

CASE STUDY: Universal Lithographers – A Business Plan for Growth

Company

Universal Lithographers, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Profile

This high quality 40-inch sheetfed commercial printer was founded in 1962 and has annual revenues of \$6 million.

Challenge

Universal Lithographers was looking to better accommodate increasing demand for short runs from both existing and prospective clients, while at the same time opening the door to new opportunities.

Solution

A Presstek 52DI digital offset press

Results

- Able to accommodate shorter runs on the Presstek 52DI, making its 40-inch presses more productive and eliminating the need to outsource short runs or turn away work
- Expanded range of services for existing customer base
- Acquisition of new customers by building trust with the DI's high quality, cost effective short-run capabilities
- Service in-plant shops by producing their quality and time sensitive jobs
- Supporting a Web store designed to solicit high quality short-run work
- Integrated the Presstek 52DI into its existing color profiles and workflow management



Presstek 52DI Acquired to Achieve Specific Business Objectives

Universal Lithographers is a high quality commercial printer located in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The company has 42 employees and generates annual revenues of about \$6 million. Universal Lithographers has two MAN Roland 706 40-inch sheetfed six-color presses with inline aqueous coating units. A Presstek 52DI digital offset press was recently installed to print short-run and fast turnaround color printing, which is not profitable to print on the large presses.

“We produce high-end, demanding work,” says Vice President Jerry Keller, “like annual reports and other corporate marketing pieces. We do business in a 250-mile radius that includes Chicago.” The company produces high-end graphics for major manufacturers, insurance companies and financial institutions, as well as advertising and design firms.

Business Plan Includes Presstek 52DI

Universal Lithographers acquired the Presstek 52DI to accomplish four specific business objectives:

1. Customer Retention. Many of the company's customers produce long-run catalogs and other projects with counts in the 40 to 60 thousand range, updating those pieces once or twice a year. “Often,” says Keller, “they need an additional 1,000 pieces or less for trade shows, special events or sales presentations. In the past, our choices have been to run the work and take a financial loss, outsource it, or simply turn it down.” Turning it down, as Keller points out, is the least attractive option, since it leaves the door open for competitors to take over the account. With the Presstek 52DI press, Universal is now able to profitably produce these short run, fast turnaround projects, increasing customer retention.

2. New Business. Often customers are not willing to trust a new printing supplier with a very large job until a relationship

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has been established. With the Presstek 52DI, it will be easier for Universal to utilize entry level sales people for new business development, acquiring smaller dollar value jobs that can be produced profitably while meeting the ultimate goal of building a relationship that delivers increasing revenue over time.

3. Supporting In-Plant Print Shops. Keller points out that many of the company's customers also have in-plant print shops. He says, "Quite often, these shops are not able to meet the needs of marketing professionals, either because the quality does not meet their standards or the turnaround time cannot be met. The 52DI gives us a way to produce in-plant overflow or other projects they might have difficulty in producing, thus growing our share of those customers."

4. Web-to-Print. "Last but not least," adds Keller, "we are in the process of establishing a Web store that is focused on customers who are not necessarily looking for the lowest price, but have high standards for quality. The 52DI press is the highest resolution DI press, and is ideal for attracting this type of work." The 52DI fits perfectly into this environment because it is a digital device—it is a "printer" on the network that produces high quality offset printing.

Choosing the Right Solution

As Universal was developing these marketing objectives, the company spent a lot of time investigating production options. "We looked at all the toner-based products," says Keller, "and we looked at the Presstek 52DI digital offset press. In the end, we decided that the Presstek 52DI was the best match for our core competencies—delivering high-quality offset printing that meets our customers' schedules."

While the 52 cm sheet size of the 52DI press was important, the most important criterion for Universal was the quality. "With 300 line screen printing," Keller says, "the Presstek 52DI comes closest to matching our 40-inch presses, and it is the highest quality digital press out there. We are also excited about the ability to use PMS colors, metallics and varnishes."

Meeting Expectations

Keller reports that the company spent a fair amount of time testing the press before putting it into production to understand how it would best fit in the shop's workflow and what types of applications and run lengths it best served. "It is not

simple to bring a new piece of equipment into our environment," he says. "Everything is profiled and we have set up plate curves for every type of substrate and every press. We are also in the process of converting the shop from SWOP to the G7 standard. The 52DI press is fitting in well and meeting all of our expectations."

Best Fit

With the press in full production, Keller reports that the sales force is finding a significant amount of interest among new and existing customers. "Customers and prospects are very impressed with the quality, which is as good as our 40-inch presses. They also like the fact that we can cost-effectively produce short runs that include a fifth color, metallics or varnish. Even though that requires that the job be run through

At first, Universal's pressmen found it hard to believe the compact Presstek 52DI could meet their quality needs. After operating the press, they now consider it a true high-tech production press that is important to Universal's success.



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the press twice, it is still more economical than trying to do those short runs on the 40-inch press." Precise registration is easily achieved by Presstek's ProFire Excel DI technology, combined with a central impression cylinder and single gripper system using Zero Transfer Printing process—where all four colors are laid down onto the sheet without any sheet transfer between grippers. Universal plans to add a coating device for the DI press as well.

Universal has run jobs with a sheet count as low as 250 sheets of 8.5" x 11" pressure sensitive label stock and as high as 15,000 sheets 4/4 on 100 lb. enamel cover stock, though Keller believes the press will be used for counts up to 20,000. "The DI is much more economical and faster in makeready and run time for a job that size," Keller says. The only reason we would put a run that short on a 40-inch press now is if it is a finished size we cannot accommodate on the DI."

Universal's experiences with the Presstek 52DI press reinforce the value of adding DI technology to a large-format printer's arsenal of tools. Using the right tool for the right job has helped them to become more capable, profitable and competitive in today's dynamic market. ■

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