

The Economical Advantage of CTP Technology

**American
Printer**

As seen in American Printer

Workflow efficiencies gained through CTP are helping this printer respond better to customers' needs for fast turnaround.

Brothers Greg and Nick Meyer both had backgrounds in sales and service, one in pharmaceuticals and the other in insurance, when they decided to open a one-color print shop 15 years ago. They hired a press operator as their sole employee at the time.

While neither sibling has ever learned how to run a press, their knack for anticipating customers' wants and needs has proven successful. Their latest effort toward client responsiveness has been the installation of a computer-to-plate (CTP) system.

"CTP technology gives us the capability to produce the highest quality work with quick turnaround, making it easy to beat the deadlines we need to in order to continue to please our customers," confirms Nick Meyer of A-1 Printers, now a 29-employee firm, including six outside salespeople. "We're able to produce higher volumes in a more economical environment, making it possible for our customers to do projects that, up until now, would have been cost-prohibitive."

With clients ranging from start-up operations to major corporations, the suburban Minneapolis printer's growing niche is in producing a variety of spot- and four-color process pieces—including brochures, direct-mail pieces, promotional items, manuals and booklets.

Meyer looks at A-1's role this way: "We can produce higher quality than smaller printers who don't have the experience our press operators have and pick up short-run color jobs where higher-end firms aren't price competitive."

As for A-1's salespeople, they often act as "print consultants" for customer contacts who are typically not professional print buyers, but rather employees "wearing many hats."

"Companies have downsized and consolidated the print buyer's function into another job. Now a person is placed in the position of buying print, with very little understanding of the process," Meyer explains. "We pride ourselves in helping these types of print buyers. They give us the basic specs and we go from there."



Brothers Nick and Greg Meyer, owners of A-1 Printers, proudly pose with their Printware PlateStream® Platesetter.

Before CTP, A-1 sent digital files to a service bureau for film output. When A-1 received the film, it was stripped and proofs were made. If the customer requested changes, the whole process began again with A-1 sending the file to the service bureau for more film. It was not unusual to spend two or three days just to get film ready to plate. A-1 invested even more labor hours burning and processing the metal and analog silver-halide plates being used.

"Today with CTP, we can make customers' changes, output a plate and get the plate on press in a matter of minutes," says Meyer. Now, after customers approve the proofs, the prepress department sends the file to a raster image processor, which

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processes data for the Printware PlateStream Platesetter. The platesetter exposes, processes and dries the plates—all in one step. A-1 executives claim they can make a plate as quickly as 30 seconds. Moving to a CTP workflow was made easier by the fact that the firm already produced 80 percent of its artwork from electronic files.

Because CTP provides better registration, with digital image replacement being more accurate than hand-stripping, A-1 can accept more four-color work and reduce prepress costs, making the firm more cost-competitive on shortruns.

A-1 runs A.B. Dick 9800 Series and Century 3500 small-format presses and a Heidelberg SORDZ. The company still goes to film and outputs metal plates for the Heidelberg, but now it almost exclusively uses either a thin or thick paper or thin or thick polyester on the small-format presses. These options fulfill A-1's needs because 80 percent of its small-format work is processed with CTP.

"For run lengths of 20,000 or less, which make up the majority of our work, digital silver-halide plates are the plates of choice over metal because they are first-generation plates," says Meyer. Another key advantage is that the polyester

plates are significantly cheaper than metal plates. "We can also make digital silver-halide plates faster because the platesetter will output two plates per minute and we've eliminated the manual steps associated with film," adds Meyer.

Meyer said the new system to paid for itself within a year. "We make 50 to 60 plates per day for our small-format presses," he explained. "The PlateStream is the most significant thing we encountered to improve our operations' efficiency. That's what we needed to stay competitive and to continue to grow our business."

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