

SBM

The Source for Business Owners

ST. LOUIS
**Small
Business
Monthly**

Vol 13, Issue VIII

SEPTEMBER 2000

Making Technology Work Entrepreneurs Form Innovative Document Management Firm

Putting a construction project together can be a complicated and costly proposition. That's the task at hand for McCarthy Construction as it's developing the new Donald Danforth Plant Sciences Center. With architects in Europe, engineers in Germany, Chile and San Francisco, sending blueprints across the globe is great news for FedEx, but bad news for the construction firm's bottom line.

Not anymore. DigiReprographics USA, Inc., has come to the rescue.

DigiReprographics organized the blueprints and electronically sends them throughout the world, saving McCarthy the heavy international FedEx charges. DigiReprographics, an eight-person document management company, utilizes the latest technology to help architects, engineers, construction firms and attorneys better control their projects.

In one case, DigiReprographics saved a client as much \$16,000 in FedEx charges.

"Usually, a contractor picks up the phone, calls a printing company to print the drawings and then FedEx's them to the construction site," said Elmer Rhodes, co-owner of DigiReprographics. "Our company replaces FedEx and UPS.

"We consider ourselves a new-breed printer and document management firm."

"The technology is also great for changes, and there never has been a project that didn't have changes," said co-owner D. Pearson Villacis. "We can post changes instantaneously."

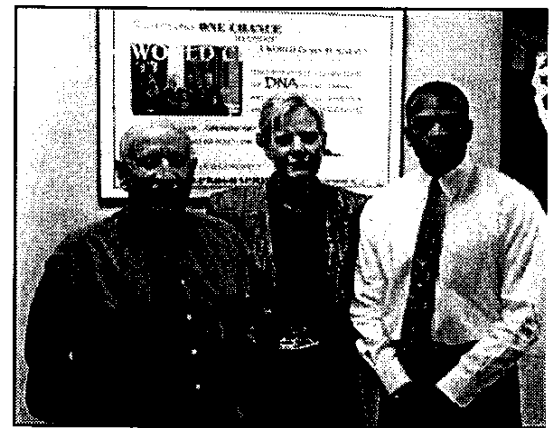
Rhodes, D. Villacis and her husband, Guillermo Villacis, formed the company last year. D. and Guillermo, long-time architects, realized the savings that technology could bring to the building industries.

"We felt we could fill the voids that are out there today," Guillermo said. In order to grow a new business and concept, the three first had to gain trust of clients. "We basically said, 'Give us the opportunity, and we will earn your trust,'" said Guillermo. DigiReprographics has reeled in such high-profile customers as McCarthy Construction, Sverdrup and the St. Louis City Public Schools.

The firm's document management has also impacted the organization's bidding practices. With its technology, organizations can now post bidding requirements through an interactive CD-Rom. The company can scan images or capture images from other software programs such as CAD systems, word processor and spreadsheets into a file for easy viewing and navigation by nontechnical personnel. Thanks to an easy-to-use index, bidders can easily focus on particulars of a project. The company recently used its technology to set up an electronic bidding system for the St. Louis City Public Schools that helped the district save 50% on its printing costs. Instead of sending printed requirements, anyone interested in bidding on the projects was given the information on CD-Rom.

The company can also distribute project plans and specifications to selected contractors for bidding and proposals for selected construction projects via its website, www.digirepro.com. DigiReprographics will issue clients a password to access company project lists with the latest updates and addendums.

"We manage the documents and take the hassle of bidding away from project managers," D. said. "We insure each addenda is sent to each contractor who has ordered project



Owners of DigiReprographics, Inc., from left to right, Guillermo Villacis, D. Pearson Villacis and Elmer Rhodes.

prints or a CD-Rom."

The owners' experiences have played a key role in DigiReprographics' early success. The three owners' knowledge complements each other. With D.'s and Guillermo's architectural background and Rhodes' extensive printing experience, the owners understand both client needs and industry standards.

"The problem with a lot of printers out there is that they don't have the industry (construction) knowledge the architects and engineers have," Guillermo said. "And, often, the architects and engineers fail to understand the capabilities of the printing industry. We bring that knowledge of both industries together."

Just a year old, the firm is excited about its future and future expansion. Said Rhodes: "Our goal is to go nationwide. We've proved that we can take care of our clients' needs."