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# Business

Tribune

## PREMIER'S OLD-SCHOOL, HIGH-TECH PRINTING STILL **IN DEMAND**

BY JOSEPH GALLIVAN

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TAKES OVER







TRIBUNE PHOTO: JONATHAN HOUSE

**COVER:** Premier Press owner Jodi Krohn in front of one of the company's large sample wall prints. **ABOVE:** Pressman Jan Brodaczynski readies a machine for foil stamping at Premier Press. The company is expanding and moving from Northwest Portland to Swan Island.

In a squat Pearl District building that looks westward over Interstate 405, Premier Press is getting ready to pack up and ship out.

In the run up to June, a moving company will take Premier Press' offset presses and giant digital printers north to Premier's \$15 million building in the Swan Island Industrial Park. The machines will be moved carefully and one by one

**BY JOSEPH GALLIVAN**

so as not to disrupt the work flow, because getting a piece of printed matter into someone's hands — whether it's a gorgeous goody bag for a NBA All Star or a piece of direct mail for pet lover — is still all about work flow.

Premier has lived through two life cycles of this part of Northwest Portland. It recently sold this 40,000-square-foot building and the warehouse at 27th and Yeon (72,000 square feet) and spent the resulting \$15 million on a 350,000-square-foot building in Swan Island.

Current CEO Jodi Krohn's

grandfather started the company in 1974 with one printer. She joined the family business in 1977. In her office a yellowing Oregonian article shows the whole clan in 1986, including her parents Diane and Arnold who ran it for years, sisters Joni and Juli who are still closely involved, and a little boy named Eric, now a man, who works down the hall.

On a recent sunny February morning you could walk in through a truck entrance on Glisan Street and see dozens of pallets piled 4 feet high with Amazon gift card

holders, on crisp, white stock, perfectly aligned, waiting to be cut. The cloud giveth and the cloud taketh away. The cards are potentially worth millions of dollars, but nothing until activated.

This is the current state of print. It remains an essential link to the consumer's senses: The sound that fingerprints make on paper and card, the smell of cured ink, the feeling of the ownership they get from a promotional postcard. Krohn cites Land's End's disastrous attempt to go without a paper catalog in 2000 which cost it

\$100 million in sales.

"I've been called the Coating Queen," she says with a laugh, adding that clients are demanding more and more interesting textures and surfaces: foil, high gloss, transparency, Tekkote raised printing.

New technology is embraced here. Three-dimensional printers are still not much use here, according to Creative Director Damon Johnstun.

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# \*Premier Press makes the move to Swan Island



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“They are very, very slow and therefore costly, and for very small things. The stuff we do is pretty big.”

He’s more excited about new wide-format printers, such as the 120 incher.

“It’s a huge benefit to us, we can railroad an image (turn it sideways) and print it an infinite length to go around a store window with out a seam,” Johnstun says. Wraps, which emerged out of the action sports scene, are big and getting bigger.

Krohn shows off a test wall where images ripped from the web are blown up and stuck to the wall so clients can see and touch them, seams and all. Down a narrow passageway there’s a test space for magnetic printing — giant, soft magnets of superheroes which can be peeled off a painted base.

“Restaurants can use them for quick changes of look,” says Ryan Widell. He’s a young account executive who stays at the cutting edge of print, working connecting with tech startups and information architects — people for whom the paperless office will never be enough.

Widell opens some cupboards which are bursting with coffee table books — the 2014 TEDx Portland book is one — and carefully crafted gift boxes. He shows one which held a soccer jersey. It rested on a clear plastic plate, and as the box opened, the jersey lit up from below. They were sent to top athletes who were asked to put them on and Tweet a selfie.

Only a few hundred of such boxes are made, hand-crafted in Premier.

The firm offers design too, but that can overlap with printing these days. They do variable data printing. For example, a flyer for a pet hospital may arrive to a cat lover’s home with a cat on it, a dog lover’s home with a dog.

“The colleges have really maximized variable data printing,” says Krohn. “They get so much data from the (prospective) students these days, they know what they are interested in, football, mathematics, whatever. So the brochure has photos of whatever the kid is interested in.”

A large part of what Premier does is make stuff for stores. If you are travelling anywhere in the United States and see a 12-foot cutout of an athlete in an Adidas Originals store, or a window wrap at a Nike Factory store, chances are it was printed here.

### Where the rubber meets the hardcourt

Premier has a \$300,000 machine made by Zund that cuts foamcore board. The router dashes across the smooth surface, first drilling holes, then cutting out panels in the most efficient pattern. They are piled up, ready, but they must first go to the warehouse — a step which slows the workflow. When assembled in a store they’ll make a large giant backdrop. The client is Nike. The aim is to sell tight garments to Cross-Fitters. The imagery is a blown up photo of a bunch of tires and heavy ropes on a beach. For all the sweat and mess it conjures up, the print execution must be clean and sharp. When Premier did something similar for a Nike store in Manhattan it sent someone to help assemble it. Same with an Oakley store in Honolulu.

Krohn will buy a second Zund when the firm moves to Swan Island, where there will be room for mock up point-of-purchase displays for clients, room to store everything, and the staff won’t have to hand-carry work between departments at risk of misplacing or dinging it. Dings are death in this business.

Many of the other loading docks around this part of the Pearl hold restaurant tables, and Krohn says the new building’s owners are turning it into a ground floor retail with three floors of housing above. She’s excited to move to the land of Leatherman and other dynamic manufacturers.

Walking around that morning, looking at proofs are brand manager Sonia Collier and retail marketer Saxon Trobaugh from Adidas. They like that it’s a brand agnostic firm — stuff from Adidas and Nike is kept apart so neither company can spy on the other.

“They have different teams, and they’re really good about not having stuff hanging around,” says Trobaugh.

“They have good customer ser-



TRIBUNE PHOTOS: JONATHAN HOUSE

Hi-touch: Premier Press pressman Phillip Dinh cleans a large cartridge for the company’s Komori Press.



Mint condition: Amazon gift card holders awaiting cutting. For all its cloud-centrism, the e-tailer still needs to get purchasing power right in people’s hands.

vice, because we don’t always know what were talking about,” says Collier. “I’m just focused on how I do this rollout, not the technical stuff.”

Krohn adds, “There are people I’ve known 30 years, you become part of the brand, so it’s not about just making something for them, you learn the nuances of their

business.”

Their sales rep, Tracy Egan says, “My job is not to sell them, it’s to help them save money. We want them all to do well.” She adds they will miss taking clients to the Pearl’s restaurants when they move. “As well as a Tilt, I think they have a McDonalds up there — and a 7-11,” she laughs.

Although millions of people have grown up with Word and Photoshop at their fingertips and a color printer a few feet away, printing is still a hard thing to do correctly. Premier hopes to get it right for at least another few generations.

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