



Steve Johnson, president and CEO, Copresco

# An Open Book

## Tales from a top executive

By Elise Hacking Carr

As part of Print+Promo's ongoing feature, Executive Perspectives, we get to know leading professionals in the print and promotional industry. This month, we interviewed Steve Johnson, president and CEO of Copresco, Carol Stream, Ill. Here, he talks about the impact of decisiveness, trending technology and his role in educating customers on the power of print.

→ *How did you first get started in this industry, and what path did you take to land in your current role?*

**Steve Johnson:** At age 15, I was mopping floors at a publishing company. It needed help in its in-plant print shop. [The company] liked my work ethic, so it offered to train me. I jumped at the chance to learn a trade that could keep me employed for a lifetime. I started in platemaking, moved onto the darkroom, then stripping. Ironically, none of those careers even exist anymore.

I became a pressman, then manager of the entire printing and binding operation by the time I was 18. I loved the art, craft and science of printing and binding, and the business of publishing, and I enjoyed the responsibility of management. The rest, as they say, is history.

*How do you set goals for yourself? For your business?*

**SJ:** An old Chinese proverb says, "To not decide is to decide." Goal setting is deciding what you want or, in the case of business, what your customers want. At Copresco, our mission has always been to economically deliver books, manuals and publications in hours or days rather than weeks or months. Our goals are all structured to fulfill that mission; otherwise, what is the point? Sometimes, this requires thinking outside the box by anticipating rather than reacting to customer needs. To quote Henry Ford,

THE INKJET  
PROCESS SEEMS  
POISED TO  
REPLACE TONER.

— Steve Johnson

"If I'd asked my customers what they wanted, they'd have said faster horses."

*What do you expect to be some of the biggest challenges the industry will face?*

**SJ:** For 500 years, print has been an essential medium of promotion and communication. Print was required for every facet of every business. The only question any user of print (and that was everyone) had to ask was, "Which printer is best for each of my needs?" Now the question has become, "Should I use print at all?"

The exciting challenge is keep[ing] the public enlightened as to the superior communication properties of the printed word. Some folks become enthralled with electronic communication options that are sadly never read or even opened. Study after study proves the intrinsic value of print for communication, information, edification and education.

An example would be school districts and colleges jumping on the e-textbook and tablet bandwagon, when, in fact, students learn significantly better from printed texts and prefer them as well. In this case, it isn't just a matter of scoring more business; the quality of our children's education hangs in the balance.

*How does the economy continue to affect the industry?*

**SJ:** Because using print is now a choice, it can more easily be reduced or eliminated from a budget if times get tough, and be replaced with less expensive—but less effective—electronic media. That makes our business more vulnerable to an economic downturn. In tight economic times, there is always a tendency to cut promotional and communication investments. It is up to us to help guide our customers away from this shortsighted and self-defeating practice.

*What keeps you up at night?*

**SJ:** I sleep pretty well.

*What do you think is the most exciting, cutting-edge thing your company is doing right now? Why?*

**SJ:** It seems as though it has been only a few years since we began using toner-based laser printing to challenge traditional inks and presses. Now, the inkjet process seems poised to replace toner. It is my job to keep up with such trends so our clients don't have to. As one of my customers once said, "I don't care if you use monks with quill pens as long as you get the job done."

*What would people be surprised to learn about you—hobbies, special interests, etc.?*

**SJ:** Many people who only see me in a business suit don't know that I'm an avid bicyclist. I enjoy riding centuries (100 miles in one day), and this year I'm working to move up to double metric centuries (124 miles in a day.)

I'm a single dad with four kids, two still at home. It wasn't what I signed up for, but it has forced me to implement a healthier work/life balance, and I'm a better father for it. ■

*Want to be considered for a future edition of Executive Perspectives? Contact Elise Hacking Carr at [ecarr@napco.com](mailto:ecarr@napco.com) for a list of questions and other details.*