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Case Study: Solving the Substrate vs Throughput Quandary

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Johnson and Quin of Niles, IL is an integrated marketing solutions provider with an uncommonly wide range of capabilities. The company utilizes the latest in personalization software, offset technology as well as laser and inkjet technology to produce high-value marketing campaigns. For some of these campaigns, Johnson & Quin produces customized coupon cards, gift and loyalty cards and other items which require the use of various substrates. Many of these jobs are complex, with intense data requirements.

I was particularly interested in the high-value personalized items they produce (gift cards, personalized mailings, etc.), and their experience with a wide variety of substrates. What challenges did they have to overcome?

Dave Henkel, President of J&Q and Bob Arkema, VP were happy to explain.

"We incorporate materials such as plastic, paper, recyclable, corn-based, foils- everything. As we find a new material, we experiment," says Henkel. Arkema adds, "We're accustomed to testing, it's just part of our process. In the past, we've utilized a 'family' of machines in order to work with the assortment of substrates we handle."

So far, so good, then? Not quite.

"We were looking for an imageable UV coating," says Arkema. "Instead of spot-varnishing with UV-coated, we wanted to image right on top of the UV."

OK, I'll take the bait. "Could you give me an example?" I asked. "Take the pieces that go through USPS, for instance," explained a patient Arkema. "USPS handling can degrade the appearance of your piece, but you can prevent this with UV coatings or other factors. Now if we can flood a UV coat and put an image on top of it, that's the best of both worlds."

A tall order, I thought.

Enter MCS Eagle UV Inkjet

"We've had to work around limitations in earlier devices and experiment with them. With the MCS Eagle, we had done experimentation and had discussed other devices. We had an idea of what we wanted to run. So we sent MCS some substrates and they tested them and succeeded," said Arkema.

Johnson & Quin was familiar with MCS, as it already had an MCS Array inkjet. "We bought the Eagle UV because of its overall flexibility with multiple substrates. Also, it works faster than other products we have tried," said Henkel.

"What about volume?" I asked. "What kind of quantities are you running?"

"We handle anywhere from 2,000 to 2 million pieces in a job," said Arkema. "So versatility of our equipment is important to us. For instance, now we can run low volumes readily and easily. And we can handle several million pieces due to the speed that the MCS Eagle has given us."

I first saw the MCS Eagle UV inkjet at Graph Expo, and its quality output and speed are impressive. The Eagle inkjet allows a printer to turn cards and mailings by 90 degrees to produce more pieces per hour. With a 4.25" print head, this can be accomplished without the stitching between 2 heads that other systems require. Also, the print quality is a full 600 dpi. My first impression was that any company in the direct mail business could appreciate these capabilities.

Tangible Results

Arkema described their results: "Right away we saw very good production numbers and there was not much ramp-up time. Also, we can move more product more cost-efficiently in certain applications. It uses only a single head,

with no stitching required,” he explained.

Henkel talked about the advantages to their customers. “It gives us a more reliable image and appearance. Also, we have the ability meet tight schedules and turn times. These are important attributes in our business,” he said.

“And now our pieces get through USPS process with enhanced integrity,” Arkema reminds us. Mission accomplished!

In business for more than 135 years, Johnson & Quin has evolved into a national leader of integrated marketing solutions. The company offers the latest in data services and personalization technologies, cutting-edge printing with both laser and ink jet printers, and certified data security practices. (www.j-quin.com or 847. 588.4800)

What's Your Plan is a consulting firm offering Strategic Planning and Execution to print manufacturers and suppliers. They are located in Chicago. (312.751.196 or www.whatsyourplan.biz)