



Focus on the Future

Guest Predictions: Bill Overstreet

Guest Predictions is a regular feature in which we ask leaders in a number of professions questions that affect us all.

Bill Overstreet is the founder and owner of Bill's Copy Center in Leesburg, VA. Prior to the opening of his business in 1981, Bill spent 11 years as an Air Traffic Controller. Bill is heavily engaged in the community, having belonged to the Kiwanis Club since 1991, and the Masons since 1993, as well as assisting the Salvation Army Men's Club and the Loudoun Chamber of Commerce. Bill sings in the Hamilton Baptist Church choir. Bill and his wife Betty were married in 1992 and have four children, two of which are from Betty's former marriage; together they have 10 grand children.

Q: What changes in your professional environment in the past 3-5 years have you found to be the most beneficial?

A: The improvement in computers and equipment wins hands down. Computer e-mail that allows for the downloading of jobs directly from the clients to the copier in our shop is now close to commonplace. Much of the equipment is far easier to use, taking in entire projects from multiple sources that are either physical copy or electronic and carrying them to a completed, multi-color, finished product in one step.

Q: What changes have been the most troubling to you?

A: Competition has increased with a series of National Chains moving into local markets behind big, highly recognizable brand names. At the same time many clients are feeling the squeeze of the economy and holding back. Additionally, the equipment manufacturers are being unusually aggressive about convincing prospective clients of our service to do their projects "in house," regardless of the ultimate quality.

Q: How will globalization affect your professional area in the near term?

A: At the local level, which is where we have worked with our clients for decades, there is no apparent impact with the possible exception of the ownership of certain key equipment manufacturers. The intensity of vendor competition driven by the slump in the economy means more products and supplies, such as paper, are coming from the U.S. once again. Other than that, the need and desired outcome is still largely the same as it has been for years.

Q: What significant challenges might be anticipated in your professional area in the next few years?

A: The use of the computer has added a range of new challenges as well as benefits, pushing us to better use emails, CD, and flashdrives. Yes, we are creating a cleaner copy when using these vs. using a hard copy, but they require new ranges of knowledge. One challenge is finding the time to interpret and download correctly, when knowing that a project is there, waiting on-line.

Q: What are the greatest challenges confronting young professionals in Western culture today?

A: The cost to get started into anything these days is the main issue. When I started in 1981 the initial cost to me was around \$3,500. Today you would be lucky to start out under \$75,000 with a mix of direct cost and debt, and, if a beginner chooses to go the way of purchasing a franchise, the cost / debt combination is considerably more. On top of that, understanding the integration of the technology is a much greater challenge than 30 years ago, and is not likely to simplify.