

Printing Fights Back

by William J. "Bill" McCalpin, EDP

"Was mich nicht umbringt, macht mich staerker."
- Friedrich Nietzsche

"What does not kill me, makes me stronger" – the famous phrase by German philosopher Nietzsche rings true for electronic printing today. Most people, including some people in the Xplor community, believed until recently that the Internet would replace electronic printing. The rationale was easy to understand: Since the delivery of information had to be many times cheaper via the Internet than by printing and mailing, both suppliers and customers would shift to the electronic transmission of documents.

However, according to a recent article in *The New York Times*, some enterprises are beginning to discover that using paper delivery of marketing materials leads to a substantially higher response rate than e-mails, enough to justify the difference in cost.

The article, which ran August 6, 2001 (www.nytimes.com) cites Peapod.com, the Internet grocer, as an enterprise which is seemingly Internet based, but which in fact prefers direct mail marketing to e-mail. Peapod.com's senior vice-president of marketing is quoted in the article, saying, "With direct mail, you have maybe a couple more seconds to get someone's attention."

"It's *déjà vu* all over again." –Yogi Berra

Some readers may be concerned that the presentation of information via media such as paper is headed for extinction because of the arrival of the Internet. There is fear in our "industry" that we are confronting an insurmountable wave of change that will overwhelm and destroy us.

What everyone needs to realize is that this is not the first wave of

change to confront the electronic printing space. More than 10 years ago, proponents of decentralized printing were chortling that the days of centralized electronic printing were numbered. Indeed, the promise of the economies of "deliver and print" over "print and deliver" seemed to imply even to centralized stalwarts that the end of "big iron" was near.

And what happened?

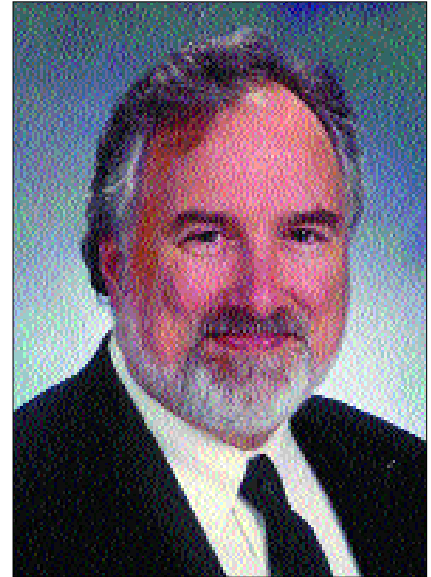
Well, two things, actually. The first was that users eventually caught on to the fact that printing 50,000 pages a day on 500 decentralized printers was considerably more expensive on a per-page basis than printing 50,000 pages a day on one or two centralized printers.

But more importantly, the manufacturers of centralized printers joined forces with the makers of finishing equipment to add value to paper-based documents in ways not possible with decentralized printers. Custom multiple paper stocks in the document set, easy job ticketing, multiple full-color inserts, automated folding and inserting, binding, and postal discounts for mass mailings all served to actually make it cheaper to produce high-quality paper documents in a centralized environment, even factoring in the cost of mailing.

In other words, instead of rolling over and playing dead, the vendors in the centralized printing space improved their product offerings. Did decentralized printing go away? No, of course not. But while there are appropriate uses for decentralized printers, the centralized printer re-established its value and re-asserted its place in the enterprise.

Competing with the Internet

In the age of the Internet, you'd think that e-mail would be the faster, cheaper way of deliver-



ing information to customers and prospects. And for many enterprises, it is. However, in *The New York Times* article referenced above, the executive vice-president of Bluefly (an online retailer of discount apparel) said that whereas "a fraction of a percent, to a couple percent" of those who receive Bluefly e-mail solicitations turn into paying customers, 3 or 4 percent of those who are sent Bluefly postcards make purchases.

This issue of *Xploration* will examine some of the advances in the world of electronic printing that are making it possible for printing to compete with Internet delivery. High-speed, affordable, full-color printing and automated proofing are just two of the technologies that are enabling printing to fight back. We thank Gilles Biscos of InterQuest and Denny Kerns of GMC Software Technology for their articles on color and automated proofing.

In addition, we have an article on "Mail: The Darling of the Digital Age," which further examines the issues raised in *The New York Times* article on how advances in printing can effectively compete with electronic delivery.

As you can imagine, these new technologies are also causing the
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worlds of electronic print and digital print to come closer together. Electronic print has been focused on high volume, production printing of fixed and variable data. Digital print, on the other hand, has been more concerned with the quality printing of fixed information, and is thus a replacement for offset printing.

The new printers are making it possible to merge the two areas and create full-color paper documents containing both fixed and variable data, within a high-volume, cost-effective production environment.

Our Thanks to Xerox

In fact, we hope that this issue itself is an example of what the new printing can do. *Xploration* approached a number of vendors of full-color printing equipment, and Xerox volunteered to print portions of this issue on their DocuColor 2060 printer. Thus, this issue tangibly represents the possibilities that full-color printing from vendors such as Heidelberg, IBM, Scitex, and Xerox can bring to your organization.

We at *Xploration* are excited about these new possibilities, and we hope you are, too. We would love to hear your comments about this issue and how printing is fighting back in your enterprise – just send us an e-mail (yes, we recognize the irony in t~~x~~s) at xploration@xplor.org.



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