

INFOIMAGE INC.

Transactional printer discovers production efficiency, turnaround time improvements, and new business opportunities using Canon production inkjet presses



InfoIMAGE's journey began in 1984 with the modest goal of establishing a company that could effectively compete with other statement print service providers. Minority-owned and family operated, its corporate headquarters is in Brisbane, California, with a regional facility in Coppell, Texas. Entering its fourth decade of business, InfoIMAGE has grown to become a nationwide leader in document composition, print and insertion, and presort and mailing services for banks and credit unions, delivering on time, quality services in the most cost-effective manner possible. Because the majority of its staff have been employed by core providers and/or major financial institutions, the scope and depth of InfoIMAGE's domain knowledge and experience translate into a keen insight and understanding of the business objectives and acute sensitivity to regulatory requirements unique to financial institutions. This has enabled InfoIMAGE to tailor solutions that perfectly align with a client's business goals.

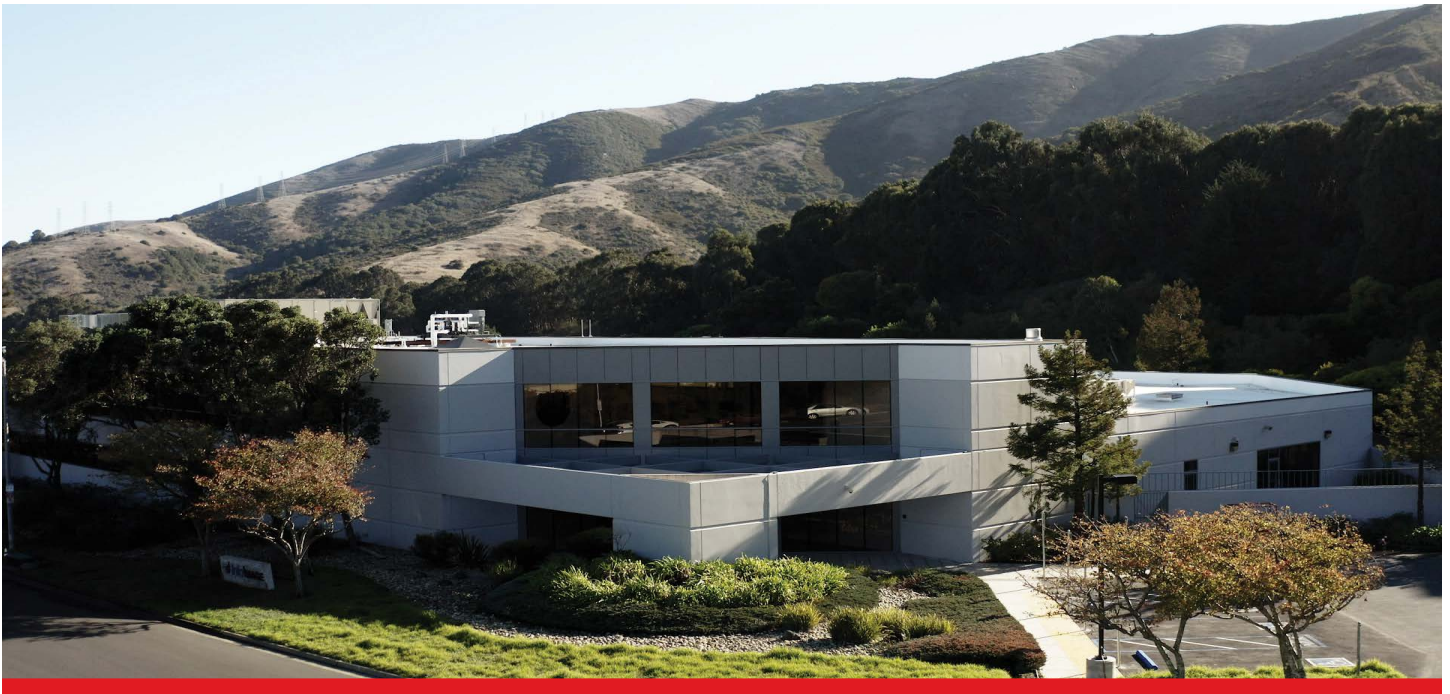
Rather than a reliance on restrictive, limiting, and/or expensive middleware or off-the-shelf products, InfoIMAGE's competitive advantage lies in creating flexible and agile processes to integrate customized coding to support the needs of its clients, whether it's customizing a statement to accommodate a recent merger or implementing complex workflows based on unique business rule requirements.

Transactional printing is characterized by having to meet the output requirements of exponential volume spikes during the beginning of the month while simultaneously complying with time-sensitive and regulatory mandates. Reliance on toner-based cutsheet printers limited InfoIMAGE's capacity. After extensive research, the company embarked on a campaign to transition to inkjet technology, which not only eliminated capacity limitations but greatly improved time-to-market for its clients' documents, decreased operating costs, improved the ability to customize, streamlined workflows, and extended its clients' reach to new customers in novel and more impactful ways.

THE CHALLENGES

Prior to acquiring production inkjet presses, InfoIMAGE utilized a fleet of sixteen toner printers across California and Texas—mainly sheetfed except for two continuous feed devices. Its workflow consisted of warehousing a three-month supply of preprinted forms (or shells) for each client, pulling the shells from inventory, and printing the variable data on the cutsheet toner devices as needed. Production was a multistep process with multiple touchpoints. In fact, the Texas facility was managing more than 200 individual forms, with some clients having multiple forms per document. The California facility had its own offset presses to print the shells in-house. The Texas facility outsourced the offset printing of these shells. Both locations needed warehousing space for the forms to be ready at a moment's notice. If a client had an unanticipated spike in volume, InfoIMAGE had to reallocate inventory to handle the demand.

A preprinted shell workflow required forecasting the number of forms for warehousing, creating production orders to print



InfoIMAGE corporate headquarters in Brisbane, California.

the shells, receiving the forms into inventory and properly warehousing them, counting the available inventory monthly (and again before the high-volume transaction runs the first week of the month), pulling the forms from inventory, and replacing any unused forms. Shortfalls could occur due to human error, e.g., putting the shells back in the wrong box or with the wrong orientation in the printer drawers.

The use of preprinted shells was also a challenge when a client needed to update data on their forms. Perhaps it was a phone number change or a credit union added a new location. Having three months of inventory could result in obsolescence and made such changes very expensive for the client.

InfoIMAGE found that its clients' service level needs were changing. Clients began wanting their statements in the mail more quickly. The company found its production capacity was a limitation in improving turnaround time. Handling the shells—removing them from

inventory, opening the reams of paper, orienting the preprinted shells in the right direction in a drawer, starts and stops between jobs, the print speed of the toner devices—limited the volume it could produce in a given time period.

One other issue was quality. "In a toner environment, you've always got the risk of toner smudge, whether it's coming off the printer or if the toner didn't set well enough before it was inserted into envelopes," explains Christina Esparza, vice president of operations. "We had to clean the belts on the inserters constantly before running a job so we didn't get any toner smears."

The need for greater production efficiency, faster turnaround times, and production capacity improvements ultimately led InfoIMAGE to transition to production inkjet technology from Canon.

THE SOLUTION

After several years of researching the market, InfoIMAGE chose a Canon

ColorStream series inkjet web press for its Texas location. The ColorStream offers high speed—1,818 letter images per minute for a twin system, up to 28 million letter images per month for a single unit, or up to 59 million pages per month for a twin.

Although capable of running high quality, full-color output, InfoIMAGE originally wanted the technology primarily for monochrome work. "We brought inkjet in for the production efficiency," Christina says. "At the time we onboarded our first ColorStream, we had only two clients that wanted color on their statements. So, we didn't make the decision because of inkjet color. We made the decision based on efficiency and speed to market for our clients' documents."

The ColorStream is ideal for starting with high-speed monochrome printing and later transitioning to color. The press can be set up as a monochrome-only printing system when needed and is flexible enough to allow a company to adapt the printing mode to match

its pace of transition to color. That flexibility contributes to a future-proof system that helps simplify the transition of applications to more sophisticated documents with personalized variable data and more impactful communication in color—of which InfoIMAGE has recently taken advantage.

With the ColorStream and Canon PRISMA production preprinted form replacement software, the need for offset preprinted shells vanished and was replaced with an electronic form. Using a PDF version of the form files, InfoIMAGE was able to substantially reduce all the individual touchpoints that had hindered its production efficiency and limited its volume capacity, printing the entire document in one pass. PRISMA also eliminated the form warehousing costs, obsolescence, and human error. InfoIMAGE found that one ColorStream press runs at about the same speed as 10 of its previous cutsheet toner devices. “Now we don’t need to put a cap on what we can generate and get out the door within 48 hours simply because we can run work so much faster, so much more efficiently, and we never run out of preprinted shells since we no longer need them,” Christina says.

In addition to enhanced production print speed, InfoIMAGE realized substantial labor savings. “Now I’m looking at having one to two operators generating just as much output as what previously would have taken four to five operators,” Christina explains. “We’re not just talking about more speed. We’re talking about reducing unnecessary labor costs and reassigning labor to where the effort actually needs to be.”

The move to inkjet has contributed to improved time to market in other ways. “In any operation, you always have



InfoIMAGE has realized enhanced production efficiency and improved speed to market for its clients’ documents thanks to its ColorStream series inkjet web press.

unforeseen issues that pop up along the way—the production workflow is more than just print. There are insertion steps and sorting steps,” Christina says. “Any way we can gain some time in the print process leads to more time to deal with other business opportunities. We’re no longer concerned about meeting a timeline when a client needs to add 40,000–60,000 additional statements this month. We’re able to onboard higher volume clients without as many concerns about capacity as we would have if we were just operating cutsheet toner-based printers. And we don’t feel as crazy during the peak time of the month. We’re not sweating it like we would have done because print would actually eat up

so much time in the production process before inkjet.”

The elimination of preprinted forms has reduced the company’s need for warehouse space. The company noticed far less paper waste. No longer were shells being misplaced or re-inventoried in the wrong location. “We have much tighter control over our paper expenditure. We’re far closer on our budget projections than we ever were before,” Christina explains. In addition, decreased personnel requirements in receiving, inventory control, and warehousing have generated significant labor savings.

InfoIMAGE uses Canon's PRISMA production print management software in both locations, not just for forms replacement, but also to streamline its workflow from start to finish. "PRISMA has done a great job for us in terms of workflow and managing how we get our jobs to print—much more so than the homegrown product we had prior," Christina says. "The user interface is very easy for our people to use." She also likes the accounting and reporting PRISMA production makes available. "We now have better tools to track our production output rather than relying on the paper logs that operators had to complete at each step in the production process. We're driving efficiency by reducing unnecessary labor, even if it is just a tick mark, and making the most of the technology Canon has made available to us through PRISMA," she adds.

To automate its production as much as possible, InfoIMAGE runs micro-perf and three-hole punch units inline on the ColorStream press. It also uses a Tecnaufinishing unit for roll-to-sheet conversion. Three weeks out of the month, most jobs are small volume ones, as brief as 10 to 20 letters, so its inserter hardware has been configured for cutsheet work.

InfoIMAGE recently installed two VarioPrint i300 sheetfed inkjet color presses from Canon in its California facility. The run lengths at that location are not as high as in the Texas facility, and the job requirements are more varied, so the flexibility of a sheetfed inkjet press was ideal for the company. Being a sheetfed press, the company also has flexibility in using varying paper stocks beyond the usual 20 lb. or 24 lb. bond paper it uses on the roll-fed ColorStream presses. In addition, one of the two VarioPrint i300 presses is equipped with

MICR ink capability, which has enabled the company to eliminate all of its non-Canon cutsheet toner devices and to drive efficiency into the workflow of MICR printing. "Now, when a client wants MICR, we can apply MICR ink where they need it, with the added benefit of security features, all printing on the fly," Christina explains. "Besides being far more efficient, it's cost beneficial, provides the security features our clients need, and the result is really, really good quality."

NEW BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

The color capability of the inkjet presses has enabled the InfoIMAGE sales team to engage with clients in different ways. The company has found that its clients are asking about variable color possibilities more and more for the messages they want to apply to their documents. "Our salespeople are finding clients who would not consider us unless we could provide full-color options. We've added a number of clients who are now printing full-color. That's exciting because our team has closed deals that we wouldn't have been able to compete for otherwise," Christina says.

Clients are using color to add value to what used to be a monotonous transaction statement with lines of data. They are using color to call attention to the balance due or to add colored arrows pointing to the dollar figure of what is due. InfoIMAGE has also seen increasing demand for variable graph data utilizing color.

The company also uses color in the statement's whitespace to help its clients reach their target customers in new, impactful ways. Whether embedding targeted offers within existing documents or creating

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Christina Esparza, vice president of operations, InfoIMAGE



The Canon VarioPrint i300 sheetfed inkjet color press equips InfoIMAGE with paper stock flexibility and just-where-needed MICR ink capability.

marketing mailers, InfoIMAGE can leverage the power of the client data it already has to provide marketing products tailored to individual needs. Customers want their documents to be easy to understand, have content personalized for them, and use color to emphasize important information—all areas where color inkjet can have a major impact. Recently, InfoIMAGE developed a marketing tool where its clients can log into their own portal just as they would for their statements or transactional mail but now for creating marketing mailers. The client provides the instructions for the mailer; supplies the art they want to use or draws from an asset library for reusing content across promotions; chooses from various formatting, styling, layout, and personalization options; and the mailer is sent to print. “The VarioPrint i300 presses really did come at the right time to handle our new marketing offerings exceptionally well. I’ve seen the color output from them, and it’s beautiful. It’s absolutely amazing!” Christina says.

THE CANON RELATIONSHIP

Christina credits the relationship with Canon as the largest selling point in choosing the VarioPrint i300 press. “Canon met us at the right time and helped us grow into inkjet. I felt like I truly had a partner, not a sales rep who would walk away when the sale was done,” Christina explains. “That gave me comfort in knowing there was no way we were going to make a mistake with this investment. We have a new business offering with our marketing products, and I have a business partner who can help me make the most of it, and, when we’re ready, help take us to another level. Success isn’t always about putting paper through a printer. Success is about doing it well, doing it better, and maybe even finding some benefits you didn’t expect along the way. That’s what we’ve seen with the ColorStream and PRISMA experience, and that is a lot of what drove us to the VarioPrint i300 decision.”

InfoIMAGE recently moved into its new headquarters in California and relied on Canon’s recommendations for the layout of that space to optimize its workflow. It

also used Canon’s Professional Services assistance in setting up job profiles within the PRISMA production software to gain efficiencies by ganging jobs with similar characteristics, e.g., perf jobs vs. non-perf jobs, 20 lb. bond paper jobs vs. 24 lb. bond paper jobs. This decreased the amount of time needed to switch paper stock between jobs for improved productivity. “No one really likes changing a roll of paper. There had been a lot of that, and the operators really appreciate the difference a streamlined workflow has made,” Christina says.

THE FUTURE

InfoIMAGE is looking forward to expanding its marketing offerings to clients by highlighting its color capabilities and helping them create more impactful mailings. “I see tremendous benefit in adding variable messaging within documents and using the data clients already give us combined with color to produce marketing promotions that help our clients grow their businesses,” Christina says.



The Canon ColorStream series inkjet web press provides top-notch productivity and operational efficiency, high-end print quality, and outstanding production flexibility.

She also sees production inkjet as a major enabler in helping InfoIMAGE be a better business partner for its clients for their everyday transactional document needs. “We’d like to think that every job runs perfectly, but we know that is not reality. There are issues and data challenges that arise,” she explains. “When those occur for a client, and we are waiting for a corrected file or an approval is running late, we can manage the tight time constraints that result. With an inkjet workflow, we can make up so much time. That enables us to really be there for the client. Now we can print most anything a client requires, do it with great quality, and do it very quickly. The exciting part is being able to perform when a client really needs you to be there for them. What we can do for clients when they are really in a pinch is what sets us apart and solidifies our client relationships. With inkjet, we can do a whole lot more for our clients in tight turnaround situations than we ever could before.”

As an example, InfoIMAGE had a recent experience with a client that had an immediate obligation to mail 30,000

copies of a 16-page document due to a regulatory requirement. That size document would not fit into a #10 envelope and had to be inserted as a flat. The initial response of InfoIMAGE would have been that the job was outside the scope of what it could do. But with the ColorStream series press, “We could print that file in a heartbeat and then get to work on the insertion,” Christina says. “Within five days, we got that 30,000-piece flat job handled. We would not have been able to do that in the past. It would have taken us five days just to print the job in the old toner cutsheet environment. I think that’s a really good example of being able to show up for a client.”

In another situation, one of the company’s clients had a merger, which triggered a regulatory requirement for a mailing. Normally the client would ship offset printed shells to InfoIMAGE for such a mailing, but time constraints were quite short. InfoIMAGE stepped in to assist, secured the artwork from the client, was able to match the color with a Delta E of less than 2, and produced the job in about two hours. “In an offset

preprint world, you’re talking about days to get the offset press running and the shells shipped to us,” Christina explains. “Inkjet helps you step into those tight situations and really gain trust with the client.”

Christina credits the thINK Ahead conferences and thINK Community* with obtaining the knowledge and confidence needed to make the transition to inkjet technology. Being able to talk with other printer providers that already installed inkjet presses, getting questions answered, and learning why other companies invested in inkjet gave her assurance the decision was a good one—and that she had the right business partner with which to work.

“The best part of my day is walking into the facility, looking at those presses, and being able to smile again,” she says. “The work is fun. Inkjet is fun. Inkjet takes the ‘tough’ out of the work and makes it enjoyable and flexible. It brings a whole breath of fresh air to our business day. I’m sure that will hold true through all the rest of our installations as we continue to grow our business with Canon.”

ABOUT US

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