

# Graphic Arts MONTHLY

## Small, Fast Less-than-full-format Presses

### Case Study



A new 40" press and CTP equipment highlight this printer's move to bigger quarters.

A Screen PlateRite 8000II (top) outputs 2,200 plates monthly.

# BUCKING A TREND?

By Mark Vruno Senior Editor



**S**tories abound of sheetfed printers abandoning the saturated 40" market and switching to the 28" format. (See related article on p.14.) Acknowledging exceptions to every rule, of course, here's a twist: A printer in Southern California with a 5-color, half-size press who was struggling to produce—and compete for—the 40" type of work its customers require.

Charles Utts, president of Custom Printing, is running three shifts 24/7 to keep pace with all the direct mail, marketing materials and high-end agency work that his family-owned company produces for clients such as Warner Bros., K-Swiss Footwear and the California Strawberry Festival. Running four-up, the commercial printer was nearly bursting at the seams before trading in a 2-color, 40" SORMZ last fall for a new 4-color, 40" Mitsubishi Diamond 3000S with aqueous coater.

"We just couldn't stay ahead of all the work," Utts points out, "and were concerned a breakdown on the 28" press would leave us dead in the water." Now, with the eight-up, 13,000-sph Mitsubishi that came on line

in mid-October, Utts says that the company has not only caught up on its work, but also was able to eliminate the third shift. Oh, and they had to move into bigger quarters, too, to accommodate the new machine.

"We move 40,000-piece jobs through the pressroom daily," he notes, adding that he's running higher quantities now. "We have more 100,000-run jobs than ever, including work that we never would have gotten before." One such job was an 11x25 1/2" size that ran three-up. "We had our best month ever in November and never seemed like we were busy," Utts says. Custom recently had another record month during a traditionally slow time of year.

The new press came with some growing pains. "We had a shortage of power in our previous facility," Utts explains. Also, leasing 19,000 sq.ft. of space in the high-rent Los Angeles area played into his decision to buy his own building. Custom's new 30,000-sq.ft. facility is situated in Oxnard, about an hour's drive from LA.



### Coexisting: 28" and 40"

Custom Printing added a full-size Mitsubishi Diamond 3000S 4-color to a pressroom that already featured a 28" Komori Lithrone 5-color press. "We just couldn't stay ahead of all the work," says company president Charles Utts. "We were concerned a breakdown on the 28" press would leave us dead in the water."



Founded in 1975, Custom has grown into a \$5 million printer with 37 employees. It operates six sheetfed presses, including the new Mitsubishi and the 28", a Komori Lithrone; also a 2-color 12x18" Hamada 665 CD and two Heidelberg—a 1-color 40" SORS and a 2-color 20" GTO perfecter. Custom also has a 12x18" Heidelberg Windmill letterpress machine and, in post-press, a Heidelberg cylinder diecutter.

Moving also served as an impetus to overhaul prepress. Utts was slow to adopt computer-to-plate technology and scoffed at the "hype." But non-action came back to bite him.

"Matchprints and blueines were killing us," he says of his former film workflow. "We were losing work on price." He recalls one quote that had a \$2,000 line item just for proofs.

After seeing the high-quality output of a new Epson Stylus Pro 9600 wide-format (44") proofing about a year ago, "We knew we had to

go the rest of the way," Utts says. "It made perfect sense to install the CTP device and conduct training at our new facility."

To set plates, he chose a Screen PlateRite 8000II thermal CTP device and Trueflow 3.0 PDF- and JDF-based workflow management system. The platesetter outputs for all the presses—from the GTO to the Hamada to eight-up—handling 17.7x14.6" plates up to a 45.6x37" maximum. When recording 40 1/2x37" plates at 2400 dpi, it can produce 13 plates per hour. "For changes on press, I can have a new plate in five minutes," says Utts. Custom employs Kodak's Sword Excel (thermal) and Winner (negative) plates.

The CTP conversion has made the one-time skeptic a true believer. "What a difference!" Utts says. As the Diamond 3000S got up and running, color looked washed out and Utts suspected there was something

wrong. "But the plates are able to handle higher ink density," he explains. "The CTP dot is so crisp that we had to change profiles to get more ink on the sheet." Now, printing at 200-line-screen resolution poses no problems.

"The same RIPed files we use to make digital proofs are also used to make plates," Utts says. "There are no problems matching the proofs to the press sheets."

Screen's direct-to-plate technology employs 32 laser diodes to image plates directly from electronic files. The laser-generated dots allow for sharper detail across the entire tonal range. The Trueflow3 workflow facilitates communication with its JDF-based job tickets. Automation for output-ready jobs covers every stage of production, including pre-flight, overprint, automated trapping, imposition, multiple-format output and CIP3 PPF/CIP4 JDF. Trueflow 3 accepts industry-standard data files, such as PDF/X1-a, PDF/X1-3, Certified PDF and PostScript 3. "Trueflow3 integrated seamlessly with our digital proofing system with only minor adjustments," Utts notes.

The 8000II platesetter reduces makeready time on press—the two will be linked via SIM card within the next few months, allowing the new press to be preset with image data. "The plates print beautifully," he says, "and the Trueflow system ensures a perfect match with our proofs."

Custom now outputs proofs from a new Epson Stylus Pro 9800 wide-format printer with an EFI BestColor software RIP that came bundled with the PlateRite. "Color is dead-on at first pull," says Utts. "It turns out that I was telling 'lies' about Matchprints being more accurate."

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