

GP HUMMINGBIRD BUILDS LEADING-EDGE PREPRESS WORKFLOW

THE SOPHISTICATED PRE-PRINT BUSINESS INVESTED IN AN ADAPTABLE PROCESS THAT PROVIDES FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPLY CHAIN EFFICIENCIES FOR CUSTOMERS.

MIKE AGNESS
HYBRID SOFTWARE

Digital presses have revolutionized packaging, delivering high-impact color and creating a new paradigm for versioning and customization. Despite its innovations, digitally printed packaging has not always offered solutions across the full

spectrum of sizes and quantities. Georgia-Pacific Hummingbird® digital packaging solutions overcame that barrier by producing digitally pre-printed rolls for a full range of customer needs, from specialty versions to everyday large runs.

“GP Hummingbird really incubated at Georgia-Pacific’s Color-Box, one of the largest corrugated litho providers in North America,” recalls Robert Seay, Vice President, Digital Print Solutions, Georgia-Pacific. “They did something very innovative. They took the work into pre-print, which



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Along came the HP PageWide T400, complementing the other equipment. The company already had laminators where rolls or sheets could be made into combined board and its box plants were converting offset pre-print from a roll press. Now it could take the rolls right off the T400, and already had the tools to make that work, immediately. “The wide web digital press let us attack high graphics print completely differently. Then, it morphed and became its own business,” Seay says.

GP Hummingbird was proof of concept that digital could work as an offset alternative. When the HP T1100 was announced, Hummingbird was the first packaging supplier in North America to provide 110-inch wide web capability for digital pre-print at lengths. Recently, Georgia-Pacific announced the purchase of an HP PageWide T1190 Press, the world's highest-volume digital corrugated packaging solution, providing an east-west footprint. It will assure redundancy, provide scale, and let GP Hummingbird improve turnaround time while reducing shipping and logistics costs.

“Much of our value proposition is supply chain efficiency. We can

help different corrugated converters, turning around high volumes quickly. It's easier to ship rolls of pre-print than boxes,” notes Seay. “Anybody can order our rolls, but we focus on those who know how to run pre-print. Our onsite packaging engineers can help optimize layouts and packaging structures.”

Varied Customer Base

Serving many corrugated converters, GP Hummingbird has to consider how its workflow will be used everywhere. Clients will deliver a piece of art, perhaps from a flexo job, but will want to print digitally. The art could be a square or a rectangle but finishing and the requirements of the box must also be determined.

Once a one-up is approved, a step-and-repeat layout must be prepared. The sheets must be imposed for the corrugated converter's cutter. For example, a corrugated converter might generally use rotary diecutters. A file built for a flatbed diecutter

needs an edge trim and a sidebar to grab before it goes on a rotary. You have to rethink the artwork at three levels – the one-up for the customer, the 'n-up' sheet for print and the corrugating and diecutting tolerances. What does that layout look like, and how do they get the customer to approve it? GP Hummingbird wanted an automated way of doing that.

The entire process of creating the art and structure requires that they are approved together. “Sometimes we complete the art, but the structure changes because it's going to a different corrugated converter – or a different piece wants the flap slightly different. That puts the art out of synch with the structure,” says Seay. At first, the process was very manual and intensive, with many cross-checks to assure something didn't change along the way, requiring adjustments.

GP Hummingbird's business model is unique. “Our original workflow couldn't be customized, which became limiting, pretty quick,” discloses Seay.

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The workflow is used to clean up files and ensure that processes are standardized. That becomes fairly important given all the work running through the shop. “The more touch points, the more potential for mistakes. The first thing we did was deploy our workflow, along with our HP and graphic management software,” Seay says. “The challenge is to know what you want to do and manage the installation as a software project. It was helpful that we could customize everything at our centralized hub in Cincinnati.”

A Comprehensive Process

GP Hummingbird breaks the workflow down into three buckets: programming and integration, editing tools and then step and repeat, building a solution that offers everything to create a press ready PDF.

The workflow is tied into the order processing system when product designs are created. They can refer to an existing design that will be changed, an existing structure, or anything in between.

Human intervention could result in a lack of consistency. “We have a



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DAVE FOX, HUMMINGBIRD GRAPHICS MANAGER

structured process so we can trust what’s going through our system,” says Dave Fox, Hummingbird Graphics Manager. Hummingbird creates PDFs that are automatically processed, eliminating judgment calls when setting the job for the press. An example is automated marks: Where are the slit lines and cut marks for the corrugated converter? What should the diecutter expect?

The workflow conducts all of the traditional prepress tasks like preflighting and trapping – as well as a few that are more sophisticated. For example, GP Hummingbird can recognize a barcode and replace it, adjusting for any print method. The company will also distort files to take into consideration what’s going to happen on the press or with the



corrugated converter. It also conducts color mapping, adjusts transparencies and clipping paths, and more. By standardizing and automating these functions in one application, it makes creation of a press ready PDF file much easier. “We get different files from many different places. They arrive with a variety of issues. There are many things we can fix automatically,” continues Fox.

The company prefers to call its proofing system a graphics portal – not a customer or vendor portal – because it’s about managing the entire graphics process. It can offer quick layout suggestions that way. For example, solid fills can cost more using digital ink. GP Hummingbird will offer cost-effective alternatives that are graphically better and can show examples of what they might look like. Customers view their proofs online. If somebody wants to make a change, it’s not communicated via email. They can mark it up online and approve it,

streamlining the entire process.

Step and repeat files and adjustments can be made without affecting the approved art. With the templates, imposing repeat items on existing layouts is faster and has increased consistency from layout to layout, because all marks are already placed, and approved.

Key to the process is being able to link the press upload server to the workflow, so files can be sent automatically to the press with a time stamp. There is one location to submit all project notes, reducing email traffic and offering a central place for team members to scan print sample info. Team members can track to see which jobs have been posted to press.

A Complete Workflow

During the COVID pandemic, GP Hummingbird’s graphic designers were able to work from home and still be effective, working from the HYBRID server. “We really didn’t miss a beat. That’s a big deal,” exclaims Seay.

Delivering samples and proofs can delay a deadline, but some customers still want to visit and do crosschecks – although there have been fewer during COVID. Online proofing simplified the process and has made the workflow very easy for many customers.

The software has eliminated a number of potential mistakes. That matters because customers want supply chain efficiency. “Our workflow conducts so many deep edits that our pre-production people can effectively normalize our production files in a third of the time, with fewer workarounds and issues due to file components. We cleared up a lot of initial graphics



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work making Hummingbird's prepress so streamlined that one person easily handles the work of two or three people using more traditional imposition tools," says Seay.

"The corrugated converter or the supply chain constantly changes. We need to pivot on the fly. A lot of the complex decisions surround finishing. How much tolerance do you have on the diecut or how is it laid out? For example, one high volume customer uses us for work that dynamically changes. When the art is ready, we need to print the jobs quickly, and to very specific specs," he continues.

"One job may require 70-inch rolls, while another might require 80 inches. If I didn't have the workflow, it would be harder to manage.

"One of the key values of our workflow was flexibility. Digital is going to morph and evolve. We want to morph and evolve our software suite as well. We also want to offer a better experience for our customers. It really comes down to, 'Can I control their artwork? Can I control the workflow in between? Can I give customers assurances that it's going to get done in a structured manner?' Because our workflow is incredibly

flexible, adaptive, and delivers high quality work, it is now extremely valuable for our business and our customers," concludes Seay. ■

Mike Agness, HYBRID Software Executive Vice President, Americas - and previously Vice President of Sales for HYBRID North America - joined HYBRID Software in 2011 after a long career at Pitman Company and Agfa Corp. He brings a strong blend of technical and sales experience to HYBRID Software and its customers. He can be reached at mikea@hybridsoftware.com