

You Can't Keep Offset Down

Wait, isn't digital printing supposed to be taking over while offset fades quietly away? Why, then, are so many in-plants still adding offset presses?

By Bob Neubauer

JIMMY FRIEND didn't want a new offset press.

"We thought that we would not invest in offset in the future," reveals Friend, director of University of North Texas Printing Services.

His 40-employee in-plant had two HP Indigo digital presses, and was getting good prices for long-run offset jobs from outside printers. Why rock the boat?

Then UNT got a new president and everything changed. A strong believer in the power of self-sufficiency, the president challenged her Denton, Texas, campus to accomplish more using internal resources. So Friend analyzed the print work being outsourced and discovered that \$700,000 of printing was going off campus.

"There was probably about half a million dollars worth of work that we could do," he realized—if only his in-plant had a four-color press.

So last year, UNT Printing Services installed not one but



Last year, University of North Texas Printing Services installed not one but two offset presses, including this five-color, 29" Ryobi 755XLW. Standing with it are (from left) Mark Spicer, Clem Deussen, Earl Callahan and Director Jimmy Friend.



Burlington County College installed this four-color Ryobi 524GE last year. With it here are (from left): Christine McCracken, Rick Jones, Steve Amitrano and Bob Cummings.

two new offset presses: a five-color, 29" Ryobi 755XLW and a Ryobi 3404 DI direct imaging press. Since then, the in-plant has brought lots of work back in-house.

"We're busy every day," Friend confirms—so much so that the in-plant should recoup the press's cost even sooner than planned.

"I would say it'll be recovered in probably five years, the way we're running right now," he estimates.

Offset in a Digital World

In a time when all the world is shouting "digital" and in-plants are shedding their older presses in favor of toner-based boxes, a number of in-plants have been adding sheetfed presses. In just the past year or two, new four-color presses have been installed at:

- The Houston Independent School District
- The San Bernardino Community College District
- Burlington County College
- The University of Iowa
- The Church of Scientology
- Madison Gas and Electric
- Gannon University

And that's just naming a few. BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee is preparing to install a Presstek 75DI press with an aqueous coater next month.

"In today's business climate, on-site shops must prove that they add value to a company and operate more cost effectively than outsourcing," explains Robert Pettway, manager

of BlueCross's 27-employee Print Solutions operation. "The Presstek 75DI will help us reach these objectives."

Clearly these in-plants and their parent organizations believe that in-house offset printing will save them money and help them accomplish the organization's goals more efficiently. In most cases, the new presses are the first four-color models the in-plants have owned. This means their organizations anticipate big savings from bringing outsourced long-run work back in-house.

"We brought a lot of [jobs] in," confirms Chris Matheis, director of Gannon University Press, in Erie, Pa. A year and a half ago, her eight-employee in-plant decided it could serve the university better by stepping up to a four-color press. The shop chose a Heidelberg QM DI press, refurbished by Presstek, which allowed it to stop printing four-color jobs on its two-color press and bring outsourced work back in-house. Now it's doing prospecting postcards, newsletters, note cards, orientation materials—all jobs that used to be sent to outside printers.

"It's really saving us a lot," Matheis says of the press. In fact, in its first year of operation, the press paid for its \$150,000 price tag, she reveals. Insourcing income for the most recent fiscal year is already more than double what it was a year ago, thanks in large part to the press.

Many in-plants with aging

presses end up abandoning their old offset friends and switching to a Xerox iGen4, a Kodak NexPress or something similar. In Matheis' case, though, there was never any doubt her in-plant would stick with the tried and true.

"We're all press operators. I ran presses for 15 years myself," she says. "I feel, and my employees feel, that offset's the way to go."

The 'Offset vs. Digital' Dilemma

Another in-plant that faced the offset vs. digital dilemma was Burlington County College, in Pemberton, N.J. For Print Facility Manager Steve Amitrano, the decision to purchase a four-color Ryobi 524GE instead of a digital press was just as obvious as it was to Matheis.

"Many of our runs exceeded 1,000 in quantity," he says; runs of more than 60,000 are not uncommon. "It just didn't make sense to try to run such high quantities as a digital format."

Then there was his six-employee in-plant's infrastructure, which included two other offset presses and a fairly new Fuji Dart 4300S process-less computer-to-plate system.

"We already had an offset operation in here," Amitrano notes. "We had the technicians that were capable of operating a full-color press. We had the knowledge base."

Not Mutually Exclusive

Not every new offset press installation has been an offset vs. digital decision, though. Some new presses have gone into in-plants that already have digital presses. Two examples, both in The Volunteer State, are BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee, which already had a Xerox iGen3 when it ordered its Presstek 75DI; and the University of Tennessee (UT), which installed a new two-color Heidelberg Printmaster QM 46 in the fall, despite having a Kodak NexPress 2500 in its Knoxville plant.

UT Graphic Arts Service Manager Jack Williams acknowledges that some of the work being printed on the new press could be done digitally, but he and his staff felt there was enough two-color work, like



This Heidelberg QM DI press at Gannon University paid for itself in the money it saved in just its first year of operation. Showing it off here are (clockwise from bottom left) Director Chris Matheis, Joe Dolak, Dave States, Tim Natale and Mac Reed.

forms, brochures, tickets and flyers, to keep a two-color offset press busy. The shop's NexPress, he feels, was not the best option for printing these two-color jobs. He also points out that some of the digital devices he looked at could not produce UT's signature PMS 151 orange.

Williams' in-plant is a bastion of offset, boasting six sheetfed presses, including a four-color Speedmaster XL 105. The new press is actually the in-plant's second Printmaster QM 46 (see story on page 5).

Over in Chattanooga at the Blue-Cross operation, Pettway and his team felt their iGen3 wasn't the best vehicle to produce large runs of high-quality marketing materials, booklets and other items they have planned for their new press.

"With the 75DI, we felt like it was a better fit for larger print-on-demand jobs that still require that same fast turnaround time. And, of course, it also provides us the additional ability to provide different [aqueous] coating options," he says. "The 75DI, with a six-minute makeready, burning all four plates in unison, inline on the press, takes offset printing to another league."

Because of their fast makereadies, automation and chemistry-free imaging, direct imaging (DI) presses like those from Presstek are certainly

doing their part to keep offset in play. In-plants like Cal Poly Pomona and the Houston Independent School District have installed them and boast of their ease of use, high quality and small environmental footprint.

"Affordability and sustainability are two of our key elements in terms of our mission and our goal for the people of Tennessee," remarks Pettway.

Upgrade or Outsource?

Many in-plants, faced with the upgrade-or-outsource decision, have opted for the latter. Industry-wide, 25 percent of in-plants no longer provide offset printing, according to *IPG* data. Those that chose to upgrade their presses, though, instead of outsourcing that work, clearly saw an opportunity the others did not.

"We felt like we could do it more economically in-house," says Pettway. "From a productivity and an efficiency standpoint, we felt that this [press] was the best fit for our need."

UT's Williams felt outsourcing offset work was simply not a viable option in his region. Local printers can't provide the same quality and turnaround times as his in-plant, he insists. "No one can really compete," Williams says.

In the Pinelands of New Jersey, BCC's Amitrano says his in-plant had been "minimally outsourcing" before getting its new press; it printed four-color jobs on its two-color presses.

"If we're keeping it in-house to begin with, why not do it in one pass, [in a] shorter amount of time and be able to satisfy our internal customers?" he asks. "It made sense to not only keep everything in-house but to do it cleanly."

Amitrano feels the press was definitely a worthwhile investment.

"It runs nearly every day," he reports.

In Texas, Jimmy Friend is still a little amazed at the turn of events that brought his in-plant a five-color press.

"I had pretty well come to the conclusion during my tenure here that we would never see an offset five-color press," says Friend. "I really think digital is the solution for the future, but I think offset's always going to have a place." **IPG**