

DELAWARE Business

BUSINESS CALENDAR

Today

Strategic Goal Setting for Businesses. Sponsored by YWCA Microcenter-

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Family business stands test of time

By DWAYNE STEWARD
The News Journal

Herb Adelman's father bought him a company when he was only 24. Today it's the oldest and one of the most successful businesses in its industry.

For a century, the Crowell Corp., based in Christiana, has been supplying some of the world's largest companies with gummed packaging tape. For 85 years, its products have come out of Delaware.

Adelman, 78, of Hockessin, has been head of the corporation since 1952. As the company celebrates its 100th anniversary this year, Adelman looks back and realizes he's responsible for more than half of the Crowell legacy.

Herb Adelman's father bought the company when it was on the verge of closing in 1952 from Charles Crowell, who was 92.

"My father bought it basically for me," Herb said. "We hired back all the people that used to work there and started to make a business out of it again."

In Crowell's 105,000-square-foot factory, filled with heavy machinery, paper, glue and dye, Herb describes one of America's best-kept manufacturing secrets.

"Our tape has reinforced fiber strength that makes it stronger than regular packaging tape," Adelman said, pointing at a machine weaving white fibers into the tape at 1,000 feet per minute. "The machines are constantly running. While one roll of tape is finishing, another is starting."

It's a complex process that produces 5,000 cases of tape a day, he said.

Gummed tape - made of paper, fiber and sometimes foam - is very difficult to tear and is typically used for shipping, Adelman said.

Crowell supplies packaging tape to Fortune 500 companies and major brand-name merchandisers such as Victoria's Secret, IBM, Ford, General Motors, Old Navy, Lane Bryant and Suzuki.

Crowell also offers Cro-nell, a patented paper and foam self-adhesive used for shipping and packaging. It debuted in the mid-1970s.

"Cro-nell was really revolutionary when it came out. ... It had a huge impact on the packaging industry," Herb Adelman said.

Herb Adelman's son, Crowell Vice



The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG

The Adelmans - Herb (foreground), Joan and Bob - own and operate the Crowell Corp. in Newport. Crowell supplies some of the world's largest companies with packaging tape.

President Bob Adelman, 52, of Corner Ketch, has been working with his father for 34 years. He started in 1972, while in high school. A year later, Herb Adelman's daughter Joan, 49, of Pike Creek, joined the business. She's now the chief operating officer.

"We produce basically 10 different types of tape, but in all different shapes, colors and sizes," Bob Adelman said. "The largest part of our business comes from our carton sealing tape. Most companies are only taping boxes across the top because boxes are being produced that are already attached on the sides."

Bob and Herb Adelman said they supply companies all over the world, including in the Dominican Republic, Singapore, Canada and Mexico.



Courtesy of the Crowell Corp.

Ray Hajek, vice president of sales, said Crowell mostly serves large industrial distributors.

Crowell's 85 employees produce, package and ship nearly one-third of the world's packaging tape. Many of the workers have been with the company for a long time and have no intentions of leaving.

Crowell veteran of 31 years Herbert Hunsucker, of Delaware City, said he likes the company's relaxed hierarchy.

"They are extremely approachable. If you have a problem or need to be away from work, they're really understanding," said Hunsucker, a shipper and receiver who said he's worked on almost every piece of machinery the company operates. "The Adelmans are some really good people."

Hajek said he came to Crowell seven years ago after retiring as vice president from a Fortune 500 company. He wanted to help the company with its marketing strategy.

"I've known Herb for many, many years, even before coming here. There's no place I'd rather be," he said.

After giving all but six years of his adult life to cultivating Crowell's success, Herb Adelman still goes in to the office every day, never once thinking of retirement.

"I don't intend to retire, if I can avoid it," he said.

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