

Filling the Mid-Range Void

HUDSON PRINTING has been in business for a half century. Today the Macedonia, OH-based operation has 35 employees and produces about \$3.5 million to \$4 million in annual sales. Despite the economic turmoil, the company grew 20 percent in 2010 and added nine employees.

This general commercial printer also has a large promotions department and offers graphic design services, both of which are geared to helping its customers advertise their businesses. Three small format ABDick presses; a four color, 29" Komori; and three four color, 40" Harris presses comprise its conventional sheetfed offset production platform. In addition, the company operates both monochrome and color Konica Minolta digital presses.

About two years ago, Hudson moved from a conventional, filmbased platemaking process to a computer-to-plate (CTP) workflow and, in early 2010, was looking for a means to more efficiently address requests for print runs in the 5,000 to 25,000 sheet range.

A CTP Wish List

"As you can imagine, our filmbased platemaking process was very inefficient and time-consuming," says Al Carrero, president of operations and finance. "It was past time to move into CTP. We were looking for an easy-to-use platemaker, and plates that were cost-effective for the many mid-range runs we produce, but that could also accommodate longer runs when necessary. In addition, we needed plates that would run well on our older presses, which are a lot less forgiving than today's newer presses."

Carrero also realized that today's printing business is a makeready business. "You don't make money off printing these days; you make it off makereadies. We needed to add a fast-makeready solution that could address the fast-growing category of 5,000 to 25,000 counts, which was not profitable to produce using either our digital or conventional offset presses."

As a result of these requirements,

Hudson added a Presstek Dimension Pro 800 using Aeon plates, and a Presstek 52DI digital offset press to cover mid-range static runs. These acquisitions rounded out the shop's production platform to meet existing customer needs.

With its updated production platform in place, Hudson was well positioned to take advantage of growth opportunities as the recession began to ease. Not only is the firm more efficient and profitable, but its customers are delighted at the fast turnaround the printer is now able to deliver.

"Getting a job ready for press, including film-based processes, manual proofs and half-day press checks used to be time-consuming," comments Carrero. "Today, our customers are able to look at the job on-screen and, once approved there, we can have output for them to review within 15 minutes. In a process that literally could have taken days in the past, now they can be in and out in 30 to 45 minutes with job production under way.

"That has really made our customers happy. No one has time to sit around for half a day doing press checks anymore. If we can free them up and make their jobs easier, it benefits all of us."

In addition to a more efficient production process, Hudson has also been able to improve overall quality, reduce time and cost of makeready, and work with a production platform that is much easier to operate. "And the quality has been unbelievable," he adds.

Carrero points out that the 52DI filled a hole in the company's production process. "It was one more tool in our toolbox, assuring that we could meet demand for small- to mid-sized runs that were not economically feasible with our existing toner-based or conventional offset presses. We had the firepower to do the very short runs with our digital presses, and to do large runs with our conventional presses.



The ownership team at Hudson Printing includes Al Carrero, Pat McCausland and Gary Began.

"But you can't afford a two-hour makeready for those mid-range runs. It threw our costs out of whack," he adds. "Now we can address it all, from ultra-short-run work all the way up through runs of a couple hundred thousand with an extremely versatile platform."

Hudson's new configuration also allows the firm to produce projects on stocks ranging from onion skin to 24-pt., and the company is now seeing quite a bit of demand for heavy posters and special mailers that use these thicker stocks. Carrero cites a confectioner that wanted to produce giveaways for its stores using 24-pt., and notes that he has found more opportunities to produce shelf-talkers and other point-of-sale materials.

He attributes at least 30 percent of Hudson Printing's growth in 2010 directly to its new investments "In addition, just having something this new to talk about with customers and prospects opened more doors for us, whether or not they ultimately had a need for those specific capabilities.

"We are prepared for the economic upturn. If I had one word of advice for my peers, it would be—don't sit back and wait. Make those investments now, if you can." **PI**