

Making the move to colour print

The realities and the rewards

Introduction

The clamour for colour output is everywhere. You hear it from suppliers promoting their latest must-have technology. You hear it from customers wanting to stay ahead of the curve. The reasoning is simple – colour is the future, colour can set you apart and help your business grow. There is no doubting the validity of these statements – for example, plenty of research exists to back-up claims about colour’s positive impact on the recipient. But such cheerleading is easy. Little is ever said about the realities of making such a commitment, the challenges involved in migrating from a predominantly monochrome toner-based set-up to one centred on high-quality, full-colour inkjet production.

Colour considerations

Moving to high-quality, production-level colour output is not a decision to be taken lightly. This state-of-the-art technology is now truly outstanding in terms of quality and productivity – and such excellence is necessarily reflected in the price. Understandably, businesses are seeking reassurance before investing at this level. However, proof-points are not always easy to find, particularly in a competitive market where businesses are sometimes cautious about sharing their success secrets.

Core to any technology investment is the knowledge that the technology will remain cutting-edge long after purchase, giving the business time to generate substantial return. This is certainly the case for colour print. According to InfoTrends, the market for high volume colour printing in Western Europe is primed for growth, predicted to rise from 17.7 bn A4 page impressions in 2011 to 75.4 bn in 2015. Print-industry research and development dollars are focused on colour inkjet development.

So – the technology is impressive and it is here to stay. But where can it really start to deliver? What are the market opportunities that will convince potential purchasers that investment will pay off and continue to pay off?

Certainly, the monochrome print market is highly commoditised and will stay so. Colour print can open the door to more revenue opportunities and help to differentiate your business. The provision of colour can potentially make the relationship with the customer more ‘sticky’, meaning that their reliance on your service provision increases with every new job that you fulfil for them. Your service offering might expand to encompass more than print – perhaps taking on graphic design and forms layout, for example. Thus, colour can deepen customer relationships and play a key role in growing customer value and stemming customer defection.

Reduce costs, drive business growth

Aside from the obvious cost considerations, one issue holding many print businesses back from colour investment is a lack of in-depth understanding of colour processes and terminology. Print buyers understand colour print and, for print vendors entering the world of colour the knowledge gap can be daunting. Certainly, the onus is on these businesses to get quickly up to speed. Here, the best technology suppliers will help to ensure that the workflow integration and colour management required to deliver the best possible quality and colour control are integral to their solution. This support can make the difference between a successful transition to colour and a protracted and difficult migration to new technology.

Businesses considering the move towards high-quality, production-volume colour print are looking for dual lines of opportunity in order to achieve return on investment. First, they are looking to replace existing work processes with improved automation, quality and efficiency. Secondly, they are seeking to identify future workflows that will sustain for the next 3-5 years.

The White Paper Factory™ concept is providing ambitious print firms with food-for-thought. Put simply, the White Paper Factory enables plain white paper and envelope stock to be printed and personalised on demand. Immediately, businesses have greater flexibility in terms of the type of work that they can process and greater efficiency when it comes to switching between jobs and co-mingling workflows. The White Paper Factory can eliminate the need for costly pre-printed shells and the associated storage of this material.

The flexibility of the White Paper Factory, and the technology that enables it, also allows transactional printers to consider developing new revenue generating lines of business including highly targeted and personalised direct mail and even graphic arts and publishing based applications. The key to success is understanding the Customer Relationship Management process and having the data to drive campaigns. Ultimately the workflow and print technology to deliver all of these communications is the same and the technology suppliers who understand the end to end process will be able to help identify and develop these opportunities.

Clearly, colour plays a vital role in any White Paper Factory strategy, adding even greater impact and clarity to highly personalised communications, but switching to colour need not happen in one radical sweep. Technology exists to enable colour to be added on a modular basis – for example, using a full-colour envelope printer in-line with an inserter. However, it is important to have an end-game in mind – an ultimate picture of where your communications need to be in terms of efficiency and quality in order to make investment that reduces current costs, adds value and, crucially, integrates into a solid platform that will underpin and enable future business growth.

The move to colour is a complex and business-critical decision. Undoubtedly, the rewards for making the move can be enormous and can help to set your business apart. There are variations in the level of colour take-up across Europe, but, in general, it is those businesses acting now – having scoped a business plan and sought expert advice from partner suppliers – that stand to benefit from market opportunities.

This urgency is highlighted by a recent example from Scandinavia. One business opted against making the investment into colour print, instead deciding to continue using pre-printed stock. Within six weeks, the organisation had lost 50% of its business due to the fact that a major customer had chosen to implement its own White Paper Factory solution. With this loss of turnover, the investment into colour became proportionally more expensive, with the result that the business concerned is now outsourcing any colour work.

Conclusion

There is no one-size-fits all approach to colour investment. Businesses contemplating such a move should spend the time talking to experts in order to understand the potential of today's technology and to formulate a clear business plan. At Pitney Bowes we make the effort to fully understand your aims and offer clear advice on achievable quality, immediate cost-savings and forward-thinking business growth opportunities.

Yes, high-quality, full-colour inkjet technology requires serious investment and long-term commitment. Happily, the advice leading to this investment can be obtained for free. By speaking to the right people you can take the first step on the transformation path, taking your business from respected commodity player to stand-out, cutting-edge colour print production expert.



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