

CASE STUDY: Leahy Press — “Putting Ink on Paper in a Quality Manner”

Company

Leahy Press Incorporated, Montpelier, Vermont

Profile

Commercial printer with 18 employees providing high-quality printing and personal service to corporate, university and government customers, as well as design studios and advertising agencies

Challenge

Acquire a platemaking process that would speed-up plate production and help produce cost-effective short-run and fast turnaround printing while also maintaining the high quality for which the company is recognized

Solution

Dimension CTP system and chemistry-free Anthem Pro plates

Results

- Fast plate production
- Increased productivity in both prepress and pressroom
- Faster job turnaround and lower costs
- Ability to cost-effectively produce short-run jobs
- High resolution plates that parallel the high-quality presswork the company produces
- Cost savings through the elimination of film, chemistry and disposal
- Better allocation of personnel and physical plant resources that were once occupied by plate production

Vermont Printer Gains Advantages with Presstek Chemistry-free CTP

The commercial driveway that leads uphill to Leahy Press has more turns and switchbacks than a black diamond trail in nearby Stowe Mountain Ski Resort. Such is life in Montpelier, Vermont, where “the nation’s smallest state capital” spreads steeply up the sides of the narrow valley of the Winooski River.

In character with the location, the platemaking process at Leahy Press once seemed as laborious and convoluted as a long uphill trek in the nearby Green Mountains. About its previous film-based platemaking process, co-owner Steve Smead remarks, “There were way too many steps involved. It was time-consuming, and it required too much equipment and produced too much waste material to be effective.”

Today, a Presstek Dimension CTP system and chemistry-free Anthem Pro plates give Leahy Press a fast, direct route from digital files to high-quality press-ready plates, with the minimum number of steps and without any waste. The high efficiency of the Dimension system and suitability of Anthem Pro plates for high-quality presswork enable Leahy to continue its long tradition of both service and craftsmanship while meeting the demands of today’s competitive marketplace for short run lengths, faster turnaround and lower costs.



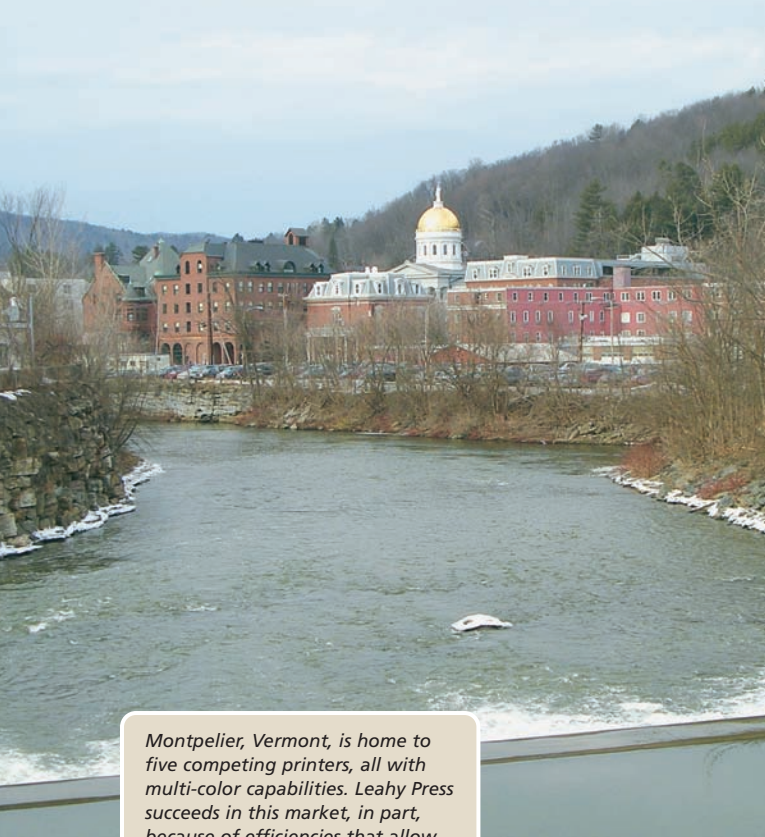
Their previous monthly cost of film, alone, would offset the monthly payments for the Dimension.

A History of Growth

Leahy Press has been a fixture in Montpelier and Central Vermont since its start-up in the 1930s at its original location across from the Vermont State Capitol building. The founders, parents of Vermont’s current U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, ran the business until retirement in 1969, when Ron and Marty Kowalkowski took over ownership. At that time, there were three employees. Soon after acquiring the print shop, Ron and Martha moved it to larger quarters and added an outside sales effort. Since then, growth has been a constant factor at Leahy Press.

While growth changed the original character of the business forever, Leahy Press remains a family-owned business.

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Montpelier, Vermont, is home to five competing printers, all with multi-color capabilities. Leahy Press succeeds in this market, in part, because of efficiencies that allow for competitive pricing, fast turnaround and higher volume. Presstek chemistry-free CTP is part of their equation.

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Deena Smead, daughter of Ron and Martha, remembers helping her parents cut paper ballots they printed for the state during the 1970s. Today, Deena and her husband, Steve, own and operate the business at its current 13,000 square-foot facility, which includes a modern pressroom, bindery, digital prepress department, and customer support areas. While visitors are welcomed in a friendly Vermont manner, it is immediately apparent that, with 18 employees and over 350 clients, Leahy Press is a busy and vital regional provider of printing services.

Higher Efficiency Without Sacrificing Quality

The vast majority of work that Leahy receives is multi-color printing that the company produces on its 29-inch five-color Heidelberg Speedmaster 74. A two-color Printmaster and a two-color Ryobi 3302 supplement their press capacity. All three presses are run exclusively with Anthem Pro plates.

While in years past Leahy printed forms and paper ballots for the State of Vermont, now they print high-end publications for the state government like the Fish and Game Division’s popular annual calendar. Leahy’s customer base includes regional graphic design firms and advertising agencies, colleges and universities, and a number of customers in Vermont’s corporate community. Cabot Creamery, Food Science Corporation, and Global Health Council are among businesses that call on Leahy to meet a variety a printing needs, from corporate-level communications to point-of-purchase sales items. “We deliver a wide range of jobs to our clients, from as few as 500 discount coupons for Cabot Creamery to their long-run catalogs,” Steve explains. As this is being written, Leahy is printing a run of 102,000 12-page catalogs for the dairy products company.

While there has not been a downturn in medium- to long-run printing for Leahy’s customers, Montpelier is not insulated from the world and the Smeads see the same demands experienced throughout the industry for frequent short-run color, increasingly faster turnaround, and more competitive pricing. With five competing printers in the Montpelier area, all with multi-color capabilities, the Smeads have to continually look for ways to keep their competitive edge.

With 65 to 75 percent of their monthly revenue from “putting ink on paper,” the Smeads continuously focus on making their printing operations more efficient and profitable. After eight years of using a film-imagesetter to output digital files, they needed to move to a computer-to-plate system.

Choosing Chemistry-free CTP

After looking at three CTP systems, they installed a Presstek Dimension system because of its chemistry-free imaging and the speed of producing a press-ready plate. Dimension systems employ thermal imaging that eliminates the need for safelights and chemical processing. Anthem Pro plates require only a water wash after imaging and they are ready to hang on press.

“When we saw that other options required a special safe-light room and chemistry, we knew that we would purchase the Dimension,” Steve says. For the Smeads, the initial attraction to Presstek’s chemistry-free imaging was the cost savings involved. “At \$300 to \$400 a barrel to ship out and dispose of waste chemistry, we knew that we didn’t want to handle chemistry anymore.” Steve reports that almost immediately after installing the Dimension, he realized that their previous monthly cost of film, alone, would offset the monthly payments for the Dimension. “And, that doesn’t even include the costs of chemistry and disposal,” Steve adds.

In addition to improving productivity and lowering costs in their prepress area, Steve points out that the ease of making plates on the Dimension contributes to a faster, more responsive and competitive workflow overall, completing a prepress strategy that strives for maximum productivity.

“The Speedmaster 74 has features that offer fast and efficient printing, like automatic plate hangers, automated wash-up, and pre-setting for ink roll-up,” Steve says. To further increase the efficiency and productivity of the press, Steve explains that they “run process color nearly all day, every day.” They have even converted some customers’ projects from Pantone colors to process colors for better price and value. Combined with the ease and speed of platemaking using the Dimension system, they are able to offer competitive pricing on jobs as low as 500 to 1,000 impressions, sometimes completing 10 or more jobs on the press in a single day. Leahy’s ability to efficiently print short-run color on their five-color press is especially advantageous in serving customers who, like Cabot Creamery, need printed products in a wide variety of sizes and run lengths, all with consistent color

and quality. While Anthem Pro is a cost-effective solution for Leahy on runs as low as 500, it still provides high-quality performance on runs up to 100,000 impressions.

Higher Levels of Service

Expressing Yankee frugality, Steve says, “Being able to do more with what we already have helps us help our customers without adding cost.” Even though Leahy Press often has to produce rush jobs, they never impose rush charges. “Technology increases the demand for rush jobs,” Steve asserts, “but technology also provides the means for us to do 24-hour turnaround.”

“They’re amazing. I’d recommend them to anyone,” says Tom Brownell of Sullivan Brownell Davies, a design firm that regularly works with Leahy. Tom recounts a recent rush job for Killington Ski Resort. “We gave Leahy the materials on Wednesday afternoon,” he recalls, “and they shipped the job on Friday—100,000 brochures in two different versions!” According to Steve and his customers, turnaround like that is not uncommon. Steve explains, “Digital workflow, the speed of our platemaking process, and our press speed all contribute to our ability to meet those abbreviated schedules.”

Asked if he is aware of Leahy’s chemistry-free CTP system, Tom considers his answer. While he doesn’t know the Presstek brand or how it works, he does realize that it has had a positive impact on his supplier. “We always heard about the platemaking process—how long it took—especially whenever we needed to make a change on press. Now, we never hear about it. It’s not an issue anymore.”

Added Benefits of Chemistry-free CTP

Because the Dimension is easy to use, with few steps and no special skills required, everyone in Leahy’s prepress department can make a plate, as well as Steve, Deena, and the press operators when necessary. “Because it presents an opportunity for

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Cabot Creamery's sales and marketing efforts require a wide variety of printed products. "It's advantageous to have Leahy Press handle all of our needs. We get highly consistent color, quality and pricing," says Jen Neary, Cabot's Creative Services Director.

Dimension225 Excel



Dimension CTP systems are available in two-, four- and eight-page models. Dimension250 Excel and Dimension450 Excel (pictured at far right), offer semi-automatic plate loading, and automatic wash and stacking. Dimension225 Excel, Dimension425 Excel and Dimension800 all offer the smallest footprint with convenient top loading and unloading. All models provide streamline chemistry-free plate production and ease-of-use with no special skills required.

Dimension450 Excel



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employees to multi-task, and because we never have to wait for a plate, it really improves productivity in both prepress and the pressroom,” Steve notes.

Another major benefit that Leahy has realized since installing the Dimension is the amount of physical space that they have been able to reallocate for other uses. “We’re using our available space better by not having to store film or plates for our customers. Plates are easy enough to make at low enough cost so there’s no reason to save a customer’s plates,” Steve says.



While Steve and Deena Smead manage and work all aspects of their business, they place special attention on customer service. “We like the face-to-face, direct involvement with our customers,” says Deena.

Furthermore,

Leahy was able to move its prepress operators and computers into the space previously occupied by their film-based operation. The compact Dimension system is located in the new prepress area alongside the desktop systems where client files are processed. Now, the Smeads are converting the former prepress area into a well-appointed customer service area, complete with color-correct viewing stations and Internet access for customers.

Asked what further changes are in store at Leahy Press, Steve answers, “We will promote more PDF workflow. Combined with the speed of our platemaking, it results in work getting to press even faster.” The Smeads considered a toner-based digital press and offering mailing services but recognized that their strength is, as Steve describes it, “putting ink on paper in a quality manner.”

For the time being, the people at Leahy Press will concentrate on what they know how to do best—deliver high-quality offset printing with a high level of personal service. Their Dimension system is helping them do that faster, with more flexibility, and more competitively. ■

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For information about Presstek digital solutions, or to schedule a free demonstration, visit

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Leahy Press delivers quality printing to customers, large and small, throughout Northern New England.

