

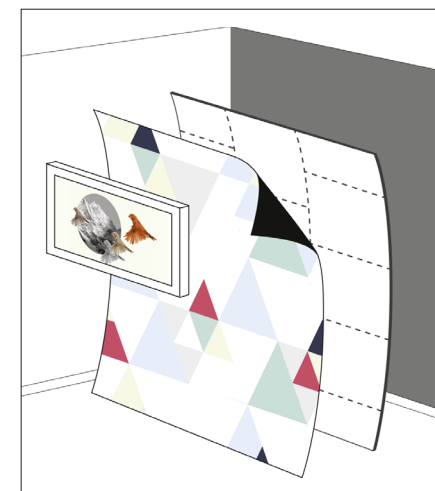


CEOs Joe and Sandra Deetz with daughter Tori, the firm's creative director, and son Dayton, strategy advisor.

Creative Force

Visual Magnetix is intent on transforming walls with a product range that allows users to mount 2D imagery and 3D objects, using the power of magnetics, all thanks to a discovery by Joe Deetz, the company's founder and CEO.

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VM's Dynamic Spaces concept employs a number of layers to achieve its eye-catching appearance.

FROM a breakthrough that took place in Joe Deetz's fabrication shop in 1992, which led to the invention of magnetic paint, Visual Magnetix evolved as a family business to become a design-driven materials innovation company that is keen on transforming walls – without a single nail or drop of glue.

The company has its New York showroom and offices in an enormous workplace in SoHo West – a space shared by start-ups, designers and architects. Founded in Massachusetts, the family business is still headquartered little more than a stone's throw from the kitchen where it was conceived in 1992 by husband and wife Joe and Sandra Deetz. During my conversation with their daughter, Tori, creative director and head of the New York office, I learn that the evolution of the company is as much about revolutionizing physical environments as it is about family. The showroom's proximity to a variety of creative outfits provides the firm with a test lab of sorts.

The company's flagship product, the Visual Magnetix Graphic System, allows retailers to easily update their displays. The strength of the system lies in its simplicity: any wall or large surface can be designed to hold a wide range of

graphics and accessories in place, from flat wall coverings to picture frames and 3D fixtures, by using the power of magnetism.

But let's start at the beginning. In 1992, a customer with a problem walked into Joe Deetz's fabrication shop. In his search for a solution, Joe mixed a basic latex paint with micro-iron particles, resulting in the company's first product, magnetic paint. 'I realized that you could apply this type of coating to all kinds of things, giving them magnetic properties,' he says. 'From there we started working on a system that would transform walls and surfaces using printable magnetic-receptive media.' The system features an alternating combination of magnetic and magnetic-receptive materials; the surface layer is rolled onto a magnetized wall to change the appearance and function of a room. The surfaces of all graphic elements involved are printed on VM's MagnaMedia, which is coated with Joe's micro-iron technology. Fabrics, whiteboard films and veneers are just some of the finishing options that allow for the customization of any wall. In 2007, when commercial printers were advanced enough to utilize wide-format media, the Deetz family decided to focus on a single market: visual merchandising. 'We had so many areas we could

'Materials come completely unprinted, ready for the client's concept'

‘I have gone into,’ says Sandy Deetz, ‘but we knew we needed to focus.’ Zooming in on the point-of-sale market proved to be the right move at the time. Today, the Deetzes’ latest concept, Dynamic Spaces, applies similar materials knowledge to improving work and educational environments.

A few weeks before my meeting with Tori, Visual Magnetix received a patent for a new product: InvisiLock. The science behind the InvisiLock system leverages a grid of magnetic poles to allow objects backed with the product to move around and lock into place when applied to a large surface – a wall or divider – also fitted with InvisiLock. ‘We’re excited, because it allows us to think in three dimensions and to build out from the wall,’ Tori tells me.

Architects and start-ups with offices in the SoHo West location also profit from the direct dialogue they have with Visual Magnetix – Dynamic Spaces applications are now used throughout the building – often finding applications that satisfy their needs. An entire wall in a large shared work area is clad in VM’s white board skin, partially printed with a minimal black-dot grid. Another space features a cartoonlike brick-wall motif, with white board overlays.

‘All our materials come completely unprinted, ready for the client’s concept. We then offer them consultation advice on material selection,’ Tori says. ‘People who have watched our videos sometimes approach us knowing exactly what they want, allowing us to work from there.



Luc Goderis relied on Dynamic Spaces to design a Douwe Egberts shop in Grimbergen, Belgium. The system allowed him to mount visuals and layers on various surfaces and to lock 3D objects in place.



The School of Visual Arts in New York City is using VM’s MagnaMedia for a photo installation by artist Simo Neri.



At the New York showroom, the Deetz family demonstrates the functionality of the Dynamic Spaces DRYerase wall.

Visual Magnetix

Established 2007 **Employees** 22 **Production site** Mendon, Massachusetts
Office and showroom SoHo, New York City **Products** Visual Magnetix Graphic System and Dynamic Spaces **Bestselling products** MagnaMedia print substrates, InvisiLock magnet, ActiveWall primer, VM-DRYerase white board media

Location photos courtesy of Visual Magnetix

That’s great, because it inevitably leads to more innovation.’

Sustainability and ethical conduct are very important to the Deetzes, values that Tori believes reflect the fact that they are a close-knit family business. ‘We always had debriefing meetings at dinner, even when I was so young that my feet didn’t touch the floor,’ she says. ‘I feel lucky, because I’ve never had to make sacrifices in terms of working in a situation that took me away from my family.’

VM’s products are 100 per cent PVC free, and MagnaMedia products can be recycled through the company’s own programme. In addition, VM’s Digital Fabrics line is eco-friendly, sustainable and made from 100 per cent post-consumer or natural-based materials. When Sandy joins the conversation, she says they would never do something that wasn’t ‘giving back’ in some way or another. ‘We’re extremely conscious of the ecological impact of our products, and we enter partnerships only with other companies that share our values.’

Thanks to the new patent, slowing down is not an option for the senior Deetzes, even though their children are now involved in the company. ‘Slowing down is not part of our vocabulary,’ laughs Sandy. ‘Visual Magnetix keeps reaching out to new areas.’ Her daughter chimes in: ‘It is so energizing to realize that designers in the industry are finally starting to understand the potential of all of this; some of the ideas that we’ve been seeing are beyond what we could ever have imagined.’ X

visualmagnetix.com



Walls treated with VM’s magnetic-receptive materials can hold a wide range of graphics and accessories in place.



Anything from flat wall coverings to 3D fixtures can be fixed into place and easily adjusted.