



# MOEbiz Turns 100

## President & co-owner reflects on long company history

by: Elizabeth Marvel, Office Technology

**F**ew office technology dealerships can say they've been in business for 100 years, but on Oct. 23, 2023, Business Technology Association (BTA) member dealership MOEbiz of Monroe, Louisiana, reached that rare milestone. Armand Vaughn "A.V." Breard opened the company that would become MOEbiz — A.V. Breard, Agent, a Sundstrand adding machine dealership — on Oct. 23, 1923, in Monroe.

In 1925, the company was renamed Monroe Store & Office Equipment Co., and in 1931 the name was shortened to Monroe Office Equipment. From its founding until the mid-1940s, the company expanded its storefronts with two additional locations in Alexandria and Lake Charles, Louisiana, and added typewriters and office furniture to its lineup. After World War II, A.V. closed the Alexandria location and sold the Lake Charles location to the general manager who ran the store.

In 1969, A.V. retired, passing Monroe Office Equipment on to his son, Armand Enochs Breard. In 1972, Armand opened a new facility in Monroe, as well as a second location under the name Office Supply Inc. in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. While expanding the company's office furniture and supplies business in the 1980s, he opened a third location in New Orleans, Louisiana, under the name Business Design Interiors, and acquired Alexandria Office Supply Store in Alexandria, renaming it Office Supply Inc., for a fourth location.

Armand led the company until 1990, when he passed it on to his son, Armand "Chap" Breard. After passing the business to Chap, Armand continued to work in the business as a sales rep and adviser until his retirement in 2010. Today, Chap serves as president and co-owner, along with his wife, Ann.

Chap started working in the business part time in 1979 while he was in high school. He then spent time in the U.S. Navy, received a degree in management from what is today the University of Louisiana Monroe and got married before starting full time at the dealership in January 1989.

According to Chap, business was especially challenging from 1989 to 1991, explaining that the dealership sold both Steelcase and Haworth office furniture from its different locations, which wasn't ideal for one of the manufacturers. "Steelcase did not like that we had a competing dealership or product line in Louisiana and they threatened that if my dad didn't close the New Orleans and Alexandria locations [which sold Haworth furniture] they would cancel his authorization to be a Steelcase dealer in Monroe and Baton Rouge," he says, adding that his father ultimately decided to end the company's relationship with Steelcase.



*Clockwise from top: Chap Breard (center), president and co-owner, cuts the ribbon on MOEbiz's new technology showroom during the company's 100th anniversary celebration on Oct. 18, while his father, Armand Breard (tan jacket), and Chap's wife and MOEbiz co-owner Ann (behind Chap, in gray), look on; the staff of Monroe Office Equipment poses for a Christmas photo in its office in 1935; and A.V. Breard (left) and Armand Breard pose for a photo during A.V.'s 65th birthday celebration. Inset: MOEbiz's 100th anniversary logo.*

"That was pretty devastating," he continues. "We had to sell all the Steelcase inventory, retrain the entire sales force and then take our current customer base and change them [over to Haworth furniture] ... It was almost like a perfect storm. All this stuff came together and the walls of the house came crashing down. Ultimately, my dad decided to close the Baton Rouge, New Orleans and Alexandria offices ... It was a struggle."

Chap explains how the company eventually recovered from the Steelcase incident. "From 1991 until about 2003, we had some tough, hard years," he says. "We basically had to rebuild the entire company from scratch. We got new product lines and we became a Gestetner copier dealership. In 2003, I built our new facility, which was really the catalyst to getting us growing again."

Another milestone came in 2003 when Chap joined the Select

Dealer Group (SDG), a BTA peer group. “I joined SDG and went to ProFinance, and that’s when I realized that we had to change things in order to be more profitable to reinvest in the company,” he says. “That was what led to the decision to sell the furniture and supplies business to a local competitor in 2012. That part of the business was 47% of our revenue and it was a very scary time. But by the end of 2012, we made more net income on less revenue, so we knew it was a good decision.”

“I think we live in a time where the only thing we have to offer is personal service. I think people will pay for that, and we need to ... focus on why we’re different.”

After the sale of the furniture and supplies business, Chap changed the company’s name to MOEBiz to highlight its new focus on technology. In 2016, the company acquired File Depot, a records management company that became an official department of MOEBiz in January 2021. Today, the department makes up about 16% of the company’s business through hard-copy records storage (in its 50,000-square-foot, HIPAA-compliant warehouse), records management, shredding and purging, scanning/scanning automation, and cloud storage.

In 2018, MOEBiz acquired Stuart’s Office Technology, expanding its territory north into Arkansas. “The acquisition took a year, as the owner died in the transition phase, which made it not only stressful, but time consuming,” Chap says, noting that MOEBiz has plans for additional acquisitions in the future. “My advice [for dealers looking to acquire] is what [ProFinance instructor] John Hey says: ‘It’s like dating’ [i.e., you have to learn about the company you’re acquiring and decide if it fits with your company — like dating to find a partner in life]. Also, don’t give up. People sell to people and you have to build trust in relationships.”

Today, the company maintains three locations (it is headquartered in Monroe and has branches in Ruston, Louisiana, and El Dorado, Arkansas) with a territory encompassing the northern half of Louisiana and southern Arkansas. It also manages networks and equipment in 12 other states. With 58 employees, MOEBiz is a Sharp, HP, Ricoh, Epson and RISO dealership. Approximately 60% of its business is in imaging products, 18% in IT services (MOEBiz built its IT business from scratch in 2012, it turned a profit in 2015 and now has a dedicated IT salesperson.), 16% in records management and 6% in A/V and phones (the most recent diversification opportunity for the dealership, which expanded its offerings with smart boards, projectors, VoIP phone systems, etc.).

On Oct. 18, MOEBiz celebrated its 100th anniversary with a Monroe Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting of the company’s new technology showroom (which, according to Chap, is dedicated to “everything technology” with the “latest projection screens, smartboards, A/V, LED walls, and copier/MFPs and printers set up for Teams integration and [smart card] key fobs”), followed by a reception.

“We probably had 100 or more people there — customers

and vendors,” Chap says. “My dad and mom came, and my sister flew down from New York. We had a big recognition of who did what, where and when.”

Regarding the future of MOEBiz, Chap says he wants to make it easier for customers to take advantage of all of his dealership’s offerings. “I think we are going to simplify the billing process by having a market strategy that says ‘for every employee, we will provide copying services, IT services, phone services, and scanning and shredding services for a

specific cost per employee per month,’” he says, noting that only about 8% of MOEBiz’s current customers use all of its offerings. “We’ve got to make it simpler for customers to buy our services.

“I think the future of our industry is bright, but it’ll be more complicated,” Chap continues, sharing more of his future vision of MOEBiz. “I think we will continue to cross-sell our customers, become more relevant to our current customer base and grow that way. I also think we need to be in a position to train customers on leveraging their current IT services. A lot of customers subscribe to all these Microsoft features, but they’re [Microsoft] not really good at training and we’re not great at it either. We have to figure out how to routinely go back to our customers and show them new features they can use to help them run their businesses. We sell them all of this stuff, but then we don’t go back and figure out if they’re really using it or show them how. We are working hard to change this by doing better quarterly business reviews.”

What advice does Chap offer other dealers based on his company’s 100 years in business and his own experience at MOEBiz? “It’s tenacity,” he says simply. “Don’t give up. It just takes grit and determination — and constant follow up. Nothing is easy. I think selling today is probably more difficult than it has ever been; you’re competing with the email inbox, you’re competing with phones, you’re just competing for people’s time.

“I think we live in a time where the only thing we have to offer is personal service,” Chap continues. “I think people will pay for that, and we need to quit worrying about how much things cost and focus on why we’re different.”

Chap shares a story about his father’s approach to selling that coincides with this advice. “My dad would take the copier operation manuals home and read them,” he says. “I can remember him falling asleep on the couch with a manual on his nose many times. He would literally wake up the next morning having found something in a manual that was applicable to a customer’s business, and he would go back and sell a machine based on some feature he found that they could use to run their business better. So, I think we always have to be mindful of trying to help our customers be successful.” ■

*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.*