

## Universal Tag Inc.: 75 years as a specialty leader and going strong with a bright future

By Eric Beard

*Tag - n. 1. A strip of paper, metal, or plastic attached to something to identify, classify, or label.*

While the dictionary entry is accurate, its brevity doesn't reflect the true significance of how important tags are in our society. Imagine the consequences if medical equipment weren't marked appropriately for example. For people who work in a manufacturing plant or a utility company, touching a dangerous wire or component that should be identified accordingly could result in serious injury or death. Sales would plummet in the multi-billion-dollar retail marketplace if merchandise weren't affixed with accurate price tags or attention-grabbing sale tags. Clearly, the lexicon professionals at Merriam Webster's don't have the room on their pages to articulate an appreciation of tags the way those who make tags do.

Protecting and enhancing the importance of tags in today's marketplace is Universal Tag, a regional leader in the premier tag arena with a solid regional and growing national client list.

### The history of Universal Tag

It was 1927 when Dominique S. Paquette began Universal Tag from a small facility in Southbridge, MA, a manufacturing town about 16 miles south of Worcester that shares its southern border with Connecticut. He started with fundamental yet necessary products. The company started as a simple operation decades before modern innovations such as Ultra Violet-resistant and tear-proof tag materials changed the market segment and created new business opportunities.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, Paquette's business consisted of six employees.



*The Mandeville Family: Paul & Brian, back row. (l to r) Michael, Bob, Jeanne, Diane & Carol (center).*

### Company Overview: Universal Tag, Inc. Established 1927

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Dudley, MA 01571  
phone: 800-332-8247, 508-949-2411  
fax: 508-943-0185  
unitag@gis.net  
Number of facilities: 1  
Sq. Ft.: 28,500  
Primary Product/Service: Custom printed tags & labels.

Year	Sales	Profitable
1962	121,506	yes
1972	336,872	yes
1982	899,900	yes
1992	2,142,780	yes
2002	2,395,857	yes

While most of the work then was done by hand, Paquette was able to bring a Chandler and Price press on line as his first piece of equipment. The press has long been retired and is on display in the company lobby.

Jeanne Mandeville, Universal Tag's treasurer and longest serving employee was only a toddler when Paquette, needing a place to live, rented a room in her family's home. After Jeanne graduated high school at the age of 17, she began working in the office at Universal Tag. "When production was busy I would ask everyone I knew to take home boxes upon boxes of tag projects that needed finishing by hand," the family matriarch said with a chuckle.

Without any significant family, Paquette left the company to Jeanne when he passed away in the 1950s. Shortly before Paquette's death, Jeanne's husband Bob, Universal Tag's current president, also began working for this growing company. With an understanding of custom tags, tickets, labels, and more, the Mandevilles transformed what was once a modest business into one of the most successful tag companies in the northeast.

Today Universal Tag provides steady employment for 30 people, including the entire second generation of Mandevilles.

Paul is vice president of operations. Brian works as a pressman. A third brother, Michael, works in maintenance. Two sisters, Diane Beaudry and Carol Morrill, also pull their fair share of the workload. Diane works in billing. Carol works in bookkeeping.

Paul is closest to the day-to-day administration of the company that he has known all his life. When he was a child, Paul would help his parents by pushing a broom around Universal Tag's production room floor.

#### Defining Universal Tag and their customers

The manufacture and production of tags at Universal straddle the line between function and art. Few other mediums have the capability to warn of potential hazards, for example, as well as to advertise a store promotion.

"Universal Tag is really in two distinct marketplaces," said Sales Manager and tag veteran Rob Meyers. "One segment of our business is the custom tag market where everything is made-to-order," he said, holding up a tag die-cut and processed to look like an American flag. "The other side of our business embodies stock product which is channeled into the distributor marketplace, specifically the garment and retail industry." Meyers grabbed a typical off-the-shelf tag that Universal produces that can be found dangling from fine apparel in stores everywhere to illustrate his point.

Universal Tag offers a wide selection of stock items, many of which would be custom pieces at lesser tag companies. Sizes range from thumbnail-sized markers to oversized tags as large as one square foot. Judging from a warehouse inventory, Universal provides stock tags to fit every color of the rainbow. Tags are readily available in various coated and uncoated materials,

*"When production was busy I would ask everyone I knew to take home boxes upon boxes of tag projects that needed finishing by hand."*

*~ Jeanne Mandeville*



Jeanne Mandeville reviews a customer order with her daughter, Diane Beaudry (right).



Rob Meyers, sales manager, Tag & Label Division.





Daniel Caouette setting up a job on Universal's two-color Ryobi.

including thermal transfer, direct thermal, Tyvek, Permafiber, and many more.

One recent breakthrough in tag manufacturing technology is Universal Tag's patented UltraTag. Besides being thin, weather-resistant, and chemical-resistant, this revolutionary tag is virtually tear-proof. Clearly the tag of the future, the practically indestructible UltraTag — made from a cross-laminated film — eliminates the need for reinforced holes.

For customers wishing to print their own tags, Universal Tag also provides a comprehensive spectrum of finishing services, including cutting, die-cutting, scoring, numbering, perforating, punching, fiber patch reinforcing, metal eyeletting, stringing (looped, knotted, elastic), and wiring.

#### Enhancing the franchise through acquisition

In February 2000, Universal Tag acquired New England Tag Finishing. As a result of this acquisition, Universal Tag can complete tag finishing services quicker and more efficiently than ever before. Furthermore, because Universal Tag also houses a complete offset printing department, they are capable of handling everything from two-color, tri-folded mailings to vivid, eye-catching marketing materials.

While offset printers usually target their services to direct-end-user accounts, Universal Tag has very few customers that fall into that classification. "Our typical customer would be a commercial printer who has a client in need of a tag order," said Paul Mandeville.



Todd Sullivan operating Universal's paper slitting machine.

"Because most commercial printers don't have the capability to fulfill tag jobs on-site, they simply call us."

Mandeville added that often times the end-user never even realizes that the commercial printer they hired for

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~ Paul Mandeville

the job didn't manufacture the tags themselves. "It's a win-win situation for both Universal Tag and our customers," he said. "As a Universal Tag reseller, our printers, dealers, and brokers recognize significant profits that, with little or no effort on their part, greatly enhance their company's bottom line."

#### Growing business demands bigger facility

For a company over three-quarters of a century old, it is refreshing to learn that Universal Tag has encountered relatively few business missteps. In fact, while not exactly following a textbook progression of corporate growth, Universal Tag has expanded in a slow, relatively problem-free manner.

"By 1963, we had outgrown our Southbridge headquarters," Jeanne said. "Needing a larger facility, we relocated to neighboring Sturbridge where we stayed for almost 30 years," and business continued to blossom throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s.

During that span, the company made several necessary additions to the Sturbridge plant. Then, in 1992, Universal moved to nearby Dudley. "We moved to Dudley for the same reasons we moved to Sturbridge a generation ago," Jeanne said. "We simply didn't have the physical room — for both employees and equipment — to keep up with the growing demands of our business."



**Service, equipment, and employees; Universal's keys to success**

When asked if there is one significant element that has lent to Universal Tag's longevity, Meyers and the three managing Mandevilles immediately shared a knowing smile then, almost in unison, exclaim "Service."

"We are a highly responsive company," Paul Mandeville said. "From a customer standpoint, nothing is more frustrating than calling a company only to get lost in its automated telephone system."

"At Universal Tag, we don't have a voicemail system. This is not a cost issue. It is part of our ongoing commitment to provide the most personal service to our customers."

Knowing that exceptional customer service is something that pertains to each and every employee, the Mandevilles have staffed their company with an extended family of workers equally motivated by the goal of 100 percent customer satisfaction.

"Because we are family-owned and operated, we strive to maintain a family atmosphere with all our employees," Jeanne said, noting that most employees have been with the company for many years. "Everyone at Universal Tag is willing to contribute wherever and whenever necessary in order to satisfy our customers."

Because the traditional tag industry dates back to the inception of the printing press, most of the equipment utilized is quite old. "There is no such thing as state-of-the-art tag equipment," Paul said. "In fact, much of the equipment at Universal Tag hasn't been made in more than 25 years. Yet, to keep everything working properly," Paul said, "all of our machinery is regularly main-

tained and every few years we completely refurbish our equipment."

Consequently, while a walk through Universal Tag's production area may seem like a throwback to a bygone era, their way of manufacturing and finishing tags is the same throughout the entire tag making industry.

"What has changed in terms of technology," Meyers said, "is the front end of our business. Universal Tag has gone from using hot metal and creating rubber plates to using photo-polymer plates."

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*~ Bob Mandeville*

**The future of Universal Tag**

"The goal of Universal Tag over the next few years will be to double our business," Bob Mandeville said with confidence. "This is a very realistic objective given that there are literally thousands of potential customers in the country that have yet to be tapped."

In order to reach this goal, Universal Tag will re-apply a marketing technique that has worked for them for more than 25 years. Back in the late 60s-early 70s, Universal Tag had a salesman who focused his efforts on direct-end-users such as department stores and car dealerships. Discouraged by their salesman's limited accomplishments, the Mandevilles decided to take the money they were paying him and spend it on a high-end catalog and direct-mail campaign. "From that day forward," Bob emphasizes, "our sales started increasing greatly. After that point in time, we reinvented who our customers were. Instead of going after the direct-end-user," Bob Mandeville said, "we market ourselves, and our profit-potential, to printers who ultimately sell our products for us."



*An assortment of the various tags & labels manufactured by Universal Tag, Inc.*



*Brian Mandeville, New Era tag press operator.*





View of Universal's tag stringing department. (l to r) Betty, Mel, Kelly and Trudy Forte.

Under the careful supervision of Meyers, Universal Tag's contemporary sales packages include not only a personal, hand-signed introductory letter, but also a credit application, order forms, and a wide variety of tag and label samples. "[Direct-mail] is, without a doubt, the best venue for us to conduct business," Meyers acknowledged. "Potential customers can actually see the quality of our work, learn about the many services we offer, and discover why they should order tags and labels from us."

In addition, Meyers said that the company has recently been working with a marketing consultant to help the company develop better programs for reaching and servicing new and existing customers.

Paul Mandeville maintains that the future of Universal Tag likely rests on the ability to print variable data and images on tags. "We recently purchased a Videojet wide array ink-jet printer that gives us the ability to print bar codes, consecutive numbering, and jumbo numbering, all of which are now in high demand for inventory and warehousing purposes."

While the future of no company is certain, it appears Universal Tag — empowered by the three-pronged advantage of unparalleled customer service, expert craftsmanship, and top-quality products — will remain at the forefront of the custom tag, ticket, label, and finishing industry for many years to come.

*About the author:* Eric Beard is a freelance writer in Attleboro, MA, who specializes in corporate profiles. He can be reached at [exclaim@attbi.com](mailto:exclaim@attbi.com).



Shipper Jeffrey Miranda and the Pitney Bowes Ascent Shipping System.

## Equipment List

### ERA Tag Presses

(6) 12" x 12" capable of the following in one operation:

- ◆ print up to 2 over 2
- ◆ die cut
- ◆ perforate
- ◆ fiber patch
- ◆ strip mylar reinforcement
- ◆ punch
- ◆ consecutive number
- ◆ transfer tape
- ◆ vpinfeed hole punch
- ◆ re-register to pre-printed image
- ◆ jumbo numbering
- ◆ consecutive bar code
- ◆ variable data print.

### Webtron Flexographic presses

(4) 6½" wide web prints up to 5 colors, tinting, die cutting, perforate, strip mylar, transfer tape, punch, overlaminate 2 sides. Pre-printed web may be sent to new ERA Tag press for re-registration for additional operations as listed above.

### Finishing

- (2) wiring machines
- (6) knotting machines
- (2) looping machines
- (6) patch, eyelet, loop machines.

### Offset Department

- (1) Ryobi 2-color offset
- (2) A.B. Dick Duplicators
- (1) Windmill Heidelberg.

Canon CLC-2050 Color Laser printer for short run full color work and proofing.