Company Profile

Hilltop Press, a division of National Graphics Inc., is a high quality, commercial printer in Indianapolis with $19.3 million in annual sales. It provides services ranging from pre-press through bindery and fulfillment from a new 115,000-square-foot facility adjacent to the Indianapolis airport. Hilltop serves large accounts in the retail and corporate communities and in the puzzles and games industry, producing elegant annual reports and corporate communications along with striking point-of-purchase graphics. In January of 2004, the company – a long-time conventional press operation – launched Hilltop Express, a new digital and small press division.

Challenge

Provide conventional press customers with digital solutions that solve corporate headaches. Expand customer service options and open new income streams through digital capabilities like variable data printing (VDP). Maintain Hilltop’s quality reputation.

Solution

Hilltop Express chose an EFI Fiery® EXP6000 color server and Xerox® DocuColor® 6060 Digital Color Press.

Results

Hilltop gained easy access to industry-leading Fiery functionality, breakthrough power and speed and unmatched color quality. It gained the flexibility to provide corporate clients with digital solutions to challenging print problems and it opened new income streams by providing expanded service options, including powerful variable data printing (VDP).
Adding powerful digital capability—fast!

When executives at Hilltop recruited Beth Coleman to head the company’s new digital and small press division they gave her just weeks to select digital solutions. “I had a very high level of confidence in the people at EFI and Xerox and in their solutions,” she says. Having successfully launched a digital facility for another Indianapolis printer. She quickly chose an EFI Fiery EXP6000 color server for its ground breaking, high-level print production capabilities, sophisticated color management and workflow support features, ease of use, and enhanced variable data printing capabilities. She paired it with a Xerox DocuColor 6060 Digital Color Press for maximum production power.

The solution was installed in March of 2004; production began almost immediately. “It’s our premier piece of equipment,” Coleman says. “We’ve been very impressed with its performance and ease of use and with the high level of customer service and the excellent support we’ve received from both EFI and Xerox.”

At Hilltop Express the Fiery/DocuColor system works along side a Xerox DocuTech™ 135 Production Publisher, printing black-and-white output; a Canon CLC2400 color copier/printer with an EFI Fiery RIP; and two small, 2-color presses.

Outstanding color quality wins over skeptics

The tough part of introducing digital solutions into a high quality conventional press environment, Coleman says, is overcoming presumptions about digital output. She conducts in-house training sessions delivering two messages: “Digital isn’t going to take business out of Hilltop’s conventional press run. And, digital has its own market segments—customers who need short-run, high quality color or black-and-white materials and customers who need personalized or custom marketing material. In the past, sales reps might have said, ‘That job is too small.’ or ‘We don’t do this.’ Now, they can bring those jobs to our counter.”

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The quality of Fiery/DocuColor digital color has won over many press loyalists at Hilltop. Managers of other production departments have been impressed by the high quality color output; customers are pleased. “Some customers can’t tell that it’s digital. Others say, ‘This is going to work out just fine and it’s really good that I got it in four hours, or overnight, because our previous vendor took four days.’ ”

Coleman adds: “The color management is very effective. We’re still learning all the things it can do.” The Fiery EXP6000 incorporates award-winning EFI ColorWise® technology and offers expert
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color management designed for the most advanced color professional as well as the entry-level user. ColorWise provides automatic PANTONE® matching and transparent handling of RGB, CMYK, Lab and spot color data, even when mixed on the same page. The Fiery’s array of sophisticated color management tools provides color output that sets the benchmark for digital color quality within the industry.

In fact, the solution’s superior color management capabilities were a deciding factor for Coleman. “Because many of our pieces had been printed in a conventional offset environment before, we had to be assured that our digital reproduction was going to be extremely high quality. The four-color reproduction is very, very good.”

During the setup phase at Hilltop Express, color test pages kept disappearing. “Sales reps were taking them to other parts of the building and showing them to other sales people, saying, ‘Look what they’re doing. This looks good!’”

**Solving problems to win customers**

Solving challenging print problems is the foundation of the Hilltop Express business plan. “One corporate customer had a high-trust relationship with an out-of-town designer. She was seeing images a lot lighter on her screen, even using the same files. It was important that we be able to recreate what she had gotten approval on. We worked with both the EFI and Xerox representatives – starting with importing her color profiles and adjusting for what she was seeing. We did it all over the telephone. Using the Fiery’s advanced color management tools, we got there and we were all thrilled.”

Another corporate customer at Hilltop Express needed help with a job that had been produced on conventional offset presses. The customer wanted a faster turnaround time and less investment in administrative time when adding as many as six variable items per sheet. “We developed a package allowing us to print five times as many materials in a day as their previous resource, and we can make each and every piece variable, which is something that their previous resource couldn’t do at all.”

“I’d recommend it for ease of start up, ease of use, outstanding functionality, and great training and follow-up from the service organizations at both EFI and Xerox. And for the overall quality; that’s a big part of it. I give it an A.”

— Beth Coleman, General Manager of Hilltop Express, Hilltop Press, a division of National Graphics Inc.

Hilltop’s high-quality digital services will keep corporate customers from dividing their accounts among multiple vendors, Coleman says. “When you have a customer who did very little digital work with you in 2003 and now in 2004, they’re going to give you a couple hundred thousand dollars of digital work, that’s a major change in their behavior. It reflects the quality of the service, of the equipment and of the solution.” Coleman anticipates that digital services, including variable data, will generate from $1.2 to $1.5 million in additional sales during the start-up year at Hilltop Express.

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Variable data – the growth market

The big business magnet will be variable data services, she says. “I anticipate that this year alone, at least one-third of our business will be variable data. Ultimately, I expect to have one Fiery/DocuColor devoted entirely to variable data and another to handle other jobs.”

Coleman is impressed with how easily the Fiery generates variable data output with Fiery FreeForm™. “It’s very easy to use,” she says, “and there are no server bottlenecks.” The powerful Fiery RIP accelerates production by intelligently separating variable information from the static information. The Fiery RIPS the static content just once, reducing the size of the variable stream that it’s processing. The result is unprecedented speed.

“That’s a major benefit for us,” Coleman says. “A lot of times we have people standing there waiting for material and often they don’t understand why the file has to go from one area to another, re-RIP and reprocess. The RIP-once formula helps a lot. And, as a result, we have more press capacity during the day, which allows us to bill more work and make more profit.”