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How has employee count changed at FedEx, IP, and AutoZone over the past decade?

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We can't say exactly what would happen if FedEx, International Paper, or AutoZone decided to pack up and leave Memphis, but one can only imagine the financial implications would be seismic.

These are Memphis' three *Fortune* 500 companies, internationally recognized names that help keep the local economy's blood flowing. Combined, they reaped \$104.2 billion in profits during their most recent fiscal years, according to filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) — though \$69.2 billion of this came from FedEx — and employ thousands in the Bluff City.



COURTESY: FEDEX CORP.

FedEx

According to *MBJ* research, International Paper Co. (IP) has around 2,400 workers based in the metro area. AutoZone has about 2,500. And it often feels like every fourth person you meet works for FedEx, who has approximately 30,000 staffers here.

Look at the companies' entire footprints, and these numbers spiral upward. But, they've changed over the years, at times significantly. Recently, *MBJ* looked closely at these three behemoths, to see whose employee count changed the most over the past decade. Here's what we found, using the business' annual reports filed with the SEC.

FedEx

Over the past 10 years, FedEx has seen the most employee growth, by a substantial margin. In May 2011, it had more than 290,000 worldwide. In May 2020, it had over 500,000.

That's a 72.4% jump.

A noticeable increase came between 2015 and 2016, when the delivery service giant's worker count jumped from more than 325,000 to over 400,000. This is likely due to FedEx's \$4.8 billion acquisition of the European delivery company TNT Express, a deal that was announced in April 2015, and completed in May 2016.

While the integration process since then has been fraught with difficulties and delays, FedEx gained a lot with the purchase — including more than 58,000 employees.

Recently, FedEx again saw big hiring jumps. It's currently bringing on 70,000 ground level workers for what could be a record-breaking peak season. And to keep pace with the e-commerce boom, FedEx Ground has hired tens of thousands of package handlers since the start of pandemic.

In FY 2020, its employee count jumped by about 44,000.

Here's what FedEx's employee count has looked like, year by year:

May 31, 2011- more than 290,000
May 31, 2012- more than 300,000
May 31, 2013- more than 300,000
May 31, 2014- more than 300,000
May 31, 2015- more than 325,000
May 31, 2016- more than 400,000
May 31, 2017- more than 400,000
May 31, 2018- more than 425,000
May 31, 2019- more than 450,000
May 31, 2020- more than 500,000

International Paper

IP's employee count has decreased over the past decade, but not drastically. In December 2010, it had 59,500 workers, and in December 2019, it had 51,000 — a 14.3% decline.

So, why have IP's employee numbers gone down?

A lot of it has to do with the company's mergers, and sales of businesses. For example, International Paper bought Temple-Inland Inc. for \$3.7 billion, and that same year, its employee count jumped up to 70,000 — an increase from 61,500 the year before.

But in 2013, it sold one Temple-Inland's segments, Temple-Inland Building Products, to Georgia-Pacific LLC for \$750 million. The deal included 16 manufacturing facilities located across eight states.

And, IP has dealt away its own businesses over the past few years. In 2016, the manufacturer sold its corrugated packaging business in China and Southeast Asia to Xiamen Bridge Hexing Equity Investment Partnership Enterprise.

The deal, worth an estimated \$150 million, included 18 plants and a workforce of approximately 3,000 employees. Then, in 2019, IP sold its India-based printing papers business. Recently, it made another move, and sold its Brazilian corrugated packaging business to Klabin S.A., a Brazil-based paper producer

Here's what IP's employee count has looked like over the past decade.

Dec 31, 2010- about 59,500

Dec 31, 2011- about 61,500

Dec 31, 2012- about 70,000

Dec 31, 2013- about 69,000

Dec 31, 2014- about 58,000

Dec 31, 2015- about 56,000

Dec 31, 2016- about 55,000

Dec 31, 2017- about 56,000

Dec 31, 2018- about 53,000

Dec 31, 2019- about 51,000

AutoZone

AutoZone's employee count has grown the way you want your car to run: consistently.

While it hasn't seen any of the 75,000 person jumps FedEx has, the auto part retailer has slowly, but steadily grown over the past 10 years. And over time, that incremental growth turns into a big leap.

In August 2010, AutoZone had about 63,000 employees. In August of this year, it has around 100,000, enough for a 58.7% boost.

The employee count has increased as the company opens more stores. Ten years ago, it had 4,627 stores. This August, it had 6,549.

The number of workers should again see a boost this year, given the company's recent performance. Last quarter, AutoZone recorded its largest same store sales performance since 1991, with those sales up 22%.

But, it didn't have enough staff members to adequately handle the surging sales volume, so it's hiring more. On Aug. 13, the auto parts retailer announced it planned to hire 20,000 new employees nationwide.

Here's what AutoZone's employee count has looked like over the past decade:

August 28, 2010- over 63,000
August 27, 2011- over 65,000
August 25, 2012- over 70,000
August 31, 2013- over 71,000
August 30, 2014- over 76,000
August 29, 2015- over 81,000
August 27, 2016- over 84,000
August 25, 2018- about 90,000
August 31, 2019- about 96,000
August 29, 2020- about 100,000

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