



VITAL STATS

PLAYERS: David and Jonathan Sher
COMPANY: Universal Paper & Plastics
ESTABLISHED: 1950
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could offer a great product at a competitive price.

"We also found a niche. We started offering roll paper products with printing on them. These consisted of everything from purely decorative to educational products that were fun and entertaining. We had a great quality product that differed from what everyone else was offering. We owned and developed our entire printing process, which meant no one else could do what we did."

Of course, making a dent in such a saturated market still wasn't easy, even with a new and different product. "You still have to be a little bit cheaper than the competition. Margins are generally small, so this isn't always easy, but price is important. Also, we had the advantage of having existing clients we could sell to. You need to leverage your existing relationships if you want to grow your business," says Jonathan.

As mentioned, Universal Paper & Plastics has grown tenfold over the last decade. But it's still not happy. The Sher family has big plans. "We've grown significantly," says David. "We're entering previously untapped markets as well as focusing on diverse export markets, both of which are growing at an exponential rate."

The company has come a long way. "In 2006, it was just a smallish family business. We've had to put a lot of systems and processes in place. It's a very different business now. We always say that it's a family business with corporate controls," says Jonathan. □

PROFILE

ON A ROLL

Universal Paper & Plastics is a family business that's been around since 1950. Since 2006, however, it's grown its revenue tenfold and evolved significantly. **BY GG VAN ROOYEN**

BY 2006 Universal Paper and Plastics had been in business for decades. But it had hit a roadblock. "The business was not in a bad shape financially, but it also wasn't growing at the type of rate previously experienced. The business had slowed down because the serviette business, which was the majority of our business, was declining in sales," says company director David Sher.

"Until 2006, Universal Paper & Plastics focused on napkins, and that business had reached its limit. There wasn't enough room for growth."

If it wanted to grow, the company needed to reinvent itself. "Our dad looked at ways in which the company could expand its offering. He wanted something that we could sell to our existing clients, and that was still within the

scope of the company," says Jonathan Sher.

Eventually, the company decided to venture into the field of roll paper products, such as toilet paper and kitchen towel. It was risky, as bigger players dominated the market. Getting a foot in the door wouldn't be easy. But the Sher family decided to give it a try.

Fast forward to today, and Universal Paper & Plastics is a strong player in the market. In fact, roll paper products now account for the vast majority of the company's sales. So how did the company accomplish it?

"A couple of things led to this success," says David. "Firstly, quality was always a priority. We wanted to be able to offer the best, and this meant we needed to be in control of our own supply chain. We started largely making our own raw materials, and this meant that we

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