

Commercial trends

Driven by the digitalization of our life, the landscape of commercial printing is continuously evolving. Once dominated by high-volume generic prints, it's no secret that commercial printing is in secular decline. The pandemic has compounded these trends, and while we are seeing some signs of recovery in the general commercial market, the positive recovery is not quite at pre-pandemic levels

The one thing we do know is that in specific segments print continues to grow when done digitally. This evolution isn't just about the digital age's influence, but effective communication which ushered in shorter, customized print runs and digitally printed books.

We're now seeing commercial printers rely more systematically on digital to remain in business, deploying increasingly creative offerings to their clients that are relevant, top quality and economically viable.

Publishing Takes a Green and Short-Run Turn

One of the most significant shifts we're observing in the publishing sector is the move towards more sustainable and short-run production. After experiencing a dip in global print orders due to excess inventory caused by pandemic-era supply chain disruptions and sluggish sales in 2022 and early 2023, publishers are adapting to the new normal.

Book publishers, for instance, are often reverting to offshoring for smaller initial print runs to offset rising production costs and regain normal shipping times. However, they're also now adopting a 'gap' approach, incorporating short-run and Print-on-Demand (POD) production from the onset of a book's life cycle, as well as reprinting sooner and more frequently in market to meet unpredictable demand. This strategy allows publishers to bridge any potential inventory shortfalls effectively and cost efficiently.



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Alexander's Print Advantage, specializing in print-on-demand products including books, journals, and more, recently implemented an HP Indigo 100K to meet such growing demand. Automated print and fulfilment was strategic. Pointing to the

presses automated workflows, Alexander's has been able to navigate rapid growth and deliver the highest quality products, faster and more efficiently than ever before.

Trade publishers meanwhile are focusing on limited print runs, leveraging digital production and special finishing techniques to elevate the perceived value of a book as emotional and experiential value becomes increasingly important to consumers. Meanwhile, academic and scientific publishers are prioritizing eco-friendly practices, including right-sizing print runs, paperback binding, and employing recyclable materials such as recycled paper and soy-based inks. This shift towards sustainability is driven by both consumer demand and a commitment to reducing environmental impact.

It's with this focus in mind that we're seeing customers increasingly invest in HP Indigo technology aligning with their environmental and sustainability goals. Earlier this year COPYTOP invested in the HP Indigo 15K digital press to deliver on the range of media it produces, but also to help reduce the company's carbon footprint. Having conducted an impact study, the company measured the impact the new press would have in air quality and energy impact with the 15K "proven in maturity, functionality, technicality, and most importantly quality and ecology".

Equally, West Canadian Digital Imaging (WCD), committed to providing sustainable solutions that enable customers to print only what they need, invested in an HP Indigo 15K Digital Press to bring previously outsourced work in house providing offset-matching quality that delivers on the demands of its customers, while upholding its commitment to sustainability.

Underpinning all these trends, the increase in paper prices and postage costs have further inclined the industry towards shorter and more targeted print runs. This shift reflects a broader industry trend toward cost-conscious and sustainable practices.





Direct Mail Makes a Strong Comeback

Direct mail, often considered a cornerstone of marketing efforts, will go through somewhat of a resurgence. In the UK for example, a staggering 80% of advertisers leverage marketing door drops, underlining the enduring effectiveness of this channel.

Although postal rate hikes caused a slight slowdown during the summer, we are witnessing a notable rebound as we head into Q4 2023 and beyond. Brands are

increasingly recognizing the value of "omnichannel" campaigns, where online combined with direct mail plays a pivotal role in reaching and engaging target audiences more effectively.

Furthermore, the escalating costs and complexities associated with advertising are compelling marketers, including digitally native direct-to-consumer brands, to embrace direct mail as a vital component of their growth strategies. This resurgence highlights the enduring power of physical marketing materials in a digital age that should help restabilise the commercial print market. While digital marketing reaches the sight and hearing of customers, brands must use a combination of printed, physical and offline marketing to reach all five senses: smell, vision, taste, hearing and touch.

In fact, America's leading niche magazine franchisor, The N2 company, recently installed two HP PageWide Advantage 2200 presses to stay at the forefront of marketing innovation while also building community by tailoring its offering to elevate clients' brand visibility, engagement, and success in today's competitive market. The company's investment in the presses owes to the guaranteed quality, production time, and overall efficiency they offer which has proven invaluable for the growth, evolution, and broader strategy of the business.

Commercial Printers Embrace New Business Models

As the commercial printing sector adapts to new market dynamics it's undergoing a significant transformation. Commercial printers understand how to handle





numerous shorter print runs and how to offer print-on-demand platforms to their clients.

Web-to-print is driving speed, customization and enhancing the overall customer experience. One of our customers, Saal Digital, is dealing with an average of 5,000 online web-to-print orders per day and to meet same day delivery demand implemented the HP Indigo 15K and HP Indigo 12000 digital presses calling out above all the advanced software and efficiency of the technology to meet the demand.

In labels & packaging, the demand for shorter runs and even ultra-short runs is growing rapidly as well and commercial printers are in a great position to offer their existing clients such services. This strategic shift allows them to tap into growing markets while leveraging their expertise in digital printing technologies. The move

towards folding carton and labels reflects a broader trend towards diversification using web-to-print platforms.

Commercial printers are adapting to the changing landscape, leveraging sustainable practices, and exploring new avenues for growth. This resilience and adaptability generate growth for digital printing technology and this is where HP proven experience and innovative solutions make a difference.

As we move into 2024, with the development of more automation and more digitalization in the commercial printing space, we anticipate an acceleration towards a digital mindset. The transformation to come will embrace sustainability, manage shorter runs more effectively than ever and will lead to new factories, and innovative production methods with less human interventions. At drupa 2024, a visit to the HP booth will be worth the stop as we demonstrate how we envision the future of the commercial printing landscape.

