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New contract prompts move for Torrey Pines

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A new contract win that will total nearly \$1 million over the next three years has prompted Torrey Pines Research Inc. to move into new digs.

The contract, with a client Torrey Pines did not name due to confidentiality issues, is for studying how digital photos printed on inkjet printers withstand the test of time. The firm will look at factors such as humidity, pollution and heat, and ways the printers' longevity can be improved without sacrificing quality.

Torrey Pines has been studying this issue for several years. Next month, the firm's chief technology officer, Peter Mason, will present findings at a national conference related to the general industry.

The firm provides product development and engineering consulting to printer and digital imaging manufacturers worldwide, including Xerox Corp. and Eastman Kodak Co. Roughly a quarter of the local office's work comes from customers in Upstate New York, while 10 to 20 percent comes from Internet inquiries, mainly from Japanese firms.

Steven Beyer, Torrey Pines vice president of business development, said the California-based firm maintains a Rochester location because of the qualified workforce and cost efficiencies. In addition, office space rent here is reasonable.

The local operation was most recently on Blossom Road and employs six full-time staffers—including Beyer and Mason—and 25 fellows, who are professional consultants in various areas of expertise.

Torrey Pines assists firms that are looking for ways to get their products to market faster, want additional expertise outside of their company or do not want to hire additional permanent employees for a job.

Torrey Pines is not a household name, but many of the companies they work for are well-known, Beyer said.

"We're like the secret ingredient companies use," he said. "When you buy a printer, or a steak packed with hickory-smoked flavor, we may have had a hand in its development."

The firm moved in late July into a new space in Fairport that is better suited for working on the new contract. In addition, Torrey Pines has invested some \$100,000

in new equipment. Beyer declined to disclose revenues for the private company, but said annual revenues go up and down, depending on what projects the company is undertaking.

Because the inkjet technology the firm studies for its printing customers can be applied to paper in an extremely precise manner, Torrey Pines also works with customers who use the technology for uses other than printing.

For example, Torrey Pines staff could assist companies looking to "print" flavoring or messages on food, place a layer of platinum on a fuel cell or coat the exterior of a stent that keeps a human's heart valve functional.

Torrey Pines' clients include those in pharmaceuticals, flat panel display manufacturing and 3-D imaging. Beyer said additional opportunities exist in the aerospace, food processing and alternative energy markets.

But working with print manufacturers continues to make up the majority of Torrey Pines' work.

Last month, the firm's work was highlighted when Kodak invited a group of industry analysts to its labs in Rochester. The group discussed Kodak's testing methods and provided results of testing it had done. This included outside testing; work done by Torrey Pines looked at Kodak's EasyShare systems, among similar systems from its competitors, in a blind test.

Torrey Pines reviewed factors such as ink use and yield, and the number of pages printed versus the amount it cost to buy the ink. In Torrey Pines' studies, Kodak's system came out best, based on image quality.

In addition to working individually with customers, Torrey Pines also completes industry research.

Jerry Daloia, operations manager for Xerox's print cartridge design unit, said Torrey Pines is a good supplier. Daloia's unit recently worked with Torrey Pines on an electro-mechanical fixture used in product testing.

The firm took the requirements from Xerox and designed and developed the tool in a timely manner.

"We give them the requirements and they take it from there," Daloia said.

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