

## Celebrating 33 Years Advancing the Mailing Industry

By Clark Cassell

The MAIL Group story begins in 1981 when Ron Robbins, a sales manager with Pitney Bowes, hears that the United States Postal Service is offering postage discounts to service bureaus that sort and commingle First Class letters from various business mailers.

Launching a company called M.A.I.L., Inc., in Lafayette, Indiana, he secured his first customer, Purdue University, hired some part-time help and began hand sorting letters into 3- and 5-digit groupings. "In those early days," Robbins recalls, "we passed a penny of the savings to our customers and kept a penny for ourselves."

By the late 1980's Robbins had founded several successful presort bureaus in cities throughout the Midwest and could see that his business model needed a technology boost. Postal automation was still in its infancy and Robbins had several mail processing procedures that needed efficiency improvements.

Robbins got wind of a high school computer whiz in West Lafayette, Indiana that could reportedly help with some of M.A.I.L., Inc.'s basic programming needs. Robbins tracked down Chris Baker working at a local Radio Shack. Baker worked sporadically on M.A.I.L.'s programming needs while completing an engineering degree at Purdue University.

Upon graduation Baker was offered an entry level position at both Cummins Engine and Caterpillar but Robbins had another offer. "Chris, let's start a technology company called M.A.I.L.Code. You and your select employees will help solve the mail processing problems that are presented from our everyday work flow."

Don Caddy was Baker's first partner/employee choice with Adam Fleming close behind. After seven successful years of developing unique mail processing innovations like their patented Differential Weighing, a standard in to-

day's postal scale applications, Pitney Bowes acquired MAILCode.

In 2006 Pitney Bowes decided to consolidate manufacturing and move MAILCode from Lafayette, Indiana to Connecticut leaving Caddy, Fleming, and software engineer Aaron Pedigo reviewing their industry future. Robbins, who at this time had founded 17 companies in the mailing industry space, was intrigued by the possibilities with the engineers who were not happy with uprooting their families and moving to



*Engineering Innovation Founders Adam Fleming (l) and Don Caddy*

Connecticut. A meeting with Robbins, M.A.I.L., Inc. partner Ron Welton, and the MAILCode trio of Caddy, Fleming, and Pedigo formed the beginning of a new business venture under the title of Engineering Innovation, Inc. (EII).

### Timing Is Everything

On September of 2006 EII moved into the 65,000 sq. ft. M.A.I.L. Group headquarters in Lafayette, Indiana and into the middle of various mailing applications performed on a daily basis.

At this time M.A.I.L. was outsourcing the daily mail processing for over 150 local companies and processing the daily catalog requests for over 200 nation-wide catalog companies. This presented a fertile ground for innovation in the mailing industry for the newly formed Engineering Innovation, Inc.

It's often said that timing is everything and this proved to be the case for EII. Robbins caught wind that the Postal Service was planning to dramatically increase the presort discounts for First Class flat size mail.

While the industry leaders in postal automation were adjusting their current letter sorting platforms to sort flats, EII was looking at the process from a completely fresh perspective. From EII's perspective sorting letters and flats were apples and oranges.

There was a new bundle-based discount level that required only 10 pieces to a 5- or 3-digit bundle. EII's EZ-Flats concept combined the ultimate efficiencies of both automation and manual interaction to become the new standard for flats sorting in the presort industry with their Dynamic Sort technique.

The EZ-Flats system was unveiled at the National Postal Forum in Washington D.C. in May of 2007. The relatively inexpensive bundle-based sorting techniques provided by the EZ-Flats system exploded onto the mailing scene and launched EII into the mainstream of

postal automation providers. Business mailers and service bureaus with as few as 1,000 First Class flats a day could see a payback in a few months when sorting flats using an EZ-Flats system.

The future looks bright for The MAIL Group and Engineering Innovation, Inc. as the mailing industry is rapidly changing. The more confusion and change that emerges has always been seen by Robbins and crew as Opportunity with a capital "O".

Don Caddy and the talented EII team continue their quest for providing the most cost efficient automated solutions to mailing problems for mailing service providers.

*Clark Cassell is a business development director at Engineering Innovation Inc.*