



# SaraMana Business Solutions

## Dealership owners retire & keep it in the family

by: Elizabeth Marvel, Office Technology Magazine

**S**araMana Business Solutions (originally named Sarasota Manatee Copying and Duplicating Company Inc.) located in Sarasota, Florida, was founded in January 1976 by Ron Brumbaugh. At the outset, the company sold A.B. Dick Co. duplicating and copying equipment, and it took on Ricoh products in January 1982. Then, in July 1982, James “Jim” Dean and his wife, Bobbie, purchased Sarasota Manatee from Brumbaugh.

Jim got his start in the industry in July 1969 after graduating from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. He took a job at A.B. Dick as a copier salesman in Houston, Texas, and worked his way up in the company over 13 years, eventually becoming worldwide marketing manager. After purchasing the dealership, he spent the next 40 years — the rest of his career — growing the business.

“A few years after buying the company, I dropped the A.B. Dick product lines and concentrated on Ricoh products,” Jim says. “When I dropped A.B. Dick, I also changed the company’s name to SaraMana Business Products Inc. Over the years, we built the business mostly through the sale of Ricoh products, though we added copier and printing products from both Canon and Sharp at different times. Today, SaraMana sells only Ricoh products and is Ricoh’s oldest full-line dealership in the state of Florida.”

Jim is proud of the company’s Ricoh heritage. “Ricoh started adding direct dealers in the United States in late 1981 and we became a dealer in early 1982,” he says. “We built our base against severe competition; we competed against a Ricoh direct office in Sarasota for many years, and there were also other Ricoh dealers in our market. But we are a family-owned business and have stayed in business for more than 40 years, outlasting many competitive dealerships. I know that will continue under the leadership of SaraMana’s new owner — my son, Mick Dean.”

On Friday, July 15, Jim and Bobbie both retired after 53 years in the industry, passing the company on to Mick, who now serves as SaraMana’s president and sole owner. Mick worked as a certified public accountant for a few years before coming to SaraMana, but he easily took to the business — and the office technology industry.

“My father had a position open up at his dealership and it was our thought process that I would work there for five or 10 years or so, we’d build the company up and then sell it,” says Mick, who started at the company in 1997 as vice president. “Then he would run off into the sunset and I’d go find the next thing for me. But we enjoyed working together and we had a lot of camaraderie. He took care of sales and I took care of



*Mick (left) and James “Jim” Dean*

everything else and, over time, I naturally gravitated to the company, the business and the industry.

“One thing I liked about working for SaraMana was that I didn’t feel like I had to work for anyone,” Mick continues. “I knew my dad was the majority shareholder and I worked for him, but no one told me where to be or when ... There was no one looking over my shoulder, so I was allowed to make my own mistakes and create my own triumphs.”

When he became president and owner in July, Mick had served in almost every role at SaraMana during his 25-year tenure. “I didn’t know anything about the copier business [when I started at SaraMana], though my dad had been in copiers his whole life,” Mick says. “I had to learn the business from the ground up, so I first learned about paying bills, accounts payable, purchase orders, etc. And then I got into the service department and managed that. We hired a service manager and I got more into management, overseeing the service department, office staff and admin staff. And then I started assisting with the salespeople and doing sales myself. In 2004, I took over as the managing shareholder.”

Jim notes that he was semiretired for about 10 years before his full retirement this July, as Mick had taken on most of the company’s day-to-day management. The trust he has in his son led to an easy transition, with no need for a formal process. “Mick has played a big part in building our family business and there was never a doubt that this transition would take place,” he says. “We have been working together for many

years, and there's not much more I could pass on to him. Honesty and integrity are important to running any business, and he has learned those traits. People buy from those they trust, and that is how we have built our client base over the past 40 years. I know Mick will carry that trust forward."

Today, the 13-employee company covers not only Sarasota and Manatee counties, but also the Tampa Bay area and the west coast of Florida. It sells and services the full

range of Ricoh products, including color and black-and-white copier/MFPs and printers, wide-format printers, digital duplicators, interactive whiteboards, projectors and unified communications devices. It also offers document management, VoIP phone services and what the company calls "technology integration services," where a SaraMana rep meshes the company's best business practices and software with the hardware being installed at the customer location.

Like many companies in the industry, SaraMana has begun to offer managed IT services using ConnectWise as well. "The biggest area I'm focusing in on is managed IT," Mick says. "I want to be a complete technology provider for our clients — not just the hardware, not just the copier — but the copier, the telephone, the computer system and so on. Basically, if it plugs into the wall in a customer's office, I want to handle it for them. We've already had some moderate success and I think that will snowball. That industry [IT] is changing a little bit as the copier people come in, and as advancements and improvements are made in the technology."

Mick is anticipating the future of managed IT and thinking about how he can adapt his business for it. "I think the future is going to be more subscription-based," he says. "So, a company might be charged a certain amount each month [for its IT services]. You've already seen it with some of the hardware out there, where we assign a lease that includes unlimited copies and they just pay a subscription fee. So you can go to a company that has five employees, and when they hire a sixth employee, their cost goes up by \$19.95 a month or \$29.95 a month. I think we've already started to see that a lot more of the products and services we sell and support are getting tied down to the employee. That's how we're going to start charging."

"One of the advantages we have is that every one of our technicians is a network-schooled engineer," Jim says, noting that SaraMana's employees are prepared to expand the company's IT offerings. "Mick's getting more into networking and IT work, and we have a lot of trained people here for that. We're not a big business, but just about every one of our technicians is trained to provide support in the areas we're getting into."

Mick is also using technology to streamline the business. He recently shared an initiative with the PRO Dealer Group on how he is using QR codes to manage his device fleet. Each

"I want to be a complete technology provider for our clients ... Basically if it plugs into the wall in a customer's office, I want to handle it for them."

machine that goes out now has a sticker with a QR code on it, allowing customers to scan the code and get information about the machine, order supplies, make a service call and more. Right now, about 25% of the machines in his fleet have these stickers, but he anticipates 80% to 90% will have them by the end of the year.

"The QR code stickers we use on our machines came about during the COVID-19 pandemic when I saw a lot of restaurants

using QR codes to pull up their online menus," Mick says. "My service manager and I took the idea and added QR codes to the ID stickers on our machines, knowing that you can embed a lot of information into a QR code and everyone has a cellphone to scan it.

"From the QR code, a customer can find out all of the information about that specific machine — the device's name, the address, the phone number, what product it is — and they can also learn how to do basic maintenance," Mick continues. "After scanning the QR code, videos come up that show them how to replace the toner in the machines and more. We filmed ourselves doing basic maintenance in the office and, now, customers can learn how to do these things themselves. They can also place service calls and supply orders, and everything is tied back into our e-automate software.

"There are some other added benefits," Mick adds. "We use them for marketing as well. So, once someone places a service call with the code, they receive a special email that thanks them for submitting [via the QR code] and gives them, for now, a \$10 Starbucks card — just to promote using it."

SaraMana has been a BTA member since 1976, and Jim and Mick both cite several benefits they have received from the company's membership. "BTA has been a big supporter of smaller businesses like ours and has always offered a lot of really good training programs," Jim says. "Another benefit of being a member is that BTA still has events on a regular basis. The fact that BTA still offers that type of activity has really been good for our industry."

Mick is especially fond of BTA's peer groups. He is a member of both the PRO Dealer Group and a Dealers Helping Dealers Discussion Group. "I've already made good relationships with some owners from around the nation through these groups," Mick says. "Through these Zoom calls, we've been able to share ideas ... I can't put a dollar figure on what it has meant to me over the last two years, but our dealership is certainly more efficient and a better, more profitable company because of a lot of the stuff I've learned on these calls." ■

*Elizabeth Marvel is associate editor of Office Technology magazine. She can be reached at [elizabeth@bta.org](mailto:elizabeth@bta.org) or (816) 303-4060.*

