

More Social Than Big Boys

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Want to tweak Jay Stewart? Discuss the importance of changing your company's name in order to compete with the other lemmings known as marketing communications firms. The owner of Capital Offset cringes at the thought. The "offset" is in his company's name for a reason...that's the type of work it does.

"I see some companies' names and I can't tell what they actually do," Stewart relates. "Sometimes I hear the name and I think, what are you and what does it mean? I haven't felt a compulsion to rebrand my company to some other name that hides the fact we're printers."

There's no crisis of identity at Capital Offset, where craft is king and the process is almost as much a work of art as the piece itself. It competes in four major disciplines, led by the production of museum and gallery books, along with fine art photography. A recent job for Capital Offset was an illustrative book containing all the design and art from the Obama campaign; the result of which, Stewart proudly (and rightly so) notes, will end up on the president's desk.

The other three legs to the Capital Offset stool are special-edition, illustrated books (memoirs, corporate histories); educational (alumni publications and viewbooks for independent schools and universities); and general commercial printing.

It's easy to tell that Stewart has a soft spot and a passion for the art books. Capital Offset enjoys a fairly wide berth for this discipline in the Northeast, and it's Stewart's eye for color and matching proofs against the original artworks that keeps his services in demand.

"I tend to travel a lot, going to client sites—museums, galleries—to review our proofs against the original art," he says. "We also photograph collections; we'll bring our photographer and set up a



Some pundits have argued that the social media craze is just getting started, and that it will have a long-term impact on how people, and business, will interact as the 21st century gathers steam. Others believe that certain social platforms, particularly Facebook, are in danger of flaming out within the next 12 months due to overexposure.

Regardless of what side of the fence you stand on, there is certainly enough consensus—and a concerted effort—among smaller printers, in particular, to embrace social media. Why the small guys? Simple. They have more personal interaction with their clientele, and some shops spend an insane amount of time with those intimately involved with a project. When a customer calls with an issue, quite often it's the owner and not a customer service rep or gatekeeper on the other end of the line.



laptop and camera for the shoot. We regularly print 300 line screen tritone and duotone work on coated or uncoated stocks, which is required for the photography reproduction side of our work."

While acknowledging that many publishers opt to outsource premium illustrated books overseas, Stewart notes that not all clients are motivated solely by price. "Certainly, offshore printers are a major, competitive force," he says. "But, there are plenty of reasons for clients to print their jobs in the United States, including press checks, trust and speed."

Often, there isn't enough lead time prior to an exhibit or event to accommodate delivery by boat. And, when detail and subtlety are factored in, along with the client's desire to "live through" the color approval process, it is printers like Stewart who have the experience and respect that provides peace of mind.

"Our team is fastidious when it comes to expectations for how we reproduce images," he adds. "We



Robert Cregg, foreman (left), exhibits pages of a book that were printed on a 40" Heidelberg press (shown in background), while Glen Adams holds the book's cover output on a Presstek 52DI (behind him).

run fine line screens and push for high ink density, even on uncoated paper. Our clients see a difference, but there's no doubt that some people out there wouldn't see a difference or wouldn't care."

For Capital, which peaked in 2007 with \$6 1/2 million in sales and a workforce of 35 people, the recession has visited its core markets during the past few years, particularly the art space. Instead of ordering a cache of large-scale books for art exhibits, clients would dial back to more modest tomes, sometimes saddle stitched books or even fold-out brochures. Keeping the budget-conscious buyers in mind, Stewart acquired a Presstek 52DI digital offset press to augment his two 40" Heidelberg (102-6P and CD102-FL) sheetfed presses.

The 52cm landscape-format press also paved the way for Capital Offset to obtain a Kompac Kwik-Finish off-line coater.

"Over the years, we struggled with the question of whether we should have a small-format press," Stewart admits. "The 52DI has filled a void and does a great job printing brochures for our existing clients. It's also great at printing covers, which was part of the motivation for purchasing the off-line coater. We felt that if we were not going to print the covers on our 40" press with in-line aqueous coater, then we'd use something off-line."

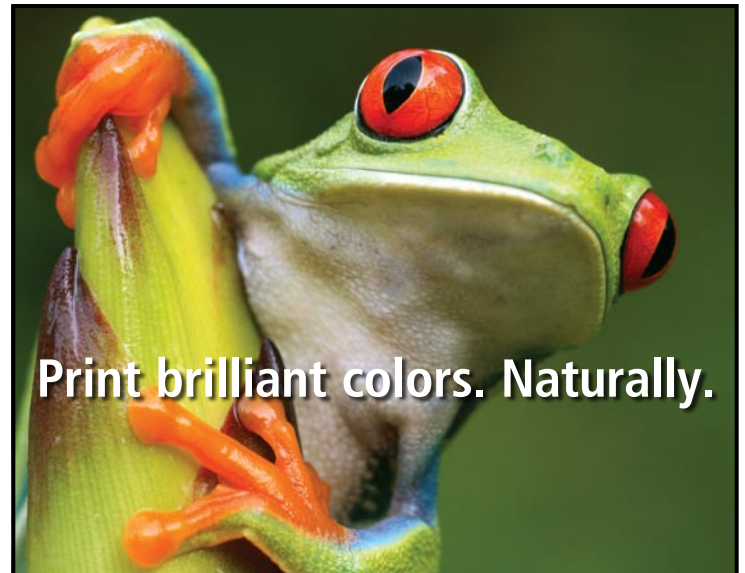
Social media has been a great source for Capital Offset to keep clients abreast of what it's doing and showcase its capabilities at the same time. For about the past year, Capital Offset has promoted a Project of the Month feature on its Website and via both Twitter and Facebook feeds. During production of "Designing Obama," the work's producer (and lead art director), Scott Thomas, put together a slick, impressive video that he shot at Capital Offset, highlighting the production process.

"The first week we launched our Facebook page, I was struck by the fact that it received hundreds of hits," Stewart notes. "It was incredible and made me realize just how powerful social media really is."

Stewart would like to see the company replace one of its 40" Heidelberg presses in the next couple of years, economy permitting. He's bullish on the growth potential of art books, and also has faith that the power of the printed piece will continue to sustain educational viewbooks, which rely on triggering an emotional response in prospective students to learn more about a particular university.

More than a target sales range, Stewart relies on an immense sense of satisfaction for the successful completion of a complex project. These books are indeed art objects in themselves and will stand the test of time, resonating with their owners long after profit numbers in the financial ledger have faded.

"We come to work every day loving what we do," Stewart admits. "We're very fortunate to work on these amazing books, serving a unique and outstanding client base from around the country. Hopefully, these books will be cherished for years to come. For me, that's very rewarding."



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