

# Ink Link

## HOWARD PRINTING

### Offset vs. Digital

Bastille Day issue

Many print buyers are still confused about the differences between offset and digital printing. It's no wonder, with the recent flood of digital printing devices in the graphic arts industry.

Offset printing uses printing plates to carry the image and transfer it to the paper's surface. One printing plate is required for each ink color printed. (E.g., a CMYK document will need four printing plates—one each for the cyan, magenta, yellow and black colors.)

Digital printing does not use printing plates. The printed image is applied

directly to paper by computer-driven imaging heads. These printing heads can be ink-jet, dye-sublimation or toner-based systems. The elimination of printing plates is the main reason that digital printing costs less than offset printing for low quantities.

However, there is a point where offset printing becomes more economical. This point depends on several factors, but for small flat sheets or simple folded items, 500–1,000 appears to be the break-even point for offset versus digital printing.

A few other factors should be mentioned. Every digitally printed order is a CMYK color or black-ink-only job.

Offset printing offers a wider range of color choices. In addition to CMYK, offset can print PMS mixed colors, metallics, fluorescents and pastels. Varnishes and aqueous coatings are also available only with offset printing.

Sheet sizes and paper choices may be more limited with digital printing. Many digital devices cannot print a sheet larger than 12x18 inches. And many digital presses cannot print laser-compatible, highly textured and extremely thin or thick papers. Offset presses can print on any kind of paper specified.

#### Choose offset printing for

- long runs
- PMS or CMYK printing
- metallic, pastel or fluorescent inks
- heavy-weight papers
- heavily textured paper surfaces
- large sheet size
- varnish or aqueous coatings

#### Choose digital printing for

- short runs
- CMYK or black-only printing
- small sheet sizes
- variable data printing
- jobs not printed on exotic paper
- transparencies

Howard Printing offers **BOTH** fine offset and low-cost digital printing. Furthermore, we have calibrated our digital press to print in tandem with our offset presses—ensuring you will receive equal image quality with either method. Ask for a side-by-side sample pack today!

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