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Newspapers need to ask good questions when designing a facility

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Publishers need to ask the right questions before deciding on a new facility, a planning expert says.

Dario DiMare, president of Dario Designs Inc., listed some of the questions that newspapers should be asking themselves prior to beginning any type of facility work.

"Facility needs depend on a paper's situation," DiMare said. "All [publications] have different reasons for doing what they're doing. Some want to be printers. Some want to be gatherers of information and they print on the side because they have to. It's necessary to do what's most appropriate for a particular site."

Dario Designs, having recently secured contracts at a number of facilities in Michigan, including The Grand Rapids Press and Kalamazoo Gazette, works with newspapers and printing facilities, helping them to successfully plan for the future.

Projects involving work on newspaper facilities — whether building brand new buildings, modifying existing ones or simply performing a pressroom upgrade — never end up being simple.

The amount of planning, budget consideration and evaluation of countless variables is tremendous, and many large publications end up spending millions of dollars to ensure that their publication is as up-to-date and efficient as possible.

The process of facility planning would be greatly simplified if there was a common list of needs to which newspapers could refer. But there is such a wide variety of themes and directions for facilities to head in, it turns out that a great many of a publication's needs may be unique to its specific situation.

"Facilities turn out differently as a result of goals," DiMare explained. Circulation, staff, market, costs and other variables differ between sites, but in terms of working on newspaper production sites, projects typically fall into one of four classifications:

- Greenfield sites — Built on a completely new piece of land, these facilities are new from the ground up.
- Brownfield sites — Though con-

sisting of a brand new building, brownfield sites are ones where a new facility is put in place of an existing building, i.e. in a downtown, urban setting.

- Renovations — These projects involve the restoration of existing facilities, equipment, etc., and can include such projects as the addition of color towers to presslines.
- Additions — Work involving the addition of space to existing facilities for projects such as pressroom and mailroom expansion.

But before a type of project can even be determined, publications need to find the answers to a variety of questions. These questions should determine your publication's exact needs, the development of the market and an analysis of potential market change, according to Ifra Special Report 3.34. The report mentions the importance of answering questions pertaining to circulation, advertising, competition, external print customers, new presses and color and pagination.

As DiMare explained, four of the most important questions that he believes a publication needs to ask itself include the following:

1. How long does the facility need to last?

This is a question vital to the planning of any facility, as it relates to the quality of everything involved in the building process. Some companies want to spend less money up front, so they use materials that are less expensive. There is a significant price difference between putting a 5-year roof on a building vs. a 30-year roof, for example, or the added cost of sound dampening equipment. Less expensive facilities will ultimately result in greater long-term costs, but some publications plan to do renovations on structures and then sell them shortly thereafter. In these cases, spending a great deal of money on modifications and construction isn't economical.

2. What are your marketing goals?

This question is as vital as the first when planning a project and should include the determination of a paper's planned size, color and distribution, among other things. Are you planning

on creating different, zoned editions for various metro areas? All of these factors come into play when a facility is designed, to provide room and resources for everything your publication plans to do.

3. What is your publication's philosophy towards the surrounding community? Do you want to have a unique branding that people can identify with?

This question is also important, despite the fact that it might not be on an immediate list of concerns when planning facility work. Its importance quickly becomes paramount when public exposure is important, however. Some publications have built new facilities with large glass walls designed to showcase their presses and press halls, and the addition of large amounts of glass and other aesthetically pleasing elements can quickly increase the cost of any structure. What do you want your building's facade to look like? What image do you want to put in the minds of the public when they envision your operation?

4. Do you have a budget?

Deceptively obvious at first, this question is more complicated than it seems. What are your planned operating costs? What about growth? How are you going to staff your facility? Is automation going to play a role? While some groups have access to large amounts of funds, those who do not are limited in terms of what they will be able to accomplish when planning for a new facility. If you want a building that will last 30 years, but don't have the financial resources to make it a reality, you will have to settle for something that is designed to last for a shorter period of time. In many respects, the answer to the first three questions may already be partly determined by your answer to the fourth.

"What do you want to accomplish when you get bigger?" DiMare asked. Perhaps the largest aspect of facility planning is "a matter of determining your core competencies and marketing goals," he said.▲

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