

Case study

Great Northern Corporation boosts its digital capabilities with eye on business growth



Investments in HP corrugated solutions enable new value-added offerings resulting in opportunities to grow business

Challenge

- Adjust to ongoing trend toward lower volumes and greater customization
- Efficiently produce jobs that require versioning
- Help customers reduce time to market
- Find digital solutions that fit existing plants and workflows

Solution

- Install HP Scitex 15500 Corrugated Press, replacing an earlier-generation HP Scitex press
- Invest in HP PageWide T400S Press with goal to replace offset printing of folding cartons
- Invest in HP PageWide C500 Press to expand digital volumes, with litho-replaceable image quality
- Partner with HP to share insights on technology development, drive market acceptance of digital across merchandising display, corrugated, and folded carton packaging

Results

- Great Northern keeps a larger share of customers' business by solving their challenges with the help of HP digital printing
- Allows Great Northern to provide new, value-based solutions in high-demand areas
- Broad acceptance of digital printing among customers enables Great Northern to integrate digital in its general production workflow



“I think digital printing has evolved to the point that it will begin to be disruptive. In the next five to ten years digital is going to change how we manufacture.”

– Mike Schliesmann, Senior Vice President, Great Northern Corporation

In the face of rising demand for lower volumes and more versioning of corrugated packaging and folding cartons, Great Northern Corporation is significantly increasing its digital printing investments. With one HP corrugated press already installed, and two more to come, it is partnering with HP not just to boost current digital capacity and capabilities, but also to fundamentally change packaging production.



“Digital has opened doors to allow us to solve problems for customers and keep a bigger chunk of their business. We’ve had pretty broad-based acceptance among our customers, so it is now one of our converting options, allowing us to provide value-based solutions in the areas we need them.”

—Mike Schliesmann, Senior Vice President, Great Northern Corporation

Industry:

Corrugated packaging, folding cartons

Company name:

Great Northern Corporation

Location:

Appleton, Wisconsin USA

HP equipment:

HP Scitex 15500 Corrugated Press, HP PageWide T400S Press early 2017

Website:

greatnortherncorp.com



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Challenge

Lower volumes, versioning, and fast-turnaround

Great Northern Corporation is one of the largest independent producers of corrugated packaging, folding cartons and in-store displays in the US. The company provides complete solutions to consumer goods manufacturers and retailers, handling everything from pencil sketch through delivery to stores. Operating five major manufacturing facilities in the Midwest, Great Northern also has extensive customer service, design and prepress groups. “As a high-service, value-added company, our business is based on fast turnaround, a turnkey approach, and high quality design,” explains Mike Schliesmann, Senior Vice President at GNC. “Our job is to enable customers to have a fast time to market; it’s why we do everything in-house.”

In business since 1962, Great Northern has extensive experience in adapting to market changes, including continuing trends toward reduced volumes, more customization, and more retailer-specific displays.” Schliesmann notes that those trends have accelerated over the past 3-5 years, in part fueled by retailer consolidation, leading to fewer promotions and shorter run lengths. At the same time, customers are demanding faster turnarounds.

“Those are all things that the digital world seems to be able to address. Versioning, for example, is very difficult with analog, but is answered very well in the digital process.”

By 2015, having used an HP Scitex FB7600 Industrial Press for several years, which proved the concept of digital for retail displays, it needed to increase its digital capacity and productivity. It was also time to take advantage of technology advances that would enable higher image quality and substrate versatility.

Solution

Investing and partnering with HP

In November 2015, Great Northern installed the HP Scitex 15500 Corrugated Press at its Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin plant, where it produces retail displays. The goal: to gain improved image quality and higher speed, for faster turnaround and increased capacity.

“With the HP Scitex FB7600 we were getting maybe 30 sheets an hour or 90 with the multi-loader; whereas on the HP Scitex 15500 we’re running at 80 an hour, giving us 240 sheets an hour with the multiloader. That’s a more than 100% improvement in productivity, at a higher image quality,” says Schliesmann.

More recently, Great Northern also invested in an HP PageWide T400S Press, due to be installed in its Oshkosh, Wisconsin laminated folding carton production facility in early 2017.

“With the savings in waste and setup time, we really see that this has the potential to be the mainstay printing process for our facility,” says Schliesmann. “Our goal is to move 50% of our current production at that facility to digital in the first year. Beyond that, it’s the whole value proposition of digital that will help us grow our business – versioning, variable data, quick turnaround, better response to customers’ demands, and inventory reduction.”

Results

Growing by offering new value

As a major corrugated converter, digital accounts for only a very small percentage of GNC’s sales, but it nevertheless plays an important role in the company’s strategy. With the ability, using digital printing, to provide value-based solutions to customers, Great Northern has been able to secure a larger portion of some customers’ business.

“Originally we touted digital as this new great thing we do. Now, we consider it one of our work stream options. We often don’t even tell our customers its digital. As we upgrade our HP presses, the quality gets even better so we have greater customer acceptance. And the speeds get better too, which allows us to be more production friendly.”

Schliesmann expects Great Northern’s new and upcoming HP presses will enable Great Northern to grow by enabling it to offer value propositions that it can’t offer now. “For example, today we have customers in our folding carton facility who want four different packages in stores for the holidays, which is this week. We can do it today, but it’s a very time, labor, and floor-consuming process. With the HP T400S Press, it doesn’t matter if they want 4, 10 or 20 versions; we can run them all consecutively and they are all integrated in the work stream.”

In parallel with the addition of the HP Scitex 15500 Corrugated Press and the HP PageWide T400S Press, Great Northern is active in the development advisory group for the HP PageWide C500 Press and will be an early adopter of the press.

“We see the C500 as a very strong evolution beyond the 15500, because of the output speed as a single-pass digital press and also because of the quality. It’s a suitable litho replacement that will allow us to expand our digital quantities.”

Schliesmann comments that Great Northern’s years-long partnership with HP has had significant impact at the strategic level. “Having the opportunity to see what HP is doing and to provide input has helped us see what we want to do with our business. Beyond helping us to add more points of value to our customers, it has helped us stay aware of future technologies and how we might bring them to our customer base.”

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