

DIGITAL MAKES SHORT WORK OF SHORT RUNS



By digitally printing full-color pack prototypes, Ghirardelli and Topps are able to quickly and affordably speed their products to market.

require two additional runs before final approval with plate charges alone totaling \$600 before the actual print run even starts. And, since there is no cost difference between digitally printed two- and four-color packs, users no longer have to choose between the quality or the complexity of their designs to save money.

Another advantage to digital is the ability to cost-effectively present different versions of the same pack. For example, if one buyer wants the word "New" added to the label and another buyer makes a different change, digital efficiently allows these multiple changes to be made by prepping the run to "batch" the projects and print different quantities of each version.

One final note on quality: because digital presses print perfectly round dots at 800 to 2,400 dots per inch, print quality will match or actually be better than that which can be achieved by using flexographic and rotogravure processes. In fact, with the goal of having both printing processes look as similar as possible, digital often requires images to be "fuzzed up" in order to resemble the results typically achieved by other processes.

THE PROOF IS IN THE PACK

When The Topps Co., Inc. needed to test six packaging designs for its Limited Edition Sweet Shop Flavor Ring Pop, they digitally printed a quantity of only two of each version. These special packs were literally turned around in 24 hours.

After the designer received guidelines on how to send the files, they were uploaded for prepping. Most digital printers will request that files be produced in a program such as Adobe Illustrator. Because the Ring Pop packaging material is metallized film, the printer also produced a white layer in the digital art file so that all copy and graphics that were silver would show through. PDF proofs were then made using Adobe Acrobat and sent via email to Topps for approval. Topps had requested the electronic proofs (which allow designs to be approved on screen) to save the time and cost of preparing hard proofs. Because there was a short deadline, PDF proofs accelerated the approval process by 24 hours, eliminating the time and cost of making and shipping hard proofs. Electronic proofs can also go to different people at the same time, which also speeds the process while saving money.

However, it is also important to note that PDF proofs are not used to approve color. Since Topps had a history of working with the digital printer and the printer was familiar with the colors used, the company opted to forego this step.

Once the electronic

proof was approved, the packaging was printed and fulfilled, double sealed and shipped the next day. Packaging peanuts were used to fill the packs and give them their final on-shelf appearance, a standard practice when test marketing package designs. After tests, the packaging design was tweaked and Limited Edition Ring Pops went into full-scale production.

There are also instances when products are so new that the packaging is produced before, or in tandem with, the actual product. For example, The Ghirardelli Chocolate Co. takes advantage of digital printing before many of its new products hit the shelves.

"We primarily use digital for sales and presentation samples," says Ghirardelli's Heather Saunders, creative services manager, packaging. "It allows us to showcase our newest packaging before the actual print run."

In fact, the company has been using digital for several years. "My first experience with digital samples was positive," Saunders recalls, adding: "The results were superior to other sample options to date."

While other options, such as conventional printing processes or hand-made samples are available, Saunders concludes: "Digital printing allows for a more color accurate representation of the product than lower-end outputs."

On a project such as that for Ghirardelli Squares, which pack in large stand-up bags, high quality was paramount. The single-printed comp bag was the subject of a photo shoot for product sales literature.

GOING DIGITAL AT CONCEPT

When approvals are needed in traditional processes, the majority of time is not spent actually reviewing the concepts, but on manually getting them into the hands of those who need to see them via e-mail or express shipping. Digital shortcuts this process using internet-based artwork and package collaboration software. The software improves the workflow from package concept to product launch by accelerating the communication and collaboration needed to speed ideas through the creative process. Because all parties have access to the files and know when to expect them, it is easier for everyone to be responsive and stay on deadline.

'Digital printing can cost half as much as conventional processes'

BOB SCHERER
CL&D Digital

Costs are typically based on per-user monthly licensing fees.

Typical workflow begins at the concept phase, when the creative brief for the new concept is written and uploaded to the system. The brief is sent on to the creative team for the development of the initial concepts, then back to all principals for reviewing. Concepts are

modified or weeded out until a single design remains. This final concept goes through a similar cycle of changes and approvals but, because routing takes place online, time and money are saved.

OPENING UP THE NICHES

Digital technology also opens up new opportunities to serve those specialized markets that were once seen as too costly to enter. For example, candy makers can now approach smaller specialty retailers with the idea of marketing their own, signature lines of candy, chocolates and mints. Similar concepts can be presented to a number of different retailers, using cost-effective, digitally customized and produced packaging.

In such cases, the printer will batch the orders and print a single large run that has been systematically broken down into 1,000 of one version, 1,500 of another and 500 of yet another custom package.

The bottom line is that when manufacturers use digital printing for sales samples, prototypes, comps, or to target specialized markets, they can ultimately get products to market faster, better and at lower costs with less risk. **CB**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Scherer is a partner and vice-president of Delafield, WI-based CL&D Digital, a digital package and label printer specializing in full production run quality for package and sales samples, prototypes and comps with runs from one to 80,000. A 25-year veteran of the printing and packaging industries and an expert in digital printing, he can be reached through the CandyBusiness office or direct at (262) 569 6732. Additional information is available at www.clddigital.com.



Once prohibitively expensive using traditional techniques, digital printing makes pack prototypes and short runs affordable.

HOW IT WORKS

Digital presses are ideal for short runs, typically in quantities ranging from one to 80,000, and provide full production-run quality packages and labels for use as sales samples, prototypes and comps.

Based on the number of colors and the quantity needed to print, digital printing can cost half as much as conventional processes. And, because digital is "plateless," it also saves time. Since finished items are produced directly from computer to press, finished jobs can be shipped within hours.

This also means that candy makers do not have to pay the typical \$100 per plate charge incurred in traditional processes because no plates are used.

In traditional two-color, for example, design changes might

THE ADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL

- Avoids the higher costs and lengthy lead times typical with conventional printing processes
- Provides full production run quality package and label sales samples, prototypes and comps
- Eliminates waste. Only the exact quantity needed is printed
- Arms manufacturers with different pack versions for customer previews at minimal cost with fast turn-around
- Opens up new markets that were once cost-prohibitive to enter.

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