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BY ANDY ASHBY

hen DeWayne Adamson started Plan Express, Inc., in December 1994, it was in response to a common problem for general contractors: getting plans to subcontractors in a timely manner.

Before he started Plan Express, Adamson ran a construction firm with several large retailer contracts, building projects across the country.

His team would put plans in a tube and mail them to subcontractors, trying to beat the 5 p.m. FedEx pick-up deadline.

"Subcontractors are on a really short timeline," Adamson says. "For a general contractor to get a really good bid, you have to put the plans in the subcontractor's hands for a week and typically we have 10 days to get a bid to the owner."

**Plan Express, Inc.**  
Construction document management  
HQ: Memphis  
CEO: DeWayne Adamson  
Employees: 115  
2007 revenues: \$15 million  
Address: 3003 Airways  
Phone: (901) 834-2142  
Web site: [www.planexpress.com](http://www.planexpress.com)

So finding a subcontractor and overnighting plans was a priority to doing business, but it required a lot of time and effort.

Adamson was working one day and noticed most of his employees were in the back room, sorting and stapling documents instead of taking phone calls or doing other work.

"I realized we had 32 superintendents in the field and numerous owners calling our company and we're not growing the company, we're not managing our business," Adamson says. "We're stuck here in the back room, folding plans."

Adamson started Plan Express in Memphis as a separate company to reproduce and distribute his construction company's plans. Then he sold the construction company and focused on Plan Express.

Adamson realized one challenge in 1999, when Plan Express had a record night of 120 packages. He and his team worked until after midnight.

"We just got too big too fast and all of the sudden we couldn't get things out the door," Adamson says.



ALAN HOWELL | MBJ

DeWayne Adamson wants to expand the niche of his document delivery business.

## Opportunity knocked

Plan Express created in response to need, automation helping delivery business grow

He decided automation was the answer to scaling his business. The company invested in the right machinery and computer equipment, which does everything from sorting to weight verification.

"We put it together so that it's almost untouched by human hands, other than putting it in the package," Adamson says. "It gave us not only an opportunity to grow, but a clear advantage over our competition."

After automation, Plan Express is on a solid growth path, but it is now trying to grow beyond its current

niche.

The company deals mainly with national general contractors in the retail field and has about 20%-25% of that market, Adamson says.

Plan Express handles the construction documents for 65 national retailers, from The Gap to Starbucks.

"While we've been very successful penetrating the market, it's like 'Now what do we do?'" Adamson says.

One way the company is growing is by adding locations in local markets. Plan Express has been opening stores across the country to get business on

**Challenge:** Handling a rapidly growing small business.

**Strategy:** Invest in improvements and automation to accommodate growth and give advantages over competition.

**Challenge:** Penetrating a much larger market segment.

**Strategy:** Add local branches and new online services.

the local level.

"It's almost like spokes, connecting to the hub," Adamson says.

The company is also expanding its Internet offerings.

Plan Express already has a private plan room online, where customers can get to their plans through a user identification and password.

The company is looking into the feasibility of asking contractors if they would like to share their plans in an effort to draw from a pool of subcontractors and get better bids.

Subcontractors will be able to register and give company information. If a contractor decides to release a plan to the subcontractor community, it will be sent to subcontractors that match the project's parameters.

"We can't just expose all this data, but what we can do is reach out to people we've shipped to before and ask them if they'd like to join a subcontractor community for free," Adamson says.

Steve Barron, owner of Barron Construction Co., Inc., signed up for Plan Express' services when he started his business in 2007.

His company has a space on Plan Express' Web site where he can put project plans and specifications.

"I can tell subcontractors to go to their site, put in our name and get to everything we're doing," Barron says.

So far, it has been a big benefit to his small company, which has five employees.

"It's a big service," Barron says. "I know that the big companies use this service and I'm right there with them. I have the same abilities they have and it doesn't cost me anything."

aaashby@bizjournals.com | 259-1732

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DeWayne Adamson, Plan Express, Inc.

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