

OFFICE SUPPLIES

GROUP BUYING POWER FUELS GROWTH

Brand Name Office Technical Products For Less

BY MYRON LOVE

Although still youthful, Vince Carboni, the head of Direct Data Products, is one of the veterans of the office technical supply industry in Winnipeg. He got his start more than 20 years ago with T.R.G. Data Products. "I learned a lot from (T.R.G. Data president) Trevor Gregg



Direct Data Products President Vince Carboni (at left, with shipper Dan DeFries) is projecting a 20% sales increase for 2005.

about sales and product knowledge," Carboni says.

At Direct Data Products, the emphasis is on service with a personal touch. Although product delivery is usually the next day, Carboni notes that in a pinch he can have products delivered to the customer within the hour and can also be available on weekends should an emergency arise.

Office Assistant Pam Davis points out that when you phone Direct Data Products, you always get a real person on the other end of the line.

Another feature that sets Direct Data Products apart from the competition is that its sales staff go out to customers to provide personalized service.

Carboni founded Direct Data Products in 1990. "Usually a company such as ours sells either hardware or software," he says. "We have bucked the trend in that we're in-between. We sell the cartridges for ink jet laser printers, photo copiers and fax machines."

The company also sells original and remanufactured Lexmark and Hewlett Packard cartridges, specialty paper products and CDs, disks and specialty tapes. The latest products, Carboni notes, are affordable HP colour lasers and lexmark printers and USB Flash Drives. The latter are

the size of key chains but can store up to 2 gigabytes of information.

"You can attach a flash drive with a cord to your hard drive, download information and take it home and play it on your home computer," Direct Data sales representative Bonnie Beck notes.

Carboni originally opened Direct data Products in a third-floor space in a warehouse on Market Avenue in the Exchange District behind the Concert Hall. Five years ago, he relocated the company to its current larger location on Garry Street between St. Mary and York. The move, combined with membership in a North America-wide buying group, Vision Business Products, has greatly fueled Direct Data's growth. Carboni reports that the company's sales have doubled since 2000.

To be accepted into the Vision Business Products Group, a company has to be a leader in its market," Carboni says. "Through our greater buying power, we are able to get exceptionally good deals on brands like Hewlett Packard, Lexmark and Brother, and then pass on the savings to our customers."

As for the new location, Carboni points out that the company has greater visibility than before. "A lot of traffic goes by here every day," he says.

He also points out that being located downtown puts Direct Data close to many of its regular customers, although the office products supplier does have customers citywide and even outside the city,

To facilitate customer orders, Direct Data Products has recently upgraded its website. Customers can be given their own individual identification code and password and can now access all the company's product information and pricing, including special discount rates, and then order on-line.

Carboni's staff are almost all long time employees. Sales representative Patrick Gwozd, account executive Mark DeWiele and shipper Dan DeFries have been working for Direct Data Products since shortly after Carboni started the company. Pam Davis has been manning the front desk and accounts for more than five years. Bonnie Beck is the newest member of the team having joined the staff in the last few months. "She has been a welcome addition to the staff," Carboni says. "We like her enthusiasm."

He adds that the company will probably be hiring more sales staff in the near future. "We are growing at a rapid rate," Carboni says. "We are projecting 20% growth over the next year." ■

www.directdata.ca