

COMMUNIS ENHANCES CROSS-MEDIA CAPABILITIES AND DIGITAL PRINT CAPACITY



Direct mail production streamlined while adding value and flexibility

For a major marketing services provider, handling in the region of five million data records a day at six facilities, investing in new production technologies requires careful planning, confidence and, of course, the right new technologies.

About four years ago, Communis plc moved towards a more technology-led approach in order to refresh the business, become more responsive to rapidly changing market needs and attract new customers by providing innovative product options and formats. This strategy led to a move into digital print, and more recently, to the installation of two HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Presses.

Communis's customer base comprises blue-chip and FTSE 100⁽¹⁾ companies that rely on it to provide reliable, high-quality products year in and year out. Almost all of Communis's printed products are time-sensitive: direct mail, transpromotional documents and products from its security printing facilities.

Overseeing much of the transformation of the 100-year-old Communis into a modern marketing services provider is David Rushton, managing director, specialist production and sourcing division, Communis. For him, the choice of the right partner was crucial to making the strategy work:

"Technology moves very quickly, but the one thing we had to get right was the quality output: was it going to be consistent, and would it meet the market requirements? That was the main criteria in terms of selecting HP."

Integrating digital printing

Cost-effective, high-quality, short-run, full-color variable data printing capabilities were high on Communis's list of new solutions to offer, and a viable first step into digital production.

"The first new printing technology we installed after adopting our new strategy was an HP Indigo press 5500," explained Andrew Lydiatt, group business manager, digital, Communis. "We use it for short-run, high-value products with variable data text and images.

"We subsequently added another 5500 press and then two HP Indigo press w3250 web-fed machines for the higher volume work."

Even with these four HP Indigo presses, Communis's digital output was a very small percentage of the business.

"Products printed conventionally needed to be imprinted [over-printed] if they were going to be personalized. This was usually done with laser printing and the variable data could only be in black," said Lydiatt.

The addition of the full-color personalization and variable image data enabled Communis to increase the added value of mailings, while the customer benefited from the ability to print highly targeted and individual direct mail pieces.

At the same time as Communis was installing its HP Indigo presses, it was also investing in its prepress and data management infrastructure.

"We manage very large amounts of data for our customers," Lydiatt said. "This ranges from basic name and address details to CRM records that include buying habits, sales and billing information and full-color images. To enable us to handle all that data efficiently, we became a preferred service delivery partner for implementation services associated with the HP Exstream software platform."

At a glance

Industry sector:
Marketing Service Provider,
Direct Mail, Transpromo

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CHALLENGE

- Respond to demands for more complex, cost-effective, highly personalized customer communications
- Maintain high print quality levels
- Deliver a consistent experience across channels and devices
- Drive operational efficiencies with integrated and streamlined workflow

SOLUTION

- 2 x HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Presses
- 2 x HP Indigo press w3250s
- 2 x HP Indigo press 5500s
- HP Exstream software platform

RESULTS

- Efficient, cost-effective fully digital document production capability
- High color print quality and product quality
- Comprehensive variable data management and integration
- New business attracted by enhanced digital capabilities



Customers supply data in various formats, but as long as it's consistent, the HP Exstream platform can handle it.

"HP Exstream pulls the data together for the most relevant channel," Lydiatt continued. "This might be electronic, for email campaigns, or to feed mono laser printers or digital presses. Data is assembled in AFP format for transactional print, or PDF for digital print."

Pursuing the vision

A milestone in Communis's strategic plan was reached in early 2010 with the installation of an HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press, the first in the UK. With a web-width of 762mm (30in) and production speeds of up to 122m/min. (400ft/min.), the T300 press transformed Communis's digital offering.

"With the T300 web press, we can produce higher volumes of personalized color print and offer a range of new formats," Lydiatt explained. "The personalization capabilities of the T300 and the HP Indigo presses enable something of the immediacy of the personal online web experience in print. Now we can create virtually everything on-demand: millions of runs of one."

The HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press enables high-value long runs with greater added value than over printed materials because of the increased number of formats possible, and the ability to have full-color personalization on a large scale.

The combination of the HP Indigo presses and the HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press enables the selection of presses for specific jobs. With the HP Exstream software platform feeding all our digital presses, job scheduling is also made easier.

"Typically we use the HP Indigo presses for 15k-20k A4 page jobs, but we have used them for jobs up to 250k runs," said Lydiatt. "Having the flexibility with all our HP presses has

brought more customers to the full-color variable data market because the cost threshold is lowered by having the higher volume capability."

Lydiatt estimates the cross-over point⁽²⁾ between the HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press and conventional production to be between 50k and 100k copies, this can vary depending on the complexity and the number of color variations in the piece.

"It can vary widely depending on the nature of the job," Lydiatt explained.

Communis has its own finishing capability with both near-line and in-line equipment, but to give the greatest flexibility, the HP Indigo web presses and the T300 presses operate in reel-to-reel configurations.

"Digital printing currently accounts for 5-10 percent of our business, but we expect that to grow to 20-40 percent in the short-term and to 40-60 percent in the long-term," he said. "There is a bit of irony in all this because while overall we are printing less, what we are printing is of higher value: more complex and more targeted jobs, and that means we have to be more effective and more efficient throughout the chain," Lydiatt concluded.

Testament to the ever-increasing success of Communis' approach to its digital printing business is the installation of a second HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press in March 2011.

⁽¹⁾ FTSE 100 - an index of the most highly capitalized UK companies on the London Stock Exchange

⁽²⁾ The number of copies below which printing digitally is more cost-effective than printing conventionally

"The growth plan HP had for the color marketplace clearly aligned with our desire to move into a new technology-led environment. They offered more than just a printer: they offered graphic arts experience; they offered document composition tools; they offered workflow products; they offered hardware and software: they were a technology business."

— Andrew Lydiatt, group business manager, digital, Communis plc

To learn more, visit www.hp.com/go/graphicarts

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Progressive Profitable Printing

