

## **The Best of All Worlds**

### **Prepress shop finds incredible versatility in high-end investments**

Print buyers have been pressing harder for progress in recent years. Not only do they want exceptional results, but they also want the work dispatched more economically, despite requiring smaller volumes. And increasingly, they're setting deadlines at hours instead of days.

Many printers work closely with service bureaus to improve their productivity and meet customer demands. Smaller printing firms compete with larger print houses by relying on prepress shops such as Fleet Graphics, Inc.

"We serve a lot of small and medium-size printers that either don't have a prepress department or can't afford to adopt computer-to-plate (CTP) technology," says Scott Waggoner, president of the 48-year-old, Dayton, Ohio-based company.

### **Satisfying Different Customer Needs**

Speed, flexibility and service have become the cornerstones of growth for Fleet Graphics, allowing it to develop loyal accounts. Significant advances in digital prepress have allowed Fleet Graphics to offer customers the same technology in a cost-effective manner. And like many service providers, Fleet Graphics has assumed expanded roles and responsibilities.

Established in 1954, Fleet Graphics employs eight full-time and several part-time people at its 5,000 square-foot facility. The workweek stretches from Monday through Friday, with one extended 12-hour shift a day.

Serving the Dayton metro area and select national accounts, Fleet Graphics produces film and plates for printers, magazine publishers, advertising agencies and graphic designers. In addition, the acquisition of Quicksan Color Separations complements its existing prepress services with support for its film- and plate-producing capabilities.

Fleet Graphics produces 150 jobs of various sizes a month. Projects can range "anywhere from an 80-page magazine to a lot of brochures and newsletters," according to Waggoner. The company recently completed a four-color, 60-page annual report for Chaminade-Julienne Catholic High School. For an international safari club, Fleet Graphics did a four-color, 160-page magazine and a 600-page hardcover book.

The firm often handles what Waggoner terms "end-user work," managing an entire project from in-house design to brokering the printing.

"Our customers are the force behind Fleet Graphics' success," he says. "We've established long relationships with our accounts."

### **Equipment-Driven Choice**

The customers' needs also are behind a major equipment upgrade. Making a commitment to offer customers the top technology available, Waggoner in January installed a PlateRite 8000 eight-page thermal CTP plate recorder and Spekta hybrid screening technology from Screen (USA). Spekta is a hybrid screening method combining traditional and FM screening, which greatly embellishes the detail in photos and eliminates many common problems such as moiré patterns.

"We have customers that order both film and plates from us," Waggoner explains. "Every printer has a different need. Some printers want plates as a backup, if their own system is down or overloaded. On the other hand, some customers opt for film for reuse issues. If it's something they need to keep and make minor changes to, they'll get film and just strip in the changes."

Currently, direct-to-plate accounts for 15 to 20 percent of Fleet Graphics' business. Waggoner says the attraction of direct-to-plate for most of his customers is the shorter turnaround time.

"We can turn around plates as fast or faster than we can turn film, and obviously when customers receive plates, they are on press immediately," he says. "The makereadies are quicker. The average turnaround for proofs on a standard four-page job in a direct-to-plate workflow is half a day. If there are no changes, they have plates within the next hour."

Waggoner says elimination of the film stage of conventional plate processing with the PlateRite 8000 is reducing the number of plate remakes. All of the no-bake thermal plates at Fleet Graphics are imaged with first-generation dots, which are sharper and will reduce dot gain. Waggoner points out that more accurate registration on press will reduce makeready time and waste. "The sharper dot on plates produced by the PlateRite virtually eliminates dot gain," he says.

Furthermore, Spekta screening technology provides increased print quality and detail comparable to 300-line high-frequency screening with an ordinary setup of 175 lpi and 2,400 dpi.

"Customers have commented on the difference in their print quality since we have started using Spekta with the PlateRite platesetter," Waggoner says. "They're able to produce consistent, high-resolution printing under standard press conditions. They don't have to incur extra expense by changing the printing environment."

### **Seeking an Advantage**

Fleet Graphics had paved the way for the move to CTP last June, when it installed Screen's Trueflow PDF workflow solution. This specialized workflow solution joined a workflow that was essentially a front-end processor used to drive an imaging device. Fleet Graphic now uses the previous RIP arrangement to process simpler jobs.

Waggoner has found that the biggest gains in employing Trueflow involve improved throughput.

"In terms of efficiency and productivity, Trueflow is a powerful system," states Waggoner. "We have seen the greatest advantages in the large magazine work. When it comes to handling big, complex jobs seamlessly, Trueflow is a huge production asset. Once you get the layout set up, Trueflow breezes through RIPing, trapping and imposition. The workflow is fast and accurate. It allows us to go to plate in no time. If we run into files with spot color issues, we find Trueflow handles them much better."

Fleet Graphics makes proofs with an Epson Stylus Pro 9500 inkjet printer.

“Trueflow maximizes production because files only need to be RIP’ed once to drive different output devices,” Waggoner relates. “Files can be set up for output on platesetters, imagesetters or proofers without the need to re-RIP files. We RIP files once on the Trueflow system, a proof file is created, which is ICC-profiled for color accuracy, and then we run a hard proof on the Epson 9500. That saves time, but it also enhances the overall consistency of the output.”

Another chief advantage of Trueflow is its network-oriented design. Clients can send job files in major industry file formats like PostScript 3 and PDF 1.3. Operators can follow job progress and review results from any terminal within the network.

Trueflow also features a platform-independent, Web browser-based interface that can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection.

“It’s a great advantage to be able to run a job or monitor the status wherever and whenever we want,” Waggoner says.

### **Key to Company Growth**

Flexibility is probably Fleet Graphics’ strongest asset. The company operates PCs and Macintosh computers in its 24 workstations, enabling prepress staff to accommodate any native file that customers supply without the need for conversion.

“We do work for some printers whose prepress departments don’t handle PC jobs internally and they job them out to us,” Waggoner says.

Furthermore, the company’s services extend beyond film and plate output. The in-house design department features Macintosh G4 computers with the latest graphic arts software. High-resolution scanning capabilities encompass all types of originals, from 35-mm slides to reflective art to small 3-D objects.

Fleet Graphics also is equipped with ColorSpan’s DisplayMaker Series 12 wide-format inkjet printer, a Xerox DocuColor 12 copier/printer for high-quality, short-run color printing and a Falcon 160 laminating system manufactured by General Binding Corporation.

“We have made a commitment to stay on the cutting edge of technology. We are always looking for tools and solutions that make Fleet Graphics more productive and competitive,” Waggoner says.

The new CTP workflow certainly fits this description.

“The quality inherent with CTP is an effective selling tool,” he says. “The more plates we get in the hands of printers, the more work they’re going to send us, because of the fast turnaround and quality of the plates. When you combine the thermal platesetter and the workflow system we have in place with the outstanding quality and detail Screen’s Spekta technology provides on the printed sheet, existing customers know we can handle additional projects and new customers are impressed by the throughput we can offer. That makes a big impact on our bottom line.”

The company’s investment strategy already has begun to pay off. Fleet Graphics finished 2001 with \$800,000 in sales, and Waggoner is confident of a 25 to 30 percent increase this year.

“We are well positioned by our wide range of services,” he notes. “We cover all types of scanning. We cover film and plate output. We cover short-run color digital printing. We also do wide-format inkjet printing for banners and posters, as well as the lamination associated with those products.”

