

Case Study

production

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Alphagraphics

Successful Printer Partners with Ricoh to Improve Print Services on its Own

"As a family-owned, full-service print provider, we have to do more than promise results. We have to deliver them. With Ricoh, we have more control in the process, so we can complete print jobs, on time, with outstanding quality every time."

– Dave Schnell
Production Manager and
Digital Specialist,
Alphagraphics Franchise,
La Grange Park, IL



ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

Even though it runs nearly 300,000 prints through its production devices every month, the La Grange Park, Illinois franchise of Alphagraphics is more than a print shop. For more than 20 years, the family-run company provided consultation and marketing services to help its customers grow their businesses. By shopping for a new production print provider, they hoped to deliver the high-quality, timely service their clients expected with more consistency.

CHALLENGE

A lot of things can be challenging in a production center. But customers don't care about any of them. They only want high-quality prints delivered on time, and within budget. That's why the owners of Alphagraphics in La Grange Park were ready to swap out their existing production print devices with new devices that could complete print jobs faster with more consistency.

For more than 20 years, the print center produced color and black-and-white projects for various customers, ranging from fast food restaurants to non-profit organizations to manufacturing companies. Many of the projects were two-sided postcards or invitations and driven by the printer's variable data printing (VDP) capabilities. The customers were loyal, because Alphagraphics promised timely, reliable service. But, it was becoming significantly more difficult to do so.

CHALLENGE

- Older production devices with expiring lease agreements
- Excessive service calls
- Slow service response
- Inconsistent image quality on longer runs

SOLUTION

- RICOH Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ Color Production Printer
- RICOH Pro 8100s Black-and-White Production MFP
- Trained Customer Replaceable Units (TCRUs)

RESULTS

- Improved production speed reduced turnaround times
- Lowered print costs for most jobs
- Fast, easy maintenance on consumables minimizes interruptions
- Consistent, high-quality results

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"We were having a lot of service issues with our production printer," said Dave Schnell, Alphagraphics Production Manager and Digital Specialist. "We couldn't always fix it ourselves, even when we wanted to. We had to wait for the vendor to send a technician out to the site with replacement parts."

Alphagraphics circumvented the cumbersome repair process as much as they could. Because of its 20-plus-year history as a print provider, the company had experienced team members who were very familiar with the devices and could predict when certain maintenance issues were approaching. As such, they'd change production schedules in anticipation of an impending interruption.

"We had to juggle a lot of projects and responsibilities," said Schnell. "But it took a lot of work, which took our people away from other tasks, including consulting with clients and seeking more revenue-generating opportunities."

The company was also growing impatient with the color inconsistency of its devices. Often, color reproductions in a single job were different, depending on whether it was from the beginning of the run or the end. Or depending on when the customer approved a proof print and the actual print run. Because of the inconsistencies and the less-than-optimal speed of the printer, Alphagraphics sometimes struggled to make color print jobs profitable. The company needed more features, functionality and reliability from its print devices.

With the lease on their existing equipment set to expire, Alphagraphics began searching for a new production print provider. Schnell and others researched several different companies. One of them stood out from the crowd.

SOLUTION

Sometimes, consistency pays off for sales teams as much as it does for print providers. Ricoh representatives checked in periodically with the Alphagraphics owners. Eventually, this led to a series of more serious discussions about Ricoh's products, capabilities and services.

"We were impressed and everything sounded great, but it was time to put it on paper and decide for ourselves," said Schnell.



The RICOH Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ Production Printer

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Ricoh scheduled a demonstration at the Ricoh branch office in Lisle, IL. Schnell and his team brought in files to conduct print runs on the RICOH Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ Color Production Printer and RICOH Pro 8100s Black-and-White Production MFP. They ran both devices through their paces. The runs included heavier paper stocks to determine if the devices could meet more intense demands.

Initially, Alphagraphics was only interested in replacing their color production printer. But at that same time their existing black-and-white production printer reached the end of its service life and needed to be replaced. So, after comparing the performances of the Ricoh devices to their existing printers as well as other vendor printers, the team decided to acquire both Ricoh devices.

The RICOH Pro C901 Graphic Arts+ Color Production Printer uses Ricoh's proprietary oil-free imaging technologies, so Alphagraphics can deliver offset-like quality output with the versatility of digital printing for handling VDP cost-effectively. Each image is filled with more uniform toner particles to create a matte finish and produce more consistency print after print, job after job.

The RICOH Pro 8100s Black-and-White Production MFP uses a new, granular toner with smaller particles, so the print provider can create sharper images with smoother halftones. Schnell was impressed with the device's ability to maintain registration as well, which makes printing booklets, postcards and invitations much easier.

"It was a package deal," said Schnell. "We were happy with that, as long as Ricoh's service was included as part of the package. The printers are specifically designed to make our jobs easier. When you're battling against the clock every day, we'll take any opportunity to save time."

Schnell also noted the Ricoh Trained Customer Replaceable Units (TCRUs) are a significant differentiator from other vendor solutions. Technicians can maximize uptime by replacing drums, rollers, fusing units and more on their own — and maximize device uptime.



The RICOH Pro 8100s B&W
Production Printer

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RESULTS

Alphagraphics is printing higher quality jobs in less time for less money. And, that's leading to more print jobs moving through the print center.

"We've shifted a lot more jobs from the offset presses to the Ricoh devices," said Schnell. "They have produced extremely high-quality images from the very beginning. So, we just keep running more print jobs on them, from postcards, invitations and other projects on the C901 to the training manuals and mailers on the 8100s device."

He noted that Alphagraphics has been able to integrate VDP easily to acquire even more revenue-generating business. With an abundance of projects requiring double-sided registration, the devices have proven more than capable of maintaining extremely tight registration, even on the longest runs.

Alphagraphics appreciates Ricoh's service teams. In part, because they don't have to use them very often. The devices have proven to be durable. When maintenance is needed, many of the tasks can be performed onsite by Alphagraphics technicians. Ricoh representatives ensure replacement parts, including drums, toner and even fusing units, are delivered onsite ahead of projected maintenance cycles.

"We're an independently run print provider, so we consider ourselves to be very self-sufficient," said Schnell. "When we need to replace toner or a drum, we just grab one from our storage room, replace it and go. We don't even have to stop the print run. This has significantly improved our ability to meet deadlines and push more jobs through quickly."

The new devices also produce more work, are faster, and require less labor. As a result, Alphagraphics has been able to focus on helping customers with other print and marketing needs.

"We've always been a full-service print provider but now we have full confidence that we can deliver trouble-free, top-of-the-line quality products," said Schnell. "Instead of putting out fires in the print center, we're igniting new opportunities for our customers."



www.alphagraphics.com/centers/lagrange-park-illinois-us375

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