



# Artlite Office Supply: Successfully Blending Family Values and Leading Edge Technology for Growth

Bert Light, Artlite Office Supply



Ask Bert Light about the importance of his DDMS® system to his family's dealership and the answer comes back without a moment's hesitation. "It's absolutely integral to just about everything we do," he says.

*"Technology is the Number One thing that affects our business and from their e-commerce solution and inventory management through to accounting and customer service, we rely on DDMS to keep our dealership healthy and help us take care of customers in a way that keeps them coming back."*

## Success: A Family Tradition

As operations manager at Atlanta-based Artlite Office Supply, Bert is part of a three-man management team that keeps the dealership his parents started back in 1964 running smoothly and profitably.

The other two members of the team are brothers Stuart, who runs the dealership's outside sales operation, and Steve, who takes care of the financial side of the business. All three brothers grew up in the dealership, cleaning the store and stocking shelves as teenagers and coming on board full-time straight out of high school.

Their pride in the company their family has built over the past 48 years comes through loud and clear as they talk about its culture and traditions. "Bert, Steve and I grew up in this business," says Stuart. "We eat, breathe and sleep office products and we always have. And even though we are all strong-willed and have our own opinions, we've never had a situation where business issues affected family relationships in any serious way."

Regular weekly meetings to discuss big picture issues and reach agreement on them before they turn into festering problems help on both the management and family front, Bert explains, and the fact that each of the Light brothers has his own area of responsibility also keeps potential conflicts to a minimum.

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And overriding all of that is the brothers' intense commitment to running the dealership as a whole as an extended family. "We make a point of treating all our staff as family members and making them feel appreciated," Bert explains. "Our employees have been the real key to our success. We treat them right and they know they're empowered to make decisions when it comes to serving our customers without having to go through multiple layers of management."

The results of the Light brothers' family-style approach to running the business speak for themselves. Two of the firm's drivers have been with the company for more than 25 years. Key administrative staff members have 34 years or more. And sister Cindy, in administration, and Stuart's daughter Michelle, in outside sales, continue the family tradition.

But don't make the mistake of thinking family style management keeps the Light brothers from making tough decisions when they have to.

Atlanta is a fiercely competitive market and like every other independent in recent years, the Light brothers have faced tough challenges from the big box stores and other national players with far greater financial resources and marketing muscle than they'll ever have.

How have they responded and kept Artlite growing and profitable? A clearly different market presence has been key, built around a distinctive product mix that includes traditional office products and furniture but also extends to a high end writing instruments business that accounts for 25 percent of total sales, other corporate gifts, on-site embossing and engraving and more.

The Artlite team, with its core of experienced, service-oriented industry professionals, also makes a huge difference, Bert says and then, of course, there's the technology backbone to support that team company-wide.



**“One of the real pluses about working with DDMS is that they really know the office products business”**

## THE SOFTWARE BEHIND THE SUCCESS

**ECi** DDMS®

DDMS is the **most powerful** and complete automated business solution for office products, office furniture, business equipment and more.

**ECi** ECinteractive™

ECinteractive is a superior Web storefront experience that's not just designed for customers like yours — it's **designed by customers** like yours. Making online purchases faster and easier than ever, ECinteractive offers powerful search features and state-of-the-art technology using AJAX, SQL databases and the Microsoft® .NET programming framework.

## 2008 Dealer of the Year — 19 Years in the Making

The Light brothers booted up their first DDMS system in May of 1989, nearly 20 years ago, and they've consistently embraced every opportunity to use ECi technology to grow. It's a key reason why they were named ECi's Dealer of the Year in the "Over Five Years in Business" category at ECi's 2008 National Users Conference and it's also why *fully 57 percent of the dealership's supplies business today comes in online* via ECi web storefronts.

As sales manager, Stuart sees his dealership's web presence as an increasingly important resource. "It used to be that when we called on a prospect, the first thing they'd ask about would be the price of paper," he explains. "Now, they want to know if we have online ordering and the good news is, we've got an answer to that question that's just as good as anything else out there today."

It helps, of course, when the team that's providing your e-commerce solution and other technology products has as much industry experience as the technical staff at ECi. "One of the real pluses about working with DDMS is that they really know the office products business," says Bert. "They understand in a very detailed way how we operate as a dealership and what we need in order to interface effectively with our customers and with our suppliers. That knowledge has provided a major benefit for our dealership on many levels."

## Right-Sizing Artlite: Double-Digit Growth, Fewer Employees

At a time when business conditions generally are more challenging than they've been in a long while, the close match between what the Artlite team needs and what the DDMS system can deliver becomes particularly valuable.

"Before all the current problems with sub-prime mortgages, financial markets and sky high gas prices, we were running close to double-digit growth over the past few years," Bert explains. "But at the same time, we went from a staff of 51 down to 48 in that same period. That simply wouldn't have been possible without our DDMS system and we're continuing to find new ways to run leaner and more productively as business gets tougher."

The pressures of big box retailing and consolidation might cast doubt in the minds of many about the continued viability of family-owned and operated businesses, but the Light brothers and their extended family tell a far different story.

They continue to provide compelling evidence that there's still room—even in a business that's as relentlessly competitive as office products—for family entrepreneurs, not just to survive, but with the help of valuable business partners like ECi, to thrive and keep growing sales and profits for many years to come.



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