

Case study

Ashford Colour Press responds to changing educational and academic book market with digital solution



HP PageWide Web Press T230s and Hunkeler Book lines offer flexible and cost-effective production

Industry

Publishing

Objective

Ashford Colour Press had interlinked objectives: respond to the changing requirements of educational and academic publishers, and offer cost-effective short runs, shorter supply chains and reduce waste

Approach

The company installed two HP PageWide Web Press T230s and three Hunkeler Book lines (fold, cut and glue) and is migrating work from conventional presses

Business matters

Operating 24/6 schedules, the company's 133 employees are producing more jobs with improved margins and less waste. Ashford Colour Press' digital capabilities have enabled new products and attracted new business



“With the commissioning of our second color inkjet web press, we are aiming to rebalance our production at 70 percent digital and 30 percent conventional. At present, we’re about 50-50, but the jobs suited to digital production are growing strongly.”

– Rob Hutcheson, managing director, Ashford Colour Press



Transforming book production

Since the purchase of the HP PageWide Web Press T230 in 2013, Ashford Colour Press has expanded its book printing business and migrated work from conventional presses. The installation of a second identical color inkjet web press in 2015 was the result of continued changes in educational publishing and of the company's success in attracting new business.



Challenge

Adapting to digital book printing

Since electronic media has become accessible to mass audiences, book printing has been a challenging market and there are few segments where this is truer than in educational and academic publishing. Gone are the days when the same textbooks are used year in and year out. Gone, too, are the days of all students doing identical work in the same classroom.

To meet the demands of publishers for shorter runs of books, in 2013, Ashford Colour Press, of Gosport, Hampshire, took the decision to move into digitally printing books and installed the HP PageWide Web Press T230.

“Short runs were putting pressure on margins,” says Rob Hutcheson, managing director, Ashford Colour Press. “With our conventional presses, we were in danger of spending most of the time on make-ready.”

In addition to the HP PageWide Web Press, Ashford Colour Press bought a book line finishing line from HP Finishing Partner Hunkeler AG. The book line was configured inline with the press to form a powerful automated workflow.

“This worked very well in the early days of running the inkjet press,” Hutcheson continues. “However, as the amount of work for the press grew – which it did rapidly – we found that the slightly longer set up time on the Hunkeler was limiting our running time on the HP. To maximize press time, we moved to a near-line configuration and as the Hunkeler was faster than the HP it could catch up with the printed output relatively quickly after the initial set up.”

Ashford Colour Press offers PUR bound, saddle stitched and single sheets, collated and wire-bound products.

“We are adding case-binding in September 2016 as demand is making it a viable service to bring in house,” Hutcheson says. “The market continues to change quickly and we need to be able to respond.”

However, it was not long before press capacity became the real issue.



Solution

Changing paradigms in a mature market

After running the HP PageWide Web Press T230 for less than three years, the company realized that it needed additional digital capacity as new work came in and more publishers shifted to the model of printing fewer copies more often.

“The question we had to answer was what press we wanted?” says Hutcheson. “We liked the HP technology and service, but did we need another four-color press? Did we want a larger format?”

“We could see the mix of color printing vs. mono shifting towards more color, and didn’t want to be caught without that capacity,” he says.

“After evaluating our customers’ requirements and the trends we saw in the market, we decided to install a second HP PageWide Web Press T230,” Hutcheson says. “We also installed another Hunkeler Book line and the Hunkeler reel to cut sheet line. Hunkeler upgraded our existing lines so that all three are running the latest specification.”

The HP PageWide Web Press T230 has a 20.5in print width on a maximum 22in web. Print speeds up to 400ft/min can be achieved on substrates from 60 – 215g/m².

“With two presses feeding three finishing lines, we have maximum interchangeability and can optimize production efficiency,” he says.

To keep things running, Ashford Colour Press has two HP-trained level III operators.

“Apart from the training, we have the HP Smart Uptime Kit for HP PageWide Web Presses,” says Jaime Layton, production manager, Ashford Colour Press. “These kits have spare parts and inventories are kept by scanning parts so they are on hand and easy to find. Under this program, software for the press is also updated.

“We’re impressed with HP’s 24-hour support, and parts arrive extremely quickly, even if they come from Europe or the US,” he says.

Customer at a glance

Business sector: Publishing

Company name: Ashford Colour Press

Interviewee:

Rob Hutcheson, managing director
Jaime Layton, production manager

HP equipment:

2 x HP PageWide Web Press T230

Turnover: \$16 million

Website: ashfordps.co.uk

Benefits

Color, automation and efficiency

“Being able to address short books runs that are affordable for our customers and still profitable for us is the main advantage of digital book printing,” says Hutcheson. “Turning around book orders in less than two weeks is an important advantage for both parties, too.”

“There are some publishers who understood the digital printing model from early on,” he continues. “This reduces waste, stock levels, warehousing costs and also improves cash flow. Running the latest HP PageWide technology enables us to work with our clients, customizing workflows to maximize efficiencies for both parties.”

“Publishers today have the option to adopt the digital printing model, printing shorter runs more frequently with delivery in less than two weeks. Or use the traditional model, ordering in bulk and waiting anything from 2 weeks with Ashford to 12 weeks from overseas.”

— Rob Hutcheson, managing director,
Ashford Colour Press

Another area where Ashford Colour Press has made major investment is in automating ordering.

“We have set up completely automated ordering services,” Hutcheson explains. “We have fully operational Automated Stock Replenishment Programs set up with two major publishers and are working with Electronic Data Interchange with another.”

Among the trends noted by Hutcheson and his team is a shift to more color in educational and academic books.

“Five years ago, we were printing 60 percent mono and 40 percent color. Today, that ratio has flipped, and 60 percent of our work is color,” he says. “This is one of the main reasons that we opted for another HP PageWide Web Press T230. Another reason was that printing short run color books on the HP PageWide Web Presses improves our efficiency by 100 percent, and we gain another 30 percent on binding. It’s had a tremendous impact on our capacity.”

Looking to the future, Hutcheson sees a continued place for conventional offset in Ashford Colour Press’ market, but supported by more automation.

“I see a split between litho and digital book printing with fully automated production from file transfer to delivery, linking with EDI and ASR systems. This will encompass print-on-demand across, one, two and four colors, offering soft-cover and case-bound book solutions. I see this backed up with a strong storage and distribution service,” Hutcheson concludes. “I also see HP as our long-term partner for color inkjet production, working closely to meet the ever-changing requirements of the publishing industry.”

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