

# Publishing Executive

## The New Role of the Magazine Printer

By Steven W. Frye

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It's ironic that when selecting a printer today, printing may be one of the least important criterion. More and more, publishers are choosing printers based on their distribution capabilities, management tools and proactive customer service reps.

"The trend overall seems to be that print vendors are providing additional services ...," says John Sartoris, group production director at VNU Business Publications. "Whether it's workflow solutions or specific project solutions, print vendors are relied upon as partners to provide resources and even marketing solutions that may cover print, direct marketing, e-media and logistics."

Examples of printers helping publishers in areas other than printing have always happened, but were usually the exception rather than the rule. Nowadays, helping publishers in non-printing areas is as much a matter of self-survival as it is a means of supporting customers.

With profit margins continually shrinking, printers are looking for new ways to generate income. It is a natural progression that new growth opportunities come from related businesses. To publication printers, this includes everything from publishing services, workflow management, advertising sales support, electronic media, targeted marketing and specialized distribution services.

"We wouldn't be in business if it were not for the strategic support printers provide," says John J. Sateja, senior vice president for information products at Consumer Reports.

Hiring a printer is more complicated than ever simply because printing is only one of many critical factors in the selection process. Generally speaking, print quality is almost a given, as digital prepress delivers higher quality than what production managers had to fight for in the film environment.

Stephen F. Grogin, president of Brunswick Graphics Associates, says, "Printing is becoming a commodity. The actual delivery of materials to the customers is the key [to] a good printer and publisher relationship."

Today's print buyer has become more of a band leader guiding the other players through the process of determining the best candidate. These "other players" are circulation, distribution, marketing, premedia and even advertising sales managers. Printers are now offering services that directly affect these departments, and these players are now important to the selection process.

## PUBLISHING SERVICES

Custom publishing is a big business, as many printers know. So Cadmus Communications set up a publishing operation that offers page layout, design, composition and even ad placement services in Chennai, India.

According to John W. Miller, executive vice president, sales and marketing at Cadmus, one of Cadmus' current business-to-business customers sells ads and writes editorial, and Cadmus handles all design, layout, proofing and file-management services. All design elements and general layouts are agreed upon up front; page proofs are e-mailed remotely for final approval; PDFs are made and then sent to Cadmus' Richmond, Va., print site.

Cadmus handles between eight and 10 magazines a month (64 to 128 pages) this way, according to Miller, "for less than half of what you'd pay one designer or production person in the U.S." He says the magazines have been able to condense cycle time and cut roughly 75 percent out of production overhead costs.

Quad/Graphics, Fry Communications and Banta, to name a few, also offer domestic creative services.

## WORKFLOW TOOLS

Ever since advertising became totally electronic, responsibilities like file inspection, reporting, storage and corrections have become a printer service. Quad/Graphics took this philosophy even further by offering Smartools, which help the publisher plan and produce its titles. It includes Ad/Sync, which helps ad reps, financial staff and production personnel manage advertising databases; Impoze, imposition software that manages layout planning; and Regional Ad Planning System (RAPS), which automates regional/demographic versions.

Short- to medium-run printer Publishers Press Inc. (PPI), in Shepherdsville, Ky., created PICA, publication planning and management software that automatically feeds PPI's internal systems, to minimize order-entry errors and save time. PICA allows users to look at any manufacturing option, project costs, avoid conflicts and include all relevant items. It also includes a layout-mapping tool, allowing both reader and imposition views, it tracks all unbound, bound, shipped and unshipped copies, and features a detailed budgeting tool.

A tool used by many printers (sheetfed and commercial) is Kodak's InSite, a Web-based tool accessing the printers' server where files are posted, trapped and ripped for plate-making. It also enables posting of soft proofs for online approval. Other printers offer InSite-based systems with boutique names, such as, Ready Page (Fry) and B.A.M. (Banta), which can add confusion when comparing printers.

Perry Judd's Inc. uses Flashpoint to process incoming files, PitStop to preflight and InSite to view final PSTI or rastered files.

Another tool similar to InSite is Dalim's Mistral, used by Brown Printing Company and Publishers Press Inc.

"We used to spend too much of our time discussing prepress—an area that overall is a smaller percentage of our manufacturing and distribution budgets," says Sartoris. "Our print vendors have assisted us with the implementation of processes and procedures for our internal workflow

and staff training on generating ‘certified PDFs’ using InSite and Synapse Prepare (an application creating prepress-ready PDFs). They helped us remove the cost component, which allowed us to move to an internal PDF workflow,” he says.

“For me,” Sartoris adds, “and more importantly, it has produced a more efficient way to work across editorial, design and production. Skeptics of the workflow are now advocates of the workflow.”

He emphasizes that without these tools he could not offer his advertisers the ability to make late changes or submit ads as late as he can now. “It allows us to SWOP out house ads for revenue-producing advertising. It’s an option that is a win for publishers and clients alike, and in these challenging times on the B-to-B side, it has become a necessary way of doing business.”

Sartoris adds that because of InSite, VNU Business Publications was able to take on additional revenue-generating projects, and offer its clients the means to view and approve layouts.

Taking premedia services a step further, QuebecorWorld (QW) has set up staff and equipment within their customers’ offices. It has 10 people on site at Forbes Inc. and eight at ESPN.

Fred Raimondo, director of marketing—magazine, direct and premedia at QW, points out, “As premedia has transitioned away from the traditional services such as scanning, film output and conventional proofing to digital-image submission, workflow automation, content management and digital proofing, we have partnered with a number of our customers to provide on-site solutions.”

These on-site faculties are linked to QW’s print sites and larger premedia sites by its fiber optic Virtual Private Network (VPN). QW also provides tools such as I-Ficient (workflow) and ImageValet (content management).

## E-MEDIA

Printers have recognized that much of the content they manage is being reused in other forms of media, primarily electronic. In response, they are offering other “non-printing” services to better utilize the Internet.

Many publishers want to provide digital versions of their publications to readers, so some printers now offer this. Fry Communications offers Fry e-ditions, and Banta just released DigiMags. These electronic versions feature the ability to search editorial and advertising content while maintaining the look and feel of the print editions. Fry’s e-ditions also enable publishers to link readers directly to advertisers’ Web sites, giving referral credits to advertisers and up-selling their products.

## MARKETING

An old bit of knowledge in the printing business is for printers to help keep their customer alive and healthy, thus keeping themselves alive and healthy. One way to do that is with strategic marketing.

Quad/Graphics created Quad/Direct Marketing, which offers 1-to-1 marketing strategizing,

mailing design and database consulting. It also offers strategies on branding, creative services, and ultimately production and distribution.

Banta's Sync Interactive Marketing Suite enables the creation of personalized print, e-mail and Web landing pages. Through a Web interface, publishers can create, personalize, proof and deliver highly targeted print and electronic communications.

## DISTRIBUTION

Printers also have had to respond to the publisher's need for specialized marketing and distribution services. Because of the complex nature of list management, printers have discovered a new profit center in list management services (LMS). LMS price lists at most printers have become quite complicated.

The basic merge/purge, CASS certification, presort and inkjet output requirements for basic mailing have grown into complicated pricing structures for co-palletization, co-binding and co-mailing. Many of these charges cannot be substantiated due to the very nature of co-distribution, and some fees appear to be randomly determined, such as a processing charge of \$600—per version. Needless to say, printers are reaping postal savings for their customers, while greatly profiting from that service.

If you want to co-mail, your printer must manage the list. You are at the printer's mercy when it comes to methodology, schedule and price. But like most new technologies, pricing will most likely stabilize with time as competition equalizes.

Many publication printers offer the United States Postal Service network tracking tool to their customers, as well as UPS and FedEx tracking systems, so publishers can monitor their issues as they are distributed.

Recently RR Donnelley (RRD) launched OneSite, a Web-based mailing campaign tracking tool that enables customers to see instantaneously where their materials are throughout the mail stream. RRD claims it is the first product to combine post-production shipment tracking and the USPS tool into one synchronized report.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Publishers are becoming more and more accustomed to printers integrating themselves beyond printing into the publishers' operations. This has grayed the areas where publishers leave off and printers begin, but it definitely reduces response time and enables late changes.

Dependency on these tools has, however, created another concern in print procurement. First, does the printer offer tools to help you increase efficiency and profit? And second, how dependent will you become on the printer, and what types of adverse effects will you experience if you elect to leave the printer in the future?

Many of these tools and services are proprietary, so investigate them seriously. You no longer are analyzing print quality, service, distribution options, production schedules and price. You have a whole new area of highly technical tools that greatly affect your "other players." Be sure to include these people in the printer selection process.

As Sartoris notes, “While the manufacturing capabilities of our print vendors are important to us and can’t be overlooked, we have charged them with identifying to us what are the emerging areas we need to be looking at for solutions on virtual proofing, digital delivery and logistics. It’s safe to say that print vendors are doing a lot more than just ‘putting ink on paper.’”

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