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— Julie Rice, MasterTag

### Company Profile

MasterTag is an international company committed to the production of plastic horticultural care labels and merchandising solutions. The company prides itself on providing its customers with creative, high quality products and outstanding customer service.

The company was founded in 1949 by Ludwig “Lou” Schmidt as Master Products Company, with the purpose of making small injection molded plastic parts. His first product was a line of fishing bobbers, called Master Float. Within a year, Schmidt was producing a line of plastic horticultural labels for greenhouse growers to replace the wooden labels then being used, a product that caught on quickly.

These tags were initially all text, but as early as the mid-1950’s labels were enhanced with color pictures of the actual plant, and Master Products ultimately became one of the first producers of full, four-color process printing on plastic.

The company continued to bring innovation to the field of plastic horticultural tags and labels, and in 1979 was renamed MasterTag. Today, still a family-owned business, MasterTag employs 150 people and serves a world-wide customer base of nurseries, garden centers and growers.

Julie Rice, MasterTag’s Pre-Production Director, says, “We serve a very complex supply chain, from people who grow plants from the root, to greenhouses that deliver full-size blooming plants and suppliers of plants for the retail channel.”

MasterTag delivers a full line of plastic horticultural labeling and point-of-purchase material including displays, signs and banners. Most MasterTag materials are printed inhouse on its sheet-fed presses on polystyrene and vinyl substrates.

## Business Challenge

Rice has responsibility for MasterTag's pre-production operation which includes customer service, design, database management, digital asset management, and prepress. The company employs professional horticulturists to do the research and writing associated with its product development efforts, as well as a team of photographers. She says, "When I first took over this operation in 2001, roadblocks and barriers to getting things done fast. Additionally, we had migrated to a more digital workflow and needed to find a way to accommodate the rapidly growing number of digital source files we were producing."

Rice found that the company was maintaining its information on four separate servers: one that held metadata, one for high resolution images, one for low resolution images and the fourth for image thumbnails. All image files were stored in file folders on their respective servers and were identified by a file name that contained the image number.

Operationally, users would look first in the metadata

server, find the image number, navigate to the high resolution or low resolution server, and reenter the number.

Rice says, "As I became more familiar with the work process, I could see that there was a huge opportunity for human error inherent in the workflow. If someone forgot to put the high resolution image into the right folder, or entered incomplete metadata or none at all, images could be nearly impossible to locate. And it was too easy to enter the wrong number when searching for an image, which could result in the wrong image being retrieved."

Rice set out to look for ways to improve the process and reduce the opportunity for error.

## The Search

Rice's first stop was Graph Expo 2003, where she visited a variety of vendors and began to educate herself about digital asset management.

Following that, she assembled a team to develop



requirements and select a solution. In addition to Rice, the team consisted of an IS manager to provide a technical perspective, a team member with graphics and prepress background and a researcher who also had a database background. The team developed three primary requirements in its quest for a better way to work:

**1** First, MasterTag was determined to shy away from proprietary systems. They recognized that this was only the first stop on a long journey, and they wanted to be as open and flexible as possible.

**2** The next requirement was that the solution have a robust searching capability. Rice explains, “A plant has four primary descriptors, including genus, species, variety and common name. We never search on all four at once. When customers place an order, they might provide us one or two of those categories, but since most of them were tag orderers, not horticulturists, they didn’t really know what the plant was called. So we had to have a large number of fields on which we could search and the ability to do Boolean and complex nested searches. We believed we would be attaching 25 to 30 pieces of metadata to each image.”

**3** The team knew that selecting the solution was only the beginning, so they were looking for a partner who offered exceptional customer service and would be responsive to future developmental needs. She says, “As the lines between document management, content management and digital asset management have continued to blur, many of the offerings on the market had too much or too little capability for our needs. Just about everyone we spoke with indicated they could help, but digging deeper disqualified most of them on one or more of our leading criteria.”

Ultimately, MasterTag selected WAVE Corp.’s MediaBank to meet its D.A.M. needs.

## The Solution

MasterTag acquired MediaBank in March of 2004 and was up and running quickly due to extensive preparation on the part of the MasterTag team. Rice says, “We used this project as an opportunity to clean up a lot of our data and to get a fresh start. So prior to implementation, we had set up a data structure and determined what metadata we had that didn’t need to be migrated. We also leveraged the skills of our on-staff Oracle expert as we thought through the new process.”

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Rice reports that prepress operators and horticultural researchers were up and running within two weeks of installation.

At the time MediaBank was deployed, MasterTag had about 100,000 images. There were about 36,000 records that consisted of digital assets that were not connected to metadata, and while these were transferred to prevent inadvertent loss of usable assets, MasterTag is currently in the process of weeding those out.

Three months into the implementation, MasterTag put the WAVE team to the test in terms of customer service and development support.

Rice says, “MediaBank has a function called synchronize records, used to automatically apply metadata to assets being cataloged. That didn’t work for us. We needed to copy metadata from one image to the other. We take one picture of a full plant in a pot, and then we make four or five compositions of that image, including a head shot of the plant, the plant in bloom and a whole plant with multiple blooms. We needed to make sure that all of them are linked to the original parent image and to metadata that includes not only the genus and species, but things such as care, lighting requirements, soil conditions, etc.”

WAVE was up to the challenge and quickly added a function which would “Inherit Data,” allowing MasterTag to apply the parent metadata to all composed “child” images.

Rice reports that their team have been pleased with their choice because of MediaBank’s functionality and the exceptional quality of the WAVE team. “Others had cool products, but we were looking for a good partner with a solution we could take to a different level. We wanted to feel confident we could call and say, ‘We need help,’ and the WAVE team has lived up to their promises in that regard.”

## Results

Rice reports that MasterTag has been able to reduce lead times during its busy season, from February through September. In the research department alone, there has been a 35% reduction in lead time which, according to Rice, is almost 100% attributable to MediaBank.

Staff members are able to locate assets quickly and accurately, and the potential for human error that was so much a part of the previous process is much less prevalent today. Rice also adds that the ability to view the image and the metadata on the same screen has uncovered a number of duplicate images as a result of employees rescanning images from slides because the original scanned image could not be located.

MasterTag has also added all of its design prototypes to MediaBank. In PDF format, prototypes are viewable by sales managers and customers and this has helped MasterTag internally with customer service and sales as they work to design products from the prototypes. Rice says, “These all used to be in books of paper that we had to search through to see what kind of

program the customer had in place, whether they were using big tags, little tags, posters, etc.”

## The Future

In addition to the nearly 120,000 assets currently cataloged in MediaBank, Rice is looking forward to adding almost a half a million individual tag files—finished product—to the database as well.

She plans to convert all of the existing tag files to PDF and make them available online for customer orders of existing product from inventory, or for reprinting. She also plans to migrate all logos and EPS files that are used to build tag files from their current location on a design server to MediaBank.

Additionally, MasterTag has begun making MediaBank’s QProof available to customers on a limited basis to eliminate the need to FedEx proofs back and forth, and is looking forward to the ability to enable customers to annotate files online for even more efficiency. She will also be looking to offer customers increased self-service functionality, including the ability to change text, crop photos and create some simple design elements online.

In a very short period of time, MediaBank has made a dramatic difference in MasterTag’s work process. Rice says, “We still have a lot ahead of us, but we have found an exceptional partner in WAVE and we are making steady progress toward our goals. And we will continue to partner with WAVE to come up with innovative ways to increase the functionality we offer both internally and externally.” ♦

