

Large Format Digital Printing

Business Services Graphics

C R & A Custom
312 West Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90015
213-749-4440
www.cracustom.com



Carmen Rad
President

BIO:

Carmen Rad, a garment industry veteran of Puerto Rican descent, started CR&A Custom Apparel in 1993 because she was having difficulty getting paid from her previous employer. She also knew she had the necessary capabilities and strong work ethics to start her own business venture. With Carmen's degree in fashion marketing and design she could not fail.

CR&A started with only two employees out of her home. Over the past sixteen years the company has grown to nearly thirty employees and into a new 24,000 square foot build-

ing. They began producing custom embroidery work and promotional items and have transitioned to primarily a large format digital printing company serving some of the same clients from 1993 as well as large corporations, such as Disney, Coors, Coca-Cola and Nike.

CR&A is a full-service large digital print production and visual display company that produces and installs billboards, all indoor and outdoor banners, fleet graphics, vehicle wraps, window, wall and floor graphics, sports and stadium signage, and all types of trade show graphics and exhibit booths. Carmen's company has recently manufactured its first environmentally friendly biodegradable banners, using UV inks which are better for the environment and specialized new equipment from HP that does not allow fumes into the atmosphere. Their combinations of media, equipment and ink have revolutionized the printing process to be entirely green.

CR&A was funded through a purchase order that was placed for readymade clothing. The item was 11,000 denim shirts sold to a promotional company that needed them for a Warner Brothers event within days. The merchandise was in stock so it was a quick transaction of purchasing and delivering the goods to the client. The client paid for the merchandise in advance because CR&A did not have funds to purchase the goods. Each of the 11,000 shirts was marked up by \$4.00.

Simultaneously, another job was in the process of completion for JC Penney stores, where again the merchandise was marked up by a few dollars. JC Penney also paid their invoice on the date of receipt of their

merchandise. CR&A had over \$95,000 dollars in revenue within its first month of business. The purchasing of goods and reselling continued for a few months until CR&A purchased sewing machines and a warehouse to fill the clients' needs for custom-made promotional clothing and embroidery items. They were clothing manufacturers for eight years until they began to invest in large format digital printing equipment as Carmen saw the emerging needs of the clients in the business market, as well as the decline of apparel industry following 9/11.

CR&A self-funded the company for the first three years until it sold the purchase orders to a factoring company who then would take a percentage of the profit. They worked with them for eight years and then finally found garnered support through interest banks.

Carmen and CR&A's success is reflected through the diversity of clients they work with, the garnered support they have acquired with financial institutions, and the many awards that have been won over the years with a wide variety of organizations.

They work with major corporations across the United States, Puerto Rico and Dubai. Their clients stay loyal for years, which allows them to form a strong base and continue to grow.

In 2007 CR&A was awarded, "Manufacturer of the Year 2007 by the US Department of Commerce", and "Latina Business of the Year 2007", by the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Carmen was also a large part of the Avon walk for breast cancer. She was a member of the Speedo team that raised the second largest dollar amount

in the state of California at \$98,000.

In 2009 CR&A was awarded, "Rising Star", by the National Association of Women Business Owners, "Green Firm" of the year by the SBA and Minority Business Enterprise, "Latina Manufacturer" of the Year by the Latina Business Association, "Supplier of the Year", for USC and nominated, "Manufacture of the Year" by the LBA.

Carmen furthered her education by graduating from the UCLA's Anderson School of Management program in 2010 and was later asked to be an Alumni speaker in 2011. In most recent news, CR&A was featured on Fox News for their successes as a booming Latino business despite economic hardships and November 2011's edition of Big Picture Magazine for their accomplishments in the wide-format printing industry.

Carmen also continues to walk for the Los Angeles Avon Walk for Cancer helping to raise money for a cure.

About CRACustom.com

At CR&A, we own the latest state-of-the-art printing equipment available in today's competitive market. Now operating for over 20 years, the team at CR&A offers an array of interactive ideas, precise execution, and creative innovation. From design to printing, our business model focuses on attending to the unique and evolving needs of each customer. From small businesses to large corporations, CR&A treats each and every customer with integrity and respect. For years, CR&A has been working with clients from all industries, helping companies take advantage of the latest digital print technology.

**Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEO CFO Magazine**

CEO CFO: Ms. Rad, could you tell us a little bit about CR&A Custom?

Ms. Rad: CR&A is celebrating it's 20th year in business on Nov 17th. It was a started out of my home in San. Gabriel which manufactured promotional clothing items for special events. It is now a Los Angeles-based, large for-

mat digital printer. We specialize in large scale graphic prints which are used for special promotions and advertising. We print and install large building wraps, car wraps, billboards and exterior signage. We work with clients such as The Staples Center, Coke, and Coors light. We are really a design company with creative advertising solution using print.

CEO CFO: What are some of the challenges when you are doing such large projects?

Ms. Rad: We work on very limited time frames. Our clients usually wait until the last minute to print because they are finalizing their sponsors but the event date does not change. There are many components involved in a large scale prints and there is no room for error. The prints are aligned side by side like curtain panels so the color from one panel to the next need to match. They are then sewn or welded together. Installation of these large graphics can be very tricky due to high winds or the exterior structure. Having the right equipment is critical to the success of an event from the printing, finishing and installation.

CEO CFO: Are there many elements?

Ms. Rad: There are many elements. There are many pieces before you see a large graphic. There is design, print, production, finishing, and installation. Many hands are involved.

CEO CFO: Are there different ways of doing it?

Ms. Rad: Technology has had a huge impact on how graphics are printed. The ability to print in large scale and speed has improved in the past few years but many of the steps are the same. It will always start from a creative designers idea.

CEO CFO: Are there many changes and advances to equipment?

Ms. Rad: There are many changes in print technology. We recently were the first in the US to purchase a Latex printer, using proven, water based inks. The equipment prints at a speed up to 1,290 feet per hour. That is extremely fast with a resolution of 1200 dpi. My husband and business partner Masoud works very closely with one

of our vendors HP. We provide information of some of the bottlenecks we face during the printing process and suggestions on what we believe some of the solutions maybe. We also share what our clients would like to see on their finished products. This collaboration in the early stages of new technology allows their engineers the opportunity to develop equipment to fulfill the printers needs and the end users.

CEO CFO: When you are evaluating equipment, how do you know when it is time to make a change?

Ms. Rad: In order to be on the cutting edge of technology and offer the best products you always have to be looking. We also consider who we are currently working with and who do we want to work with moving forward.

CEO CFO: How do you reach potential customers?

Ms. Rad: We still do traditional marketing. We set up an appointment, make a presentation, and share with them why we would be a value to them.

CEO CFO: Are there many companies in the space that are as specialized as C R & A?

Ms. Rad: There are many small print shops but I would say a small number of large format printers. It is an industry which requires capital and a large space. It also requires a large team of experts in print.

CEO CFO: Would you tell us a little bit about how you started the business in your home?

Ms. Rad: I was only able to do the marketing from my home we quickly moved into a small warehouse in Los Angeles a few months after opening. Masoud my husband and I both worked in the fashion industry. I worked on the marketing side and he owned a factory which he closed two years prior. I would market our fashion production services to movie studios who were interested in promoting their films but wanted something more unique than a basic tee shirt or sweatshirt. Some of our clients sent us Video's of upcoming featured films to view and then we would

create something specifically for that film. It did not necessarily have to be apparel, but the majority of the items produced were.

CEO CFO: How did you make the move to signs?

Ms. Rad: We were in the printing industry in our early years but in sublimation printing. We designed and manufactured sublimated clothing for clients like Thor and FOX Racing. Sublimation is a transfer process in which the image becomes a part of the actual item. Sublimation needs special ink, paper and specific substrates with polyester coating to work. When heated to high temperatures, sublimation ink turns into a gas. Pores of the polyester coated item open up and allow the gas to enter. Then, once removed from the heat, the pores of the polyester substrate close up, trapping the ink inside.

We printed banners using the sublimation process but wanted to move out the clothing manufacturing industry. We recognized early the impact China was making and affecting the prices we could charge in the US. The internet also impacted the security of your intellectual property. We could design an item send the email to a client at 5pm and they could share it with a factory in China who can have a sample ready by the time we woke up.

CEO CFO: Are there services and products you offer that you feel are not taken advantage of enough?

Ms. Rad: We did invest heavily in green technology. We own equipment which

We were researching and attempting to develop our own environmentally friendly prints using UV and Latex water-based inks. The color vibrancy are amazing and the images look photo real. The graphics can be printed onto biodegradable and sustainable medias, but people don't want to pay the difference in cost. I once received an FRP for a government job which originally requesting a biodegradable banner, but enough printers bidding on the project protested that that technology was not available and the RFP was changed,

"I feel that our creative environment is unique. In addition, the way that we process our orders is unique. We have a tremendous retention from clients. Many of our clients come back year after year, and it is something that is of value not only to me as the President but to our employees because it affects them as well."

- Carmen Rad

though it does exist.

CEO CFO: Do you see that as something that will be a differentiator going forward that you are able to work with environmentally friendly products?

Ms. Rad: We were researching environmentally friendly products years before we heard the word "Green". We were awarded as 'Green firm of the year by the City of LA's Minority Business Opportunity Center U.S Department of Commerce in 2009. We recently were the first in the US to purchase a Latex, water base printer. We want to be prepared and find it important to have options.

CEO CFO: What still excites you about the business?

Ms. Rad: Twenty years is a long time to be in any business, but I do still get excited. I love developing new products and solving problems for clients. The day to day aspects of running a business are in place allowing me to work on the entrepreneurial side of the business which is the key ingredient towards growth.

CEO CFO: What is your geographic range today?

Ms. Rad: We have shipped all the way to Dubai. We can work with anyone across the world.

CEO CFO: How is business?

Ms. Rad: We are doing very well. We have an increase of 14% for this year. We are on target to meet our end of year goals.

CEO CFO: Why should people in the business and investment community pay attention to CR&A?

Ms. Rad: I feel that our creative environment is unique. In addition, the way that we process our orders is unique. We have a tremendous retention from clients. Many of our clients come back year after year, and it is something that is of value not only to me as the President but to our employees because it affects them as well. Our culture is composed of people who have a clear understanding of what our goals are. It does not matter if it is a small or big client, but their success is our success.



C R & A Custom

312 West Pico Boulevard

Los Angeles, CA 90015

213-749-4440

www.cracustom.com