

**Governor's Council on
Developmental Disabilities**

**For Immediate
Release**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**DIGITAL IMAGING TECHNOLOGY AND PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES WERE SMART SOLUTION FOR SHARP ST. PAUL COMPANY**

**Long established binding company reaps gains from coupling today's technology
with dedicated workers who focus on accuracy and timely performance**

A longtime Minnesota manufacturing firm is enjoying a new burst of energy and efficiency, the result of a decision to shift from paper files to electronic records and to employ people with developmental disabilities to make it happen.

Trendex, Inc. of St. Paul, a company that started operations in Minneapolis in 1919, had reached the point where old paper files were consuming enormous amounts of space at its headquarters and light manufacturing location. The acquisition of St. Louis-based American Looseleaf made the space crisis even more critical. Then, company owner Thomas Polacek saw a story in the paper on an innovative project where a state agency was converting its huge store of records to electronic files, employing people with developmental disabilities, and the light came on. That would be the answer to the squeeze.

The \$8.5 million binders and binding supplies company serves Fortune 100 companies, medium sized organizations and a host of small professional firms, such as CPAs and attorneys. It is important that client files be readily accessible when calls are received for reorders and adjustments, a process complicated by its field offices in Denver and Des Moines.

GCDD/page two

“Occasionally they couldn’t find the files and that upset everyone,” said Polacek, adding that the amount of time required to pull the records was a problem.

Polacek had been using Lifeworks, a Twin Cities area organization providing employment services for people with disabilities, for janitorial work and he called them about the possible new project. Together, a system was developed that had a three-member team of people with developmental disabilities working at the company with the help of a job coach. The coach set up the operation to fit the scanning equipment and software and oversaw operations. Team members then handled the document preparation, scanning and indexing. In two months, an entire year’s worth of customer records was entered into the computer system.

Salesman Bob Dorobiala says he saves over a fifth of a mile of walking each day and saves time. He would make visits to the files about 10 times a day, using an hour of the workday in the process. Describing the benefits of a computer-based records system, Dorobiala says “more than one person can look it up at the same time. When it was a hard copy, people would say where is it? Who has it on their desk?”

Also pleasing to the owners and staff of Trendex is the return on investment they are seeing. The annual savings from the digital imaging system represent the salaries of two to three full-time workers.

Commenting on the success of the program, Polacek said, “no one at Trendex quite believed the change that scanning would make.” He also said the people with developmental disabilities fit in well and were contributing members of the workforce.

The Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities is conducting a program to inform employers around the state of the benefits to be gained from digital imaging and the jobs that can be filled by people with developmental disabilities.

“Our goal is to enlarge opportunities for people with developmental disabilities, people who can make a major contribution to the work of many employers,” said Colleen Wieck, the Council’s executive director.

The Council has prepared materials detailing how such projects may be undertaken. Those interested in receiving additional information are urged to go to the Council's website, www.mncdd.org, call the Council at 651-296-4018, or toll free, 877-348-0505. Additional information on Trendex is available at www.trendex.com and the Lifeworks web site is www.lifeworks.org

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