



Web Consulting Inc

Americas Office
398 Columbus Ave. #331
Boston, MA 02116
UNITED STATES

Tel: +1 617 536 5925
Fax: +1 617 536 5926
Email: info@web-na.com
Web: www.web-na.com

Elgin company helps customers get the picture

As published in the *Chicago Sun-Times*
Technology Section; November 29, 2006
Written by Sandra Guy

The local shopping mall's Santa's castle and twinkling tree could very well have been made by an Elgin company that prides itself on its technological prowess. Fabric Images Inc. got its start 14 years ago when founder Pat Hayes quit his job as sales manager for a company that made flags for marching bands' drill teams. Hayes, now 66, saw a niche for a company that could make appliqued banners for corporations. He hired his son-in-law, Marco Alvarez, 43, from the marketing department at DuPont, and the two searched for technology that would enable them to transfer anything digitally created onto exotic, uncoated textiles such as Spandex, taffeta and sheer fabrics. The product opened the way for the design community to create unique environments using textiles.

They chose transfer dye sublimation, a two-step technology that first prints graphic designs onto special paper. It marries the paper image with the fabric using a high-temperature heat press. Fabric Images has invested more than \$2 million in developing and improving the technology. Today's banners and tension fabric carry a sophisticated array of computer-generated digital graphics, ranging from the Chicago skyline to a twinkling holiday star. The company's next leap started nine years ago with the search for a machine that would create 10-foot wide prints without requiring seam stitching. Alvarez found an Israeli company, Nur, at a trade show in Duesseldorf, Germany, to make the machine for Fabric Images.

The machine arrived the week of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and Fabric Images started printing seamless, 120-inch-wide fabrics using dye sublimation. "We could create anything that the design community could design on computer, and print it on soft textiles," Alvarez said. Fabric Images also has a metal shop and uses lightweight aluminum as a skeleton to create displays. The results include holiday mall displays of an exploding gold- metallic gift box made of fabric, and Santa's Castle with Spandex fabric towers designed to look like stone, with a bridge leading to a house nearby. The value of such fabric-based designs is their quick set-up and take-down. Santa's Castle took a team of workers one evening to put together. The advances have enabled Fabric Images, a profitable company with 100 employees, to enjoy 18 percent annual revenue growth, boosting it to more than \$10 million in revenues this year.

"Fabric Images is pioneering new applications and new products," said Michael Flippin, president of Web Consulting, a Boston-based market research and consulting firm specializing in wide-format graphics. "They are adding a new dimension to the marketplace."

Among Fabric Images' subcontracting clients is 3D Exhibits, an Elk Grove Village company that designs, constructs, installs, dismantles and stores booths for trade shows. Bob Prihoda, vice president of operations for 3D Exhibits, said the company sends all of its fabric work to Fabric Images because Fabric provides a high-quality product at a fair price and knows how to deliver with top-notch service on deadline. Fabric Images also works closely with 3D Exhibits' designers to make sure that a trade- show booth has the bells and whistles needed to get attention.

"Trade shows involve absolute deadlines. There is no 'I'll get to it tomorrow,' " Prihoda said.

e-mail: sguy@suntimes.com

Copyright CHICAGO SUN-TIMES 2006

Web Consulting Asia Pacific
Room 322, Apollo Building
1440 Yan'an Road Central
Shanghai 200040 CHINA

Tel: +86 216 249 8378
Fax: +86 216 249 8078

Web Consulting (EMEA)
EMEA Representative Office
Oxfordshire
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 1993 898 609