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Busy Library Checks Out DI Press

A new four-color digital offset press has allowed the King County Library System to bring outsourced work back in-house and save thousands of dollars.

— By Cary Sherburne

THE STATE of Washington's King County Library System is reportedly the second busiest library in the nation. As the county continues to grow, the library system is being called upon to expand its collection and to provide more resources for its 43 community libraries.

J. Tarner manages the five-employee graphics department in Issaquah, Wash., part of the public relations team for the library system. The team develops concepts, creates graphic design and manages print production for a range of promotional and program support materials.

The group had been using a two-color A.B.Dick duplicator and Digital Plate-Master (DPM), as well as two Canon imageRUNNER 8500 black-and-white copiers, to produce one- and two-color work. This approach had historically met most of the library system's printing needs. But as the demand for four-color printing increased, Tarner found he had to outsource a growing volume of printing. This brought increased costs and longer turnaround times.

"Although we generally experienced five- to seven-day turnaround times with our two-color press, outsourcing usually required two to four weeks," Tarner says. "On rare occasions for special rush projects, we could get outsourced work turned around in a week, but there was often an extra cost associated with those 'rush' jobs."

He needed to find a way to produce affordable, quality four-color printing in-house, without the need for more staff.

Good-Bye to Outsourcing Headaches

In February of 2006, the in-plant installed a Presstek 34DI digital offset press, replacing its two-color press.

"As a result," says Tarner, "we have virtually eliminated outsourcing, and we now routinely deliver work with a three-day turnaround, even though I have a small staff and no dedicated finishing personnel. The DI press has enabled us to significantly improve our level of service to the system."

Tarner reports that his annual outsourcing expenses have decreased from \$80,000 or more to a few thousand dollars.

The two-color to four-color transition was smooth, according to Tarner. Presstek removed the old press and installed the 34DI. Everything was up and running within a week, and that included training.

"Although there continued to be a learning curve, we were using the press almost immediately," he says.

Now Tarner has complete control over his press schedule.

"I can look out a month and know what I am going to be printing every day," he says. "The press is so accurate and reliable that I can estimate exactly how long a job will take."

Under the previous process, the in-plant produced an average of 125,000

two-color sheets a month; now it can deliver 250,000 four-color sheets.

"There are many jobs I simply would not have been able to produce in the past that we can easily handle now," he adds. Tarner points out that almost nothing has been outsourced to date in 2008.

The 2008 summer reading program will require the production of 60,000 8 1/2 x 11" stitched booklets and 50,000 four-color full-bleed 8 1/2 x 11" summer reading game sheets for preschoolers. The shop will also be producing 150,000 library program schedules.

"The DI allows us to produce all of this work in-house," he says.

Fast Turnarounds Required

Another example Tarner cites is a brochure that had a very tight production schedule. Layout was completed on a Monday, and the piece was printed,

finished and shipped by Friday. Tarner points out that while he could have done

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this job on the old two-color press, it could not have been done in that time frame. Nor could he guarantee that kind of turnaround with outsourcing.

“When we did four-color printing on the two-color press, we only printed one color at a time because we had difficulty with the registration. It took a lot of time and skill to get it done, so we were not actively promoting our four-color capability. The DI press makes this type of job easy, and the quality is exceptional.”

In addition to the Canon image RUNNER 8500s, which run about 64,000 8 1/2 x 11" images per month in forms and internal



J. Tarner (left), graphics specialist at the King County Library System, and Tamara Burke Crain, press operator.

administrative materials, Tarner has added a Canon C1 color copier to the mix to produce short runs (fewer than 500 copies) of posters, brochures, etc. By color calibrating the press to the copier, he is able to ensure equivalent color between the two devices. The Canon C1 also serves as a proofing device for the DI press, eliminating the need for a separate ink-jet proofer.

The library system also has in-house finishing equipment to support its requirements. This includes a Challenge Titan 265 cutter; two document folders, a Formax and an Ultrafold 714Xe; a C.P. Bourg tower collator; and a C.P. Bourg bookletmaker/stitcher/trimmer.

Thanks to the new press, Tarner's group now produces all of the library system's important branded and promotional work in four color. Even though letterhead is generally two-color, it is also produced on

the DI press as a four-color job.

Another advantage of the Presstek 34DI is the ability to produce more cost-effective versioned materials that allow individual libraries to be more creative in their promotional approaches. Promoting the summer reading program is an example.

“We used to print 150,000 offset shells for the summer reading program and overprint each individual library's schedule using the black-and-white copier,” he says. That took a lot of time and made the materials look generic. “Now we do a different layout for each library as a four-color job and just run them continuously throughout the months of March, April and May. That way each library can exercise more creativity, and we can produce them in 11x17" or 8 1/2 x 11", depending on the size of the library and the complexity of the program.”

Tarner's group reduced another aspect of outsourcing by printing envelopes on the DI press.

“Prices to outsource four-color envelopes were through the roof because they have to be converted,” he says. “Now we simply run Number 10 envelopes through the press.”

Four-color envelopes have been a boon for the system's library foundation, which sends out requests for dona-

tions several times per year. Tarner says that just by changing the envelope design from black-and-white to full color, it really pops in the recipient's mailbox.

Another important aspect of this transition to on-site production of four-color work is the delivery of more environmentally sound and sustainable printing services. Tarner and his team have spent a great deal of time educating customers about the new capabilities, helping them create projects tuned to the DI's functionality, and letting them know how environmentally friendly the DI press is.

“Our customers are as concerned about cost savings, sustainability and environmental friendliness as we are. They are thrilled that we have been able to eliminate seven different types of chemicals from our operation,” he notes. “With the DI's environmentally friendly operation, we now generate only about five gallons of waste per month, and that

Keeping Staffing Levels in Line

Like most in-plants, particularly in the public sector, the King County Library System needed a solution that could be implemented without adding additional staff.

At the time the system was acquiring the press, its press operator retired. This left J. Tarner, manager of the graphics department, looking for a replacement.

He turned to Tamara Burke Crain, who had previously worked for the Library System in the shipping and graphics departments, as well as in production doing copying and finishing. She was not a professional press operator.

“The DI is a different learning curve than a conventional press,” says Tarner. “You have to know more about the computer. However, someone who is computer savvy and willing to learn can operate the DI; and that is much different than it was 10 years ago. Tamara had the right combination of computer skills and enthusiasm about printing, and it has been a good match.”

gets recycled. Doubling our print capacity and discontinuing the use of chemicals has meant a huge cost savings for us.”

The library system is also using Toyo soy inks and Mohawk paper with 15 percent post-consumer waste, manufactured with 100 percent wind-generated power. In addition, there is much less makeready waste with the DI, since the press comes up to color in about 25 sheets.

Tarner reports that his customers want to know that the library is participating in “Keep it Green” initiatives in a meaningful way, and his team feels great about the environmental contribution they have been able to make with the DI press. **IPG**

Prior to launching her consulting practice, Cary Sherburne was vice president of marketing communications and outsourcing solutions at IKON Office Solutions. Before that she was a director at CAP Ventures, where she launched and managed a document outsourcing consulting service. She has also had marketing positions at Xerox, Indigo America and Bitstream and is a frequent speaker at industry events.