

# **Trial by Fire**

## ***Marking 10 Years Since Tragedy Struck, 3C! Packaging Points to a Pivotal Aspect of Its Overall Success: a Solid Contingency Plan***

When it comes to contingency plans, Joe Elphick is a rare specimen in his industry. Like the top executives of nearly all pharmaceutical packaging providers, Elphick can rattle off his company's back-up plans from a position of deep industry expertise and firm knowledge of client-servicing best practices. But Elphick also has something that most top executives would rather not have – at least not when it comes to contingency plans.

Experience.

Elphick is the President and CEO of 3C! Packaging, a pharmaceutical packaging solutions company specializing in the design and manufacture of custom folding cartons, printed literature, inserts/outserts, labels and unit-dose compliance packaging. Late one night in August 2005, Elphick was awakened with terrible news: a fire was blazing through his Clayton, North Carolina manufacturing facility.

The fire had started in the company's graphics department, and destroyed one-third of the 72,000-square-foot building. The rest of the structure had to be gutted as well, due to smoke damage. No one was injured in the blaze, but most of the equipment was rendered useless.

What followed was a real-world test of a contingency plan that the management team had developed three years earlier to overcome such a situation. A temporary "command center" trailer was set up on the property so computers could tap into the company's client and data files, which had been backed up off-site. Additionally, Elphick solicited help from members of the Independent Carton Group (ICG) – an association of 19 independently owned folding carton companies across the country – for assistance completing all customer orders in the company's pipeline.

The contingency plan worked beyond expectations, and perhaps even aspirations. Not only was the business saved – along with the jobs of nearly 100 employees – but something even more astonishing also was preserved: the company's entire client roster. Not a single customer was lost because of the fire, a result that would have seemed unthinkable to anyone who had witnessed the blaze and its immediate aftermath.

Within 30 days, the fire site was cleared, and a temporary building was powered for partial production runs. Within nine months, a new building was completed and brand new equipment installed. Today the plant stands at 115,000 square feet.

According to Elphick, the key to this swift recovery – and a lesson he wants to impart on his industry colleagues – is the importance of association participation. Elphick believes it was the strategic partnerships, developed through ICG, that allowed 3C! Packaging to continue operations by outsourcing major components of the manufacturing process throughout the recovery process. This ‘insurance by association’ allowed the company to remain focused on its core business and swiftly rebuild its facilities; in the process, it didn’t miss a single order, much less lose a single customer.

Less than a year later, the company returned to full capacity with larger facilities and new state-of-the-art equipment. This was the beginning of a new era in packaging solutions – one in which mere product vendors transitioned into turnkey solutions providers – and the company evolved into a full-service designer and manufacturer of printed packaging components. Part of this rebirth was a rebrand: The company changed its name from Colonial Carton Company to 3C! Packaging in 2009.

Now, 10 years after that fateful day, 3C!’s workforce has swelled to more than **XXX**. An anniversary of what could have been a knockout punch for the company instead is celebrated as the time when it overcame its greatest challenge: quite literally, a trial by fire.

Along the way, 3C! enjoyed a five-year stretch in which it experienced double-digit growth *each year* – a feat more indicative of a successful start-up than a snake-bitten stalwart. In 2011, 3C! was named one of the Top 40 Fastest Growing Companies in North Carolina by *Triangle Business Journal*. Here, a steadily broadening roster of premium equipment played a large role, as during that time 3C! added, among other machines, a **Heidelberg 102ZP 2c Perfecting 28x40 Press** for large format circulars, a **Vijuk MV2011** capable of folding a 40” L x 20” W sheet and up to 210 panels glued, and a **Longford Piggyback System** with three placers.

The company also constructed a dedicated ink room to house its new **spectrophotometer**, a unique system that provides greater control of the color matching process to better meet clients’ expectations by delivering superior print results. The equipment became the basis for 3C!’s proprietary “Color by Numbers” concept, which electronically matches brand colors via a system far more exacting than the human eye.

**Add specifics on KBA presses.**

Cutting-edge equipment has led to cutting-edge technology. Earlier this year, 3C! Packaging introduced a sophisticated new coating for coding applications. Offering high precision, functionality and consistency without intruding upon limited design and product information space, the company’s **Clear Code** is a next-generation system employing an industrial CO2 laser, which works with a clear coating by causing a color change reaction to produce a positive contrast image. The result is enhanced clarity and contrast.

3C! also is embracing technology as a means of continuous customer service improvement, in the form of a 24/7 real-time app that makes customer updates instantly and ubiquitously accessible to all 3C! employees. Through these types of robust project management solutions, 3C! commits to 'controlling the chaos' and relieving the stress associated with new product launches. Here, the emphasis is placed on unity and tight organizational control, allowing 3C! to position itself as **one** team in **one** building with **one** shipment approach to meeting customer needs.

The strategy appears to be working. 3C! had more than 30 launches in 2014, as well as 100% satisfaction and on-time delivery rate. 2015 business has been proceeding along a similarly promising curve. It seems that disaster can sometimes lead to a recovery that exceeds expectations.

# # #