

Jamaica Gleaner Online (Delivery Solutions)



Marsha Smikle

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The recession didn't send Marsha Smikle into a frenzy, worrying about what was to become of her business. She, instead, saw opportunities.

Indeed, so optimistic was Smikle that she went out and spent tens of thousands of dollars on bits of new pieces of equipment that will improve the efficiency of her [operation](#), thereby allowing the firm, Delivery Solutions, to take on more clients.

"In light of the recession, companies are finding different ways to minimise spending and save money," Smikle said in a recent interview. "One way in which to do so is through outsourcing."

Among the things that Jamaican firms are increasingly outsourcing is the delivery and collection of mail and packages.

Indeed, the business began to pick up steam in the 1990s, not so much because of the state of the island's economy, but the government-run post office. It had grown slow and unreliable.

So, firms relied more on emerging technologies to communicate with external clients, and where this was not practical, hiring their own messengers. Courier companies saw an opportunity and several emerged to fill the void left by the post office.

Four years ago, Smikle, a logistics and project management specialist with an itch to do something for herself, thought this would be a good idea.

Gave up job

Armed with \$600,000 in loans, all the personal cash she could muster and space offered by her consultant father at his New Kingston office, she gave up her job at a European Union-funded project that helps former banana workers transition to new ventures. She launched Delivery Solutions.

At the EU project, Smikle said, she had seen the positive impact that "excellent bearer service" could have on service delivery.

But Smikle launched her business at a time when the global economic clouds were just beginning to darken, foreshadowing the recession that lay ahead.

Smikle, nonetheless, believes that the move was timely. And the numbers suggest that she is right.

Smikle won't give specific figures - Delivery Solutions is privately held - but said that the company is profitable.

In fact, by the end of its second year, the company had recouped the initial investment and its contracted clients had moved from two to 13, including a major telecommunications firm. The client base, ranging from firms involved in telecoms finance and marketing to academia, transportation and distribution, has continued to grow.

Indeed, from a few hundred at the start, Delivery Solutions now handles, on average, 130,000 bits of mail and packages a month. The company employs 165 workers, 150 of them contract employees, who criss-cross the island delivering packages, or other services expected of that kind of operation.

These days, Delivery Solutions operates from its head office at South Avenue, Kingston Gardens, with 1,400 square feet of sorting space. It has an associate office at Altamont Terrace in the New [Kingston](#) business district.

A client might choose to have a Delivery Solutions bearer attached to it exclusively, might call in a messenger for a single assignment, or may utilise a range of courier facilities. Or, Delivery Solutions might be hired for data-base management, sending staff to a firm periodically to sort and digitally back up records.

"Outsourcing their mailroom allows for companies to increase their overall efficiency while maintaining cost-effectiveness," argued Smikle.

That is part of the reason for Smikle's recent decision to invest in the new equipment, including a sophisticated machine that will not only vastly improve the pace at which mail is sorted but enhance security.

"The device will accommodate up to 5,000 mail pieces on its conveyor belt, and as it goes through the dispatch will read each printed address, capture each address with its state-of-the-art miniature camera, and sort by parish, community and even street name and number," Smikle explained.

She added: "Currently, most manual solutions process and sort 10,000 pieces in approximately 10 hours. The new Digital Sorting System will do exactly the same job and quantities in just one hour."

Digital franking

Another recent buy is a digital franking system that will also allow for the faster franking of letters.

Additionally, a recently acquired hand-held scanning device, Smikle said, was "the first step in the track-and-trace technology we are bringing to Jamaica".

"The device allows confirmation and verification of delivery receipt and electronically uploads signatures, eliminating the use of papers. When this device is put into use next month, customers will receive signed delivery confirmation on the product.

Bringing her business this far has not, Smikle concedes, been a cakewalk. Finding the right staff has been a challenge.

She said: "The nature of the job requires individuals with certain characteristics, including the right attitude and aptitude, as well as a high level of dedication, commitment and professionalism."

This has meant an investment in training and that good old method of trial and error to ensure that the right team is selected.

Despite the problems that still affect the economy, Smikle is looking forward to robust growth in her operation in 2011, translating, she argued, to savings for her clients.

Said Smikle: "Companies are able to outsource their mailroom to us and we manage the entire process from printing, sorting and packaging to delivery."

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