

Stampology Chicago

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When Dave Velez opened Stampology Chicago in August 2003, it represented the culmination of many months of planning right down to the printed logo on the shopping bags. When *The Rubber Stamper* spoke to Dave for this article, he had been in business for about six months. And while, he says he is constantly looking for ways to keep the store fresh and successful, he's very happy with business thus far. In addition to healthy sales and class attendance, Dave cites a custom card stamping service and placing stamped cards for sale at a local florist as examples of the vision he has for his company.

Dave discovered stamping five years ago by attending a Stampin' Up! party

STORE PROFILE

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with his wife, Sue. As a flight attendant, Dave would take advantage of his travels for work to visit stamping stores throughout the country. While in a shop in Seattle, WA, Dave began chatting with the owner. When she learned he was from Chicago, she went on to tell him that, each month, up to 15% to 20% of her Internet sales were from stampers in Chicago. "She said this was because there were not really any stamping stores in the city of Chicago; they are all out in the suburbs of the city," recounts Dave. Upon some research of his own, he found that there was a lack of stamping stores in the heart of Chicago and this became a new venture.

"With the airline industry the way it is



Stampology Chicago is located in Chicago, a few miles from the city's O'Hare Airport.

right now, I had been thinking about a 'Plan B' for my career. And this presented itself as an opportunity," says Dave. After finding, and negotiating for, a location with a parking lot (Dave points out parking was very important in an urban location), the work began to refurbish the space. "It was very important to me to project an urban, modern look," Dave explains. He devised a color scheme that he thought would create that image—purple and olive walls and a complementary mustard-colored ceiling. Laminate wood flooring completed the picture. It took Dave, his wife, family, and friends to complete the renovation of the shop.

In addition to the image of the store, Dave concentrated on several other issues he deemed critical. For one, he did not want to track inventory, and other administrative tasks, by hand. "I knew I wanted to invest in a computer system that would do that for me," he explains. "It was very important to me not to make the mistake of coming into this as an oversized hobby."



(From l to r) Pictured are Dave Velez, Sue Velez, former manager Candi Tario, and Gloria Medel

In terms of product, one of Dave's goals is to sell stamps that shoppers may not see in other stores. He set a goal of carrying 20% "big" companies and 80% smaller companies. He defines small companies as those where the owner is the stamp designer, although he acknowledges it's not a definition without exceptions. He presently carries about 50 stamp lines.

To achieve the goal of selling unusual, and not off-seen stamp designs to his customers, Dave also focuses on procuring exclusive stamp lines at the



Dave and other instructors teach classes in the rear area of the store, which is partitioned by movable fixtures.



LEFT: Dave estimates there are over 300 SKUs of cardstock in the inventory at any given time. While striving to offer a variety of merchandise, a prime concern is making the shopping area open and airy as well.

store. Currently, he has the selling rights in the state of Illinois for two companies—Come Clean Designs and The Cat's Pajamas. "It's not that I'm trying to corner the market. But I am trying to give people a reason to come back. Exclusives, in my opinion, help me with that," he notes.

In-store classes are also an important part of the store's activities. The classroom area, which accommodates about 10 people, is located at the back of the store behind a partition. The

classroom area is stocked with all the materials needed to make featured projects; Dave includes all materials in the class fee.

There are also social events for both adults and children. The store hosts private parties for groups that want a place to get together and stamp. And there are children's classes held the last weekend of every month. While Dave says the average ages of the children who attend are between six and 12, he notes that two four-year olds have made

appearances at the last few events.

The custom card stamping service that the store provides is a growing revenue driver. Dave explains this came about when a customer asked if the store would design and stamp 40 invitations for an engagement party. They took the job and received two more custom orders as a result. They've done baby announcements and even 500 corporate Christmas cards, so far.

And since last December, a florist in town has ordered 60 dozen custom stamped cards for its inventory. "We make Get Well, Baby Announcements, Happy Birthday..." says Dave. This connection was made when a woman who attended a class at the store (and works at the florist shop) showed a card she made to the owner. There was interest, Dave met with the owner, and an agreement was made.

"I keep an eye on generating income outside the store... not waiting for people to walk through the door. And while, the custom cards may be taking on a life of its own, it's ensuring that the focus is on rubber stamps. And it's increasing the awareness of stamping."

Ironically, as Dave works to make Stampology Chicago stand out among stamp stores, he notes that over the past six months, many people have asked what franchise he is a part of. Dave attributes that to the streamlined image they have worked to create—from the unified colors in the store and on the website to the shopping bags and employee shirts with logos. And it seems multiple locations aren't out of the question. As Dave explains, "Right before the grand opening, I added the 'Chicago' to the store's name. Being the big dreamer that I am... who knows, maybe there'll be a Stampology Maui someday." —AV

We would love to feature a tour of your store! Please invite us by contacting us today. Call Anne at (800) 969-7176, ext. 217. Or e-mail avazquez@hobbypub.com.