Keeping the print business thriving in a digital age

Printing company taps the power of technology to stretch its reach and punch above its weight

By Neo Siew Khoon, Ng Xin Yu and Tan Xue Ting Supansa

IN THE new digital age, the changing consumer habits and rapid growth of e-commerce companies such as Amazon and eBay present new challenges to many businesses, the printing industry included.

Understanding that change is the only constant in this business environment, Edwin Ng, managing director, Markono, emphasises innovation. Since the company's establishment in 1967, it has transitioned from being a general printer for business cards to an aspiring provider of world-class printing today.

It prides itself on being nimble to capitalise on growth opportunities and advancing its business model to remain competitive in the changing landscape.

Redefining the traditional supply chain

Over the last few years, Markono has redefined the traditional publishing supply chain by adopting improvements in the digital printing technology. The model of zero-inventory through "print on demand" service was launched to maintain cost effectiveness for customers. These items will then be printed based on orders and fulfilled directly to end-consumers.

"Instead of printing 10,000 copies of one book, we are now handling one copy of 10,000 books; thus the print-on-demand feature cuts down obsolescence and inventory costs," said Mr Ng.

Serving as an Asia fulfilment hub

Despite gaining a strong foothold in the printing industry, Markono did not relax its pace in striving for customer excellence. To maintain an edge over competitors, Markono shifted its focus to deliver high value content in its product offerings. This spurred the company to work towards being a one-stop fulfilment hub, which offers convenience and flexibility in all its customer's supply chain requirements.

In November 2016, Markono shifted into a new building to enhance its warehouse storage capacity. This bold move demonstrated the company's commitment to creating greater customer value by catering to the entire supply chain beyond the print process. Today, customers can entrust Markono with their entire supply chain as the company manages the whole process – from printing, warehousing, Customs documentation to the final shipment.

With the redefined supply chain, Markono has successfully transformed into a one-stop fulfilment hub for its customers. Leveraging on the strategic location and strong Intellectual Property (IP) Protection in Singapore, Markono aims to establish itself as a preferred partner for multi-national publishers looking to penetrate the Asian market.

Taking on the global platform

In an increasingly globalised world, Markono recognises that an efficient global supply chain is vital as the company progresses to serve global markets. Being part of GPS Global Printing Solutions, which claims to be the world's first truly integrated global manufacturing network, Markono's strategic alliance with global market leaders provides the company an edge in offering supply chain services.

In addition to eliminating shipping and storage costs, the partnership allows customers to manage their global print and distribution seamlessly. This propels Markono towards its vision of being the trusted supply chain partner for delivering valued content to the world's leading organisations.

Since Markono's establishment in 1967, it has gone from being a general printer for business cards to an aspiring provider of top-notch printing. Managing director Edwin Ng (fourth from far left) puts this down to embracing innovation.

A culture of continual innovation and improvements

To remain competitive and relevant in today's changing landscape, Mr Ng advocates the need for the business to reinvent itself and stay nimble to anticipate change and capitalise on growth opportunities.

At Markono, innovation and continual productivity improvements are deeply rooted in the corporate culture.

Embracing the paradigm shift in the digital age, Markono leverages on IT resources to create innovation and enhance customer value.

The development of online portal "e-Motion" is the result of such innovation initiatives. Enhanced information visibility, better inventory management and accessibility are the key aspects, which Markono strives to provide to its customers through the portal. It also sets the ground for Markono to provide data analytics services to advise customers on optimising print-buys and their inventory in the future.

Internally, the company also focuses on streamlining operations to reduce redundancies and promote efficiency in the workplace. Mr Ng believes that new ideas and innovations can be inspired from solving day-to-day problems in the organisation.

A dedicated in-house team was also formed with the aim to develop customised solutions for clients. Markono begins by working closely with customers to identify pain points and their specific needs. The close collaboration provides opportunities for the company to spearhead new innovations and novel solutions that will better serve the needs of its clients.

Markono also invests in people and new projects that it believes will be important in the future. This strongly demonstrates the market leader's dedication towards continual reinvention of the business, the key to maintaining an edge over its competitors.

The writers are students from NUS Business School.

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