



Send Me a Postcard from Chicago!

by **Mark Vruno** (</contact/10169390/mark-vruno>)

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Modern Postcard of Carlsbad, CA, produces about 6 million postcards per week and mails over 2.5 million of those from an integrated production facility with five-color sheetfed (a pair of 40-inch Komori Lithrone perfectors) and digital (HP Indigo 7500) presses mated with a large in-house inkjet, finishing, and mailing operation. What challenges do they have with that kind of volume?

Arnie Cohen, production manager of mailing and finishing, described some of the firm's recent issues: 1) It needed an ink/printhead combination that lets them produce the addressing at a faster speed, printing in portrait orientation, not landscape; 2) it needed UV inks to work with aqueous coatings; and 3) it was looking for good consistent speed and consistency of ink adhesion.

"We had originally thought that it would be difficult to achieve all those goals," Cohen admitted. "We had wanted to increase our throughput for quite some time. But we were stymied by the challenge of running things the short way (i.e. feeding the long-edge first). We had stitched together inkjet heads on our existing printhead systems, and it wasn't delivering what we wanted" he noted.

Enter MCS Eagle UV Inkjet

MCS Inc. (Booth 4805 at GRAPH EXPO 2011) showed its Eagle UV Inkjet system at last fall's big show. The flexible, 4.25- and 8.5-inch UV inkjet printheads support addressing and graphics without stitching --even with the print rotated by 90 degrees. Heads can be combined for a total width of up to 17 inches. And it produces true, native 600-dpi resolution.

"We had an MCS Array system, and it had always been a good workhorse," Cohen recalled. "We knew the MCS folks and had a great relationship with them. So, with our challenges in mind, we tested the Eagle UV Inkjet system and quickly saw that we would achieve all of our targets: production speed, adhesion, and density of ink. In fact, it worked so well, we ordered three more to replace our older UV technology," he said.

So, with production and speed challenges resolved, where do the savings come in?

Drop Size Yields ROI

"The small drop size was our single biggest justification for making the switch," Cohen explained. The Eagle UV Inkjet system boasts drops of just 14 picoliters, while many other systems use 28 to 80 picoliters. "You can actually feel the difference in the drop sizes it puts out," he added. "The ink savings alone will significantly reduce the payback period." Plus, "the head maintenance is not as onerous. We purge much less, thereby wasting less ink. With the Eagle UV, everywhere you turn, you're reducing ink costs."



"Combined with the labor savings, it's tough to ignore the financial justification for the equipment. The software is so much easier to work with," too, Cohen went on. "It's the same with the MCS Array -- it [has] always been easier and very straightforward. It's the easiest to train on. It's easier to find stuff. With fewer settings to search through, there is less chance for operators to waste a lot of time tweaking things. Also, the operators here are proud of the fact that they can show more productivity in the same amount of time. We've been able to boost our throughput by about 50 percent."

Good for the Customer, Too

By putting two Eagle heads on one transport, Modern Postcard can run variable-data jobs using the inkjet instead of digital laser print, which saves the customer money. If a customer has, for instance, three to four areas for variable data, offer codes or personalized URLs, this equipment can handle it. "Many of our customers are small- to medium-[sized] businesses or non-profits, and they appreciate this," Cohen said. "In fact, we're proud of the fact that we provide the robust services to our client base that are usually only accessible to the 'big guy' larger companies."

Pat Veverica is a principal of What's Your Plan, LLC, a Chicago-based consulting firm offering strategic planning and execution to print manufacturers and suppliers: 312-751-9196 and www.whatsyourplan.biz

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