

# Lieberman Printing Makes the Move to Desktop Publishing and CTP

By Karen Lowery Hall



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In 1932, Leo Lieberman started a printing company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Naturally enough, he named it Lieberman Printing Co. The family-run business, currently headed by the founder's son, Richard Lieberman, has kept the presses rolling ever since.

A critical evaluation of the firm's ability to meet the increasingly digital demands of the marketplace convinced Lieberman and his plant manager Scott Axtman that drastic measures were required to bring the company up to speed. The decision was made to make the move to desktop publishing (DTP) and computer-to-plate (CTP). Even in the early part, the company was still using an old Compuset 500 to create camera-ready originals. Lieberman and Axtman put their heads together and designed a plan.

"It's a costly process," Axtman says of the old methods. He measures costs in manpower, time, and efficiency. "You have to have skilled people who know how to do that, and we used to have terrible bottlenecks. Prepress was just horrendous. By the time it got out to the shop, it was a rush job. I don't know how we ever got along without the PlateStream® CTP at all," he says.



Lieberman Printing's Plant Manager Scott Axtman, (left) with Nick Walczak of the prepress department.

## A New Day

The first step in the modernization of Lieberman Printing was to install computers. In shopping for computers, they were able to keep in mind the CTP angle, so that everything was compatible from the onset. Essentially, the entire front-end of the shop was redesigned as a whole, from the bottom up. "We didn't want to buy everything at once," he explains. "We wanted to install one system at a time—get our workflow working with that system, and work the bugs out of it—then install the rest of it."

## DTP Transformation

The DTP components were installed first and for months later the CTP equipment was setup. "In the interim", he explains, "we were out-putting on Macs, just doing laser prints and still using the process camera, and shooting negatives for the plates." The prepress department was retrained to DTP and computer applications during that phase. Several employees started taking night classes, with Lieberman footing the bill. One employee even bought his own Mac laptop so he could practice at home.

"The two gentlemen in prepress have become so fast now that we've started to cross-train them," Axtman asserts. "By midmorning,

they are out of work." Part of the decision to move into DTP included a discussion of just that scenario. "We didn't want anyone to lose their job because of the transformation, so we opted for cross-training," he says. "That's also why we offered to let anyone go back to school who wanted to, and we paid for it. Everyone here is intelligent, they are established with the company, and we wanted them to stay."

Axtman also is convinced that the phenomenon of the prepress department running out of work by midmorning will be short-lived. The company's overall capacity has increased so dramatically as a result of the changes, that he predicts a cycle of growth in the near future. The benefits gained by retraining also go beyond the obvious. When any outfit makes a visible commitment to its employees, it raises morale and employee loyalty throughout the company.

## CTP—The other important element

Lieberman Printing completed its move to a fully computerized prepress department by adding Printware's Platestream CTP equipment. Axtman admits to being a bit surprised at how user-friendly he found it to be.

The turnaround time on jobs has literally been cut in half, Axtman states. That has allowed an increase in the jobs that the shop can produce. "With this system, I've actually been able to get more jobs on the presses, because I can get more jobs to the plates quicker. So, we've actually gained press time because I don't have pressmen standing around waiting for plates to be made or fixed. Work is just coming through like crazy," he beams.

The change appears to have made work more pleasant and productive for everyone in the 20-employee company. Axtman points out that the



overall stress level in the shop has dropped noticeably. Not only are production workers buzzing along at a faster clip, but the two outside sales rep are also greatly pleased by the plant's increased capacity.

One of the customer trends Axtman has observed since joining the company in 1994 is the growing demand for multicolor work. Lieberman Printing has been doing two-color work for years. In the quest to offer as many options as possible to its clients, all Lieberman presses—including the two envelope presses—can be set up for thermography. A portable Virkotype thermography unit can be rolled to the end of any press for in-house raised letter work.

When looking to the future, Axtman says the firm is considering adding a 25-inch two-color press. That would allow him to parlay the increased efficiency of the prepress department into increased capacity in the actual production facility. The theory is that increased capacity would lead to increased sales.

With annual sales currently approaching the \$4 million mark, Axtman feels that Lieberman Printing is on a cusp. Hovering in the limbo between being a big quick printer and a small commercial printer, he would like to see the company complete that transition in the next few years. The company's combination of pioneer spirit and visionary leadership should combine to make that dream come true.