

Editor's Note: This is the first in an occasional series of articles about new equipment from the perspective of the reprographics shop, rather than the manufacturer.

Billy Hamilton is CEO of RGS, a reprographics firm with locations in Las Vegas and Singapore. The company focuses primarily on the AEC market. The company acquired two HP PageWide printers in November, and they have been up and running since January.

Q: Why did you decide to acquire the PageWides?

A: One reason we decided to upgrade was that we've seen that architects and engineers are paying a lot more attention to fine detail, and we just knew we were going to have upgrade meet their expectations. We looked at all the options from KIP, HP, and Canon, and we just went through the process – getting color samples, asking many, many questions -- and ultimately decided that even though the PageWide was very new, and we knew there would be some kinks and learning curves to go through, that it was the best equipment for us. We had some other HP printers already, and combined with our other HP models, the PageWide gives us the complete package.

Q: Have your PageWides lived up to your expectations so far?

A: Our production team really took to the PageWides right away. We've probably put about 1.5 million square feet on the machines already. I've not had one complaint from clients on quality. And in terms of speed, we are able to do things far quicker, it's amazing. For example, we had a job this morning – between 1,200 and 1,300 color prints. Before this we would have been doing this job still tomorrow, but the PageWides had it done in under an hour. The time efficiency savings have been huge on the PageWide, without a drop in quality. When we do stuff like that we know we made the right decision.

Q: How dependable have the PageWides been?

A: We've had very few issues in terms of breakdowns or something. What we have experienced is with the HP SmartStream software -- it's had its bugs. But we take a practical view of that, and we know we have to work out the bugs, and that never put us off. The one thing we've been pretty impressed with is that they've had a lot of feedback from us -- for example we've seen all sorts of things of how the machine reacts to the different types of files -- and HP has been very proactive with that information. They've come up with some major upgrades in the time we've had it. So we've been happy with their response so far.

Q: How has your cost per print been?

A: That's one of the biggest questions I've had from others. We heard that there's no way that the cost of running PageWide could be as cheap as [toner-based printers], so one thing we did right away is added up all the costs and we've been very pleasantly surprised that in terms of

cost of doing prints we've found it to be spot on and virtually identical to running the [toner-based] machines.

Q: What kind of work have you been running on the PageWides?

A: We're seeing that the majority of the color work is CAD color, line drawings, mark-ups, whatever. But we've also had good results with standard posters, and we're hoping we'll increase that business.

Q: Have you been able to capture more CAD color work because the cost is less than the cost of running these prints on typical inkjet printers?

A: We have been a little more aggressive on price, but not overly aggressive. We do not want to come down extremely cheap just because we can do it fast. People still regard it as a premium service. Even though PageWide is fantastic with speed, we're not going to throw in our clients' face that it's massively faster because the immediate reaction is that it must be cheaper.

Q: Any advice for others interested in the PageWide?

A: I say do your homework. We looked at all the options, and did as much homework as we could. We didn't rush into this. [And once you get the machine] run the hell out of it the first month. We didn't play lightly with the new machines – we made the conscious decision to put as much as possible through them.