

OC METRO

BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR

Like a fine stew, there are a lot of ingredients to a good life. Family, friends, hobbies, sports, vacations – and work. Work that is both challenging and satisfying, workplace relationships that are mutually supportive, a boss who knows how to be a friend as well as a CEO. These are the qualities that make some jobs a wonderful experience while others that look good on paper turn out to be bitter pills.

One of the hotbeds of economic activity in the nation, Orange County

is blessed with a great number of exciting, dynamic companies. In OC METRO Magazine's annual Best Companies to Work For in Orange County issue, we focus on six companies that stand out from the crowd. Each shines in a particular way. As always, money and benefits such as health insurance and retirement plans are critical considerations when job seekers look for greener pastures and new positions. But other qualities are important as well. Camaraderie, recognition, training, teamwork, profit sharing, advancement and flextime are other important considerations.



LEFT TO RIGHT STANDING: TIM PURUGGANAN, ARACELI SALGADO, JENNIFER MCGRAW, MARK VIE, STEVEN YAGER, SAUL ROMANO, YESSÈNIA VARGAS AND MARTIN STEIN (SEATED)

QUALITY IMAGING PRODUCTS

FOUNDED: 1990

BUSINESS: Remanufactured printer and copier cartridges

LEADER: Martin Stein, CEO

EMPLOYEES: 140

KEY CHARACTERISTIC: Rapid growth

When he started at Quality Imaging Products in 1998 as a temporary worker on the factory floor, Saul Romano was just looking for a paycheck. He found a family and a career. Today, after only four years with the company, he is production supervisor, overseeing 120 employees engaged in remanufacturing half a million printer and copier cartridges annually. A graduate of Santa Ana High School with one year of community college, Romano knew nothing about printer cartridges and not much about information technology when he arrived. Today, he knows all 130-plus cartridges in the company's constantly changing product line inside out and uses sophisticated computer programs to download orders and schedule production.

"I learn something new every day," says Romano. "Every day, I look forward to coming to work."

Yessenia Vargas started at the company as an assembler six years ago. Today, she heads a 10-person packaging department where her innovations have increased productivity by 25 percent and attracted the attention of Stanford Business School, which recently did a case study about her redesign of QIP's packaging process. She says the sense of group spirit and motivation is the best thing about working at the company. "QIP is part of my family. I love working here and it gives me a lot of satisfaction all the time to do a good job and help the company provide good quality to our customers. I can't imagine working anywhere else."

Quality Imaging Products has grown 800 percent in the past five years, from 60,000 to 500,000 cartridges sold per year to wholesalers, office product dealers and printer service technicians. Employee count increased from 20 to 140 during the same period. Dedicated workers such as Romano and Vargas have enabled the company to thrive in a competitive business in challenging economic times. At the same time, the company's growth has given employees a wealth of opportunities to grow professionally and personally.

"We hope that people who work here become better not just as workers or managers but as people. We strive to create an environment where people can actualize. Senior management sends this message: 'We trust you; we value you; we want you to be all that you can be.' It pays off in loyal employees and high productivity."

The company's rapid growth and enlightened corporate culture have attracted top management talent. Before joining QIP as vice president of sales and marketing in April 2002, Mark Vie was director of sales for a \$5 billion school and office supply company. He left the much-larger corporation for QIP because of the opportunities and camaraderie he saw in the company.

"I had a number of meetings with Martin (Stein, CEO of the company) and other managers to make sure it was a good fit before I accepted the position," says Vie. "The people attracted me. I liked the spirit, the ethics and the camaraderie. I decided I wanted to be part of this unique culture and help contribute to the company's success."

"The opportunity to change and improve and have an impact is much greater here than it was in the company I came from. If you are the type of person who is interested in growing personally and growing a business and learning a great deal, this is the place to be."

Strong internal communication is key to QIP's success. Every Monday morning CEO Martin Stein meets individually with each department manager for half an hour to discuss current projects and their relationship to company objectives. Then, every Monday afternoon, managers meet individually with their staff members to update them, go over pertinent information and assign any new projects.

Once a month the management team meets as a group to discuss the previous month's financial statement and departmental results. After the monthly management meeting, a companywide confab is held to share financial results with all employees. At this meeting, each manager presents his or her respective department results and project progress to the entire company.

To further share results and keep employees fully informed, QIP has large results boards posted in the front office and production area that display sales revenue, gross margin, outstanding back orders, customer returns, productivity broken down by department and line, cost reductions, bad debt and other information.

"For the information to have integrity, we have to share the bad news along with the good," says Stein.

"Posting daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly results allows people to see where they are relative to expectations," says Steven Yager, operations manager. "It helps them know where they were yesterday, where they are today and where they should be tomorrow."

"We establish a fairly high set of challenges for people to rise to and then provide them a set of tools to achieve their goals," says Stein.

All permanent employees are eligible for bonuses of up to \$450 a month for exceeding their productivity goals. Other benefits include medical, dental and vision insurance that the company helps pay for, paid holidays and vacation days, and a 401(k) plan with a 25 to 50 percent match on the first 6 percent of employee contributions.

Quality Imaging Products also places a premium on fun. Holidays are celebrated with parties and meals. Birthdays are recognized with balloons, gifts and visits from senior management. Employee accomplishments are recognized with plaques and gift certificates.

"We have a lot of fun here with all our celebrations," says Vargas. "We dress up for Halloween and have a party with a piñata at Christmas."

"I've worked for some good companies before," says Vie, "but never a place where the people were really excited about coming to work. The growth here is very dynamic, the challenges are large and people have a lot of fun."

In 2002, despite lingering problems in the economy, QIP has set several company records. There has been a 33 percent increase in quality, a 15 percent increase in productivity and a 30 percent increase in sales. January was a record month for sales, a record month for productivity and a record month for earnings.

Keeping up with growth, the company is about to launch a facility upgrade that will increase the number of production lines from eight to 14.

"We are a counter-cycle business in some ways," says Stein. "Our cartridges cost 20 to 40 percent less than new cartridges, so we do well when companies are trying to hold down spending. They have to have printer and copier cartridges and we offer outstanding value and quality." **OCM**

—By Steve Thomas



25342 Commercentre Drive, Lake Forest, CA 92630
(800) 423-8600 | (949) 855-6364 | Fax: (949) 855-6348
Email: info@qip.net | www.qip.net

Quality is not just in our name . . . it's in our products.