

# Case Study

production

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## Alphagraphics

Thriving Printing Franchise Regains its Edge with Ricoh Production Printing Technology and Service

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*"We really enjoyed working with Ricoh. It's a very different experience from our previous color printer supplier. The Ricoh team is made up of straight shooters who are very good at answering our questions and not beating around the bush."*

– Haley and Matthew Haar,  
Owners,  
Alphagraphics Franchise,  
Kansas City, MO



### ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

The Kansas City, Missouri franchise of Alphagraphics provides printing, design and marketing services to a wide range of local businesses in the area. With 300 to 400 customers on an annual basis and no jobs rarely the same, the company prides itself on being able to consistently deliver high quality without having to turn away a job or a customer. However, when color consistency and turnaround times began to suffer due to its printing technology, this Alphagraphics franchise turned to Ricoh to help them continue to meet the high expectations of its growing customer base.

### CHALLENGE

Alphagraphics in Kansas City came under new ownership four years ago when new owners purchased the struggling franchise. At that time, the franchise only had limited digital color printing capability and the owners wanted to expand into color production printing to grow the business. They leased an upgraded color printer from a Ricoh competitor and looked forward to extending the bottom line.

For a time, that's exactly what happened. The owners grew sales for the franchise 30 percent since acquiring the business. They expanded their staff to six people—three sales representatives and three production specialists that concentrate primarily on traditional printed pieces such as brochures and direct mail but also occasionally provide marketing services, promotional products and book printing for the burgeoning self publishing market.

#### CHALLENGE

- Diminishing color consistency
- Excessive set-up and printing times
- Substandard, unresponsive service

#### SOLUTION

- RICOH Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ Production Printer
- EFI Fiery print controller
- ES2000 densitometer
- Expert service and attentive problem solving

#### RESULTS

- Dramatically enhanced color consistency
- Turnaround times reduced by half
- New capabilities that deliver a competitive edge
- Expert, reliable service for troubleshooting unusual jobs

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“We’ve been successful because the likelihood we tell our customers no is pretty slim,” said Haley Haar, co-owner of Alphagraphics, Kansas City. “We always try to find a way to make it work. No project is too small or complicated to manage.”

This Alphagraphics franchise runs a very tight operation, color calibrating on a daily basis to make sure the color produced today matches materials printed in the past as well as materials that will be printed in the future. As fast turnarounds and color printing became a very critical component of Alphagraphics’ growing business model, the staff noticed their color printer just wasn’t keeping pace. They contacted the printer supplier for assistance, but were consistently told the color output was within spec.

“We weren’t getting the service we needed from our former printer supplier so we had to spend hours on recalibrating, tweaking and fighting with it to get it to print well,” said Haar. “What should have been a 15-20 minute set-up process was taking hours.”

These delays were causing a moderate loss of business among current customers and new prospects. The hours spent perfecting color during set-up also generated far too much waste.

### SOLUTION

Ricoh’s production printing team had often run across the owners at industry events, touting the advantages of Ricoh’s color printing technology. However, until this point, the owners didn’t seriously entertain a switch to Ricoh since they were still under lease with the competitor’s printer.

“We were very frustrated at this point and said ‘make us an offer we can’t refuse’,” said Haar.

Ricoh started by visiting the Alphagraphics franchise to discuss the situation and assess the limitations of its current color printer. It was easy to see where the problem rested—the competitor’s printer was more suited to an office environment that didn’t heavily tax the system than a production facility with high volumes, discerning quality and fast turnarounds.

For the office printer to even come close to the output quality of a production printer would take specific expertise in color management and G7 certification—expertise the competitor didn’t offer to the owners. While Ricoh did possess the color management knowledge and G7 certification to improve the quality of Alphagraphics’ color output, the Ricoh team knew such endeavors would be short sighted. There would still be potential waste and unnecessary delays.



The RICOH Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ Production Printer

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Instead, Ricoh showed the Alphagraphics owners the capabilities of its Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ color production printer specifically designed to deliver high quality and performance for the graphic arts industry. It includes a powerful EFI Fiery print controller for advanced color and job management, which would help Alphagraphics execute sophisticated print jobs, document assembly and variable data printing (VDP) with ease. The production printer also employs Ricoh's oil-free imaging technologies that produces near-offset quality without the higher costs associated with large commercial printers.

To ensure Alphagraphics could take advantage of the Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ technology and resume its success mantra of quality color printing and fast turnarounds, Ricoh offered to buy out the remaining one year of the competitor's contract. This was the perfect solution for the owners, and they leapt at the opportunity.

Within three weeks, Alphagraphics had its new Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ color printer in-house and the Ricoh team then had the unit up and running in about 4 hours. With no downtime to spare, Ricoh assembled the new system while the older system was still running to ensure that Alphagraphics didn't lose any productivity.

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### RESULTS

Since installing the Ricoh Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ color printer, Alphagraphics has experienced greater efficiency, generated less waste and improved its color consistency dramatically. Some customers have even taken notice.

"We let some customers know we were changing our machine and they have told us they are very happy with the color quality and consistency now," said Haar.

The new production printer does more than resolve problems that could have eroded this franchise's upward trajectory of the last four years. To give Alphagraphics an advantage with prospective new jobs, Ricoh added an enhanced graphic arts software package that includes an ES2000 densitometer. With the densitometer, Alphagraphics can now read any color on a photograph, determine the exact PMS match and then program the Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ system to print that PMS color where that color appears. Also the Ricoh technology allows Alphagraphics to remove all red eye in photographs, enhance brightness and change colors to customer specifications—all of which are standard capabilities of a G7-rated machine.

The owners have also noted how much faster printing is with the new production printer. With its old printer, jobs could take up to two hours to print; now the average time to complete a typical job is 45 minutes or less. With the Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ printer, Alphagraphics is also able to accommodate a wider variety of paper stocks and program the paper stocks into the printer to easily call up.

"Our previous printer supplier would make a change to our paper stocks and end up deleting all the specs," said Haar. "Ricoh set up all of our standard paper stocks so that all we have to do is make a choice and print. It's so much more efficient."

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Ricoh is even available to help when Alphagraphics encounters a new project with an unusual paper stock that isn't programmed into the system. Ricoh's G7 specialists recently developed a workaround when Alphagraphics needed to print on brown paper, and they modified the printer configuration to accommodate color printing on linen paper.

"Ricoh brought some stock back to their facility, worked on it and recommended system tweaks to make the paper run efficiently," said Haar. "Our production staff knows they can call someone at Ricoh and quickly get a response to their problem."

All in all, this Alphagraphics franchise is very pleased it purchased the Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ color printer and forged a relationship with Ricoh. While finding a printer that could accommodate its need for high quality and fast turnaround was tantamount, Ricoh's dedication to service and integrity has been a welcomed bonus.

"When we had a problem with our old printer, we used to be lumped in with office service teams and those techs didn't understand we're putting up to 50,000 clicks per month on our machine. They were used to clients with 10,000 clicks," said Haar. "Now we have the right printer and the right partner in Ricoh."

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