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Great West Newspapers exploits capacity, profitability at new plant

BY TARA MCMEEKIN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Photo: Great West Newspapers

Canadian community newspaper publisher Great West Newspapers of St. Albert, Alberta, in collaboration with Web Offset Services, ramped up its new print facility in July.

Like other publishers struggling to remain competitive, GWN wanted to make printing operations as efficient and profitable as possible, prompting construction of the new facility to do just that.

"In an industry where many are turning off the lights and willing to declare it dead, there are still opportunities to compete and make a profit," Duff Jamison, publisher and owner of GWN said. "It just requires a change in thinking, not only by the printers and publishers but also from the rest of the industry itself."

GWN prints 22 newspaper titles and a stable of commercial work. With page counts and circulations in decline, the economy growing tighter and competition becoming more intense, the publisher mulled every option before ultimately deciding in favor of a greenfield site in St. Albert, just north of Edmonton. GWN built its site from the ground up, tapping mostly local people and companies.

Among the key goals for the new facility was the implementation of a multi-format printing infrastructure that could take the place of its old 20-unit singlewide pressline — a mix of Goss and DGM units. GWN recruited Sam Wagner of Web Offset Services and began familiarizing itself with different production possibilities and techniques, exploring 2-by-2, 4-by-1 and 6-by-2 press formats.

As the project got rolling, additional opportunities presented themselves, prompting further changes in existing press requirements: The neighboring Edmonton Journal had two aging presses and was considering outsourcing its printing. GWN inked a deal with Journal parent Postmedia to print the 6-day-a-week paper in August of 2012.

"Although printing the Journal would mean producing a heavy page count, multi-section broadsheet, we still needed the same flexibility and production possibilities our old single-width press offered," Jamison said. "We run a mix of tabloid and magazine products in a number of different sizes and formats, and wanted to retain all of that work."

In addition, GWN wanted to offer heatset or UV to its customers.

Breaking ground

In tandem with designing and implementing the right press, GWN was breaking ground at the new location to keep pace with the Fall 2013 deadline for vacating its old plant. That meant beginning



GWN President Duff Jamison and plant manager Evan Jamison, with Sam Wagner of Web Offset Services.

construction before a final press decision was made.

"This presented a number of additional challenging situations, including designing and optimizing a press hall to accommodate a number of different press configurations — no easy task while keeping the project on a tight budget and compressed timeline," Wagner said.

In addition, GWN wanted to retain as much of its existing staff as possible rather than hiring a new press crew based on the new press. That made planning, training and control-system design critical.

Once the Edmonton Journal contract was finalized, GWN's maximum product specifications increased from 96 tabloid pages to 72 broadsheet pages, with up to six sections in a single run. As construction moved forward, GWN would be tasked with fitting whatever press it selected into

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The new facility houses GWN's 7,000-square-foot press hall. The publisher's new KBA Colora press was installed in January.

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the 7,000-square-foot, 32-foot-high press hall already under construction.

The publisher ultimately opted for a hybrid Colora from Koenig & Bauer AG, which was installed in January 2013 — at the height of the Canadian cold-weather season — and began testing the press in April.

The first shift of GWN's production load was moved from the old press at the end of July. The next week the balance of the work was moved onto the new press and the old press was shut down. Within three more weeks, the full daily runs of the Edmonton Journal were being done and GWN's two old presslines were shut down on Aug. 28.

Web Offset Services and Wagner configured the UV-equipped Colora, which supports single, double and triple-wide production. Prime UV provided UV curing technology capable of handling up to 48 UV pages per run. An advanced slitter/angle bar package accommodates sectioning for broadsheet and other products.

The hybrid design allows GWN to produce a variety of sizes and formats, from broadsheet pages as narrow as 8 inches and as wide as 16.5 inches (four to 72 pages), tabloid heights of 10 inches to 16.5 inches (four to 144 pages) and magazine page widths of 5 inches to 8.25 inches (eight to 96 pages).

The machine is comprised of three towers, three pasters and a customized KF5 folder capable of producing multiple formats, thanks to an adjustable triple former assembly mounted on a single level. The press measures 110 feet long, 23 feet wide and 32 feet high.

An adjacent mezzanine houses all of the supporting equipment. GWN's quiet room and CTP rooms were also integrated to minimize the distance between operations for an optimized workflow. The quiet room is on the main level of the facility and CTP equipment is housed directly above at mid-tower level to minimize plate handling. A freight elevator and overhead crane streamline movement of supplies and maintenance.

EAE supplied semi-commercial controls that are integrated with auxiliary press systems from Technotrans, Q.I. Press Controls, and Baldwin Technology Co. Inc., among others.

'Leading, not bleeding, edge'

Wagner said the goal throughout the project was to ensure that automations put in place would increase efficiency in reality, not just theory.

"The focus throughout the project was that it is good to be on the leading edge, but not the bleeding edge of technology," he

said. "While many new presses tout various forms of automation and advanced features, this can drive up cost substantially while the actual savings in a real-world production environment can be hit or miss, depending on the particular printer's needs."

In addition, he said, more complex machines can add to the burden in terms of training and maintenance. To that end, Wagner said GWN was careful to evaluate every function and component of the new facility.

"Sometimes older and simpler designs can be more beneficial and in the case of this installation, a higher level of operating efficiency is being realized, while costing 25 percent to 35 percent less than comparable machines," he said.

To that end, proven designs

were chosen for all major components at the facility, from the KBA-supplied pasters, units and folders, to the advanced EAE presetting and control system, to integrated register controls from QIPC, integrated blanket-washing systems from Baldwin, spray dampening, water cooling and treatment components from Technotrans, to the integrated Prime UV curing system, to roll-handling equipment from Specialty Machine Co.

Because of the multiple sizes and paging possibilities required of the press, a catalog-style production system was implemented to eliminate the need to create and plan the various press configurations on a daily basis. The multiple requirements also meant integrating the CTP workflow with the EAE control system to automate layout



The KBA Colora press went live at GWN's new facility in July.

GWN's EAE platform maintains all production parameters of more than 900 separate products, all of which are preprogrammed into the system.



and pagination.

"Assembling all the right components is only part of the picture," Jamison said. "The real challenge becomes the full integration of all components and systems."

The EAE system is the crux of that integration, according to Wagner.

"Integration usually means that the systems 'talk' to each other and maybe a few functions are included — but rarely are all systems totally integrated," he said. "In this case, total integration meant removing the need for the operator to make dozens of button pushes and adjustments at three or four or more operational points, and instead interact with a single display at the console with all associated activity happening automatically in the background."

The EAE platform maintains all parameters of more than 900 separate products, all of which are preprogrammed into the system to reduce the need for manual intervention.

Extensive integration of systems meant extensive testing at the facility.

"Installations always

seem to take longer than expected and once paper is in the press, everyone wants to go into production, so extensive testing is often cut short," Wagner said.

Avoiding that pitfall, Jamison said GWN didn't skimp on testing or training of staff.

"The final pieces to the puzzle are the people and the planning," Jamison said. "Our people, after all, are the ones that need to make this all happen and are key to the success of the new facility."

To that end, he said, employees were very involved in the internal preparations that took place even before the arrival of the new Colora press — a challenge considering the existing facility had to remain operational in parallel to the new one ramping up. GWN tapped a Danish printer who had worked with Web Offset Services on a similar upgrade, to help train its staff and ease the transition from a 20-year-old, singlewide, one-around press, to fully automated triplewide equipment.

Today, Jamison said, GWN has increased its press capacity by four to six times what it previously had. Total weekly

output has more than doubled, with an additional 30 percent of capacity available to fill — and it's been accomplished without any additional staff. Routine production includes changing over from one format and/or size to another many times a day, with some days requiring as many as 15 to 20 makereadies for jobs ranging from 800 to 100,000 copies or more. All this is being done by a press crew of two to four people, with waste for each new job started in the range of 150 to 400 copies, depending on the product, according to GWN.

Plant Manager Evan Jamison isn't ready to declare "mission complete" just yet, considering it's only been a few months and new lessons are being learned each day, but he's seen enough to confirm GWN made the right choice.

"For an operation where so many different types of products and jobs must be run every day, this efficiency is an absolute necessity in today's competitive marketplace," he said. "I'm really looking forward to the years to come." ▲



UV curing, provided by Prime UV, allows GWN to handle up to 48 UV pages per run.



The new KBA press arrived at the facility in January, at the height of the Canadian winter.



GWN tapped Specialty Machine Co. for roll-handling equipment.