

A New Lease on Life

To increase efficiency and cut costs, Brown University carried out a full-scale reorganization of its Graphic Services department. After adding equipment, and cross-training staff, the Rhode Island in-plant is busier than ever.



Leslie Rutledge, director of Graphic Services at Brown University, goes over a proof with Jim Smith (left), plant manager, and James Watkins, DI press operator.

IN THE summer of 2010, Leslie Rutledge moved from her position at San Diego State University, where she was manager of ReproGraphics, to head up the Graphic Services department at Brown University, in Providence, R.I.

“Prior to my arrival, the university had undergone a reorganization, which had to be completed by June 30th,” Rutledge says. Targeting redundancy, the university was combining administrative services to achieve greater efficiencies.

“The decision was made to consolidate eight or nine graphic designers from different departments under the director of Graphic Services to create a centralized team to provide cost-effective, high-quality design,” she says. “The print facility was left alone until my arrival.”

When Rutledge came on board in August of 2010, she was charged with examining how best to reposition the 20-employee Graphic Services department to bring more value to the university.

“It was bigger than simply incorporating an art director and an additional graphic designer into the services,” she recalls. “We needed to figure out who

we wanted to be, how we would position ourselves, and how we could modernize and update the department to meet the university's current and future needs."

Rutledge says she had terrific support from her boss, Elizabeth Gentry, assistant vice president, Financial & Administrative Services, throughout the entire process.

"She has supported me a million percent," Rutledge lauds.

A Familiar Situation

Rutledge had faced a similar challenge when she first came to San Diego State University.

"Based on those experiences, the first thing I did was reach out and talk to customers," she says. "I wanted to know what they liked, what they didn't like, where they thought we needed to improve and how we might be able to capture the design work that was being outsourced to firms off campus."

Feedback ran the gamut, from very happy customers to unhappy customers. In some cases, Rutledge discovered, work was being sent off campus because of a lack of confidence that it could be completed accurately and on time by the campus print shop. In other cases, the in-plant simply did not have the resources to accomplish the work.

"Although our 'Brown First' business model centralizes all university printing through Graphic Services," Rutledge comments, "if we cannot meet customer requirements, then the work goes off campus for services."

At the time, the Graphic Services print facility, which is located off-campus, had an HP Indigo digital press, an aged two-color Sakurai and a pair of Hamada presses.

"Even though we had the Indigo, it was being used as a four-color press," Rutledge remarks. "There was no true variable work being done. Pricing was even established like an offset press, with setup and makeready charges."

Based on the model that had worked for her in San Diego, Rutledge began the process of determining how to restructure Graphic Services to address the issues she had uncovered through her evaluation of the operation and

from customer feedback. First to go was the Sakurai press.

"It sat there more than it ran," Rutledge points out. "Hardly anyone wanted two-color work, and we could not produce quality four-color on it."

Equipping for Change

She was able to make a case for replacing the Sakurai and the two Hamadas with a four-color Presstek 34DI digital offset press. This would allow the in-plant to produce affordable, high-quality, full-color printing in the short runs its customers were looking for.

"We kept the HP Indigo for short runs, and to be able to build the business with variable data services," Rutledge adds.



**Presstek 34DI
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She also worked with Presstek to purchase pressroom and DI supplies using its online portal (shop.presstek.com) to consolidate some of the purchasing and gain some benefit from volume purchases.

"We have a great inside sales rep, and we have had good success with the Toyo inks," Rutledge says. "We can also print metallics and varnish on the Presstek 34DI, and it looks gorgeous. Envelopes are another thing we do a huge amount of on the DI. We are really running that press to the max."

Mailing Moved Off Campus

In March of 2011, Rutledge began in earnest the job of reorganizing Graphic Services from top to bottom.

"I know this runs against the grain for many

print shops, but one thing I did during that reorganization was to shut down our mailing operation,” she explains. “Our equipment was old and dated, and I knew that Intelligent Mail Barcodes were on the way. We couldn’t handle that. It was better for

Rutledge acted as the plant manager for three months while she sought a qualified candidate for that role. She also hired two excellent press operators, one who was already experienced with the DI press, and another who knew the HP Indigo press but was also cross-trained on the DI. Currently the shop has three press operators.

“In a plant manager, I was looking for someone who really understood digital and variable data, who had an eye for color and who had good management skills,” Rutledge notes. She also wanted to ensure buy-in from the remaining staff so she could build a cohesive team.

“Seven people on the team interviewed seven candidates for plant manager,” she explains, “and Jim Smith was the top choice for everyone. It was really amazing.”

Smith came from a commercial print operation in upstate New York. He has about 10 years of experience in managing prepress, color and digital printing operations, and as an added bonus, he has IT skills.

“Coming from a commercial printer, he also brought a customer service perspective,”

Rutledge says. “It was also helpful that he was grounded in XMPie and Indigo Yours Truly, so he brought a great deal of valuable knowledge with him and has really raised the bar in the department.”

One area where the bar has been raised is in the production of variable data work. Examples of typical variable data jobs the shop is now producing include:

- Variable postcards for Admissions,

thanking prospective students for their interest in the university.

- A personalized dining services guide that includes the student’s name and his/her chosen meal plan.
- QR Codes on the back of business cards for various university faculty and staff.

Cleanup Time

With the plant manager and press operators in place, Rutledge turned her attention to cleaning up the shop, getting rid of old inventory that had been stored in a warehouse and updating the bindery. The in-plant added a Duplo 645 slitter and a Duplo System 5000 bookletmaker. The folder and cutter were also overhauled to bring them up to par.

“This updated bindery capability allows us to deliver higher quality finished work faster,” says Rutledge. “Our previous bookletmaker did not have a face trim. As one example, we do hundreds of booklets for a Brown program called Choices, ranging from 32 pages plus cover to 80 pages plus cover. We had to run the books and then take them to the cutter for the face trim. Now we simply program the Duplo for the book. If it is a larger book, we can use the hand marry station for the cover. Books are done in one pass, and what used to take days to complete now takes hours.”

Rutledge is also very pleased with the results she receives from the Duplo 645.

“It is unbelievable how much time and aggravation this saves us,” she says. “We score all covers, and even 100-lb. text when needed to eliminate cracking. We used to score on the cutter or folder, which meant we couldn’t cut or fold while that was going on, or we sent it out. We also use it for perfining, which was previously done on the folder. Our new process is much more efficient.”

Rutledge cross-trained all of her staff on the new equipment so they could move where the work is.

“The prepress staff can operate the Duplo 645, and they are responsible for producing the layouts for this machine,” she explains. “Our



Since adding this Duplo System 5000 bookletmaker, the in-plant has been able to deliver higher-quality work at faster speeds. Operating it here is Kennedy Arias. In the background, Joe Volante takes finished books off the conveyor to box them for shipping.

the department and for the university to partner with off-campus experts for mailing services. That has worked out really well for us.”

Rutledge also points out that should the university decide to bring mailing services back in house at some time in the future, it would not be hampered with inadequate equipment infrastructure and would have an opportunity to start the service fresh.

pressmen can also run both Duplos. Indigo operators can run the DI, and the DI operator will be trained on the Indigo. We need to make the best use of everyone's time, and these cross-training efforts have paid big benefits."

Brown's Graphic Services department is now a much different operation than it was a year and a half ago. Rutledge has been able to recapture much of the outsourced work except for very long runs and oversized pieces.

"Our amazingly talented art director, Sara Ladds, has also been key to our turnaround," she says. Ladds provides creative consulting to customers early in the development process for print projects. "Customers who used to go off campus for design are now delighted to be working with us," remarks Rutledge.

Today, the shop is profitable, but Rutledge says, "What I measure is quality and on-time delivery. We have made significant strides in those areas, and those are two things

we really need to stay on top of to retain our customer base."

More metrics are in store for Graphic Services in the near future, however. The department is installing EPMS Enterprise 32, an MIS system from Enterprise Print Management Solutions designed specifically for colleges and universities. It will allow the in-plant to collect shop floor data and better manage inventory.

"It has everything you need to run a business, including job submission via the Web, which we will begin to implement in January 2012," Rutledge says.

The MIS system will help Graphic Services successfully navigate the changes Rutledge expects to see



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—Leslie Rutledge

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over the next decade, which include shorter runs, more variable data and more "responsible" printing.

"I tell my customers to print what they need when they need it," she says. "This gives them the flexibility to update and change materials easily.

"I believe there will continue to be reduction in the printing of forms, letterheads and similar items that can be efficiently processed online," she continues. "An average in-plant will need to become involved in printed material as well as electronic delivery."

Rutledge and her team are excited about the future of Graphic Services at Brown University. The reorganization process has given them an opportunity to develop into a strong team, dedicated to customer service and brimming with new ideas.

"2012 should be an exciting year," Rutledge proclaims. **IPG**