Marie Rosado – President, 3A Press, Puerto Rico



What differentiates 3A Press is that we are truly consistent in our quality and service

02.12.2019

Tags: Puerto Rico, Packaging, Service Provider, 3A Press

With a special focus on life science companies, 3A Press is the leading printing and packaging company in the Caribbean. President Marie Rosado explains how her family has managed to compete in the industry for three generations and reveals the reasoning behind a recent seven-million-dollar investment that she hopes will take the company to the next level.

Could you begin by introducing 3A Press?

3A Press is a family-owned company. Although the company has been in Puerto Rico for 23 years, our history goes back to 1948 when my grandfather started working on the printing industry. He started a small printing company out of the basement of his house doing yellow ribbons and business cards. By 1979, my father acquired the company from his father with the vision of becoming a supplier to the life science and electronics industries that at the time were established in Puerto Rico; it was a great moment for those industries because of the establishment of section 936 of the Federal Tax Code. My grandfather thought that he was completely out of his mind, but, with a lot of sacrifice, commitment and dedication, my father was able to transform the company into one of the top three printing companies in Puerto Rico to supply the literature that accompanies medications.

Back in 1995, my father received a very aggressive and interesting offer from a major USA printing company to buy Insertco, and he sold it. The fact that section 936 was going to end was the

deciding factor for him. Not long after he sold the company, my brother and I asked for a revision of our contract and the new ownership decided to terminate us. Reflecting on what happened to us that day I can say that it was both the most humiliating and yet best day of our lives for it gave us the strength and motivation to start our own business. One month later, we were establishing 3A Press. We lost a job but found our own path.

We started 3A Press on the 23rd of April 1996 and began to see incredible results right away. We started 3A Press with the support of companies like HP, Warner-Lambert and General Instruments. But one year and a half later, Warner-Lambert's product Rezulin got a recall and the product was taken out of the market, HP moved their packaging lines to West Virginia, and General Instruments was one of the first companies that shut down in Puerto Rico after the end of section 936.

How did you overcome those challenges to become one of the largest service providers to Puerto Rico's life sciences industry?

All of a sudden, we were in the search for new customers. In the meantime, we identified a niche within the medical device industry to supply instruction for booklets in the form of either perfect-bound or saddle-stitched manuals. We found that niche and decided to go all in. On the other hand, by having a four-unit Heidelberg press we were able to print full-colour, which meant that we had a window to supply the commercial industry in Puerto Rico. The only problem was that 3A Press is located in Lajas, in the southwest of the island, and the distance for some clients was a hassle; travelling regularly to Lajas for many companies located in the San Juan metropolitan area resembled going to another country.

It is important to remember that technology was not as advanced and advertising agencies, for example, required a quicker response in terms of proofing and overnight deliveries. We understood that it was not the best fit for the company and decided to focus on life science and medical devices, in particular. Down the road, HP asked us if we would be interested in supplying their folding carton needs for a new product and, since the process for producing folding carton is similar to printing inserts and manuals, we saw a new opportunity. That is how we got started in the folding carton industry. Today, this is the area with the most growth within the company. It will also become the future of the industry due to the fact that instructions for use will eventually be fully available through the internet. Patients will be able to look at that information from their phones or home computers. For this reason, 3A Press' latest investments have been mainly for the folding carton division.

What are the main products and services that you provide to the life sciences industry?

Folding cartons, manuals, whether they are saddle-stitched or perfect bound, inserts, assembly kits and we recently began working with laminated corrugated boxes, which is still in the validation process. We see 3A Press through the eyes of our customers, bringing solutions to their problems and thus creating a memorable customer experience.

3A Press' different certifications confirm the company commitment. Commitment to quality through the ISO 9001-2015 certification, commitment with the responsible management of forests worldwide through our FSC, PEFC and SFI certifications, and commitment with the environment by the acquisition of a solar panel system to supply the energy demand of the manufacturing site.

Why should any multinational company choose you as their provider for printing and packaging solutions?

Because we are committed to creating value. Although it may sound like a cliché, service and quality must always be present. What differentiates 3A Press is that we are truly consistent in our quality and service. Originally, the company got its name because all of our names start with an "a", but we have come to the realization that 3A stands for agility, accountability and autonomy. Being autonomous allows us to be agile when responding to our customer's needs while being accountable represents our commitment to nothing less than excellence. We make sure our customers distinguish 3A Press as a trustworthy partner.

Can you explain the expansion strategy after investing seven million dollars in new equipment this year?

The seven million dollars investment was used to buy the Heidelberg Speedmaster XL 106 and a Bosbt Expertcut die cutter machine. The Heidelberg will allow us to bring more services like UV coating which we did not have the ability to do before. Having this capability will allow us to give our customers and the market a new supplier alternative to their UV cartons demands. It will also allow us to be faster because the press is highly automated and centrally controlled. The press is connected to the Heidelberg Cloud for smart services and smart collaboration through the Heidelberg's Assistant, which means predictive monitoring, service at a fingertip and higher

machine uptime. In our industry, we sell time so we must be always one step ahead.

Another potential opportunity that we are looking into is the USA Government Printing Office (GPO), which buys over one billion dollars' worth of printing every year. Gaining just one percent of this opportunity would be wonderful for us.

How do you compare with other companies in the region?

As I mentioned earlier, being autonomous allows 3A Press to be agile when responding to our customer's needs. We are committed to creating value to our customer by not only investing in technology but also by promoting a culture of accountability which results in a trustworthy product consistently. This is what makes us unique.

A good example is our latest investment, the Heidelberg XL 106, which is the most advanced printing press in the Caribbean and one of the very few in the USA. This press has an inspection control system that inspects 100% of every sheet and the Inpress Control system for color management, which means that the the press is continuously calibrating itself.

How helpful were the public incentives to the growth of 3A Press?

Our reputation of 23 years has positioned 3A Press as a reliable and solid local company. The Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO), a government-owned corporation dedicated to promoting Puerto Rico as an investment destination, granted us a five million dollars incentive for new equipment which has certainly supported our growth strategy. We are very thankful to Secretary Manuel Laboy and his team for their trust and the support we have received over the past years.

Hurricane Maria marked a before and after for Puerto Rico. In your opinion, how has the island rebounded since then?

I want to begin by saying that, as a company, we were very fortunate during Hurricane Maria because 3A Press did not suffer any major loss. We had just finished installing our own solar panel system and none of them were gone. Our team was back in business the following Monday. Unfortunately, there are two sides of the coin for companies after Maria; some of them have shown

resiliency and bounced back, having learned from that massive hurricane. And then there is the other side, represented by people that were forced to close or leave the island. Those of us who stayed have become more focused on helping our beautiful island and intolerable to incompetence and corruption.

What would you tell investors looking for a new place to do business?

First and foremost, our human resources are highly educated in regard to engineering, manufacturing and supply chain. They are also bilingual, a great asset to investors. Potential investors need to learn about Puerto Rico's advantageous tax incentives for businesses, Individual Investors (Act 22) and Export Services (Act 20). Puerto Rico is a beautiful island with a lively culture.

In March, you were named as the 2019 Small Businesspeople of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration, along with your brother. Why do you believe they chose you as the winners?

Honestly, it took us by surprise. We did not even know that our names were being considered. Because of our recent investments, we were nominated by a financial institution. It was an honour to receive an award on behalf of Puerto Rico's private sector. I think that, when the U.S. Small Business Administration looked into 3A Press, they saw that we were rock solid. Our lenders and providers are very important to us and we make sure we pay them first. For this reason, they trust us and support us in all our endeavours.

What motivates you to stay in the industry?

Continuing our family tradition and leaving a legacy is our main motivation. My brother and I represent the third generation within the Rosado family in the printing business and the fourth generation is already working and rising within 3A Press. I want to make sure that they grow proud and cultivate what the family has accomplished. After all, printing runs in our genes.

See more interviews