

eCopy/Canon Electronic Paper Distribution Solution Makes Gift Giving Easy

Since its founding in 1969, Coach House Gifts has become one of the nation's largest retailers of greeting cards, fine collectibles, and gifts for friends and the home. The card and gift chain, based in Ames, IA, now boasts 150 locations and employs more than 7,000 people in 30 states – a track record for success, yet one that has also presented a complex challenge: how to manage the ever-increasing volume of paperwork that comprises the corporate information flow. For a solution, the company turned to its area office copier supplier for a better, less expensive way of handling and dispatching essential paperwork chain-wide. The solution uses Canon digital copiers outfitted with the eCopy digital paper distribution solution to transform paperwork into electronic files that are e-mailed easily over the existing corporate network and the Internet. eCopy has helped Coach House Gifts cut telecom costs, simplify information distribution, eliminate the paper swirl, and drastically reduce the human effort involved in getting the right gift to the right customer.

A Leading Solution for a Leading Company

Coach House Gifts' goal is to offer the newest and finest card and gift retail products – and the reason for its remarkable success is clear when you look at the vast corporate machine working behind the scenes. Thousands of sales and operational reports, purchase orders and invoices, employee paperwork forms, and retail training materials are dispatched along a complex send/receive loop chain-wide:

- The Ames, IA-based corporate headquarters manages operations, product selection, purchasing, merchandising support, and the company-wide IT system.
- The Denver, CO-based administrative center handles property leasing, accounting, payroll, and employee services.
- Individual stores located throughout 30 states report to 14 district managers and three regional managers.

- Corporate planning teams, made up of individuals throughout the entire chain, interact constantly on product selection and purchasing, merchandising, management, and training issues. These groups are tasked with helping the stores continuously refresh their merchandise and display presentations to appeal to customers.
- Corporate buyers rely on input from store managers nationwide for guidance in selecting and instructing vendors. Buyers must strike a balance between achieving volume savings and reacting quickly to regional gifting trends and product innovations.
- Employees are constantly trained in techniques for serving customers better, meeting their shopping needs, and winning their buying loyalty.

Clearly, organizing all this activity is a Herculean task. According to MIS Manager Mike Tallman, Coach House Gifts had been relying heavily on faxing and courier services, plus a printing company that had originally been contracted for mass mailings. "We actually made our printer the hub for a lot of our corporate paperwork which they'd copy, then assemble into information packets for dispatch," Tallman says. "For the volume of paperwork we generated, we were burning significant time and money on paper and supplies, copying and printing charges, long-distance faxes and express couriers, and other steps involved with moving paper around the chain."

The paper volume was significant. Tallman explains that the Ames headquarters sends out thousands of daily, weekly, and monthly reports, response forms, merchandising information, and instruction materials to the chain, district managers, and the Denver office. "All this information has to move fast," he says. "It affects the efficiency of all our stores and their ability to properly service our customers."

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MIS Manager
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Faced with such a complex distribution network, Tallman says that Coach House Gifts was ready for a solution – but he didn't expect it to come attached to the new office copiers. "When our last copier contract expired, our office supply representative suggested we check out the Canon imageRUNNER 400S, a network-ready digital copier," says Tallman. "Equipped with high-speed scanning capabilities and the eCopy system, our Canon digital copiers deliver the convenience and efficiency of e-mailing paper – sparing us the frustration of sending countless faxes, express packets, and mailings."

Tallman adds, "We're very pleased with the Canon/eCopy solution. Staff in our Ames and Denver offices quickly found out how easy it was to transform a paper document into an eCopy file, then deliver it over the Internet. They took to the system quickly and eagerly. It's solved a lot of logistical headaches for us because it speeds up our corporate and retail workflow."

A Gift of Speed and Efficiency

Tallman worked with the company's Canon dealer to integrate the Canon/eCopy technology into Coach House Gifts' IT system and create an instantaneous, chain-wide loop. Now, it's effortless to make and send eCopies of important paperwork between the Ames and Denver offices, field managers, and the retail store network.

Using the Canon/eCopy system, the Coach House Gifts staff can circulate and share any paperwork, documentation, ordering information, invoices, and other corporate communications needed to keep the entire chain informed, efficient and innovative – without the hassles of printing, copying, faxing, and shipping paper documents between enterprise work teams.

"We eCopy all our daily sales reports and send them to our regional managers, our district managers, our vice president, and our Denver office," says Tallman. "Before, we had to make hard copies for the office staff and fax the information to Denver. We had to keystroke special electronic files to send the information to the district managers so they could download and print them out. Now they can just view the eCopies on their laptops."

He adds that Coach House Gifts also eCopies all the purchase orders made for each store. "It allows us to check POs so changes can be made before any orders ship," he says. "The purchase orders are sent as eCopies for on-screen viewing, which eliminates the need to send any hard copies at all."

Company Profile

Since it opened its first store in 1969, Coach House Gifts has grown into a nationwide chain of 150 locations employing 7,000 people in 30 states. One of the largest card and gift chains in the country, the company is considered a trend-setting premier retailer of Hallmark and other greeting cards, fine collectibles, upscale gifts, and items for the home.

