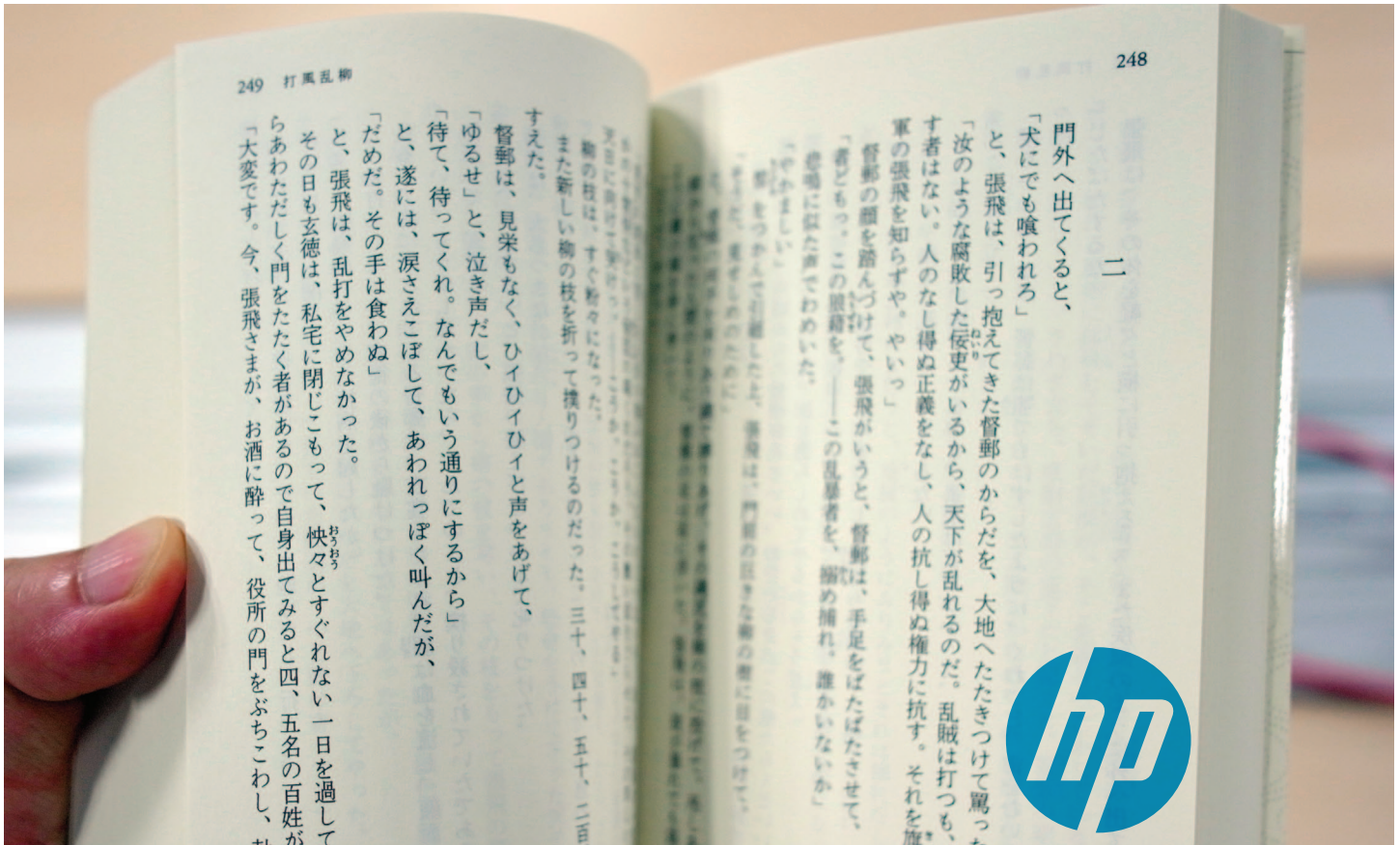


Kodansha embraces HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press to boost business agility



At a glance

Industry: Publishing
Business name: Kodansha Ltd.
Headquarters: Tokyo, Japan
Website: kodansha.co.jp

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KODANSHA

Challenge

- Improve supply chain management and reduce warehousing costs.
- Meet offset quality and media variety but with the ability to produce shorter print runs.
- Upgrade contents in new print formats, and transfer publishing data to eBooks and hybrid products.
- Achieve a streamlined workflow incorporating print, bookbinding and finishing.

Solution

- Benchmarking against international best practices, Kodansha invested in the HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press to deliver the necessary speed, efficiency and publishing flexibility.
- Using the HP T300 on short-runs of small format books and to print academic content, including upgrades from monochrome to color.

Results

- Reduced stock count, improving cost control and inventory management.
- Improved business agility; now able to print in shorter runs and respond to market demand.
- Enabled the refresh of academic content with cost-effective use of color images in previously monochrome titles.

“The HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press was able to meet our requirements. We looked at many factors, including ink-density, and test-printing showed that other companies’ equipment would not be able to meet our needs.”

– Kenjiro Umezaki, executive director of Kodansha’s Production Division

Kodansha is one of the largest publishing companies in Japan. Established in 1909, it publishes more than 50 magazine titles, along with 3,000 book titles every year. Unusual among Japanese publishers, Kodansha operates its own printing company, Toyokuni Printing.

Despite its size, reputation and vertical integration, Kodansha is not immune to the challenges of the wider publishing industry. Across the industry, print circulation figures are falling, while the availability of online content is flourishing. The print circulation of new title launches is also dwindling.

The traditional business model, where publishers use offset printers to produce large volumes of product (with the risk that not every copy will sell), is proving costly and inflexible. Unsold copies require warehousing, stock management and ongoing marketing involvement. In addition, offset printing makes it difficult to react quickly to new print opportunities.

To thrive, publishers need to be far more agile. They need to be able to repurpose content in response to market demand and, where applicable, adapt print content as eBooks, creating a new hybrid publishing market.

Kodansha wants to be able to trial new titles with shorter print runs and examine niche opportunities. This way the business is better able to quickly and cost effectively identify commercial successes, and reduce the costly storage of excess paper stock.

Benchmarking against international publishers

Kenjiro Umezaki, executive director of Kodansha’s Production Division says the business sought a new press, one capable of printing short-runs: “Even if we were only printing short-runs, we look for savings in the cost of printing, so we were considering new printing systems.”

Umezaki says Kodansha typically benchmarks new purchases against the equipment of rival publishers. He says he was impressed with the performance of the HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press and HP’s experience in international markets, particularly in the book publishing sector.

“We were looking at using the HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press not for on-demand products, but for routine short-run production for wide distribution to bookstores. To do so, we wanted to use the same offset paper as with the previous set-up.

“The HP T300 was able to meet our requirements. We looked at many factors, including ink-density, and test-printing showed that other companies’ equipment would not be able to meet our needs.”

Reducing stock costs

The HP T300 Color Inkjet Web Press has made an immediate impact. The ability to offer short-runs has reduced the risk of printing an excessive amount of copies. This will lead to a reduction in stock and improved inventory management, contributing to considerable annual savings. “We expect this will be the most significant cost-reduction area for the business,” says Umezaki.

More than cost saving, the HP T300 has enabled Kodansha to be more flexible with its approach to market. Short-runs allow the business to test a product and if demand is strong, go ahead with larger runs.



“We don’t know for sure which titles will succeed or how many copies will be sold. It’s important for us to establish the production line to supply books promptly according to market response,” says Umezaki. “Furthermore, if we can determine how many books we should produce at any one time, it becomes a less risky process.”

In addition, academic books, previously published in monochrome, can now be produced in color, making the product more attractive and able to command a higher margin. In addition, the publishing content is reused in the publishing of eBooks.

Umezaki says printing towards the upper range of the HP T300’s limits, which is color print runs of up to 3,000, will deliver cost comparable to offset. This allows Kodansha to print in color at monochrome prices, while improving margins and delivering a higher quality product. It also impacts Kodansha proof-books, promotional copies sent to bookshops and buyers.

Hideki Okada, chief operating officer of Toyokuni Printing, says the HP T300 is now being trialed on bunko books, small format books similar to paperbacks, with print runs between 300 and 500. This format needs to be light yet robust, requiring thin paper but glued solidly to prevent falling apart. For quality purposes, it is important neither ink nor Bonding Agent shows through the thin paper.

The HP Bonding Agent, a colorless liquid applied before the other inks and only where inks are printed improves optical density and pigment adhesion to the paper. The HP T300’s use of the HP Bonding Agent means Kodansha can not only print onto low-cost, uncoated offset media, but by doing so, achieve a level of durability and output quality that surpassed what it considered achievable.

“We’d like to use the new system to increase the number and variety of such publications,” he says. “We can improve bunko books by including more pictures and illustrations, something the HP T300 enables.

“Usually with inkjet printing, you need to choose a specific paper carefully, but with the HP T300, you can use standard offset paper. The effectiveness of the HP Bonding Agent also gives us more flexibility in choosing the paper.

“We can streamline the production process with bookbinding and finishing. Conventional high-volume production is based on a separation of these processes. The HP T300 gives us a good opportunity to streamline our production.



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