



Digital Print INNOVATORS

Unique substrates, some preconverted, show the range of output possibilities. Packaging (above, American Greetings) and cans (below, Merrell Romington) printed on Xerox devices.



Early adopters and innovative users of digital print technology lead the way, showing the possibilities.

Few companies want to be first. Taking the lead is a huge risk. It can be a journey to disaster or success. For a capital-intensive industry like printing, the stakes for innovation are high. A false step could lead to annihilation; but failing to innovate can yield the same result. But printing firms, once they adopt new tools, find remarkable ways to put them to work—and quickly. In so doing, they advance innovation across the industry.

The area of digital presses has greatly benefited from leading firms willing to be early adopters. So, too, has the value of print, as these first movers have unlocked products once unthinkable.

A common characteristic of printing companies taking the lead here is a solid rationale and a plan backing their actions. Devices are purchased as part of a larger strategy to meet customer needs and op-

erate more efficiently. The following pages highlight such firms, serving different end markets with various digital printing devices and technologies.

Direct Group leads in inkjet webs

2008 could be described as the year of the digital press at Direct Group, Pennington, NJ. The company serves the direct mail industry and, over the last two years, has heavily invested in digital printing, database marketing and postal automation to strategically build out its client serves. The \$140-million firm has three New Jersey production facilities.

This year, Direct Group dramatically reconfigured its print and personalization platform, adding 47 Océ continuous-feed printing engines and two Canon ImagePress C7000 digital presses to complement its conventional offset production. The

firm is the first U.S. installation of the Océ JetStream 2200, a high-speed, fully variable, color inkjet web press. It also bought 32 toner-based monochrome Océ VarioStream 8750s, along with a monochrome sheetfed VarioPrint 6000 system with Océ Gemini Instant Duplex engine.

Greater than 10% of the company's production volume is now produced on digital presses, and company officials see that number exceeding 20% in 2009.

"Digital print solutions have become a key strategic asset for many of today's sophisticated direct marketers. As mail volumes decrease, our clients are still looking to grow their businesses so ROI for every campaign becomes more important than ever before," says Pat O'Brien, sales and marketing VP. "Our clients continue to push a greater percentage of their volumes to the digital platform."

O'Brien says the digital presses, combined with the company's database marketing services and innovative postal tools, offer clients a powerful return on their print investments.

A big trend in direct mail, he says, is the use of trigger-based mailings, where a life event triggers a specific and relevant offer. These data-driven, full-color, personalized mailings can yield response rates 5% to 15% higher than a traditional campaign.

Data and market timing are key variables in trigger mailings. The Jetstream press allows the company to execute these one-to-one mailings, printing 4-color process both front and back in a very compressed cycle time.

Direct Group has also made significant investments in building its database and mailing infrastructures to power digital print,

King Printing inkjets full-color textbooks

Serving the short-run book market for 30 years, King Printing, Lowell, MA, is the first book printer to add a Screen Truepress Jet520 full-color inkjet web press to print finished book blocks in an automated production line. King one of the first on the East Coast to install a Xerox DocuTech.

"As customers feel cost pressures, we can offer high-quality, 4-color printing at competitive prices with the press, and produce

Pages (below) from an 8.25x10.75" book printed on a Screen Truepress Jet520 at King Printing and finished via a Standard Hunkeler Gen6 paper-handling system on the Graph Expo show floor.



DGI-Visuals, Burlington, MA, found rapidly growing opportunities with wide-format inkjet printers for point-of-purchase and display projects.

jobs on demand," reports Adi Chinai, the firm's joint managing director, "so clients don't need to hold inventory and can get books into their key markets with much quicker turnaround."

He says the Truepress meets client demands for producing more titles, in lower quantities, at higher frequencies.

King Printing serves educational and trade publishing markets, supplying book quantities as small as 50 copies and as many as 50,000. Its 65,000-sq-ft. manufacturing plant operates three shifts, five days a week, producing hardcover, softcover and mechanically bound titles on web, sheetfed and digital presses.

Chinai says the company had been evaluating the progress in inkjet technology for time some, but until now felt inkjet was unable to deliver the speed and quality required. Its Truepress is running around the clock, producing millions of impressions daily in run lengths from 1 to 1,000 books or more at 720 dpi.

"We have a near lights-out electronic workflow, where a customer uploads files that are processed automatically and delivered to the press," he says, "The only manual intervention: proofing."

King configured the press with two printing units in tandem. This dual-engine duplex arrangement enables half-web or full-web printing on both sides of the roll. The Jet520 prints on standard offset, inkjet and newsprint stock up to 20.5 inches wide.

"The front-end system allows for RIPing large amounts of variable data, and the device handles many substrates," Chinai notes.

For post-production, the press is outfitted with a Standard Hunkeler Gen6 paper-handling system for unwinding, consistent web tension, perfining, web merging, rotary double-cutting and precision stacking. The double-cut capability allows full-bleed trimming across and inline with the web.

MicroPage beta-tests Canon device

Digital printer MicroPage, New York City, was the first beta site for the Canon imagePRESS C7000VP and has added 40 new clients since adding the device. The 10-employee company began as a postscript service bureau and evolved into a marketing services firm that counts digital printing among its services. It specializes in direct marketing campaigns, sales collateral and event materials for high-end cosmetic companies, nonprofits and art schools, including New York's School of Visual Arts, Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design. The firm was an early user of the Heidelberg QuickMaster DI press back in 1995.

Job produced by MicroPage on the Canon imagePRESS C7000VP. The device prints 1200 dpi at 70 ppm on stocks up to 110 lbs.

Company owner Brian Boyajian says, in the beginning, it was hard to say the “d” word (digital printing), but “the quality coming off the Canon C7000 is comparable to offset.” He says the digital device offers no-streak printing, color stability and consistency.

“The color gamut of this device is huge, which our art student clients love,” he says. Each year senior art students from Parsons use the company to produce their final projects, for which color consistency and quality is a mandate across all components.

Boyajian says many clients have cut back on print and are re-defining their printing needs, making the production flexibility offered by digital printing an equipment essential.

“We’re finding that customer are running smaller volume jobs, but repeating them at a higher frequency (paying for the jobs with credit cards), a trend that suits digital printing,” he says.

The current economic mess has also put work on MircoPage’s digital press. Boyajian says many companies feel the need to produce a printed response to stakeholders providing perspective.

On the flip side, many clients have left print for e-mail, so the company has stepped up its multimedia and variable-data printing offerings to bring them back to print.

Taking risks: status quo at O’Neil Data Systems

This month, O’Neil Data Systems, Los Angeles, will begin beta testing the HP Inkjet Web Press, a high-volume, high-speed digital color using the HP Scalable Inkjet print head. The national provider of data-driven publishing and marketing communication services initially will use the press for transpromotional and marketing communication documents.

Assuming the role of pioneer is familiar for O’Neil. Started by *Investor’s Business Daily* founder William J. O’Neil, the company was an early adopter of database publishing. When its offset business began to erode, it made a bold move into digital printing.

Personalized cereal boxes printed by Merrell Remington & Associates demonstrate the innovative products possible with digital printing.



O’Neil invested millions in 2004 to re-engineer its business with new staff and equipment investments—including a Xerox iGen3.

The 4-color HP press prints up to 30”. Expected to be available in 2009, it produces up to 2,600 letter-size pages per minute or full-broad-sheet newspaper pages at 400 fpm.

Digital direct marketing at Merrell Remington

Merrell Remington & Associates, Salt Lake City, is a direct marketing advertising agency that invested in digital printing to support its push into variable-data print. The company, who has been creating targeted print campaigns since the early 1980s, is an annual winner in the DMA Echo and Xerox PIXI awards for its digital printing work.

The company moved into digital printing five years ago with the launch of its Digital Solutions unit to advance its target marketing services. Bringing digital printing in-house would allowed the company to control quality, costs, time and maximize its ability to product direct mail pieces that delivered phenomenal response rates.

The company first installed a Xerox DocuColor 12, then a DocuColor 5252 digital color press and monochrome Nuvera 120. Half its 14,000-sq-ft. facility handles digital printing and mailing.

“The first question we ask a client is, ‘How much do you know about the prospect you are trying to reach?’” says Kent Merrell, company founder. The more relevant the offer to recipient, he says, the greater the chance the print will make the sale. The firm also prints short-run jobs.

DataProse expands operations

Printer of direct mail, billing statements and transpromo, DataProse, Oxnard, CA, opened a 42,000-sq-ft. plant in Coppell, TX. The facility is equipped with a full-color Océ 9000 series digital printer, offering the ability to produce 800 full-color variable-data prints per minute. The facility also includes printing and mailing equipment from Xerox, Pitney Bowes and Bowe Bell + Howell.

The company, founded in 1990 by Xerox veteran Glenn Carter and Kinko’s founder Paul Orfalea, says it was one of the first to adopt highlight color variable-data printers. It is an entirely digital print house.

“We can turn a bill into to a one-to-one direct marketing and advertising piece, where the biller generates advertising revenue from printing their obligatory statements,” says Carter company VP. For example, he describes a utility bill with a pizza coupon for the recipient’s favorite type of pizza at their local pizzeria.

“This innovation is cutting-edge and has enabled us to drastically improve what we offer our clients. We’ve turned a bill into to a one-to-one direct marketing and advertising piece,” he adds. ■

