



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Canon production inkjet customer and **thINK** member Nathan Thole, Director of Printing Services, shares Iowa State University's transition from offset to high-speed production inkjet and how it catapulted them into a new era of efficiency, quality, and versatility, all while achieving their sustainability goals.

Nathan grew up on a farm in eastern Iowa and went to Iowa State University, initially to pursue a career in architecture due to his love for drawing and aptitude for math, though he soon changed his course to Art & Design. It was during his last two semesters that, through a friend, he got a job at one of Iowa State University's satellite quick print centers. (He remembers the days of printing 12 color pages per minute as a student intern!) After graduation he had to move on, since the print center hired only Iowa State University students for their internship positions. His manager connected him with a local printing company in Ames, Iowa. Using his farm-boy work ethic, he spent the next 13 1/2 years doing, well, everything—including hand bindery, design, pre-press, and customer service—ultimately working his way into management positions.

It was then, almost 14 years later, that Nathan received a call from his former Iowa State University supervisor recommending he apply for the Director of Printing Services position. Nathan was awarded that role and came full circle, from student to Director of Printing Services for Iowa State University. That was seven years ago, in 2016, and he still recalls his first initiative when he assumed his new role: tackling the outdated technology. "One of the first things I noticed was that the technology we were using was dated and needed to be replaced, so that was one of my first strategic initiatives: to get our equipment updated," Nathan said.

Nathan's interest in inkjet technology was piqued after witnessing an inkjet press demo. The remarkable quality and speed of the machine left a lasting impression on him. Recognizing the potential of inkjet, Nathan knew then that it wasn't a matter of "if" but "when"... and the "when" soon came. Nathan reflected, "When I saw the Canon varioPRINT iX inkjet sheetfed press, I was like 'BINGO! This is it!' I put together a very extensive ROI and hands down the Canon varioPRINT iX was the clear choice for us."

Once the decision was made, he credits the Canon team with a thoughtful and hands-on approach in ensuring the install and start-up was successful. Nathan said the press was up and running within a week, and his team was astounded by its capabilities. Nathan chuckles, admitting that when the varioPRINT iX hit the floor, lined up right next to it were their four offset presses and a toner device for "back-up". However, he reports, they never again used the offset presses. "When we first started putting our jobs on the Canon iX, I thought there would be a few jobs that we would still have to run on offset; but we just never looked back, we never did turn back to our offset presses. I was particularly impressed with how the Canon varioPRINT iX handled a diverse range of coated and uncoated papers and delivered results that rivaled offset printing. The iX just has exceptional print quality and that, combined with the production speed, makes it an unbeatable force," Nathan shared.



The transition from offset to inkjet was almost too seamless.

“August is one of our busiest times of the year, but, two weeks into August, I just didn’t feel like we were that busy. Jobs were being printed and shipped and there was absolutely no backlog. I checked and rechecked our books. While it felt like we had a reduced amount of work from years prior, we actually had more work, and our revenue was increasing. It was just amazing how fast we could suddenly get work done. The varioPRINT iX handles workloads so efficiently that it feels seamless,” Nathan explained.

Iowa State University Printing Services’ mission is to contribute to the success of Iowa State University by providing high-quality printing services at a competitive price, with a prompt turnaround time, integrated into the emerging digital communications flow, all while being proactive with its sustainability initiatives.

“The Canon varioPRINT iX helps us deliver on our mission. With the PRISMAsync controller we were able to consolidate our workflow and boost overall operational efficiency for maximum productivity, which helps us deliver on our mission to provide high quality print at a competitive price, and with a quick turnaround time. We can also easily take on a wide variety of larger and more complex variable data projects jobs, so we are now the go-to source for all of Iowa State University’s printing needs. In addition, moving from offset to inkjet has significantly reduced our environmental impact. Digital printing offers many sustainability benefits, including less waste, chemical-free production, reduced make-ready and set-up time, and cost-efficient production of shorter runs,” Nathan shared.

Nathan’s strategic adoption of inkjet technology and his relentless pursuit of excellence have reshaped Iowa State University Printing Services, catapulting them into a new era of efficiency, quality, and versatility, all while achieving their sustainability goals.

Reflecting on his journey, Nathan offers valuable advice to fellow print professionals considering the transition to inkjet technology: “Not all inkjet presses are created equal. My advice to those looking to get into inkjet is to do your research, evaluate what is right for you, and once you’ve done that, take the leap of faith. I haven’t talked to any inkjet press owners that regret their decision—if you do the homework, I expect you won’t either.”

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