Corp. The Chicago-based company is a full-service, multicolor sheetfed printer with state-of-the-art prepress services that specializes in one- to five-color catalogs, brochures, ad reprints, and postcards in small, medium, or long runs.

Graphic Image has been working closely with Spiel Associates for more than four years, purchasing two Coilmaster Jrs and a Coilmaker. According to Markasovic, the partnership works well. "Their equipment is reliable, their pricing is fair, and their service is tremendous." And on an informal basis, he reports, "We have personal conversations with one of the brothers. They're always very pleasant."

Fred Tenorio, the owner of Digital World Solutions Inc. in New York City, has been working with Spiel Associates for nearly 15 years. Among the machines he has purchased from the brothers are a CreaseMaster unit, a Digipunch, and a Digibinder perfect binder.

"I've worked with many other companies in the past," Tenorio recalls. "What I like about Spiel Associates is that I'm able to sit with any of the guys over there and explain to them what my needs are. They have always been able to advise me about which direction I should make my investments in. They not only take care of my needs today, but also my future needs."

Thus, Tenorio adds, the Spiels add de facto consulting services to their menu of offerings. Service has also proven to be excellent. "When it concerns getting any type of service for my equipment I always get a response in a day or, at most, two days."

On a personal level—and most business is ultimately built on relationships—the bond is there. "I think Michael Spiel and I have developed a very close relationship," says Tenorio, "to the point where I've referred other clients to him, as well."

Always Wrong?

On the occasion of their company's 50th anniversary, the brothers are unanimous in expressing gratitude to their father, the company's founder, Norton Spiel.

"My Dad always used to say, 'The customer is always wrong,'" recalls Saul. "Why? Many printers would call up asking to buy a punch when looking for a drill. But deeper than that, printers are not aware of the various types of equipment suited towards a particular job, any more than I can pick out ink or cover stock. We recommend the right machine for the right job—even if we don't sell it."

"My father loved solving bindery problems," recalls David. "He liked it more than selling. Maybe it was because he was trained as an engineer. Customers would come into our booth at a trade show with some crazy job and he would spend oodles of time trying to solve the problem, sometimes neglecting more profitable endeavors." A lot of that has rubbed off on him and his brothers, David adds. "That's why our customers call us—not to sell them something, but for our expertise.

"My Dad turned 79 in March and he still comes into work almost every day," he concludes. "If we kids can't solve a bindery problem, we know who to turn to. To quote The Godfather, 'Who could be a better *consigliere* than my father?'" ■■