

CTP Allows Dallas Printer to Master Quality and Speed

Instant & Small Commercial Printer

As seen in Instant & Small Commercial Printer

Charlene Sims, owner of The Master's Press in Dallas, prides herself on exceptional quality and fast turnaround to build and keep a loyal following of customers for her small commercial print shop. She founded the company in 1976 after working for several years in another shop. With The Master's Press, Sims brought personal commitment to exceptional service—and for the first 25 years, that was enough. With technology continuing to flourish, Sims knew she needed to keep up with it if she was going to maintain her competitive edge.

With 10 employees and annual revenues of about \$1 million, The Master's Press prints everything from business cards to four-color process, which helps to serve a mixture of personal, small- and large-business clientele. The shop has two A.B. Dick 9800s with T-heads, two A.B. Dick 360s, and a recently installed Heidelberg Printmaster 46-2 two-color portrait press.

The way it was

Before CTP, camera-ready artwork would be created on a laser printer or sent to a service bureau for film or velox. Metal plates were made from the film or polyester plates burned from the mechanicals on an Itek camera. Sims says, "We were spending \$1,500 per month on film, which is more than enough to cover the platesetter lease

payments — and that doesn't even count stripping and processing labor." Speed and quality were just as important considerations as the economic savings. Sims continues, "We could save at least a day in turnaround time by bringing the work inhouse. Plus, we could improve the quality."

Sims had been researching the exploding area of CTP for several years. She visited trade



(l. to r.) George Harrison, Charlene Sims, Sean Smith and Rick Goodin of The Master's Press with their PlateStream Platesetter.

shows and talked to the equipment suppliers. Because her run lengths were less than 20,000, she was intrigued by the economy of polyester silver-halide platesetters and the low cost of the plates, but she was skeptical of the image quality and registration based on her experiences with a camera platemaker. After a number of plate tests, she was

impressed by the quality of today's digital silver-halide plates.

The way it is

Sims' search converged on the Printware PlateStream platesetter because of its image quality. The PlateStream was also the only machine available with a combination Bacher/pin-bar punch, which eliminated the punching step for the duplicator plates they currently need, while it allowed them to punch plates for multicolor presses in the future.

The Master's Press occasionally still needs to use film. The PlateStream, while primarily a plate-setter, can image film as well as plates.

"The PlateStream certainly wasn't the best known system, but it was clearly the best choice," says Sims.

Better Image Quality

Sims reports that less pressroom labor — primarily due to faster makeready — more than makes up for the additional time it takes to preflight and check files. Makeready time is vastly improved on color and tight-register work, because the plates line up the same way every time and are ready to run.

Sims says, "Press operators are one of my most valuable assets, and they're spending a lot less time on plate prep and make-ready." Sims points out that preflight can be sped up with an automated preflight package. Early in the switch to CTP, operators checked each plate for image position, font substitution and other gross anomalies. Sims thinks those checks can be eliminated with experience.

Better Image Quality with Polyester Plates

When it comes to better image quality, Sims says she was pleasantly surprised to find that the digital polyester plates were actually better in quality than conventional metal plates in many respects. Digital polyester plates allow a range of screens to be imaged without plugging unlike negatives and metal plates. With film and metal plates, screen were limited to 133 lpi, but with CTP, screens are routinely 133 to 150 lpi. Sims reports that her customers can see the difference in their CTP jobs. She says many report that the pictures look finer, even if they do not know exactly why.

Fine lines also are noticeably better with

CTP. This was demonstrated with the first CTP job Master's ran — their house stationery set — which has a delicate script-reversed font. Small type also was reproduced much better with the platesetter.

Faster Job Turnaround

Faster job turnaround is another benefit of the CTP system, according to Sims. "We've always said three-to-five days turnaround time for a typical two-color job, but now we're a lot closer to the three than the five. We love to pleasantly surprise our customers."

The way it will be

With CTP in place, Master's is looking at ways to take advantage of its higher-quality, more efficient workflow. The print shop's owner can buy a two-color press, such as a Ryobi 3302 or an A.B. Dick 3985, to improve its four-color capability. The PlateStream's Bacher C2000 punch pattern will allow plates to be registered quickly and precisely. Master's expects to add more color to its printing in the future. And Sims says she hopes to use more of the capabilities of the turnkey scanner now that the shop is comfortable with the basics.

Now Sims has the enviable "problem" of how to allocate the plate cost savings. She says she doesn't feel right charging customers \$50 for a plate that now costs her far less than that. So, what will Sims do with the extra money? "We pass a lot of the savings on to our customers," she says. "It's the right thing to do, and it will give us a competitive advantage." Now that's technology being applied to customer commitment.