

success story

Jeff Thomas bought Priority Dispatch Inc. from his father in 2006.



to **Driven** Succeed

By Vincent Brennan

By revamping processes and reorganizing efforts, Priority Dispatch has grown into one of the largest courier operations in the Midwest

adapting to change is one of the biggest and most significant “X” factors associated with business operations. In any industry, times change, and the processes that worked in the past don’t always produce results five, 10 and 15 years later. For Priority Dispatch Inc. (PDI, Cincinnati), its founders became familiar with the idea of adaptation in the business’s early years. The process of altering courier operations while keeping Priority Dispatch tuned to individual customer’s needs paid big dividends for founder Dick Thomas and his son (PDI’s president and current CEO) Jeff Thomas.

“We continually change our model to adapt to a marketplace that requires very different things year after year and decade after decade,” Jeff Thomas explained. “We spend a great deal of time trying to restrategize the

company and our footprint to meet the changing needs of the marketplace.”

In 1973, Dick Thomas founded PDI as a small courier company catering to a local photo-finishing company. Known as a “radical new idea,” Dick Thomas expanded his service to other local business, such as Avon representatives. Little did he know that the birth of his small company would expand to almost every major market in the Midwest, including Dayton, Columbus, Cleveland and Toledo, Ohio; Ashland, Beattyville and Lexington, Ky.; and its headquarters in Chicago. Today PDI grows by 9 to 13 percent every year. The company currently is in the process of expanding to Michigan.

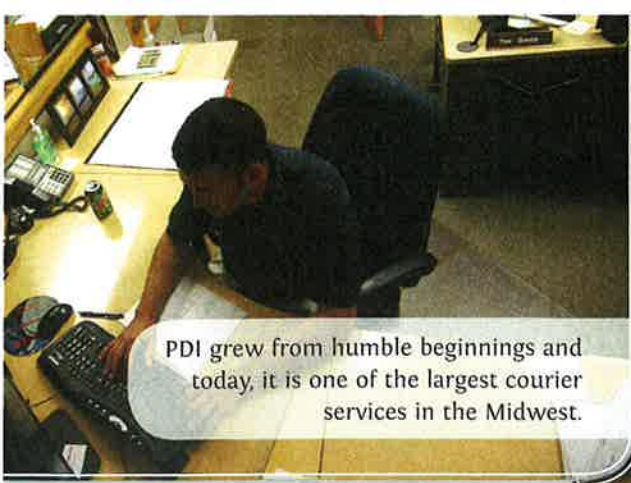
The legacy of the original PDI operation continues today with Jeff Thomas. He said the company was comprised of more than 90 associates and nearly 850

independent contractors, far from his father’s four employees and two drivers when PDI started. With delivery centers strategically located throughout the Midwest, PDI maintains a strong supply chain that caters to large corporate accounts and small business clientele.

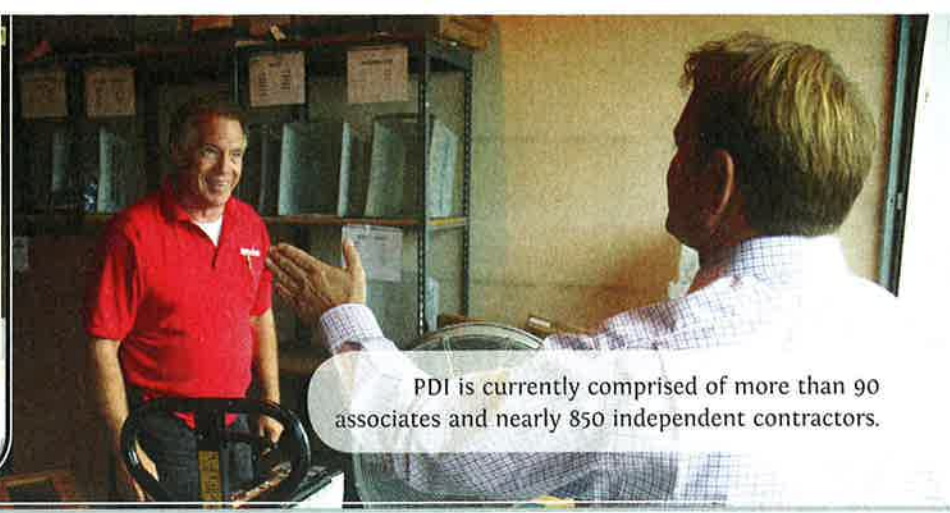
“It has been a great, steady and sustainable growth pattern in what I think is a great space within our industry,” Jeff Thomas stated. “Year after year, we provide affordable, reliable solutions for businesses that require deliveries on time, every time.”

‘Succeeding’ success

Now retired, Dick Thomas laid the groundwork for the Priority Dispatch structure. By focusing on customer service and striving to maintain a quality product at an affordable price, his efforts began to spread to others, including his son. Jeff joined the business in 1987 as a



PDI grew from humble beginnings and today, it is one of the largest courier services in the Midwest.



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salesperson and served “practically every position in the company,” he noted, before becoming president in 2002. He bought the company from his father in 2006.

By remaining committed to improving and standardizing processes and creating a quality “strategic initiative,” Jeff Thomas attained a successful second-generation transition. Just as it did when Dick Thomas was in charge, PDI remains competitive by focusing on quality and price differentials. Its business model has now expanded from a regional presence to national notoriety by leveraging capacity and its existing customer base.

Leadership outside of the company is another important component of PDI’s success. Dick Thomas wasn’t only committed to the success of his business but the overall industry as well. Dick Thomas was a former member of the Messenger Courier Association of America (MCAA) and participated on its board of directors. In addition to receiving two significant accolades with the MCAA—induction into its Hall of Fame and a Distinguished Service Award—Dick Thomas currently serves on the association’s advisory committee.

“The MCAA is a great network and an organization that prides itself on best practices, education and networking,” Jeff Thomas said. “It has been a great acceleration not just in learning about the industry and my competitors, but it’s also a way for me to get a better understanding of trends and government affairs.”

Current President Jeff Thomas took a cue from his father and carried his interest within the industry to the MCAA (former board member) and other associations to advance courier interests

and business. He serves as the president of the Ohio Same-Day Transportation Association. Jeff Thomas explains that his experience with each group has advanced his understanding of the industry.

PDI’s business model also uses the expertise of Vice President Julie Thomas (Jeff’s sister). She is responsible for the human resources department, strategic planning, process improvement, organizational development, team training and communications.

New Ideas lead to high times

Built upon a foundation of evolution, PDI continues to show its diligence for providing the best possible service through the latest technology. Jeff Thomas outlined several steps his company took to grow within by optimizing operational processes and implementing state-of-the-art technology.

According to company executives, PDI invested in its own proprietary, enterprise-level technology solutions that accomplished three main goals:

- Providing real-time signature capture and on-demand proof of delivery.
- Seamlessly moving data back and forth using various integration techniques with multiple customers.
- Achieving back-end operational and administrative objectives by using the data to better manage the business.

Jeff Thomas said the company’s integration of technology helped PDI move forward and grow within the industry. However, he noted that the company was not solely dependent on technological improvements to keep the company afloat. A strong operational structure with a

strategy in place pushes employees and management to succeed. Jeff Thomas called the idea a “strategic initiative.”

The current “Strategic Initiative and Framework” comprises seven strategic drivers:

- Superior customer service
- People and knowledge sharing
- Priority 360 (security, staffing, metrics, technology and pricing)
- A delivery event-management system
- Sales, branding and marketing
- Operational excellence
- Fiscal control

Through Priority Dispatch’s ability to develop new and effective processes, combined with top-of-the-line customer service, Jeff Thomas found a winning formula. If it wasn’t for his father’s foray into the logistics world with a strong commitment for evolving with the business, a successful business venture might have fallen by the wayside.

“Our commitment to strategy planning and strategy execution is probably the most important element of our organization,” Jeff Thomas said. “So many of us spend great efforts building strategic plans, but it’s the execution of that plan is most important ... Building that plan doesn’t take you where you want to go.”

Instead, Priority looks poised to grow atop a solid foundation of a changing business strategy, evolving to compete in a new age of logistics.

About the author

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