

# This Is Print

Digital color printing is taking hold as the next creative design frontier

Everyone who has worked with color proofs knows that proofing systems are fundamentally flawed. You use one device—a color proofer—to represent the output of another, the offset press. Logic tells us that the ideal proof comes from the same press as the final piece—a “press proof.” Ideally, it would also be a sample piece rather than a color swatch, mock-up, or comp. The prohibitive expenses of offset make-ready and short run printing make on-press proofing impossible on an offset press. But with digital color presses, it’s not only possible, it’s actually being done today for high-quality applications.



By Bob Wagner

If this is a surprise, you probably haven’t assessed digital color printing in the last six months. Web accessible digital printing and finishing capabilities exist that can overcome every fundamental objection you might have to printing your showcase pieces in digital color, such as:

*The quality isn’t good enough.* Have you seen the output from a Xerox iGen3 Digital Production Press? It compares to offset press output as digital photos compare to analog shots. Each technology has distinctive qualities that affect output, but the quality achieves professional standards in nearly every application.

*Our run lengths are too long to be economical on digital presses.* Offset will always have a cost advantage on longer runs. However, many long runs can be produced more cost-effectively by breaking them into many smaller runs, printing on demand over the life of the document. The cost savings on warehouse space, tax on stored inventory, and cost of destruction usually covers the slight premium for digital printing. In addition, the files can be updated as needed, so the collaterals never have to be out-of-date. Opportunities to automate with Web-based fulfillment systems often provide additional savings.

*The available papers for digital printing are too limited.* Here again, the iGen3’s SmartPress paper handling system sets new standards for printing a wide range of coated and uncoated



All three books—showcases of creativity—were printed on the Xerox iGen3 Digital Production press.

papers and other substrates from the very light to the very heavy (60 to 300 gsm).

We don’t have the expertise for variable information printing, which is digital printing’s real value. Two points. One: many successful digital color printing businesses focus on static documents. Two: Variable information (VI) printing, which personalizes pages in a print run, isn’t necessarily difficult, and newer software, such as easy-vi from Xerox, is designed to make VI printing and versioning on the fly easier—even for novices. In addition, Xerox offers VI services—including database integration, Web site programming, document design, application programming, file testing, and system integration—to fill in organizational knowledge gaps.

The technology has three other strengths that will soon make it indispensable:

1. Meeting customer requirements for ever-faster turnarounds of high-quality printed materials. By 2005, 33 percent will want turnaround in 24 hours or less, according to data from the Rochester Institute of Technology. This trend plays to the strengths of digital printing’s abbreviated job setup time and favorable economics for short runs.
2. Streamlining production to provide cost efficiencies.
3. Providing chances for growth, profit, and competitiveness.

Together, these capabilities permit creatives and production shops to do things that have never been possible. For example, as a class project, students at the Parsons School of Design in New York City created and produced the 52-page *PS Magazine* on campus life in just eight weeks using a PDF workflow and the iGen3. Proofing was done with PDF files—and an actual, on-press print sample.

Logic tells me that similar success stories will play out in the years ahead. If you want to lead this industry into fertile new frontiers, you’ll exploit this technology now to help create some of these stories.

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