

“HP’s digital presses have transformed how we communicate with customers, bringing in millions in extra revenue, attracting new customers and improving loyalty at the same time as reducing our paper usage.”

– Jo Van De Weghe, sales and marketing manager, Symeta



Born out of the merger of Druco printers, one-to-one specialist Mitto and Colruyt Group Services, Symeta combines the strengths of the latest printing and press techniques along with multichannel marketing platforms.

Today, 300 employees at two modern production sites dedicate themselves to making customers’ business communications more effective. Through tailor-made print and document management solutions, the company simplifies the way customers receive and manage communications. The concept is summed up by “The right message to the right person, through the right channel and at the right time.”

Symeta also acts as the in-house printer for mega-retail brand Colruyt Group, which comprises budget superstore Colruyt with over 200 Belgian locations and other brands including Spar, Okay BioPlanet and Dreamland. Central to the sales strategy for Colruyt is the intelligent design and targeting of discount coupons. In order to streamline the printing process, Symeta invested in its first digital press three years ago. At that time, each coupon booklet consisted of 32 pages and was delivered to two million customers.

“The problem with that approach was that the sheer volume of coupons put people off. There was no personalization so there was a lot of information to wade through before finding a deal relevant to the individual customer,” explains Jo Van De Weghe, sales and marketing manager at Symeta. “The CEO asked us to explore how we could deliver a more customized booklet.”

Quality, speed and reliability

“After exploring the market, we decided that HP provided by far the most reliable, fast and best quality digital presses available,” adds Van De Weghe. “HP also invited us to visit industry leaders in data-driven publishing and delivery solutions, O’Neil Data Systems in Los Angeles, to see the presses in action. It was this level of engagement that convinced us that HP would be a long-term strategic partner rather than just a supplier of kit.”

Symeta first invested in a HP T400 Color Inkjet Web Press to handle the coupon booklet production. The impact was immediate. Symeta transformed its approach, from producing two million copies of the same 32-page booklet, to printing 1.6 million customized four-page booklets with specific products the company knew those consumers were interested in according to their purchase behavior. There is a comprehensive query process involved in identifying the right customers for any of the available discounts.

“We have 1,000 different discounts for every bi-weekly booklet and need to match them to the right consumer. This process isn’t just about looking at past purchases,” says Van De Weghe. “Before we print and deliver a coupon, there are around 24,000 queries to process based on data we have already accumulated. This allows us to build a core profile of a brand consumer that we can then compare with our customer base and match to a particular discount.”

Amazingly, all 1.6 million booklets could be printed in just over a day thanks to the speed and reliability of the HP T400. Every two weeks the company produces a new set of coupons.

More services, more customers, more revenue, less paper

There are multiple advantages to this approach. First, the customers can apply for a redemption card in order to redeem the coupons without physically cutting them out. As a result, card holders have risen from 50,000 to over one million, which has led to increased revenue of between six and nine percent. The new approach has also drastically reduced the amount of paper and ink used by 600 million pages a year – not only saving money but also minimizing the impact on the environment.

“This has transformed how we communicate with customers. By giving consumers deals on products we know they like, we are forming a closer relationship and encouraging them to visit the store and spend more. The rise in revenues corresponds to an extra €360M in group turnover,” says Van De Weghe. “And we have also slashed printing costs and paper use. It’s a win-win scenario all round.”

“For us, print is still the primary customer communication method. Even with the evolution of social and mobile channels, it remains the most important means of communication. However, by 2008 our mailers were too crowded to be effective,” adds Bart Van Roost, director of strategic marketing and business intelligence at Colruyt. “At the time, we were limited by technology, so Symeta and HP have played a crucial role in making our messaging more relevant. Households are now using more coupons because they appeal directly to the consumers’ needs.”

The company has also produced fully personalized newspapers for Zeb, a leading high street fashion retailer, which incorporates customers’ name and date of birth with content tailored to their interests.

Following this extraordinary success, Symeta added an HP T200 Color Inkjet Web Press to handle shorter print runs, including books and magazines in volumes as low as 1,000 copies of 16 pages. It has also invested in an HP Indigo 7500 Digital Press for new products, including photo books, cookbooks and highly personalized fashion brochures for customers such as Dior.

“The Indigo 7500 gives us much higher quality on heavy stock paper – 350gm media for example presents no problems,” comments Van De Weghe. “That allows us to produce luxury printed goods like our personalized cookbooks, which customers can customize and order online in a number of different languages. All these added-value services bring us even closer to our existing customers while attracting a whole new audience.”

Looking to the future

With HP now at the heart of Symeta’s digital print operations, the company is looking to future innovations to stay ahead of the curve.

“We dream of producing a fully customized 32-page magazine with not only coupons but content such as recipes specifically tailored to that individual. HP will help us realize this dream,” concludes Van De Weghe. “Colruyt has been amazed by what we have created with HP. It is a strategic partnership that will form a critical part of the company’s future growth.”



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