

Magnolia Clipping: scissors, glue sticks — and cutting-edge tech

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Magnolia Clipping and Broadcast Monitoring Service Inc. started out some 70 years ago as a home-based, family-owned press clippings business employing a handful of workers. Today, Magnolia offers both press clippings and broadcast monitoring and employs nearly 40 workers at its state-of-the-art facility in Ridgeland, branch office in Tuscaloosa, Ala., and satellite offices across Mississippi.

Some things remain unchanged. Magnolia is still owned and managed by the Porter family — Dred Porter Sr. and his sons, Dred Jr. and Joe. On the press clippings side of the business, workers still sit at tilt-up tables, poring over stacks of newspapers, clipping news items for a wide variety of clients.

Past that, however, few vestiges remain of the company that was founded seven decades before in Jackson. The company utilizes high-end computer hardware and software, practically all developed in house or custom made for it. And while it has been in the broadcast monitoring for decades now, that side of the business is still evolving, and Magnolia is leading the charge into new territory in that arena.

Family affair

The story of Magnolia began with a seemingly innocuous encounter. Dred Porter Sr.'s grandmother, Clara Forrest, went to visit a friend, and found her surrounded by newspapers with scissors in hand.

"My grandmother asked what she was doing," Dred Sr. says with a grin. "She told my grandmother she was cutting articles out of newspapers. She said, 'And I'm tired of it.'"

Invited to take over the business, Forrest set up shop at her home, and Magnolia was born.

The exact date of Magnolia's founding and details of its early history are not known



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Donna Haynes, legal notice specialist and 30-year employee of Magnolia Clipping and Broadcast Monitoring Service Inc., with principals (l to r) Joe Porter, Dred Porter Sr. and Dred Porter Jr.

because records were lost in the Easter Flood in Jackson in 1979. But the Porters believe it was the late 1940s when the company clipped its first newspaper article. A press clipping business in Jackson actually predated Magnolia, but Magnolia would subsequently purchase that competitor.

(Dred Sr.'s mother, Ann Porter, eventually took over the business from Forrest, and Dred Sr. took the helm from his mother.)

Magnolia outgrew the house, and moved to a facility off of Interstate 55 before relocating to Canton Mart Road, where it was housed in two offices. Here, the company suffered the flood, but rebuilt and stayed there until 2000 when it moved to its present headquarters on Commerce Park Drive in Ridgeland.

All of the Porters literally grew up at Magnolia. Dred Sr. has been on board since 1969. Dred Jr., who oversees the broadcast

monitoring side of the business, went to Mississippi State University, earning a degree in business management, before joining his dad at Magnolia. Joe, who remembers making paper airplanes in the clipping room as a boy, also went to Mississippi State, earning a degree in food service. After a brief stint with a poultry processor, he, too, came to Magnolia, where he now manages the press clippings operation.

Changing times

At its office in Ridgeland, Magnolia has an early photograph of its clipping room. While the dress and venue has evolved, Joe says the operation remains pretty much unchanged since the company's founding.

However, the company uses barcode technology to sort the pieces and ensure that clients get the information requested.

Indeed, its technology where Magnolia has proven to be a pioneer.

Dred Sr. explains that press clipping and broadcast monitoring hardware and software is not available on the market. If a company needs these tools, it's on its own. Thus, Magnolia is technologically self-sufficient. Dred Sr. wrote the company's first software decades ago when computers were in their infancy, and his sons have lent their hand in this area. Today, the largest part of Magnolia's computer muscle was created by the Porters. The rest was special-built for it.

Magnolia is a full-service press clipping and research organization offering numerous services (press clipping and tracking, legal notice, online research, advertisement tracking and analysis) in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia. On the broadcast side, Magnolia monitors dozens of television stations and networks, and all records are made exact to one second with the timing under nuclear timing control, and also offers audio feed and caption transcripts among other service options.

While Magnolia is a regional service provider, its customer base, which numbers more than 1,000 clients are scattered across the nation and the world. To offer this national and international service, Magnolia is a member of a alliance of its peers that share a database. (Dred Jr. refers to the relationship as "cooptition.")

The company is also a member of four trade associations, with the Porters serving as leaders in several of those. Dred Sr. says these memberships are important to not only the company, but the entire industry, as well. Ethics are tops on the Porters' list of priorities, and for good reason.

"We do not divulge our clients," Dred Sr. says. "It is in the contract. You know, sometimes we know who is going to run for governor months before the candidate actually announces. If I went to a party and said, 'Hey, guess who wants to be governor, and here's who he thinks he's running against,' and a reporter hears me, well..."