

Going digital keeps printer rolling, efficient

By Gary Pinnell - 1/25/2002

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As far back as 1986, John Yurchak Jr. realized that the printing runs of books were getting shorter. Companies that had once ordered tens of thousands of volumes were buying in the thousands, or even hundreds.

Yurchak, owner and president of Yurchak Printing Inc., East Hempfield Township, Lancaster County, looked at alternative storage methods — the Internet and CD-ROM discs — and understood that giant printing presses were dinosaurs. So, Yurchak bought digital presses that are really high-speed laser printers, and now the company specializes in short-run printing jobs.

The advantage of short runs for customers are obvious, Yurchak says. "Instead of having a three-year inventory, they have a six-month inventory."

And, instead of ordering hundreds of copies of — for instance — technical manuals, law books or medical books that may go out of date before they're all sold, a bookseller can order what is needed. The customer also saves warehouse space.

The laser printer on most desktops produces eight pages per minute. YPI has four digital presses that can print more than 6,000 pages per minute, says Yurchak's partner and co-president, Dennis Bellafiore. He says YPI prints about 250 million to 300 million impressions — pages — per year.

In conventional offset printing, the typeset pages of a book or magazine are transferred onto an aluminum plate, which is wrapped onto the drum of a press, Bellafiore explains. Petroleum-based ink is pressed onto the paper, and several hundred pages of paper are often ruined before the press begins to make perfect copies.

Laser printers work like copiers. Dry ink is sprayed onto a page, then heated until the ink coagulates and sticks to the paper. Presses are fed by 1,000-pound rolls of paper as big as kitchen tables.

"Customers can order five books or 15 books," says Phil Huepenbecker, chief executive officer of H&H Graphics Inc., Lancaster. Doing business as Sir Speedy Printing, his company also owns digital presses. He says conventional presses sometimes take hours to set up.

"Digital presses can be up and running in a matter of seconds, and the first one that comes off is as good as the last," Huepenbecker says.

The shelves around YPI's office and warehouse are lined with legal, professional and scientific book titles. Yurchak's clients include West Group, Minneapolis, and Matthew Bender & Company Inc., New York City. They are two of the nation's largest law book publishers.

Because book buyers are often doctors, lawyers or accountants who own hundreds of volumes of professional books, their shelf space is limited. So they want books printed on thin paper, Yurchak says.

Laser printers are well-suited for thin paper.

"We can print on paper that's lighter than this," he says, holding up a sheet that's about the same weight as telephone-book paper, but as clean and bright as copy paper. Lightweight paper costs about the same as copy-weight paper, but mailing costs are cheaper.

YPI has 30 full-time and eight part-time employees, and Yurchak says it stays busy 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Yurchak, who spent most of his professional life in the printing business, bought the company from Wickersham Printing Inc. May 1, 1998. Bellafiore, a former Penn State University and Franklin & Marshall College physics professor, came on board in October 1998. Revenues were \$1.6 million the first year, \$2.4 million the second, and Yurchak expects \$3.6 million the third year.

Yurchak, 61, and Bellafiore, 56, plan to retire soon and will hand the company to Yurchak's sons: John W. Yurchak, who works in the 19,000-square-foot East Hempfield plant; and Jason, who operates Village Press, which prints brochures, signs and other materials at a Bird-in-Hand plant.

YPI prints only with black ink now. The company is five or 10 years away from four-color presses, Yurchak says.

"We continue to look at machines that will automate what we do," Bellafiore says. "That way, we're not just throwing bodies at the problem."