

Printforce speeds ahead with fully automated, single copy book and journal production using HP Indigo presses



At a glance

Industry: Publishing

Business name: Printforce

Headquarters: Alphen aan den Rijn, Netherland

Website: printforce.nl



Challenge

Make 'zero warehousing' a reality for Scientific, Technical and Medical (STM) publishers by offering:

- Affordable production of books and journals in small volumes – for orders ranging from single copies to 700 or more.
- The same quality of finished books, including their print, paper and binding, whether produced using offset or digital.
- Guaranteed 48-hour turnaround from order to shipping.

Solution

- Four HP Indigo W7200 Digital Presses for on-demand printing of high-quality color STM books and journals, and self-published books.
- Three Hunkeler Popp6 cutter/stackers (one inline, two near-line) for automated production of book blocks ready for binding.
- Two HP Indigo 5600 Digital Presses for printing hard and soft book covers.
- End-to-end, automated workflow, developed in-house, covering order handling, printing, finishing, binding and logistics.
- Advanced integration with key publishing customers' ERP systems for automated ordering and fulfillment.

Results

- Printforce has become one of the largest STM printers in Europe, growing at over 20 percent a year since 2009, serving leading global publishers such as Reed Elsevier, Springer and Royal Brill.
- In Q4 2013, Printforce's fleet of HP Indigo presses printed more than 500,000 books, representing 64 million A4 pages, including over 10 million monochrome pages.
- With its automated workflow, Printforce is able to handle about 1 million orders per year with a customer service staff of just four people – one-third of the staff it previously needed to handle much smaller volumes.

“The quality of HP Indigo printing is superb. Now we can print high-quality STM books on demand, and it has enabled us to enter the market for self-published books.”

– Rombout Eikelenboom, general manager, Printforce



To see the future of printing for the global Scientific, Technology and Medical (STM) publishing market, look no further than Printforce, one of Europe's largest digital printing companies.

From its headquarters in the Netherlands, Printforce provides zero-inventory and automated stock replenishment services for global STM publishers such as Springer, Reed Elsevier, Royal Brill, and IOS Press. By combining digital printing and finishing capabilities with its automated ordering and fulfillment services, Printforce delivers print-to-order books and journals in runs of 1-500, with an average order size of just 1.6 copies, and subscription runs of STM journals of 15-700+ copies. This enables publishers to reduce or eliminate their warehousing costs and working capital needs by better matching supply with demand.

Rombout Eikelenboom, general manager, Printforce, attributes its success to two key differentiators: having a comprehensive and fully automated workflow; and offering the highest quality print production.

HP Indigo presses deliver quality on every front

“There are many print-on-demand vendors who can make a book, but almost no-one can make the quality that we do, in large part because we use HP Indigo printing equipment,” he says.

For its color digital printing, Printforce has repeatedly chosen HP Indigo technology, primarily for the high quality results achievable with HP Indigo presses. The company currently has four HP Indigo W7200 Digital Presses, on which it prints about 8,000 books and journals per day; and two HP Indigo 5600 Digital Presses, used for hard and soft covers.

“There are at least three aspects to quality, all very important,” comments Eikelenboom. “First is the imaging quality, and Indigo is as good as and often better than offset because you can see more detail. The second aspect is the paper quality, which is also very good, because the paper hardly heats up, so it stays very flat.” Maintaining the flatness of the paper is particularly important because Printforce mostly uses lightweight stocks, running papers as low as 70 gsm on the HP Indigo presses. “And third is the binding quality. With our brand new Kolbus lines, we deliver conventional quality in single copy production.”

Eikelenboom notes that the color reproduction consistency is another major factor in Printforce's choice of HP Indigo presses. “We might print 100 copies of the same book across 100 different days, and each copy has to be the same as the other. We're able to do that with HP Indigo.”

Maximizing production efficiency

Printforce has standardized its production on a limited number of papers and introduced sophisticated batching. This allows it to take advantage of the efficiency of the HP Indigo roll-fed printing solution even while printing hundreds of different book and journal orders a day.

One HP Indigo press is equipped with an inline Hunkeler Popp6 finishing system, and the others print roll-to-roll, with the finishing handled on two near-line Hunkeler Popp6 lines. This configuration enables Printforce to maximize uptime, production and flexibility. The Hunkeler finishing systems deliver cut and stacked book blocks ready for immediate binding, eliminating the need for costly and time consuming manual processes.

The company is installing two new Kolbus binding lines, fully automated with the rest of its workflow via XML. Capable of binding 2,000 books per hour, the Kolbus line will handle all binding requirements for soft and hardcover books (even traditional rounded spines and headbands) in hot-melt.

Quality proves key to opening new markets

Printforce acquired its four HP Indigo W7200 Digital Presses to replace earlier-generation HP Indigo presses and expand its printing capacity. This has enabled the company to enter new markets that demand high-quality printing in color.

“Before, we could not achieve that kind of high quality for print-on-demand STM books. Now we can, and it's also opened up the self-published books market, enabling us to win new customers such as mybestseller and WPG Unlimited,” says Eikelenboom. “In this respect, HP Indigo is the enabling technology.”

“We have customers who want particularly high quality and want it specifically printed on the HP Indigo press, laminated and bound. Having books like that to show prospects has been very effective. It convinces them to partner with us.”

Education publishing is another market that is now in Printforce's sights. It is evaluating how the Enhanced Productivity Mode (EPM) on HP Indigo presses, which increases productivity by 33 percent, can help Printforce enter this market.

End-to-end workflow pays off for all

Printforce has been growing at a steady pace of about 20 percent per year. The company's HP Indigo presses play an important role in that growth, working alongside all the other components in Printforce's in-house developed integrated workflow.

“Our complete workflow system integrates order systems, printing and logistics. We receive orders and files and process the orders without anyone intervening,” explains Eikelenboom. “We do all the printing, finishing and binding, drop ship all over the world, and report back to our customers. It's a complete fulfillment system.”

Integrated ordering has enabled Printforce to grow without adding staff. “Today we handle about 1 million orders a year, and we've got just four customer service people. If you go to an offset company it will be quite different. Five years ago we had about three times as many customer service reps, but did a lot less business.”

Printforce has connected its systems to some key customers' Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, enabling those customers to order automatically, according to their inventory strategies. Printforce sees these kinds of automated business processes as the future.

Both Printforce and its customers benefit from this approach. “We are helping our customers with their low inventory strategies, helping them drive down their risk. There's huge potential for them, because they don't need staff to direct and redirect orders and they can save on warehousing.”

And at Printforce, “we don't need expensive staff to handle order intake and manage all these processes, so I have a very lean and efficient organization that can offer competitive pricing.”

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