

The true cost of colour



Introduction

In the business world, the impact of colour is proven. From brand identity to printed communications, colour helps to generate interest and capture attention. In 2010, a survey of 1,500 consumers by Leflein Associates found that, given a choice of colour graphics or black-and-white text, participants were over twice as likely to open the envelopes with colour graphics first. Once the envelope is opened, colour plays a key part in ensuring that key messages are noticed, read and retained.

Of course, the use of colour in business communications is by no means a new phenomenon. But how colour is used and the level of image quality that can be achieved continues to evolve.

Certainly, when it comes to inkjet printing, old ideas – based on a historical understanding of the technology – are being dynamically challenged. It is therefore essential for those businesses considering an investment into colour print to fully understand the capabilities and potential of the latest continuous forms / web production inkjet printing technology in order to maximise investment return.

The inkjet evolution

Significant leaps have been made in the development of inkjet colour. These technological advances enable users to throw-off the shackles of the 'old school' approach to colour application and to realise the true value of inkjet colour production print.

One can point to a broad timeline of inkjet evolution:

Production Inkjet development timeline

- 1993** Short run digital colour printing showcased at IPEX trade show. Benny Landa launched Indigo E-Print 1000 digital offset cut-sheet colour printing using unique ElectroInk and Xeikon launched the DCP/1 as the Agfa Chromapress web-fed dry toner electrophotographic colour printer.
- 2000** Press-like paper transport chassis combined with continual flow inkjet heads product development enabled high speed 4/4 digital colour printing. Quality was deemed good enough by some for basic business document enhancement and started the possibility of eliminating pre printed forms.
- 2005** Second generation technology using piezoelectric drop on demand inkjets nudged print quality along but was still some way from offset processes at production speeds/throughput.
- 2009** Near offset quality finally becomes a reality but it has taken a radical rethink of the basic technology. The newest generation of print engines powered by thermal drop on demand inkjet technology are designed from the ground up to function as inkjet web presses for the publishing and graphic markets. The addition of a specialised digital front end, combined with transactional workflow, enables fully variable content with near offset quality for the transactional application market.
- 2012** High speed and game changing 4-up A4/Letter sized versions of web presses deliver a true challenge to the productivity and quality of traditional methods resulting in significant consolidation of existing electrophotographic and early generation inkjet printers.

Unrealised potential

However, in many businesses, existing use of colour remains inflexible. Generic offset shell stationary is designed to meet corporate marketing requirements and ensure colour compliance but these shells are often time-consuming to design and create, and legacy operational procedures make

usage of multiple shell designs costly and slow. Storage and handling costs against multiple shell designs are significant. And considerable wastage can occur when stock is deemed surplus because of obsolescence or damage. Consider also the loss of production during job changeovers if multiple shells are required for a campaign, and the difficulty in organising production to take full advantage of postal optimisation.

More advanced offset shells may include some generic marketing images or text but the traditional – and still rather common place – view of inkjet colour is that the technique is fine for transactional highlighting but inadequate for more demanding marketing-based applications where coated substrates and high ink density have traditionally challenged high speed inkjet. Consequently, personalisation is often limited to basic content and text rather than graphics and images.

Staying ahead

The stark truth is that offset shell usage is anchoring businesses to the past, preventing communications from truly taking off and, ultimately, resulting in wasted spend. Forward-thinking organisations are recognising that investment in today's continuous inkjet is not simply a matter of cost-per-print. Rather, the latest technology is driving a completely new approach to communication production, one that frees businesses to better engage customers through personalisation and drive business growth.

A simple test of current communication efficiency and effectiveness is to ask some simple questions:

- As a marketer can you target small groups or individuals as part of a large campaign?
- Can you perform small marketing campaigns quickly and at low cost?
- Can you simultaneously run multiple campaigns across different brands and still obtain full postal discount?
- Can you create fast response communications when needed?
- Can you apply your full CRM data profile to individuals or groups?
- Can you run campaigns in conjunction with your billing / statement runs without laborious IT based changes?
- Does your outsourced print service bureau or in-house print facility minimise waste and reduce handling and storage costs?
- Can you add relevant messaging and personalisation offers to your envelopes to draw the customer inside?
- Can you ensure lower postage costs by printing your message on transactional document white space rather than adding inserts to your existing envelopes?
- Do you gain the maximum postal discounts?

If the answer to any of the previous questions is 'no' then there is an immediate justification to further explore the potential of inkjet technology. Today's print-engines, finishing technology and sophisticated workflow software have the flexibility and finesse to truly deliver on the age-old promise of one-to-one, personalised messaging. Communication becomes a multi-channel, two-way process that extends way beyond the initial contact.

It is precisely this sophistication that is driving the White Paper Factory™ strategy – the process by which highly targeted business communications are created from plain white paper via a workflow that is automated from end-to-end. The freedom afforded by such a communications set-up is extraordinary – leading to dramatic improvements in terms of quality, control, integrity and postal optimisation.

Early White Paper Factory installations limited themselves to the digitally produced pages to fill the envelope. Now, state of the art White Paper Factory facilities extend the concept to the envelope by either imprinting onto a blank/white envelope or producing a printed 'wrap' roll (from a production colour inkjet printer) that is manufactured into the envelope and integrated into the production inserter/ mailing systems by wrapping around the digital pages on the fly, without compromising integrity of the mail piece.

Pitney Bowes remains the one vendor able to provide the necessary technology and expertise at every stage of the automated White Paper Factory process. For businesses, dealing with a single supplier brings major benefits, resulting in a true partnership approach to solution integration, service support and future-proof forward planning.

Take another look at inkjet

The old ideas around inkjet capability are just that – old. Not all inkjets are created the same but the most advanced technology is now capable of delivering superb, near offset quality print at high-speed, enabling 100% variable content – including envelope messaging – within a secure environment.

Undoubtedly, many print and mail buyers are unaware that their current service is failing to deliver an optimised return on investment. It is all too easy to stick with existing technology – perhaps fearing the cost of change – but this is false economy. Potentially, these buyers could switch technologies and immediately pay less for a vastly improved level of service and enhanced flexibility. But short-term cost-savings – although welcome – are only part of the story. The reality is that full colour printing is establishing itself as a communication must. Investment into high-end inkjet technology is significant but it is an investment that delivers a long-lasting payback. Measurement is not in money-saved through cost per page, but rather in the enduring customer loyalty and business growth generated through more engaging and dynamic communications.

Those businesses not adapting to the increasing demands and expectations of customers for smarter, clearer, more convenient communications will ultimately pay the biggest cost.

'Good enough print quality' today is already behind the curve in terms of what can be achieved and your customers will notice.



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