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When business is tough, embrace change to thrive

It's no secret that the package printing industry has become increasingly competitive over the last two decades. Yet in the last decade, one Rochester company grew its sales year over year by double digits. Today, this firm boasts \$100 million in sales and 400 employees.

For this feat, James Hammer, president and CEO of Hammer Packaging Corp., recently was awarded the 2008 Herbert W. Vanden Brul Entrepreneurial Award by Rochester Institute of Technology's E. Philip Saunders College of Business. Each year this award goes to a local business entrepreneur who has made a significant impact on the Rochester business economy.

Since taking over as president and CEO, Hammer has fostered a culture centered on the inevitability of change.

"Expect it, accept it, thrive on it," Hammer says.

New Hammer associates hear this message when hired and continually throughout their careers.

"Our markets have gotten progressively more competitive, and the driving challenge is to maintain one's competitive advantage," Hammer notes. "To us, that equates to innovation."

But innovation does not simply happen. At Hammer Packaging, an innovation department looks to leverage emerging technologies. This commitment to leading-edge technology has been recognized by the industry: The company is ranked among the



INNOVATION EDGE

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top five printers in North America when it comes to reinvesting in its business.

A recent example is a new press technology that uses electron beam inks and coatings that have unique properties and provide a more eco-friendly alternative to traditional printing methods. This investment was quickly followed with a 10-color press, expanding Hammer Packaging's capabilities in the pressure-sensitive markets.

Innovation also is driven by the company's quality system. Hammer Packaging had five facilities and needed to improve communications to provide customers with better-quality service. So, early this year the company installed a new enterprise resource planning system.

Innovation also has influenced policies for its staff. Last year, Hammer Packaging was honored with the Rochester Business Ethics Award. In addition, the company has received Best Workplace in America honors from the printing industry.

"Both of these honors are a tribute to the associates at Hammer Packaging. We focus

a lot of time on hiring the *right* people," Hammer says.

And it is those people, along with shared ideas and resources, who have allowed Hammer Packaging to stay ahead of the curve on print technology and innovation.

In 1998, Hammer faced a difficult choice: Stay in Rochester or move the majority of the operations to North Carolina. A discussion with RIT's then president, Albert Simone, helped influence the final decision. Hammer acquired space from RIT at its Business and Technology Park. Close relationships with RIT and its School of Print Media contributed to innovation at Hammer Packaging. In 2006, the firm invested almost \$6 million to expand its operations in Henrietta.

In 2007, competing against 5,200 entries from firms around the world, Hammer Packaging received four Premier Print Awards from the Printing Industries of America and Graphic Arts Technical Foundation. And with a view to reducing its carbon footprint, Hammer Packaging consolidated five facilities to three.

Hammer Packaging is one of the most respected companies in the region and in its industry. Innovation has driven the company to find creative ways to stay ahead of the competition, to develop its people—and to stay in Rochester.

Ashok Rao is dean of Rochester Institute of Technology's E. Philip Saunders College of Business.