

Color Group Crosses the Digital Horizon

BY RICH HANDLEY

When Marc Weinstein went to work for his father more than 20 years ago, he could not have predicted how different their family-run photo lab would become in time. Back then, Color Group Inc. of Hawthorne, NY, made its profit—as photo labs everywhere did at the time—on film processing and enlargement. Bulky, clunky equipment lined the place, and the concept of an all-digital photo lab that worked without film seemed a crazy idea to anyone of sound mind.

Color Group traces its roots back to 1946, when the original owner built a three-person lab in his basement. "My dad bought it from another fellow who started it after World War II," recalls Weinstein. "My dad was a photographer after the war, and he bought the lab in 1969. Then I came along in 1982. I was a photographer in New York City for 10 or 12 years, and I decided to try working with my dad, which worked out okay."

These days, Weinstein is Color Group's president, leading a digital lab that handles all phases of the visual, photographic and graphic arts. The company contains a drive-in photo/video studio available for rental on a per-diem basis, which spans 2,000 square feet, has 22' high ceilings and incorporates a corner cyclorama measuring 29' L x 25' W x 17' H. Recently, Weinstein completed a renovation of the entire lab, installing two new Mediaphot/Colenta processors and two ZBE 50-inch printers to his cache of equipment.

Throughout its existence, Color Group has provided a wide variety of services. "We did all kinds of work over the years, stuff that doesn't exist anymore, like slide shows,"

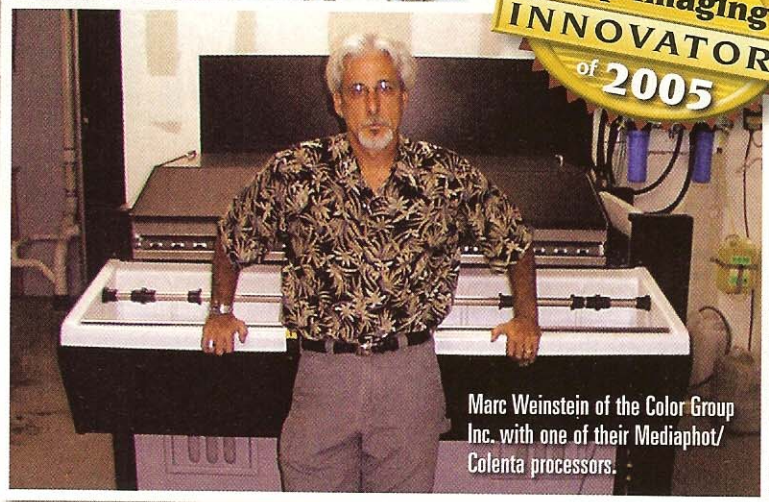
says Weinstein. "Now, we're into outdoor graphics and digital C-prints." Their major clients include large corporations, trade shows, department stores, chains, malls, restaurant franchises, clothing retailers and the cosmetics industry. In addition, they also cater to what Weinstein deems "quite an active street trade."

When It's Time to Change

Unfortunately, the 1990s proved very difficult for Weinstein and his staff, threatening the survival of the second-generation family business. As film development and enlargement gave way to the digital arena—with personal computers eliminating even more business by promoting an "I can do it myself" approach—many labs exposed their last frames. In the end, Color Group was one of the lucky ones to make it through the dry times.

Weinstein attributes Color Group's survival to his staff's determination to adapt to changing times by learning new skills and purchasing new equipment. "We decided it was time to renovate the business and get everything up to snuff," he explains. Since the minilab had been slowly going digital for years anyway, it was a feasible task. "We had enough work in different parts of the business, so we decided to clean up the mess."

Before the renovation, Weinstein owned one digital ZBE Chromira photo printer and a Kreonite model. Recognizing that the digital C-print business was getting very busy, he bought another Chromira and two processors, which proved



Marc Weinstein of the Color Group Inc. with one of their Mediaphot/Colenta processors.



to be a great boon to the business. "Scheduling was always a problem," he says, "but the second machine alleviated the whole issue."

Realizing the same scheduling problems would exist for the lab's Kodak Duratrans, and for regular paper, Color Group pulled out its entire black-and-white department and put in a second Mediaphot/Colenta for processing 50-inch material. The difference was immediately noticeable. "Now, when doing a couple hundred or a thousand Duratrans, it doesn't get in the way of our glossy and matte C-print work,

because the C-print work goes on one processor and the Duratrans, at a different speed, on the other processor."

This allowed Weinstein, an artist who attended RIT and the Pratt Institute, to transform Color Group into what he calls "a kind of art-related business." The company now provides fine-art printing, giclee printing, book production and prepress work, something that would not have been viable during his father's time at the helm.

"In the past ten years or so, we've done about, I guess, five (continued on page 41)

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