

Alliance casts wide net as more papers roll out CTP

Production managers cite single source for parts and service as key reason they opt to buy platesetters, peripherals from the partnership.

By Tara McMeekin

Editor

Publishers continue to tap Southern Lithoplate Inc.'s, CTP Alliance of vendors for computer-to-plate and associated hardware and software.

The CTP Alliance, formed last year, includes SLP, Screen USA, Presteligenge Inc., Polkadots Software Inc., Prolmage and Nela, all of whom agreed to market and support each other's products.

The Norfolk (Neb.) Daily News, for example, in August will commence installation of CTP equipment from Screen, with plans to go live Aug. 22, according to Mike Jones, assistant production manager.

The Daily News (daily, 16,837) purchased its equipment and associated software and consumables through the PAGE Co-Op, leveraging PAGE's relationship with the CTP Alliance.

The Daily News chose Screen's PlateRite News 2000LE, Polkadots Software's PrePage It workflow app and SLP's Viper 830 thermal plates.

The Daily News will run 22 to 25 plates an hour through its platesetter, which will be processed in an SLP (Protek) 105 processor. In addition to the paper, the publisher will run its load of commercial work through PrePage It workflow and the Screen platesetter. The workflow software is installed and the staff has already been through training on the app.

"Now everybody's used to it instead of throwing this software at them and then

a new CTP unit all at once," Jones said.

The PrePage It install has resulted in increased quality and Jones said adding CTP and running the SLP plates will only further enhance that benefit.

"Quality is a good benefit because of course we want to run a quality product," he said. "On top of that, I believe our ROI will be less than 3.5 years."

No more film

The newspaper will not keep any filmsetters as backup when the transition is complete. Jones said he believes maintaining film would be a "money-losing battle."

Instead, to ensure continuity, "We've worked out a joint emergency services agreement with another nearby plant that has Screen installed and running," said General Manager Les Mann. "We'll be their backup and they'll be ours."

The Daily News is shouldering the training on the equipment, enabling the paper's staff to fix any potential problems either site encounters.

Before committing to thermal CTP, the paper researched the technology for three years, Jones said. "For the size of our newspaper and our future business thermal was the best fit," he said. SLP's purchase of a thermal platemaking plant in Jackson, Miss., that it acquired through its takeover of Citiplate also weighed into the paper's decision, Jones said.

Alliance eliminates finger pointing

Working with an alliance of vendors appealed to Mann, who said he wanted to avoid finger pointing in the event of problems with equipment or software.

"We've gotten into situations when we've purchased systems and opted for another vendor's software or hardware and something fails or you're having some issue and they always want to point fingers at someone else," Mann said. "We just want to know that when we have a problem, one of those people will fix it."

Wick Communications' unit Territorial Newspapers in April installed a similar arrangement of CTP equipment — including Screen's PlateRite News 2000 with an SLP (Protek) processor — at its facility in Tucson, Ariz., but opted for Presteligenge's NewsXtreme workflow software.

The publisher prints the Daily Territorial, the county's Monday-through-Friday publication of legal notices, and Inside Tucson Business, a weekly Tucson business journal.

Territorial Newspapers also prints a number of Wick newspapers from surrounding areas, as well as commercial jobs including monthly newsletters and high school newspapers.

All told, the Tucson plant runs about 40 plates and hour and Production Manager Matt Klinger said a single CTP unit will serve the needs of the Tucson site going forward.

"We do plan to install a second CTP line at our plant in Sierra Vista," he said. "They already have a (Creo) thermal platesetter, so we'll add a Screen machine in maybe four to six months."

Territorial will not maintain film backup, Klinger said.

"We pulled the rug out after about two days," he said. "It's not that we weren't motivated to convert, but we just wanted to eliminate that crutch."

Speed crucial to single press crew

The equipment's speed was critical, Klinger said, since Territorial has only one press crew.

"(Converting to CTP) has significantly reduced the number of waiting time for plates, our makeready times are much lower and overtime has gone down, which of course is No. 1 in your budget," Klinger said.

For Territorial and Wick the decision to go with thermal was a group initiative. The publisher also made a site visit to The (Nampa) Idaho Press Tribune, which runs a Screen platesetter.

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Photo: Norfolk Daily News

Joe Griel of the Norfolk (Neb.) Daily News oversees the burning of an image onto a plate on the newspaper's Nuarc plate burner. The daily will install a new Screen PlateRite News 2000LE CTP unit from Screen in August.

"We fell in love with it," Klinger said. "It's very user friendly, NewsXtreme is extremely user friendly and the service has been very, very good on both ends."

The Hickory (N.C.) Daily Record, meantime, rolled out its CTP Alliance-anchored prepress foundation in February. The paper (daily, 21,115; Sunday, 23,933) designed a system that consists of ProImage News-Way workflow software, a Screen PlateRite News 2000 CTP unit, SLP's Viper 830 plates and a Nela Benchmark punch bender with three-point registration.

"All of our papers have been looking great since we went to computer-to-plate," said Jim Lillagore, regional production director for the North Carolina community newspaper unit of Media General Inc. "The color jumps off the sheet. It's terrific."

Lillagore said The Daily Record considered reliability first, followed by cost and vendor support, and like the Norfolk Daily News, liked the idea of a single source for vendor support.

"Even though we are operating equipment manufactured by different vendors, any problem can be resolved with one call to Southern Lithoplate," he said.

In addition to its daily, the publisher produces a six-day-a-week and a twice-weekly paper; circulations for the papers range from 6,200 to 12,500.

Freedom, Landmark tap alliance

Elsewhere, Freedom Communications Inc. and Landmark Community Newspapers Inc., which both began migrating

sites to CTP in the past two years, have elected to outfit some of their newspapers with equipment from Screen and SLP.

LCNI, whose conversion to CTP began in spring 2005, said it will fill its remaining sites with Screen platesetters and NewsXtreme software.

When the publisher initially embarked on its group wide CTP deployment, SLP was aligned with Creo (now Kodak) and as a result Trendsetter units were installed at three sites — the Carroll County Times in Westminster, Md., the Citrus County Chronicle in Crystal River, Fla., and the News-Enterprise in Elizabethville, Ky. (see *Newspapers & Technology*, July 2005). These papers will maintain their Trendsetter units and Prinergy workflows, according to Joyce Ford, production specialist at LCNI.

"They're only two years old and there would be no reason to replace them at this time," she said.

Moving forward at a pace of two sites per year, LCNI will outfit its remaining facilities with Screen PlateRite News 2000 units, SLP Viper 830 plates, NewsXtreme software and Nela punch benders.

The first installation took place in April, at Standard Publishing in Shepherdsville, Ky. Approximately 15 sites are left, Ford said, with the smaller papers getting Screen's entry-level unit, the PlateRite News 2000E. The deployment is slated for completion by 2010.

Many sites

LCNI has sites throughout Colorado, Flor-

ida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, and Ford said most of the group's facilities will install one platesetter apiece and act as backups for other plants close by.

"In Kentucky, we have four printing plants and the larger plant, which we just installed (in Shepherdsville) will have a backup imagesetter," she said. LCNI publishes three dailies and its additional papers are weeklies, biweeklies and triweeklies.

Ford said LCNI is a strong proponent of thermal. "The plates and the purchase of equipment, when we did it over a five-year plan, looked better on thermal than violet," she said.

Finally, Freedom purchased Screen PlateRite News units for The Daily News in Jacksonville, N.C., and The Telegraph in Alton, Ill.

"Freedom is an active participant in the PAGE Co-Op and also because of our relationship with Southern, we started looking at Screen for our Jacksonville and Alton papers," said Gary Blakeley, Freedom's director of enterprise purchasing.

In Jacksonville the equipment will replace no-longer-supported UV CTP units, and in Alton the Screen platesetters will allow the paper — which could not previously convert to CTP because of space restrictions at the facility — to replace film.

"The Kodak machines would not fit in there physically, and we wanted to stick with thermal and with a PAGE supplier, so we went with Southern Litho and Screen there," Blakeley said.

Freedom's CTP deployment began in 2004 (see *Newspapers & Technology*, February 2005), and its sites are outfitted with a mix of Anitec, Kodak Polychrome Graphics and Creo (both now owned by Kodak) equipment. —PT

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