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Despite 'paperless' age, copier firm is growing

By Tony Hagen
Times Business Editor

SOUTH BRUNSWICK — The "paperless revolution" never materialized, says Chuck Cahn, whose rapidly growing copier service and sales company, Stewart Industries, has seen sales more than quadruple over the past five years and anticipates similar growth in the near future.

Stewart, of Mount Laurel, has just opened a field office on Route 1 in South Brunswick to handle area clients that its salespeople formerly had to reach from more distant locations.

"We're very excited about the Princeton office," says Cahn, second-generation owner of the family business started in 1959. Sales are expected to reach \$30 million this year, up from \$5.4 million in 1998.

In the past, Stewart has concentrated mainly on government and school business. It is the sole copier service company contracted to the Office of Legislative Services and serves more than 380 school districts in New Jersey, including Hamilton and West Windsor-Plainsboro public schools.

Any rumors that paper was on its way out were false, says Cahn, who sees businesses and schools gobbling up more and more paper as new trends in disclosure counteract the tide of electronic data storage and retrieval.

"The average school makes over 11 copies per student per day, and that's been going up

over the past five years because of parent involvement, 'right-to-know', at-home schooling and distant learning," he says. "Certainly, over the next five years, it doesn't look like that's going to change dramatically."

Newadays, Stewart wants to broaden its service and sales involvements with the medical

buying machines that can scan these documents and transmit them to the court system," Cahn says. It won't stop with the bankruptcy courts.

"They say all the courts are going to electronic filing. We all understand why that would be: 100-page briefs," Cahn quips.



Bob Bain, director of sales for Stewart Industries, stands at a copier in the firm's South Brunswick office.

industry and the legal community, where Cahn sees courthouse changes spurring even more demand for what his company has to offer.

Lawyers remain addicted to paper, and what they can't give up spells good business for Stewart.

"The court system just passed a ruling that all bankruptcy filings after Oct. 1 must be done electronically. Now you have law firms running around

Cahn's director of sales, Rob Bain, is heading up the Princeton area field office and has witnessed another avenue of growth develop over the past three years.

That plain vanilla office printer has become an inefficient dinosaur that should be replaced with an all purpose, multi-tasking copy machine that prints for far less money possibly even paying for itself one day, Bain contends.

"Stand-alone printers on a network will disappear entirely," he says.

Bain and his team of seven or eight field representatives at the South Brunswick office like to go out on what they call meeting visits, during which they analyze copy printing activity and, hopefully, come up with enough evidence to persuade a customer to make the switch from stand-alone printers to copiers.

"Normally, we find that when we connect our copiers and break into a new account, we save them up to 40 percent of document expenses, copying and printing."

Cahn says new trends and the demise of the paperless revolution aren't the only reasons his company is doing so well these days.

He says Stewart does right by its customers, treats its employees like family, and chooses its field reps well.

Most of them have a minimum of 10 years of experience. A polished veteran with that much time under his or her belt knows what it takes to succeed and helps the company to gain the winning edge, says Cahn, who joined the business right out of college in 1976 and stuck with it.

"Everybody has a passion. I love this business, feeling responsible for the families that work for me. It's a good feeling," he says. "People come here and they never leave. That's unheard of in this industry. The average copier sales person is in the business for 12 months."