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Forces of Change: Willing to evolve and change

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Willing to evolve and change

After years of climbing the corporate ladder, Chris Warner '96 decided it was time to take matters into his own hands.

So in November 2003, he and business partner Kush Shah founded directFX Solutions in Memphis, Tenn., which today aims to be a "one stop shop" for mailing, printing and data processing needs.

Warner and Shah had both been working in Nashville for Pitney Bowes Office Systems. "I'd acquired a bad taste for the corporate world," says Warner. "You have great ideas that people don't listen to, and sometimes it gets frustrating."

He was convinced that he could do better — in part because for months he and Shah had been meeting over coffee, pondering the possibility of starting their own business. One day, they decided to make their dream a reality.

Warner had learned about the packaging services businesses during his time with Pitney Bowes and in a previous job with Nortel. He believed a mail processing center that would serve as a liaison between businesses and the postal service could be profitable by offering greater convenience, strong customer service and lower costs.

Memphis seemed a logical choice for such a business because of its foundation as a distribution hub and its proximity to many casino chains. The city also offered access to Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Alabama and Kentucky.

Warner (at right in photo) and Shah, a Vanderbilt graduate, poured all their energy into the startup, realizing that the early years for any business are pivotal. They began by renting a U-Haul, establishing a small office and working tirelessly — even going door-to-door — to get their name out to potential customers.

"We were two men and an inserter," Warner says with a laugh.

DirectFX strives to offer a different, service-oriented approach — something

Warner and Shah felt was missing in the corporate sector.

"We were focused on one-on-one interactions," says Warner. "We knew we could bring a better value and take care of our customers first."

At first directFX offered only mailing services, but soon Warner and Shah realized that they had to be ready to evolve with the changing demands of the marketplace. While they had previously worked with a private printing service, Warner and Shah decided to expand their company's abilities to cover printing as well as mailing. The two invested in color equipment and dropped the "Mailing" title from their original name.

"Timing is everything in business. You need foresight and a willingness to change," says Warner, who points out that he and Shah are always looking toward the future. "If we don't make investments like that, other larger companies will. We want customers to get the best bang for their buck."

Evidently, the customers do. One client with a Memphis theatre company told the *Memphis Daily News* that she had worked with many mail houses over a period of 13 years. Now that she has found directFX, she says, "I bless the day I was sent to them."

By the middle of last year, directFX was one of the top two printing and mailing

companies in Memphis and had accounts with many major casinos along the Mississippi River.

One venture Warner is excited about is the company's foray into the Internet. Its Web site (www.directfxsolutions.com) allows customers to design mailings and enter postage information on-line, which speeds the company's ability to have their product ready for distribution.

A history major at Furman, Warner says the skills he learned through his liberal arts education are quite applicable to his everyday decisions. "It strengthens you in any and every capacity," he says.

But even while he studied the Civil War at Furman, Warner says he was also an avid reader of such publications as *Entrepreneur, Inc.* and *Fortune*. "It was almost like taking classes."

Although directFX is just beginning to become one of the major mailing and printing providers in western Tennessee, the hardest part seems to be over for Warner.

"It's a challenge to open up your own business. We didn't realize it was going to be as difficult as it was," he says. "The hardest thing was just making the jump."

— JESSICA TAYLOR '07

