

Mixing Offset & Digital

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JIM KOHLER printing & graphic arts specialist

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There has been a lot of confusion in the last few years regarding when to use digital and when to use traditional printing methods, such as Lithography. To help answer that question, we will take a look at the advantages of each printing technology.

So which printing technology is better? Well that really depends. Each technology shines in its own rite. Use these tips as a guide, but always talk to your printer for their perspective.

“Did You Know” Tips provided by Jim Kohler for International Paper and Printer's Playbook™

PrintersPlaybook.com

 Printer's Playbook

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OFFSET ADVANTAGES

- Very high image quality
- Can print on a high range of substrates such as paper, plastic, film, etc.
- No qualification process is needed for substrates
- The unit cost of a project goes down as the volume goes up
- Depending on the size of the press, can print large formats
- Much faster printing process than digital
- Much better reproducing Pantone or special colors
- Can do varnish and coatings inline

DIGITAL ADVANTAGES

- Short turnaround time
- Supports Variable Data Printing (VDP)
- With Variable Data Printing (VDP) there is less waste due to minimal make-ready and more accurate counts
- Provides cheaper low volume printing than conventional printing for the same low volume counts
- While image quality is less than offset printing, the differences today are small
- Good color control top-to-bottom since you are printing both at the same time and there is no fountain ink balance issue
- Can use, in most cases, any software from word processing to high-end print software. In fact digital loves PDFs!
- Can proof right on the digital press plus the proof is extremely accurate!

SO HOW DO YOU DECIDE? OFFSET OR DIGITAL? HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO HELP YOU DECIDE:

Quality – Offset tends to print higher print quality

Printing Substrate – Offset can print on a wide variety of substrates where digital cannot.

Color – While some digital presses can print 4 – 7 colors, offset can utilize a much larger range of PMS colors. While Offset can provide a much larger color gamut than digital, it is at a higher cost for lower volumes.

Turnaround - This is where digital wins. Digital jobs can be turned much quicker than Offset. No plate changes, make-ready, bringing up color, etc., allows digital to print very quickly.

Customization - Digital printing can combine static information with variable imaging.

Proofing – Digital printing offers more accurate proofs since what you see is a sample of the printed piece you will actually receive.

Combining Both – You can print the static offset (for VDP) and the variable imaging digital.

Paper – It's important to use a digital sheet on digital equipment. There's a common misconception to use an offset sheet and cut it down, but that creates the risk of more dust in the equipment, more jams due to improper moisture content and curl.

Run Lengths – For short runs, generally 1,200 or less, go Digital. For long runs, choose Offset.