PlanetPress Helps Custom Data Imaging Corporation (CDIC) Achieve Variable Data Success

CDIC walks the "*variable data talk*", and customers appreciate that, according to President Frank McPherson. "*When CDIC started in 1999, we had one of the first business plans based on variable data publishing and we have always marketed ourselves using the same one-to-one communications we make possible for our customers.*" CDIC has carved out a successful niche market catering to financial institutions, insurance firms and many others by offering personalized print services to help businesses produce highly customized direct marketing campaigns to impact their audience with far greater results than traditional mass marketing.

Customers also prefer CDIC because it is a total provider, combining both the data management side and creative designing side of documents for complete printing services of variable data printing. With PlanetPress from Objectif Lune, CDIC has a solution that offers versatility, flexibility and engine speed printing.

PlanetPress is part of a complete software suite that allows easy creation of all kinds of variable content documents integrating images, graphics and data that also offers integrated management of output distribution and workflow process. "*PlanetPress is solid and trouble free, and we are quite happy with it,*" said David Bell, CDIC Prepress Manager. "*Objectif Lune has been good to deal with, and the email web support for technical assistance is superb.*"

Helpful for Both Data and Graphics Users

CDIC first came across PlanetPress over five years ago. It worked well and was soon activated on all their printers. "We can maximize the equipment and software," said Bell. The PlanetPress platform isn't proprietary, so we can use it with any PostScript Level 2 or 3 printer.

The mostly Mac shop uses Quark software and Indigo color presses, with PlanetPress running on four workstations. The lean staff of 25 means a lot of job sharing. "PlanetPress helps because it can be used by data people and by graphics people. It has a lot of capabilities," said McPherson. PlanetPress gives users full control of forms management to more efficiently maintain and modify the variety of documents customers require. Conditional printing of graphics, data and pages allows customized documents on the fly. Workflow and job management save time and money.

Good With Any Kind of Data

Variable data publishing by definition involves databases, but, Bell noted, "*Most of the software out there has limited database capabilities. However, PlanetPress is quite capable of working with a wide range of databases, and it's very good at dealing with any kind of data. It doesn't have to be a particular format, language or character stream. PlanetPress can take just about anything, and you don't have to do a lot of prepress with the database. That's important because when processing data, the more you handle it, the more likely an error can happen.*" PlanetPress makes it easier to work with client-supplied files that might otherwise be difficult to prepare. "*We get work from insurance clients whose IT departments are very rigid. They don't want to change a job once they give it to us, so we may have to play with it to get it ready for production.*"

Automating Large and Small Runs

The PlanetPress design module is especially well suited to the batch runs that make up the bulk of their VDP work, such as mailings of 2,000 postcards. Once or twice a year, CDIC also runs hundreds of thousands of pages through the PlanetPress engine, but more routinely they run multiple jobs of 200 to 300 pieces. These add up, and multiple daily set ups can be a bigger workflow challenge than one large job.

PlanetPress brings a broad suite of capabilities that effectively automate processes, whether it's the first time a job runs or the tenth. "*If we need to do the same job again in a year, once we set something up with PlanetPress, we can just keep using it over and over with very little additional attention required,*" said Bell. CDIC uses the software to build a workflow and drop in the data, so they don't spend time building files. All their templates sit on a server, and PlanetPress brings up the file and loads the database.

Easy on Color, Eliminates Forms

CDIC uses PlanetPress for all their black and white output and plans call for more color work. "*One thing that surprised us was how well PlanetPress handles color through the Indigo press,*" Bell noted. "*If we've done the color work properly up front, PlanetPress simply passes the color through intact. We'll use it for more color work, because many jobs that used to be batch are now becoming on demand, and we have to do them every day*" PlanetPress keeps this from becoming a set up nightmare.

With PlanetPress, CDIC can publish customized booklets for clients in financial planning, insurance and other markets. This saves money for customers because they only print and pay for the pages they need.

PlanetPress gives CDIC the convenience of printing everything on demand, so there is no need to store preprinted forms. For example, an insurance client sends customized packets in response to TV ads. *"We're running them off the Indigo press without any preprinted forms. This works well because we don't need an inventory of shells, and recipients just get the pages they need,"* explained Bell.

One Tool Covers a Lot of Ground

Like many contemporary print operations, the CDIC shop has a variety of printing platforms. While this creates versatility to handle many jobs, it also means having to accommodate the needs - and quirks - of different print engines. For example, one device will start printing a 100,000-page job once the print buffer reaches 35 pages. Another must process the whole file before printing a page. Whatever the behavior, *"PlanetPress is very quick and efficient in sending large variable data files down,"* said Bell. The software's open architecture allows flexible data stream routing from device to device. Processing occurs on the printer, and form size is very small and easy to create and maintain, putting less strain on network and storage resources.

"PlanetPress has been around a long time, and we are continually exploring the software's advantages," said McPherson. *"For us, PlanetPress is quite a versatile tool. Other software could do some of the work we require, but then we would have to maintain a number of operating systems, service contracts and so on. With just this one software platform, we can cover a lot of ground, and the depth of PlanetPress gives it the ability to handle tough jobs. We find there is not much that it can't do."*