

2017 Entrepreneur of the Year Awards Subscriber Content

Andrew Cousin saw a future for printing company

Winner - Products & Manufacturing Category

Jun 23, 2017, 4:02am MDT

Get Denver Newsletters and Alerts

Morning Edition >> Afternoon Edition >> Breaking News

[Special Report: 2017 Entrepreneur Of The Year awards](#)

[Andrew Cousin](#) caught the entrepreneurial bug when he moved from the United Kingdom to the Silicon Valley in the late 1980s to work for a technology firm. After a few years, he decided that a startup would provide a fun and stimulating work environment, as well as the financial benefit of ownership.

Cousin invested in and acquired a number of companies over the years, typically stepping into the CEO role in each venture. When [Circle Graphics](#) first came across his radar in 2012, however, Cousin wasn't impressed.



[Enlarge](#)

“My initial reaction was the printing industry is a horrible place to be,” he said. The volume of printing had been declining for years, and margins and profitability were low.

Then Cousin took a closer look at the actual company. It turned out that Circle Graphics had a long history as an industry disruptor, carving out significant market share in its core business of printing billboards.

In fact, thanks to Circle Graphics, workers haven’t been wallpapering images onto billboard structures since 2008. The company developed a single-sheet recyclable polyethylene poster that the entire industry eventually adopted. Today, Circle Graphics prints about 65 percent of all billboards in the United States.

In addition to its strong market share in billboards, Cousin noted that Circle Graphics had recently entered an emerging market focused on producing personalized wall décor from a photo or other image.

“I saw a business with a mature, stable, but low-growth core business and an intriguing new potential market opportunity that I felt could be significant,” he said.

When Cousin and his investors purchased the company at the end of 2012, Circle Graphics was valued at about \$75 million in revenue. His instinct paid off: In 2017 the company will do close to \$200 million in revenue, nearly tripling his investment. Most of the growth has come from the new wall décor division, he said.

Over the last five years, Cousin has also expanded the company’s core billboard business to include transit advertising on buses and in rail stations and airports. A 3D project for the Utah Office of Tourism, for example, transforms San Francisco’s Montgomery Tunnel into Utah’s Arches National Park.

[Circle Graphics](#) also employs chemists with PhDs to formulate the company’s proprietary ink – produced at about 10 percent of the cost of commercial products.

As the company has grown from 75 employees to 200 employees in five states, one challenge has been finding a way to institutionalize the innovative spirit of its original founder.

“One person being the driving force behind the entrepreneurial activity was not going to bring the company to its next stage of development,” Cousin said.

Each year, Cousin takes key employees to an offsite meeting to focus on innovation and identify new market opportunities. He has two tips for generating disruptive breakthroughs. The first is that there are no stupid ideas. The second is to have an environment where it’s OK to fail, Cousin said: “If people are reticent to float crazy ideas, you’re never going to stray too far from what you are currently doing.”

[Andrew Cousin](#)

Title: CEO

Company: Circle Graphics

Industry: Printing

Location: Longmont

Phone: 303-532-2370

Website: circlegraphicsonline.com

Twitter: @Circle_G_Online