

CASE STUDY:

SDSU—Making the Most of a Hybrid Printing Platform

Company

San Diego State University (SDSU),
San Diego, California

Profile

In-plant print shop with 9 employees.

Challenge

Three years ago, SDSU faced increased competition from external print providers. The Department looked for ways to stay competitive and better serve the needs of its constituents.

Solution

A Presstek 34DI® digital offset press

Results

- More productive and reliable offset printing processes
- Reduced outsourcing of four-color printing
- Chemistry-free environment with completely digital workflow
- Hybrid printing platform meets the needs for vast majority of University printing
- Increased capacity



San Diego State University is an academically rich, urban university. With almost 34,000 students, award-winning professors, top-notch research facilities, SDSU offers students the tools to expand their knowledge and their horizons.

Presstek 34DI® Press Operates in Tandem with HP Indigo to Place SDSU Reprographics at the Leading Edge

There is no policy mandating that departments have to use San Diego State University's on-campus printing service. Nevertheless, the in-plant shop found itself buried in a workload that exceeded its capabilities. With inefficient workflow, outdated equipment, turnaround times lagging behind clients' needs, and an inability to meet a growing demand for four-color printing, the University has made major changes over the last three years that have transformed the print shop's operations into a model of digital efficiency. Now, a Presstek 34DI digital offset press and an HP Indigo toner-based digital press work together to make the SDSU ReproGraphic Services a prime example of an efficient in-plant operation. This modern production platform ensures that the in-plant shop is the University community's first choice for meeting its printing needs.

"Our 'school' colors are Pantone 187 and Black," says ReproGraphics Manager Leslie Rutledge. "We have ink for the Indigo press mixed for us by Rochester Institute of Technology that perfectly matches the waterless inks we use on our Presstek DI press. This allows us to almost interchangeably use the two presses to balance workload and meet customer needs for fast turnaround." Rutledge explains that ReproGraphics operates a storefront with a PDF workflow that allows users to place orders for business cards, stationery and other items online. "We have an automated program in place to run business cards on the Indigo," she explains. "And matching stationery is then run on the DI press. We are mixing and matching the two presses all the time."

Rutledge cited a recent example where the shop had nearly a dozen different flyers ranging in run lengths of 7,000 to 10,000 that needed to be produced within a tight timeframe. "By combining the two presses, we were able to easily meet both the deadline and the customers' expectations," she remarks.

In another example, the shop was producing a 12,000 run of a small 16-page digest-sized brochure on its DI press when a change in one signature was requested. "We were able to make the change and re-run the signature on the Indigo, integrating the signature back into the run with little lost time," Rutledge explains. "It works the other way as well. The two presses complement each other and that lets us leverage our production platform to the ultimate extent."

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Continued

Prepared for Economic Challenges

Like most organizations, SDSU ReproGraphics has felt the pinch as budget cuts were implemented at the University in light of the economic downturn. “Our revenue has dropped,” says Rutledge, “but our overall financial situation is still strong. This is due to the mix of work we can now produce and the fact that our new configuration has made it more affordable for our customers to use full color.” Rutledge explains that three years ago, most of the work the shop produced was 1- or 2-color, with high end 4-color being produced off campus. Today, 80% of ReproGraphics’ production is high quality 4-color. “We are producing extraordinary work here,” Rutledge says. “Our community and peers from other universities are amazed. I am often asked to run sample jobs on the DI press for other universities who are considering acquiring one.”

Changing Printing Habits

Rutledge and her team have also worked hard to educate the campus community about the benefits of the shop’s short-run configuration. “I tell customers to print only what they need, in a print-on-demand model,” she explains. “There is no need to print long runs to inventory, and there is no penalty to come back for more. This also gives them the flexibility to make changes from run to run, saving everyone time and money, and ensuring that content is accurate and up-to-date.” Average run lengths for the DI are in the range of 2,500 to 5,000 sheets. “All things being equal,” Rutledge adds, “anything over 2,000 sheets goes on the DI press. I rarely do runs of 30,000 anymore.”

The Value of Versioning

SDSU’s production platform also makes it easier to customize documents in multiple versions. SDSU has seven colleges. Commencement programs for each college include covers, 32 pages that are common to all of the programs, and a center section of 12 to 20 pages that is unique for each college. “In the past with conventional offset,” Rutledge says, “the cover had to be designed in such a way that we printed 30,000 shells and overprinted black to vary it from college to college. Now we are able to give the colleges and the graphic designers a lot more flexibility to create their own highly customized high quality full color covers. They can add more pizzazz to their designs.” Covers are run on 12 x 18” pre-cut stock so that there is no pre- or post-print cutting. “Each cover can have unique information,” she adds. “They can use knock-out type, photos can change if needed, and the covers are much more interesting. We just queue them up on the Presstek DI press and quickly knock them out.”



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SDSU Imperial Valley Campus (IVC) is a newer remote campus served by ReproGraphics. According to Rutledge, IVC’s commencement covers had to be based on the standard template with the old process. “Now,” she says, “they can have their own cover design. One element on the cover is the number of commencement exercises the college has conducted. IVC had to use the same number as the main campus in the past; now they are not restricted in that way.”

Standardizing for Savings

Using pre-cut 12 x 18” stock for many other applications has also saved the University money. An example is Athletics, whose posters traditionally were 16 x 20” and had to be outsourced, which was quite expensive. By standardizing on 12 x 18”, ReproGraphics is now able to produce posters for Athletics sports seasons in a much more cost-effective manner. “We have spent a great deal of time educating our customers about the possibilities,” says Rutledge. “We also reach out to them on a frequent basis to make sure we are keeping up with their needs; our open houses are a good example of that. We’ve had a great turnout and visitors learned a lot.”

“We are proud of the operation we have built,” concludes Rutledge, “and also happy that we can share what we have learned with the university in-plant community. With our improved hybrid production platform, we are able to support the campus community much more effectively, and as a result, they are wholeheartedly supporting us. It is a win/win situation.” ■

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