

Printware

H. C. Miller

Jumps Into CTP With Both Feet

As seen in:

**PRINTING
IMPRESSIONS**



Jan Wein, H. C. Miller's Prepress Manager, with the PlateStream

H. C. Miller, a commercial printing operation in Milwaukee, jumped into computer-to-plate with both feet and didn't look back. So say company execs who invested in CTP in June 1997 to help expand a product from its Green Bay facility to its Milwaukee plant.

H. C. Miller Company is a large printing firm which has been in operations for 100 years. The company has a staff of 140 employees located in two Wisconsin plants: one in Milwaukee and the other in Green Bay. H. C. Miller prints loose-leaf manuals and index tabs for the trade. Seventy percent of their printing is one-color, but they also print two-color, spot-color, and four-color process jobs. Impressions per plate usually range from 500 to 20,000.

Previous Workflow

Before CTP, H. C. Miller used film to make metal plates (see Figure 1):

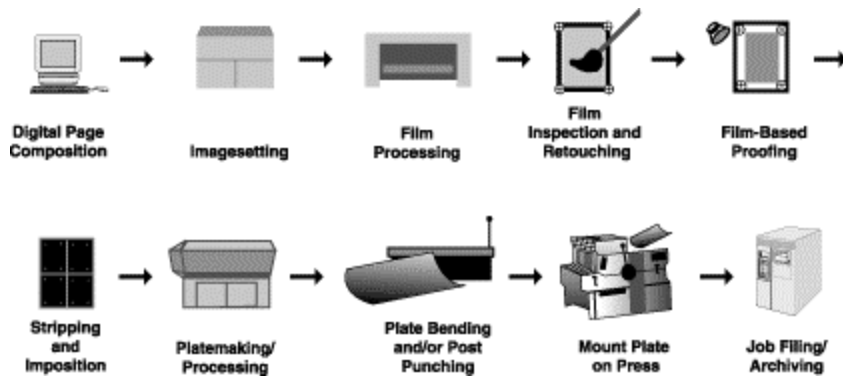


Figure 1: H. C. Miller's Previous Workflow

Like most printers using the conventional platemaking method, H. C. Miller found stripping and imposing film a labor-intensive process. Not only was it time-consuming, it often resulted in inaccurate registration. The Prepress area had already gone to a digital workflow. Prepress receives artwork from customers about 25% of the time. Of that, 95 to 99% is electronic, and if not, H. C. Miller scans the hard-copy original, creating a digital master. For the remaining 75% without artwork, the Prepress department creates digital artwork for customers. They maintain an archive of customer files on a server, which is backed up on Jaz and Zip disks. Moving to CTP was easy for H. C. Miller because they had already learned the ins and outs of working with electronic files.

Making the Decision

In order to implement their plans for the expanded Milwaukee operation, H. C. Miller reviewed the various pieces of equipment they would have to buy, such as filmsetters, light tables, platemaking equipment, and plate processors. They also projected the number of people they would have to hire to operate this equipment. A lack of space was also a concern as was the plumbing requirements for developing film and processing metal plates.

H. C. Miller performed a cost-benefit analysis between conventional platemaking and going to CTP. According to Ron Demske, General Manager at H. C. Miller, "It didn't take long to figure out that CTP was the best option. I knew if I could find a reliable platesetter, it would save us money, take less space, and require fewer employees than platemaking the conventional way."

H. C. Miller purchased a custom tab division from another company, which had been using a Printware 1440 metal-plate Platesetter for years and found it to be reliable technology; however, Demske wanted a platesetter with higher resolution. In June 1997, Printware began selling the PlateStream, a silver-halide platesetter that offers up to 200 line screens. **"When Printware introduced the PlateStream for the commercial market, we felt a sense of confidence in moving to CTP because Printware had**

the experience we were looking for," says Demske.

Computer-to-Plate Workflow

Now H. C. Miller's platemaking process is much simpler (see Figure 2):



Figure 2: H. C. Miller's Computer-to-Plate Workflow

Although they still use conventional metal plates for their large-format presses, 95% of their plates, or about 150 plates per day, are made on the PlateStream. Digital files are output directly to the platesetter which images, processes, dries, and cut plates. Press operators just mount plates on press.

Vendor Qualifications

In addition to reliable technology, H. C. Miller wanted a vendor that could get the machine installed and fully-functional in a short amount of time. They had a tight schedule for getting the index tab production operation up and running, so it was critical that the installation go smoothly. "We didn't have time for problems. The PlateStream was installed, the manufacturer trained our staff, and we were making plates in no time. We really didn't have any surprises," commented Demske.

Another criteria was an effective service and training program. "My goal was to create in-house expertise, so we could service the PlateStream ourselves. We cannot afford to be down for even five minutes. Our prepress manager underwent training, along with two prepress specialists. As a backup, if there is ever an emergency, we can have a manufacturer's technician here the next day, if not the same day," says Demske.

Benefits

H. C. Miller realized a multitude of benefits from CTP:

Lower platemaking costs—Demske says platemaking costs are about half that of conventional by avoiding the costs associated with film, including the film itself, developing chemicals, and special disposal of the chemicals. They also save money on plate material because the PlateStream uses any vendor's supplies, which permits them to negotiate among a variety of supplies sources. Finally, since all of the platemaking is under one hood, labor is significantly reduced.

Better press utilization—"Everyone know that CTP should create efficiencies in the Prepress area, but we saw a great impact in the Press Room. Plates off the PlateStream are always in register, which means our presses are better utilized. We get more paper through the press in a shorter amount of time, so we can accept more customers' work with the same amount of equipment," says Demske.

Faster turnaround—There's 50% faster turnaround with the PlateStream. Jan Wein, Prepress Manager at the Milwaukee facility says, "We have compressed our platemaking time from hours to minutes. The PlateStream outputs two plates per minute. And, if the Press Room needs to remake a plate, they can access the file without intervention from Prepress, so our workflow is much smoother." According to Demske, "Since we're servicing printers who are servicing their own customers, time is of the essence. Our customers want a seamless solution, so their customers don't necessarily realize it's a two-step process."

Commented Demske, "When installing a new production line, it makes sense to take advantage of the efficiencies the latest technology offers. We knew CTP was inevitable and for us, it didn't make sense to go any other way. The time was right for CTP."