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Spindrift

...Scandalising The Graphic Arts Industry Since April 2003

News Focus • Opinion
Reviews • Techno-Babble
Attitude

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Variable • **noun** **1** a variable element feature, or quantity. **2** a star whose brightness changes, either regularly or irregularly.

– From the Compact Oxford English Dictionary

Dear Reader,

An incredible diversity of stuff is going on at the moment, from trade shows to trading announcements, alliances to new technologies. Photokina has just finished, Ifra, Graph Expo and Digital Print World are coming up and people are already planning for Drupa 2008 and the next Ipex. Trading news comes in from the behemoths in computing, printing, imaging and all points in between. Overall it suggests an immense range of interest in shared communications, whatever their shape and form. We can be very sure that our need for communications, print or otherwise is growing.

What we can't be sure of is the effectiveness of either the words and pictures we send, or of the channel we use to send them. How can we be sure that our messages get the responses we want? The answer to this is central to many printers' and publishers' business propositions, and it's what colour management, variable data output and cross media publishing strategies are all about.

Marshall McLuhan once said: "Gutenberg made everyone a reader, Xerox made everyone a publisher". Today publishing is about much more than distributing copies. Ensuring messages reach the right targets and create a positive response sets professional printing and publishing apart from the rest of the media dross. Without editorial process, production control and quality assurance it's just so much noise in the channel.

Enjoy!

The Spindrift Crew,

Cecilia, Laurel, Paul, Nessian and Todd

In This Issue

Across the Web Divide

The Internet has brought us many things, from shopping to socialising. Publishers haven't universally welcomed the Internet, but mixed Internet and conventional sales models are gaining popularity. The Internet is both production and commercial environment, so how can small publishers jump aboard the Internet bandwagon? Nessian Cleary investigates.

see page 11

The Colour of Money

Colour is the beating heart of commercial printing and publishing. We strive for perfection and but measuring colour is still a struggle. Paul Lindström takes us through his five big Ws of colour management: When to measure colours? Where? Why? and With What? (It's a Swedish thing.)

see page 15

Variations on a Theme

Wouldn't it be great if all the successful variable data printers shared their top ten tips for success in the variable data print market? Wouldn't it be great, but wouldn't it be unbelievable? Variable data gives companies a seriously competitive advantage, but success doesn't come easy. What does? Laurel Brunner looks closer.

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Regular Columns

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News Focus

Metro International is upgrading all of its newspaper sites worldwide to Quark Xpress 7. Metro is the world's largest and fastest growing international free newspaper brand, and appears in 69 editions in 93 major cities in 21 countries and in 19 languages worldwide. It has an estimated daily readership of 18.5 million.

The company has chosen Xpress in order to reduce production costs and improve production quality and efficiency, through collaborative editorial and content sharing using Xpress 7's Composition Zones and Job Jackets. According to Michael Mendoza, global IT director of Metro International "these features will allow all Metro journalists and a network of freelancers to reach new levels of productivity and efficiency." He also said that: "we evaluated [Adobe] InDesign but decided that it didn't deliver the same level of functionality as QuarkXPress 7 ... it simply wasn't an option." How's that for a gem of a quote!

Metro has ordered over 500 copies of Xpress 7 and is working closely with Quark on additional projects. Could this mean QPS we wonder? Whatever it means, this order marks an important turning point for Quark, an endorsement that scotches speculation that Indesign is fast filling Xpress's shoes. It's been a series of long and tricky climbs, but it looks like Quark is finally back on track, focusing on

what it knows best (publishing systems) and not on what it was doing best (upsetting people).

Xeikon has introduced the Xeikon 6000 digital colour press, a machine that can output 160 A4 pages per minute (9,600 full-colour pages per hour!!) and has a duty cycle of almost 4,000,000 pages per month. The new press has an upgraded version of the X-800 digital front end capable of running it at rated speed, and uses Form Adapted (FA) toner for outstanding print quality. Xeikon claim this is the fastest digital colour press in the market able to offer graphic arts quality.

The Xeikon 6000 handles stocks including paperboard from 40 to 350 gsm, at 320 to 500 mm wide and limitless length (web press remember). The X-800 manages high-speed data output and colour management and control, including a fifth colour. The new press is equipped with new FA toners, polyester based, shape-modified toners designed for high-speed digital colour printing and developed by Punch Graphix. The FA toner is FDA-approved for indirect food contact. The new press is also Pantone-licensed and red, blue, green, orange, white and clear spot toners are also available "off the shelf". Whose shelf we wonder?

Heidelberg has introduced baby versions of its Suprasetter platesetting technology, priced at less than €100,000. See Expandocs for details.

HP and **X-Rite** have announced a strategic partnership for integrating digital colour management and inkjet printing. The new HP Designjet Z Photo Series printers have a spectrophotometer based X-Rite's Eye-One technology mounted on the printer carriage. HP provides the control software user interface for accurate colour management, ICC profiling and closed loop calibration. The two companies have also developed an optional profiling solution based on X-Rite Profilemaker. Profilemaker has intelligent colour gamut mapping tools for device profiling and creating output profiles.

This is an important step in the move to transparent colour management, for markets not generally credited with much of an interest in it. The addition of colour measurement and control software to these printers will provide an opportunity for photographers and designers to pro-

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vide output services to clients, without having to agonise about getting the colour right.

There are expected to be further announcements along these lines from X-Rite and HP.

Epson is expanding commercial and industrial applications for its piezo inkjet technology, as used in the Stylus Photo and Stylus Pro range of inkjet printers. Working with commercial and industrial partners in photo lab printing, digital printing, textile printing and others, Epson is developing a range of products specifically for these markets. Epson works with Mimaki, Mutoh, Roland and Screen so we can expect to see some interesting new developments, for large format digital printing particularly.

Adstream has launched technology for online document creation, editing, management and ordering. The tool uses predefined templates populated from a data resource depending on the corporate user content requirements and access rights, to produce print ready PDFs. It is designed for brand owners, designers, agencies, printers and publishers, for managing the brand integrity of corporate material. This includes advertisements, POS items, direct mail, brochures, reports, leaflets and something Adstream call “stationary” which describes the dominant characteristic of a thing that doesn’t move. Stationery, the stuff of envelopes and letterhead, is probably what they mean. The new product is called e-ssential, and although you might mistake this for a de-scription, e-ssential really is what they are calling it.

This technology apparently has the scope to be the basis for media independent content management, including video and audio. It can integrate with third party asset management systems, MIS and electronic commerce. Let’s hope they give it a real name sometime soon!

Océ’s forthcoming financials for Q3 2006 show “disappointing” revenues for DDS (Digital Document Systems). Excluding acquisition integration and restructuring costs and exchange rate effects, revenues fell 4% compared to Q3 2005, although WFPS (Wide Format Printing Systems) revenues developed well. Océ expects an operating income of €16 million for the quarter and approximately €90 million for the full financial year 2006 compared to €75 million for 2005.

Foveon has released its 14.1 megapixel X3 DSLR image sensor, claiming it is the highest resolution sensor avail-

able. Designed for high end digital photography, the new X3 sensor has process enhancements for improved performance at long exposures and high ISO speeds. It also has 40% more pixels than its predecessor.

X3 is unique in that it stacks 14.1 million 7.8µ pixels, into a 2652 x 1768 x 3 (RGB) array. This increases the information density of the captured image across the active image area of 20.69 x 13.79 mm and eliminates colour sampling artifacts. The sensor can capture data at up to 5 frames per second and is available in the Sigma SD14 camera, Sigma’s latest Digital Single-Lens Reflex (DSLR) camera

Sigma is also launching a new compact camera with the X3 14.1 megapixel sensor. The X3 image sensor will also be available through Alternative Vision Corp., Foveon’s sales partner for scientific and government markets.

Leaf, Kodak-owned developers of digital camera backs, has introduced the Leaf Afi a medium-format digital camera. There are three models (Afi -75, Afi -65 and Afi -54) designed for professional high resolution digital photography, all based on the new Leaf Aptus S-Series digital camera back. These cameras are based on a cooperation with Jenoptik.

Kodak has introduced the Nexpress Photo Bundle for customers in the photo services market. The bundle includes various components to enhance revenue opportunities for digital printers, particularly for photo printing, with software (ICC colour profiles etc), hardware (an upgrade to the Nexpress’s front end for faster data throughput and new Operator Replaceable Components) and professional advisory services (training and workflow consultation). This is a smart move by Kodak as an increasing number of photo services providers are investing in Nexpress on the basis of its photorealistic output.

HP Indigo has introduced the ws4500 for labels and packaging printing and a new reseller agreement with packaging doyens, Esko. HP Indichrome Plus now adds a green HP Electroink to the CMYK, orange and violet set.

The new press can replace spot colour inks without interrupting the run and improving the profitability of individual jobs. The press is designed for high throughput and has optional Esko software for job and colour control.

Agfa’s Sherpaproof line of proofing systems has received Fogra’s blessing and is now fully certified for production ▶

of ISO 12647-2 and ISO 12647-4 (offset and gravure printing) proofs.

Microsoft has made its XPS technology available to Windows Vista developers. XPS (eXtensible Paper Specification). Global Graphics developed this software RIP to provide a new printing platform, based on Global Graphics core Postscript language interpreter.

ECRM will introduce a new 120 plates-per-hour fully automated violet CTP device at Ifra in Amsterdam. The MAKO Newsmatic HS (High Speed) is suitable for plates from 635mm x 927mm and has eight resolutions from 1016 to 2540 dpi.

Quark and **Easypress** have entered into an agreement for Quark to include Atomik XML Publisher plug-in technology with Xpress7. This extends Xpress's XML capabilities and requires minimal configuration, making XML simple for nontechnical users.

Callas Software has introduced a new PDF/A tool. Pdfapilot is for users working in archives, public authorities, and enterprises so that they can check if existing PDFs can be archived as PDF/A files. Users can also save existing PDFs as PDF/A-compliant files.

Xerox scientists have developed a font so small that you need a magnifying glass to read it. Microtext Specialty Imaging Font is 1/100th of an inch high and is designed to help make valuable documents with personal information such as birth certificates, personal identification papers, and cheques harder to forge. The new specialty font is included in Xerox FreeFlow Variable Information Suite 5.0 for customised document production. How will the iGen3 print it we wonder? Answers on a pinhead please.

HP has introduced a new piezoelectric inkjet technology for industrial inkjet applications. The HP Scitex X2 Print-head works with UV-curable inks and is highly durable and super quick.

Gradual Software has introduced its latest member of the Switch line of workflow management and automation tools (see Spindrift volume 3, issue 10). Power Switch adds support for scripting and metadata, and includes a workgroup client for automation across workgroups.

Gradual Software and **Markzware**, developers of the Flightcheck software series, have announced a partner-

ship to integrate allows Markzware's preflight tools with the Switch product line.

Esco has introduced Perfect Highlights screening technology for flexo printing, providing tradeshops, flexible converters and label printers with a bevy of new tools. Customers can create complete screening sets optimised for specific jobs, with specific inks and substrates for specific presses.

St Ives Web has signed up for Agfa's Delano project management, proofing and customer service tool, in order to streamline and enhance print project management.

Agfa has added the Avalon SF thermal engine to its line of platesetters. The device images 21 B2 Azura chemistry-free plates per hour and is positioned between Acento II and Palladio II, and 8-up/B1 systems such as the Avalon LF.

EFI has agreed to acquire privately held Jetrion LLC for some \$40 million in cash. Jetrion is a subsidiary of Flint Group Inc. a leading developer of inkjet technologies, especially inks. The transaction is expected to close by the end of the year.

IGAEF |Eye-gaff|

INTERNATIONAL GRAPHIC ARTS EDITORS FORUM

www.igaef.org

The screenshot shows the IGAEF website interface. At the top, there's a search bar and the site's name. Below that, a row of logos for various industry partners like AGFA, SCREEN, FUJIFILM, and BPIF is displayed. The main content area is divided into several sections: a navigation menu on the left, a central 'Welcome' message with a list of instructions for users, a 'Pic Of The Week' section on the right, and a 'Glossary' section at the bottom. The page is designed with a clean, professional layout typical of a technical forum or resource site.

Spindocs

(Where the spinner gets spun!)

It seemed to be a case of the spinner getting fed up with the spin. KBA's press release from September 5, was screaming Enough Already! and put a smile on our faces:

"While others talk, KBA delivers

Separating the wheat from the chaff in large format

From the fuss being made about large format presses, anyone would think they had just been invented. And the most vocal manufacturers seem to be the ones that don't even build them – giving a B1 (40 in) press an XL tag does not make it any bigger. KBA, the global market leader for sheet sizes from 910 x 1300 mm to 1510 x 2050 mm (353/4 x 511/4 in to 591/2 x 803/4 in), has decades of experience in kitting out printers of commercials, books, displays, posters and packaging with customised LF presses whose technology is second to none."

KBA goes on to give MAN Roland some credit for introducing a super large format press at Drupa 2004, alongside KBA. But then we are reminded that:

"KBA is the only press manufacturer in the global marketplace whose product range extends to convertible eight-colour perfector presses for sheet sizes up to 1120 x 1620mm (44 x 633/4in)."

So keep your hands off those XL tags!

Driftwood

(Useful stuff washin' up on our shores)

The human touch

In Spindrift's digital pages we like to cover quality assurance methods, especially software and hardware used for colour management. But we have realised that there is one factor that perhaps is too easily forgotten in our crusade for excellent colour control: the humans! Less

than 20% of us have absolutely flawless colour discrimination capacity, which means that around 80% of the human population has slight or serious problems when trying to detect and describe small colour variations. There are very few people that are really colour blind, but among the 10-15% of the population that has serious problems when trying to differentiate between colours, men are for some reason in the majority. Again, few people are really colour blind: they see colours, but not the way most other people would describe them.

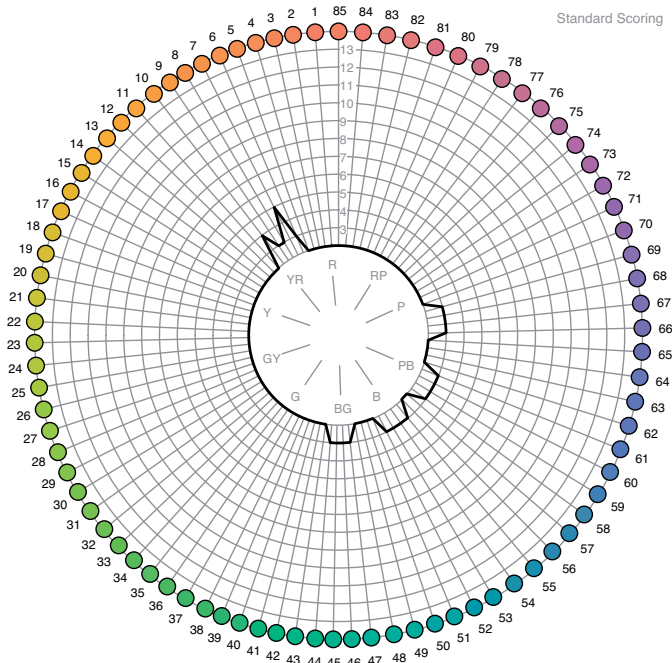
So what has this to do with colour management? A lot of course, because if less than 20% of those involved with checking print and proofs can actually perceive colours accurately, it might explain why an "OK sheet" for one person really seems to be OK, but is far from OK according to another, looking at the same print or proof, under the same viewing conditions. So what to do? Is there a way to test for colour discrimination capacity (as it is called by colour scientists)? Yes indeed there is.

One way is to use the Farnsworth-Munsell 100 test. This test came to our attention during a colour management course we copresented in India this summer with the help of two excellent training and support people from X-Rite South East Asia: Mr Pongtorn Juntarawatt and Mr Wei-Sang Khoo. These extremely knowledgeable people tested the colour discrimination capacity for all 50 course participants. Of course Paul took the test, although with some anxiety, something he only admitted after the fact. Having worked as a scanner operator and conducted innumerable tests of scanners, digital cameras, proofing systems, monitors and even presses, it would have been somewhat embarrassing for him to discover that he had serious flaws in his colour discrimination capacity.

As the name suggests, the Farnsworth-Munsell 100 test asks viewers to discriminate between 100 slightly differently coloured discs, going from pale green to pale orange. Colour scientists have since found that 85 are enough. The viewer sorts the coloured cups according to shade and their order reveals any limitations with their colour discrimination capacity. The 85 discs are split up into four sets. Each set's colours are scrambled and the

viewer has to place them back in the correct set order. In all this only takes about 10-15 minutes, so it's not a very difficult or complicated test to do. What is clever about the package offered by X-Rite is the evaluation software that comes along with the discs. Errors are weighted with more penalty points depending on age and years of experience in colour evaluation, and which discs are incorrectly placed. The software automatically works all this out quickly and summarises the results to give the final scores. To classify as what X-Rite calls having a "Superior Colour Discrimination Capacity" you can't have more than 16 in the scoring.

Farnsworth-Munsell 100 Hue Test Results



The Farnsworth-Munsell 100 is a test of your capacity to discriminate between different colours. The evaluation software that comes with the test kit provided by X-Rite presents the results in a graph like this. The poorer the colour discrimination capacity is, the more spiky the graph.

Now, does this mean that only people with "Superior Colour Discrimination Capacity" can work with print and publishing. No, we have to accept that most of us have some flaws in our capacity to identify and discriminate between subtle colour differences. But what's good about taking the Munsell 100 test is that you will know in what areas of the colour spectrum you have some troubles. And you will also know how serious a problem you have in those areas. The Munsell 100 test is much more precise than

just checking that you are not colour blind. Very, very few people are physically unable to see colours, but quite a few have serious problems to differentiate between them correctly. You need to score quite badly on a Munsell 100 test to be disqualified from judging prints and proofs at all, but of course it would be best if those who do evaluations of proofs and print knew their real capacity and limitations.

We were so impressed by the Farnsworth-Munsell 100 test that we strongly recommend that anyone working with high end colour management and colour evaluations take the test. Even if you just have some minor flaw in your colour discrimination capacity, it's good to know in what part of the spectrum it is, because then you can ask for advice if you are not sure about colours in that area.

So how did Paul score then? Well, to his relief he can continue to evaluate monitors, proofing systems and printed matters et cetera, for the foreseeable future. An error score of 8 is not flawless, but then – what is?

Expandocs

(In this section, we aim to cast some extra light on a particular recent news story.)

Suprasetters Reaching Out

At Drupa 2004 Heidelberg made three important announcements: the new Speedmaster XL 105 press, JDF workflow technologies and the new Suprasetter. At the time we said that the Suprasetter was "not so much a platesetter as a declaration of intent" and that is precisely what it is turning out to be.

Development of the Suprasetter technology began just after Drupa 2000 where Creo and Heidelberg had intended to introduce a new line of co-developed platesetters. Despite the fact that all was in place for the platesetters, the end of the Creo/Heidelberg relationship was also the end of the line for the new platesetter. But not for long.

The Suprasetter was introduced at Drupa 2004 to provide Heidelberg with the foundation technology for a range

of platesetters and, at the time at least, direct imaging presses. Now, Heidelberg expects this foundation imaging technology plus screening technologies to secure its imaging technology leadership. This may not be mere boasting: although the initial 4-up Suprasetter 74 and 8-up Suprasetter 105 platesetters suffered supply problems for the new laserhead, these have been resolved and Heidelberg has sold over 500 Suprasetters.

Technospeak

Suprasetter's imaging module comprises cooled, 20 amp ASICS transferring data in real time to 64 individually addressable lasers, each controlled by a photo diode, using a sophisticated bonding technology to ensure a closed loop circuit. This provides total control over the 64 individual beams. This constant measuring and control of the laser power output helps quality and secures production to protect customers' investments. Glass optics with less than 1 micron accuracy transfer light energy to the plate without loss of signal strength, and the whole assembly is only 110 x 60 x 67 mm including power supply.

The imaging model's design benefits from low power consumption and high precision, but the optics, bonding and ASIC technologies are not easy to mass produce. The tricky manufacturing problem could turn out to be the Suprasetter's most competitive advantage: it's so hard to build in quantity that it's almost impossible to replicate. The technology is protected with 20 patents, is highly modular and suited to any environment, including hostile ones.

Suprasetter A52 and A74 is an external drum thermal technology (830 nm) with a special cooling system to maintain the laser modules at a constant temperature and ensure consistent imaging on plate. It doesn't matter if ambient conditions change within the range of 17 to 30° centigrade or a humidity range of 30 - 70%.

Two new models

As promised at Ipex, the company has launched new Suprasetters for the 2 and 4-up markets, extending its product line to offer thermal and visible light imaging for

all formats and providing processless and chemistry free processing for all market segments. Suprasetter A52 and A74 cost about the same as the equivalent visible light (405 nm) Prosetter models, and 50% less than the Suprasetter 74 and 105. 80% of Heidelberg's prospects for the new machines are apparently interested in chemistry free plates and 95% of clients want the optional integrated punching system.

Since Heidelberg entered the CTP market in 1996 the company has sold nearly 5000 CTP systems including Gutenbergs, Trendsetters et al and they have imaged



Suprasetter A52 and A74

around 248 square kilometres of plate material. Most of this has been VLF output so the two new small format Suprasetters are intended to bring the Suprasetter technology to broader market. They have a fixed performance and work in conjunction with Prinect screening technologies for higher quality output up to 400 lpi screens (AM, FM and Hybrid). The Suprasetter 74 and 105 can be fitted with up to 4 or 6 laser modules, each of which has 64 channels. The A52 and A74 are designed with a single laser module. The Suprasetter laser module includes Heidelberg's Intelligent Diode System so that if a diode fails, those to the left or right of it are switched off depending on where there are fewest. This minimises performance loss to no more than 50 percent.

Suprasetter was designed as a modular technology, from plate loading and internal punching through to the imaging system, for long-term upgrade flexibility in the field.

▼ The new Suprasetter A52 and A74 aren't quite so flexible but they are available as manual or automated machines and can be upgraded in the field. Heidelberg is selling the A52 2-up and A74 4-up as complete systems including associated software designed to give customers a fast payback on their investments.



The Suprasetter's laser module

Remote diagnostic software is included as is a new version of the Metadimension RIP which also drives the Prosetter. The new Prinect Metadimension 52i is special version for 52 format output and includes an Acrobat plug-in based imposition editor, for imposing PDF pages and outputting PDF flats. However it does not connect to Prinect Printready.

How much?

The new engines will have a 20-30% cheaper price than the Suprasetter 74 and 105 and are expected to come in at less than €90,000 depending on the format and configuration, with the automatic model some 20% more than the manual one. They will be available in January 2007, following controlled release in Germany.

The target market for the new engines is family printing businesses with 10 to 12 people still working with film,

and having done so for the past 6-10 years. They will also have 35 x 50 and 50 x 70 ie Quickmaster 46 to Speedmaster 74 printing units. Heidelberg is assuming an average plate throughput of 25 to 50 plates per day. This machine plus chemfree or processless plates is indeed a compelling system for small printing companies wanting to get into CTP, since processless platesetting requires no processor investment or chemical disposal.

How many?

Of the 11,500 target printers in Germany, around 80% of them are small businesses and of these only around 15% have gone to CTP, according to Heidelberg. The company has a current manufacturing capacity 720 units per year and according to a spokesman the company expects to sell this many Suprasetter A52 and A74s "at least".

The A52 and A74 Suprassetters are designed for high uptime and consistent imaging in hostile environments. Output speed is up to 14 plates per hour for the 4-up and 17 per hour for the 2-up engine and Heidelberg reckon up to 20 per hour for Quickmaster 46 plates. Of course these numbers depend on the type of plate. Heidelberg can add a debris removal system to its original Suprasetter technology for running ablative plates.

Punches are available for all major presses with three positions on the bar. The new machines have a new Auto Top Loader (ATL) for cassettes (50 to 100 plates, depending on thickness) with integrated slip sheet removal system, that separates plate and paper in a very reliable process. Heidelberg claims that the ATL makes the A52 and A74 the most compact machines in their class.

Once loaded, plates are transported within the platesetter via a swivel table. The new engines can image plates from 240 x 240 to 670 x 750 mm. Heidelberg has successfully tested the new models with all thermal plates on the market, including chemistry-free plates. The company is constantly evaluating thermal plate technologies from all manufacturers, and each country's sales organisation can choose the plates they want to offer with Suprasetter A52 and A74. In Germany and Switzerland Heidelberg is offering the Saphira brand. ▶

▼ VLF next in line

Heidelberg expects to extend the Suprasetter technology for other formats in the future, most immediately for VLF output, in readiness for the new large format press introduced last year and expected at Drupa 2008. The company is investing in a new 35,000 square metre factory for the new VLF press, construction of which is underway at an estimated cost of €45million.

But these things are all relative and as Heidelberg's board member for technology Jurgen Rautert says: "new technologies will decide the future of short run colour", and for Heidelberg today this means Anicolor, closed loop colour control and of course CTP. Heidelberg's recent worldwide survey of 300 digital printing customers, appears to support this position; it seems that these customers experience a 30% capital equipment utilisation and only 10% print variable data, suggesting they use digital printing exclusively for short run colour. Short run colour is a market that press manufacturers are facing aggressively head on and for Heidelberg, Suprasetter A52 and A74 are very much part of that picture. However as expertise in variable data management spreads and as other direct to output technologies continue to evolve, time will come when press manufacturers might need an alternative to conventional print technologies to satisfy customers in this market.

Say What?

(Iffy Writing Award Presented in the Ether for Obfuscation, Confusion, Misinformation or All Out Pretentiousness)

We know life is confusing, but surely that's where public relations companies are supposed to help? We aren't sure which PR people are behind the following two examples, but if either is reading this please, get some outside help!

We've tried to cover both of these stories in the News section, but both of these paragraphs had us foxed. We had a stab at interpretation. See how you get on:

"Centreville US and Cambridge UK, 21 September 2006: The XPS Reference RIP implementation that Global Graphics (Euronext: GLOG) has developed for Microsoft Corp. to help hardware and software developers in their XPSDrv driver testing and development for Windows Vista is now available for download from the Microsoft web site (<http://www.microsoft.com/whdc/device/print/RRIP.msp>)

Release Candidate 1 (RC1) of Version 1.0 of the XPS Reference RIP heralds the next phase of Global Graphics' contract with Microsoft under which Global Graphics has been providing consultancy and proof of concept development services on XPS since 2003 and working with the Windows development teams on the specification for the new format."

... pause for deep breath before continuing with:

"The reference RIP contains version 1.0 of Global Graphics' core XPS kernel, which has also been delivered to partners who are participating in Global Graphics' Early Adopter Program. Concurrent with the work it has undertaken directly for Microsoft, Global Graphics has been readying an extended range of commercial solutions based on the same core kernel that it has provided to Microsoft but with features and optimisations above and beyond the reference RIP implementation. The core kernel is designed for integration into solutions for the full range of printing devices from desktop inkjet printers to high-speed digital presses used in commercial printing."

And this, our second source of stabbing cranial pains:

"To demonstrate the capabilities of its new HP Indigo press ws4050 HP will hold an official EMEA launch event at a customer open house at the beginning of October. This will be hosted by Netherlands-based Eshuis, which has been using the new press. 'With previous experience of working with both the HP Indigo press ws4000 and ws4050, I believe the HP Indigo press ws4500 is the masterpiece of the series,' said Peter Overbeek, Eshuis BV."

Acrobites

(Something to get your teeth into)

SSID

A Service Set Identifier is a network name broadcast by a WLAN access point and router. It makes the setting up of wireless clients very convenient, since you can locate a WLAN without having to know what it's called. However, an SSID also makes your WLAN visible to any wireless systems within its range. Turning off the SSID broadcast makes it invisible to neighbours and passers-by. On a recent trip to the States, we found that in pretty much all of our friends' houses we had access to at least two or three of their neighbours' wireless networks, thanks to them broadcasting their SSIDs! We naturally took advantage of this digital hospitality to make phone calls over the Internet. We even called England using McDonald's network at JFK Airport in New York City!

Could this mean the beginning of the end for conventional telecommunications business models?

PSA

A form of digital advertising, Public Service Ads are a Google phenomenon. When you set up a web page which is to include Google ads, Google has to have crawled that web page to work out what words are in it, in order to be able to display the relevant contextual adverts. It normally takes about 48 hours for Google to get around to doing this – so for the first 48 hours it has no context against which to display relevant ads. So instead it puts up a category of ads called PSAs. These might be for hurricane relief or other such global appeals. For more info about Google ads, read Nessian's feature on web tools.

Boomerangs

(Your feedback fed back)

We've received a comment about the Boomerang in Issue 4-5 about processless plates. The writer, who works in the plate industry, wishes to remain anonymous:

Dear Digital Dots,

Having just read the latest Spindrift I feel that someone should comment on Tony King's (obviously marketing orientated) reply to Dave Elvin's comments about dot measurement. I am surprised that Tony thinks that the readers of Spindrift are being taken in by all the smoke and mirrors surrounding the Azura plate. Whilst undoubtedly a good technology (derived by the way from technology developed by Hoechst in the 1970s) it can in no way be described as "processless". Any end user will have to buy a processor and the chemistry, OK I know that they call it a "clean-out" or gumming solution but its job is to remove unexposed polymeric coating from the plate and once used the solution has to be disposed of like any other contaminating chemical, i.e. it cannot be washed down the drain. I do not want to appear partisan here, it could be argued that the Kodak and Fuji plates are also not strictly processless, it's just that the processing is done on-press and is therefore invisible to the customer. Both technologies are valid and both have positive and negative aspects, ultimately the customers will decide.

Name Supplied



Reaching out

Many large media outlets have adapted their production to take account of the Internet for delivering both ads and content, but how can small publishers jump aboard the Internet bandwagon? Nessian Cleary investigates.

The widespread adoption of the Internet has brought both challenges and opportunities for publishing. On the one hand, the ability to disseminate large amounts of information quickly and cheaply has been a boon for many. But on the other hand, the basic principle of the Internet's founding fathers that information should be free, has been a serious setback to commercial publishers.

Large publishers with enterprise-level IT resources have developed bespoke solutions for automated production of ads and editorial content for cross-media publishing. But smaller publishers have fared less well. Mostly, this is because they are locked into a print production chain and they lack the tools to exploit the advantages of the web, so in this article we're going to look at some of the issues and some possible solutions.

The first place to start is the simple problem of how to generate web pages. Both Quark and Adobe have sought to add web page abilities to their existing page layout programs in an attempt to position them as cross media packages. However, both have taken very different approaches. Quark has completely rewritten the underlying code base of Quark Xpress 7.0 so that it now supports XML natively. This has made it easier for Quark to piggyback a second web-orientated layout tool on top of the familiar Quark Xpress tools. When you start a Quark Xpress project you can choose whether to set it up for web or for print, and at any point in the project you can change it from one to the other. You can also set up a print project and then make a duplicate as a web page.

The advantage of this is that Quark has produced an elegant web authoring tool that any designer can learn to use within five minutes, because it looks and behaves much as one would expect XPress to do. The downside is that, although Quark Xpress is good for generating a lot of web pages very easily alongside a print workflow, it does not have any kind of site management. This means that as you add more and more pages to your website, it can be hard to maintain the links between all the pages without a great deal of careful thought.

Adobe has taken a different approach, bundling in a dedicated web authoring tool alongside Indesign with Creative Suite. Currently Creative Suite includes Golive, but Adobe has just announced version 2.3, which will include Dreamweaver with the Premium edition, as well as the new

Some printers also offer a service to their customers whereby they will upload their printed pages as web pages. One of the neatest solutions around is Digital Alternatives, which aims to make the online experience mimic that of leafing through the pages of a printed publication.

▼ Acrobat 8.0. Dreamweaver can be more complicated to set up than Go-live, but is a better program, and more scaleable for any possible future expansion. Both programmes provide excellent web authoring and site management tools, though both come with a rather steep learning curve.

Adobe also has a number of other useful solutions, including Fireworks, for editing images for web use, Flash, for interactive content and Contribute for easy management of websites.

Using databases

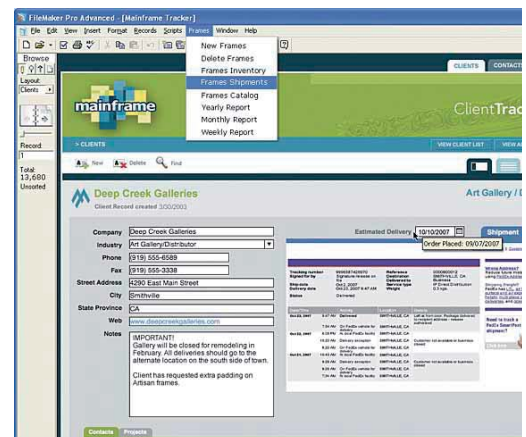
Most online solutions now store text, images and advertising elements complete with XML tags in databases. The pages can be built on the fly simply by using the XML tags to place the content on a template. Both Quark and Adobe provide tools for tagging the content on their pages but for Quark Xpress users there's a better, more automated option in the shape of Atomik from Easypress Technologies. There's an Import and Export version, for getting XML content into or out of Quark Xpress pages, and a Roundtrip version which does both. Quark is now including this extension with Xpress 7 (see News).

Almost any database can be used, though Filemaker seems to be a particular favourite for small publishers, as it can be used on both Macs and PCs, is relatively cheap, and has been around long enough for most people to be familiar with it. Filemaker was one of the first consumer applications to recognise the value of XML, and consequently any content stored in a Filemaker database will automatically carry an XML tag. The latest version, 8.5, can pull information from live web pages, such as currency exchange rates, which can then be used to generate invoices in those currencies. Filemaker is extremely easy to use, and anyone who's mastered programs such as Quark Xpress or Dreamweaver should have no problems in building their own database solution.

However, you can also buy ready made solutions from other developers. One of the neatest of these is Smartpublisher from Pre1 Software. This has a number of aspects including customer relationship management for advertising sales reps with fairly sophisticated tools for tracking potential sales and for invoicing. It also includes production tools which can track ads from the copy stage through to proofing and final artwork. It can even export fully marked up classifieds to either Quark Xpress or Indesign, either as PDFs, or with XML tags.

Digital Alternatives

Some printers also offer a service to their customers whereby they will upload their printed pages as web pages. Digital Alternatives, which aims to make the online experience mimic that of leafing through the pages of a printed publication, is particularly handy. Richard Roocroft, account manager for Digital Alternatives, explains: "We actually convert from the



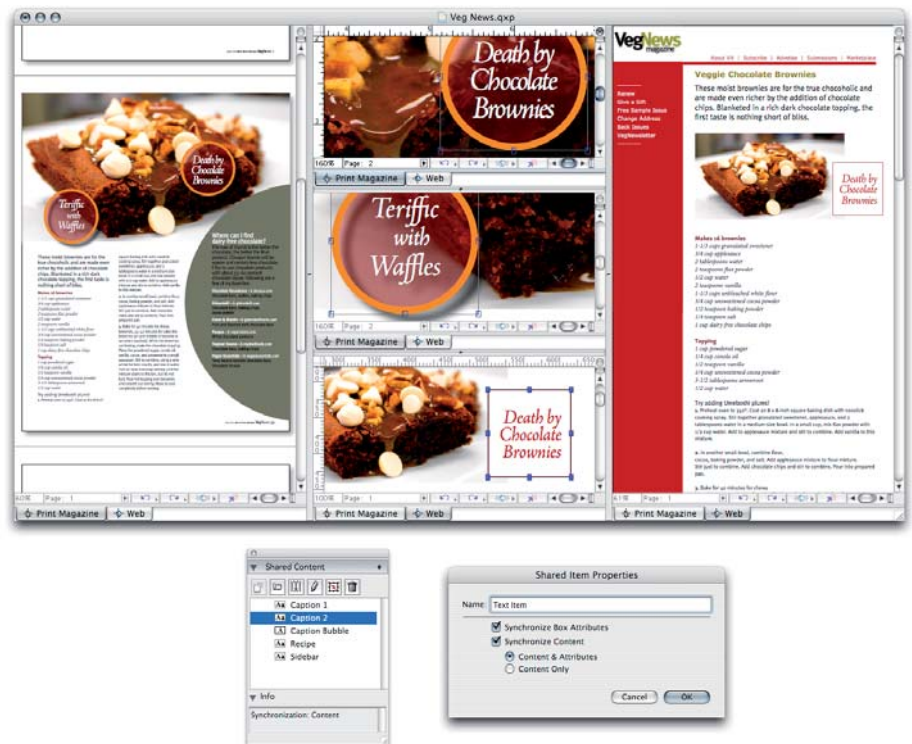
Most online solutions now store text, images and advertising elements complete with XML tags in databases. The pages can be built on the fly simply by using the XML tags to place the content on a template. Filemaker is a particularly popular database with smaller publishers.

Print PDF and create an exact copy of printed magazines into familiar page-turning digital editions that can be viewed online from your website, via email, saved to PC or put on to CD for offline viewing.”

The pages can be viewed in any standard web browser, and viewers can choose to look at single pages or spreads, and buttons on the top of the screen allow you to view the contents, zoom in to the pages, or carry out searches. One of the great advantages of this is that it preserves all the original advertising. Roocroft adds: “You can also track over 30 different viewing statistics to see how well your Digital Catalogue is working.”

Online publishing tools

So far we've looked at tools that can be used for making web pages, but there are also a number of tools designed purely for setting up online publishing sites. One of the most comprehensive of these is System 7. There are three main components to this: Content Management system is a database for managing the content of a site, which can categorise articles by item type; the Publication Management system is for building the publication from the content in the CMS; and a skin which can be automatically attached to every page in the site. System 7 can be used to set up subscriber log-ins, or to assign pay per view tariffs to content, and can manage classified advertising. It can also be used to set up online blogs, reader comments on articles, and can export content to print production cycles via XML.



QuarkXPress 7.0 is able to synchronise content between print and web publications.

You can buy the system outright, but as UK Managing director Dominic Williams explains: “Typically a smaller company wouldn't set it up themselves, they would just rent a System 7 account off us, which has a far more powerful digital publishing platform with far more features and so on than huge publishers who have spent millions developing their own in-house bespoke systems. You'll have an account set up so you don't have to install any software yourself, configure the server, or anything like that. System 7 will support you, back up your content every night for you, and give you all the software upgrades, for a monthly fee.”

Some ISPs also offer the kind of practical tools that you will need for a successful online publishing venture. For example, Pipex, in the UK has a service called Instantsite, which provides the building blocks for a site

▼
for a set fee each month. This includes page templates, as well as setting up RSS feeds and a forum. It even allows for some form of e-commerce. It's a fairly basic service, but may be enough to get a small publisher up and running.

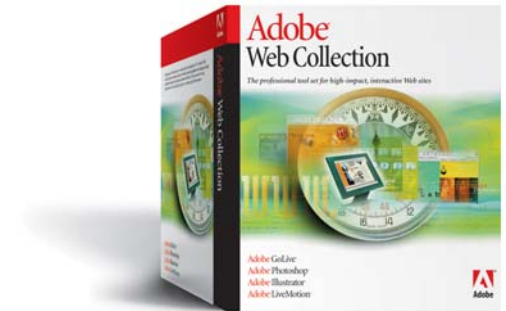
Commercial issues

Finally, it's worth touching on the business of making money, which is the single biggest hurdle most small publishers face. Google offers a good starting point with a service called AdSense, which offers publishers some revenue in return for placing adverts matched to the site's content. The publisher who puts the ad on their website gets paid per click. Mostly, this is what the advertiser does too, through a scheme called Adwords. Adwords is a pay per click scheme, by which your advert appears on others' websites. The advertiser usually pays per click, or he could pay per impression. In either case you are talking about small change, the average cost might be something like 7 Eurocents. Whatever money the advertiser has paid, a percentage goes to Google and a percentage goes to the publisher of the website on which it appeared.

Peter Bargh, a photography journalist who set up an online photographic magazine, ePHOTOzine, says that selling advertising for web use is not as straightforward as with printed titles and can bring its own problems. With printed titles ad rates are usually determined by the number of readers the publisher claims for the magazine: "You can have measurement systems set up so an advert might be there, and it might be seen by 40,000 people just as a magazine would be, but [with a web based ad] the advertisers can see that 137 people actually clicked on it and if they are paying the same rates as a magazine it becomes impractical."

For this reason it's essential to increase the traffic through your site and the best way to do this is through optimising your site for search engines to find it. There's a whole industry of consultants offering these services, but that's a separate article...

– Nessian Cleary



Adobe's Web collection based around Golive.

The colour of money

Colour is the beating heart of commercial printing and publishing. Accurate colour both on the screen, on the colour printer, proofer and on press, is what we strive for, but in order to manage colour reproduction we need appropriate measuring devices. So this article is about the five big Ws of colour management: When to measure colours? Where? Why? and With What?

With What?

Starting backwards, we need to know what measuring devices are suitable for which types of measurements. Densitometers, both for transmission (reading film) and reflection (reading print on paper and other substrates) are well known in the graphic arts industry, and hopefully in use daily in most printing plants worldwide. But the densitometer is actually totally colour blind. Inside a densitometer is a light source and a selection of filters, which help the control software identify the printing colours to measure. To be able to read out a density value for cyan, the complementary colour red is used in the filter, for example. But we don't know if this is the accurate colour "cyan", we only know that it's something "cyanish", with a density (greyscale level) of let's say 1.4 D that we look at. So while densitometers are very useful and important, they have their limitations. What they can do, however, is to be programmed to also calculate the screen density, useful when calculating the dot gain in print (in the ISO standards dot gain is referred to as Tone Value Increase, TVI).

To actually measure true colours, you need at least a colorimeter. Like a densitometer it also contains a lightsource (unless it's only supposed to measure emitted light), and filters. A colorimeter is amongst the cheapest of devices for colour measurements, and is commonly used to calibrate and characterise monitors. A colorimeter in some sense acts as a densitometer, but it reads and expresses values in CIE Lab. The CIE Lab colour space is the preferred standard when expressing absolute colour values, and is used in ICC-profiles and the latest revision of print standards like the ISO 12647.

A more accurate colour measurement device (and therefore more expensive) is the spectrophotometer. Like the name suggests it measures the spectral composition of the emitted or reflected light. A spectrophotometer is by far the most flexible device, since it also can be used as an advanced densitometer. Knowing the intensities over the whole range of visible wavelengths (often also including the nearly visible wavelengths like ultra violet), a better and more accurate analysis and definition of the colours can be made.

Finally we may need a dotmeter to be able to measure screen density on the printing plate. Optimists have tried using conventional densitome-



While densitometers still have their place in print production, you need a spectrophotometer to measure the true colours. Pictured is Heidelberg's Princt ImageControl.

ters for this, but the often low contrast on especially CTP plates has been found to be problematic for “normal” densitometers. The measurements have been found to vary too much for the result to be trusted for quality assured work. The dotmeters, sometimes referred to as “digital microscopes”, are absolutely necessary when calibrating and linearising a CTP device.

Why and Where?

In a colour managed workflow it's key to establish a known status for all the devices. In reality this means calibrating the device in question and, when necessary, linearising it's behaviour. For a monitor this means defining at what whitepoint we want it to work, at what light intensity (brightness) and what greyscale curve it should apply (gamma curve). For this we need a colorimeter, or better, a spectrophotometer. On top of this, to evaluate the monitor's suitability for accurate soft proofing we need some evaluation software. One of the few on the market is the Ugra/Fogra software called UDACT (Ugra Display Analysis and Certify Tool).

To linearise colour printers we need at least a densitometer, but it's better to use a good spectrophotometer, since this is also necessary for the characterisation (creating ICC-profiles) process.

For the calibration and linearisation of a CTP device it's necessary to use a dotmeter. If this isn't done, we have no clue if the plates are correctly exposed and/or processed. If we don't know the dot values (tone values) on the plate, we then don't know if the TVI is reasonable and within tolerances.

In order to be able to use one standardised ICC-profile for a certain paper type, we might need to apply different TVI curves in the RIP, for the different printing presses at our printing plant. This is at least one way to achieve predictable and accurate print quality across a press fleet. But in order to do this we need to measure both the plates and the actual print, on press. Most modern press control systems use a scanning spectrophotometer at the press, or a scanning densitometer. If you use a densitometer you need to translate the target colour values according a given standard, for example the ISO 12647-2 (sheetfed offset) by using a spectrophotometer at some point. From there on, the measured colours, expressed as CIElab-values, can now be translated to “standard” density target values, in that press, for that paper.

When?

When, and how often measurements need to be taken depends on the device we are talking about, and the tolerances that you set up in your quality assurance work. Generally measurements need to be done when a new batch of ink, film or plates is delivered, or when any process parameter is radically changed. Since more and more printers have started using spectrophotometers at the printing press, they find that the ink batches can differ quite considerably. Cyan is not always the cyan we expected it to be (or what it should be according to the ISO 2846-1 standard). Same ▶



To measure CTP-plates you need a dotmeter. Here the Plate Scope from X-Rite, which can read low contrast plates as well as different screen types.

thing with plates: one batch may need quite different settings in the CTP than the previous, and this isn't discovered if proper process control isn't applied. Actually it is discovered, and with generally undesirable consequences, because it's too late to fix.

One way to automate this is to implement what is called "closed loop systems". In newspaper production systems for automatic control of CTP-plates has been introduced by for example Agfa and Nela. The Agfa solution is called Afirm and ensures that the plates are checked for correct exposure and processing directly and automatically at or inside the CTP device.

For proofing systems and monitors it's difficult to give a general rule of thumb how often they need to be calibrated – it depends on how stable the system is in itself, and at what quality level you want to operate. An important factor is the viewing booth. Check that the light is at both the white point you have decided, normally 5000 K according to the D50 standard, and at the correct intensity, at least 1500 lux (all according to the ISO 3664 standard).

Even the measuring device needs to be calibrated now and then. The filters in both densitometers, colorimeters and spectrophotometers (possibly also dotmeters) age over time, and need to be replaced or at least recalibrated. Again, it depends on at the quality level you want to achieve, but most devices need a big overhaul at least every third or second year. Some vendors suggest every year, and X-Rite (including former Gretag Macbeth) even offer a system to calibrate your device against a "master device" remotely. The solution is called Net Profiler, and makes it possible for an organisation to monitor and ensure that all measuring devices are synchronised to measure in the same way, within the defined tolerances.

Challenges

Once regular measurements are made in the workflow, you soon discover that when a factor or technology is changed, the measuring device you use may not any longer be relevant and appropriate for the task. This is the situation with some of the new processless CTP plates. Some of those plates have such a low contrast in the image on plate that even some of the dotmeters have problems seeing and so measuring the dot in a stable and predictable way. Some plates in particular have been mentioned in discussion forums and articles, like for example the Fujifilm Brillia Pro-T and the Kodak Thermal Direct. But such problems are for the engineers to solve, and an upgrade of the Techkon Spectroplate to a version called All Vision is supposed to be able to read even low contrast CTP plates like the ones mentioned above.

Another challenge for the dotmeters is to correctly identify and read tone values for different screen types. Besides conventional AM and FM screens a CTP may very well produce a hybrid screen or a second generation FM screen. This needs to be taken care of in the control software for the measuring device, but even this seems to be a nonissue according



The very low contrast processless CTP-plates might be difficult even for dotmeters to read correctly. But according to Techkon the new upgrade of the Spectroplate to a version called "All Vision" manages to read even what seems to be an invisible image on a plate.

▼
to X-Rite, if you use their latest Plate Scope device. Using a special light source called Spectral Illumination Array it's supposed to read low contrast plates as well as many different screen types.

There are other challenges of course for the quality control manager, not least to convince all involved in the print and publishing workflow to establish and maintain a reasonable level of process control. But well managed and colour controlled workflow should pay off in the long run. And then we can discuss what the true colour of money really is.

– **Paul Lindström**



Variations on a Theme

Digital press manufacturers have made huge investments to educate the market for variable data output. And yet the percentage of variable data print in the commercial colour market is still surprisingly low, at between five and ten percent. Why is this? Is it a problem of information? Clearly not. The information about variable data print is widely available and accessible, whether its via articles and white papers, or educational seminars. Companies such as Xerox, Kodak and HP are willing not only to spend money on market education, but even on providing business partnering services. So what's the problem?

Perhaps rather than looking at why companies choose not to go the variable data route, we should look at the business drivers for those digital printers who have made a success of it. The best example of this is transactional print, the ultimate in variable data output. Transactional print is a drastically different market from commercial print, however digital printing technology, especially variable data management, is blurring divisions between the two.

Transaction Transfer

The transactional print market means bills and suchlike documents that primarily carry financial data. By their very nature they are complex, time critical and demand accurate data processing and security, all of which places huge demands on the front end system used to generate the data. Output is the least of the problem for companies needing to produce high speed variable data documents such as credit card bills, investment fund statements and so on. The data processing is the priority, not the print. As long as the output is fast enough and the engine capable of imaging the required formats legibly and without breaking down, the rest didn't much matter.

Compare this scenario to what customers expect in commercial print: a bewildering array of varying and complicated demands for colour, print quality, format, production cycle times and finishing, all of which are determined by the final print's purpose: effective communications, not transaction documentation. In this market, print production concerns dominate the list of output priorities, not data.

This may be a question of culture: data processing versus print. In order to make a success of variable data output or to take advantage of the latest printing technologies, companies have got to embrace a new culture,

The data processing is the priority, not the print. As long as the output is fast enough and the engine capable of imaging the required formats legibly and without breaking down, the rest didn't much matter.

▼ either data processing or printing. Either way, those that have done so have made a success of variable data output.

Business Smart

In the US, DST Systems has evolved from being a provider of conventional high speed transactional print to become a leading variable data print provider. This huge company was founded in 1969 to develop an automated record keeping system for the US mutual fund industry. Shareholder record keeping and documentation has a number of application characteristics that are solid gold opportunities for variable data print: quantity, data complexity, frequency and high value to the reader. DST employs around 9000 people and other than its herd of Xerox iGen3s has no connection to commercial print.

Obviously pretty much whatever this company prints involves an overwhelmingly high percentage of variable information. In 2002 DST's output division produced 1.8 billion pieces, including more than 11 million full-colour digital images. Most of DST's work is printed on high speed continuous form printers, however the company has added Xerox iGens in order to cross the divide into colour. In so doing DST has had to embrace new production disciplines, but can offer customers a far higher quality, and more effective printed product.

The story is similar elsewhere. In Belgium financial group ING has recently upgraded its digital printing department to install a Xeikon 5000 to create full colour bank statements for its VIP customers. ING manages banking, insurance and asset portfolios for some 60 million customers worldwide (maybe they need more than one Xeikon 5000!) and is the 13th largest financial group in the world. Pol Vanderick, head of ING's digital printing department in Belgium, said that ING "selected Xeikon technology again because of the quality and stability of the printed output. We are especially pleased with enhancements such as the in-line densitometer, which ensures an even higher colour accuracy throughout the run, and the ability to utilise a fifth colour within the system. This will be beneficial in the production of our own corporate orange colour, and for the use of security toners. The Xeikon product provides our customers with a high-quality printed image, similar to offset printing, and the reel fed device prints duplex in one pass, guaranteeing data integrity, which is critical in our business." Since when does a bank speak of densitometers, security toners and fifth colours?

Both DST and ING have moved into colour output in order to provide customers with more compelling and effective print. Nonetheless, the criteria that make these companies' printing applications perfect for variable data digital print are relevant for other companies, rather more accessible to commercial printers. This is why on the other side of the output fence commercial printers are offering data processing as an additional value added service.

Eleven Application Characteristics & Investment Considerations for VDP

1. **Quantity:** average run lengths and frequency
2. **Data complexity:** benefit of data for customers, versus hassle to produce
3. **Frequency of runs** relative to engine's duty cycle
4. **Value of VDP** to clients
5. **Total cost of digital print sales**
6. **Benefit to customer** of high response rates
7. **Willingness of customer base** to try new ideas
8. **Suitability of typical jobs** for short run, colour, variable content
9. **Access to partners** with whom to cooperate for complete service offerings
10. **Support cost** for data management and output device maintenance
11. **Feasibility of moving into data driven services**

Romein Holiday

Romein Grafisch Management in the Netherlands has invested in a four-colour HP Indigo press 3050. This company moved into digital printing in 2003 and has gradually developed its data processing skills to produce variable data content for its customers and a profitable new revenue stream. Forty per cent of Romein Grafisch's total job orders are now variable data print. Apart from having to learn about data processing Romein Grafisch has had to sell VDP to its customers. According to managing director Jasper Romein "We had to work hard to achieve these figures, since the market wasn't initially ripe for digital printing. But now more and more clients have become aware of the benefits and are beginning to demand variable printing."

Romein works closely with its clients and printing company partners, to provide additional data related services. One customer is a card publisher selling picture postcards to bookshops and other sales points throughout Holland. Romein manages the client's image database, processing a weekly order form with variable requirements based on the pictures, specific texts and quantities the client wants printed. The average run length per card is 25 and Romein recently upgraded its HP Indigo 1000 to an HP Indigo 3050 for higher productivity and higher quality. Business growth has come on the back of data services.

The Print Sell

Variable data output services do need to be sold, primarily because people aren't aware of the potentials or difficulties. Some companies try to produce their own targeted output without really appreciating that there is an entire industry dedicated to its production.

All Tile Inc. is a building materials wholesaler in Chicago, USA which set up a customer loyalty programme in order to maintain its competitiveness and protect its customer base. Working with a travel premium company, All Tile set up a website so that customers could track their points and see if they had enough for particular travel deals.

What started out as a great idea turned out somewhat less than wonderful, drowned in an ocean of apathy. According to the company's marketing director, Marc Haberman "We did everything you could possibly imagine to motivate our customers to get involved in the program. Direct mail, email, sales calls, special promotions — really innovative ideas." Only about one quarter of one percent of the targeted customers visited the prize website so in a last ditch effort to recoup its investment, the company turned to variable data print. It sent out 2700 personalised, hardcopy program statements using simple, deadly slow mail merge procedures and printed at its own cost. Then one day, a local print provider came to call and suggested a rather more efficient alternative.



Jasper Romein, managing director of Romein Grafisch Management.

▼ Creative Digital Color produces 80-90% of its jobs with variable data output on the NexPress 2100 and was more than able to produce the 2700 customised loyalty programme statements. It added teasers to encourage clients to achieve the next prize level, and congratulatory messages on the statements when they did so. The process was painless for the customer, as Marc says: “These new personalized statements were the breakthrough we needed. They looked fabulous and communicated wonderfully. And all I had to do was send the sales data file to Creative Digital Color. It was beautiful. Customers understood the program better, and they participated at levels that we hadn’t ever come close to.” The combination of high print production standards and variable data output generated a 100% participation in the loyalty program. All Tile improved business from dormant clients and expanded the product range active accounts purchased.

A successful VDP project comes down to the specifics of the application and the relationship between print service providers and their clients. The work being done with variable data ranges from the relatively simple to the extremely complex for both the data processing and the output. At Prontaprint in York, UK, a seven-colour HP Indigo 3050 is printing work for corporate and small business clients. The machine offers the flexibility necessary to meet very diverse output and data requirements, and according to director Peter McFarlane: “The wide variety of substrates the HP Indigo 3050 offers allows us to develop new solutions for our customers, [with] optimum print quality and a range of innovative solutions facilitated by wide substrate availability and seven colour printing process.”

So what do these examples have in common? Well not much really, and perhaps that is the point. Digital printing with variable data output appears to have a low uptake, but perhaps we are not looking in the right places for usage data? There is no simple category of print for which digital print is relevant, because it is relevant for any print application. It’s a bit like trying to measure the uptake of lithography in the early 19th century.

Much is written of printing’s technological evolution, but we rarely discuss its uptake in the market. It just is, and it’s simply everywhere. So it is with variable data print: wherever there is print, there is a potential VDP project waiting to happen. More and more information providers recognise that high print production values enhance the effectiveness of communications. Adding variable data to the mix creates even more effective messages, which is what it’s all about.

– Laurel Brunner

There is no simple category of print for which digital print is relevant, because it is relevant for any print application. It’s a bit like trying to measure the uptake of lithography in the early 19th century.



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