

SMALL BUSINESS
STRATEGIES

You've got mail

General Mailing & Shipping delivers competition for the big guys

BY DAMON SCOTT | INBWS STAFF

Visit the website and you'll see the banner, or walk to the front door and you'll see the decal: "In competition with Pitney Bowes."

Few businesses proclaim in bold type who their biggest competitor is, but General Mailing & Shipping Systems Inc. didn't hesitate.

"When we started, there was no question who the Goliath was in the business," owner Mary Stramel said. "We did it so there was no need to explain who we were or what we did. Now we like to say they're in competition with us."

General Mailing has a lot under its umbrella, or in industry lingo, its "mailstream."

Tom Anderson, director of operations, describes his work this way: "For someone like [the Public Service Co. of New Mexico], who probably processes 60,000 bills regularly, it's important to have the right mailroom equipment. But companies of any size need sorters and automated billing systems that will work. We can help any customer fold it, stuff it, stamp it, seal it and stack it."

Stramel says the Pitney Bowes proclamation is a friendly one. She got her start in the business by working for the Stamford, Conn.-based behemoth, first in Sioux Falls, S.D., and later, Chicago, El Paso and New Mexico.

"I was a sales director for 10 years, and it was a very good experience," Stramel said. Anderson, who also worked at the company, hired Stramel, and later came to work for her at General Mailing.

"At Pitney Bowes, I learned that most people did not know what a postage meter was," Stramel said. "I had moved up the ranks, and after moving here to get married, I realized there was no competition — Pitney Bowes was the only game in town — and I knew there was a wonderful opportunity to promote a locally-owned business."

Stramel realized she could apply her experience to rev up a new company. "We started with no customers, and now have more than 2,500, a majority of state agencies and about 51 percent of mid-to-high range customers throughout New Mexico," she said.

Pitney Bowes officials couldn't be reached for comment on General Mailing's friendly New Mexico rivalry.

Stramel and her stepson Scott, who was



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New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions printing machine operator Naomi Vasquez, foreground, works with mail while General Mailing & Shipping Systems owner Mary Stramel and service technician David Burns oversee the project.

Vital Stats:

Company: General Mailing & Shipping Systems Inc.

Owner: Mary Stramel

Address: 3411 Candelaria Road NE Ste. J Albuquerque 87107

Phone: (505) 883-3223, toll free (800) 759-2345

Website: generalmailingmm.com

Employees: 16 full time, 2 part time

Revenue: \$3 million in 2009

Strategies:

1. Provide services that the competition does not.
2. Treat your employees like your customers.
3. Have a great value system and treat your customers with integrity.

a technician at Pitney Bowes for six years, founded General Mailing in 1991. The company is located in the Candelaria Business Center, in a 4,440-square-foot space that includes administrative offices and a warehouse. General Mailing also has an office in Santa Fe and a service dispatch location in Clovis.

Stramel says General Mailing's strategy is based on being locally owned, servicing the entire state and asking the question: "What do customers not like about our competition?"

She says customers dislike the "endless loop" some find themselves in when calling a business, so her staff does not use voice mail during business hours.

"When our customers place a call to us, they are greeted by a local employee who can answer their questions or get them in touch with someone who can assist them," Stramel said.

Other strategies that separate General Mailing from the big guys, according to Stramel:

Employees are cross-trained to help customers resolve any question quickly.

Customers receive unlimited training on mailing systems.

Equipment is stocked on-site and tested before installation at the customer's office.

The company pledges a maximum four-hour response time on service calls.

"We like to think of ourselves as a one-stop shop, and the buck stops here," Stramel said.

Anderson says General Mailing has a loaner inventory that is generally not offered by the competition.

"We also use modular technology, which just means that if a unit is down [not operating], we can replace a particular part instead of the whole unit, which is more costly and takes longer," he said.

Even though many clients are doing more Internet marketing, Stramel said the direct mail market is alive and well.

"Really, what we're finding is that people are doing both [Internet and direct mail]. Many companies are still taking advantage of the Post Office for direct marketing, and there are significant discounts with

standard presort and postal software," she said.

The recession has not slowed business much either, Stramel added.

The company was awarded the New Mexico State Pricing Agreement, which added 500 customers in 2004-2005, Stramel said. This contract to perform mailing services for government accounts includes state public safety offices; Children, Youth and Families Department offices; and city and county entities.

Anderson said that once those accounts started taking off, other government entities piggybacked on the pricing agreement. An account with the National Guard was recently finalized.

Gene Fulgenzi, manager of the postal processing center for the New Mexico Taxation and Revenue Department, which includes the Motor Vehicle Department, has used General Mailing for five years.

"The big thing that sets them apart from the competition is their service. If it's not the same day, it's because they have to overnight a part," Fulgenzi said. "The competition cannot match it."

Fulgenzi and his staff of nine are responsible for mailing 125,000 MVD registration renewals every month, tax return checks and tax assessment documents. The department is the largest state agency mailer in New Mexico.

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