

From last fall's testing: Pressline Services 3V plate-up for three-page-around printing on a converted Goss Metro unit, in *The Oklahoman's* pressroom

After vendor testing and newspaper prototyping, is a three-page-around press conversion at hand?

## 3 PAGES ON 1 PLATE

BY JIM ROSENBERG

**T**HE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY MAY FIND OUT THIS YEAR IF converting two-plate-around presses to three-page-around printing is a viable production option. A large daily tested one supplier's converted plate cylinders earlier this spring. Another test-printed its editions in the new format created by such a conversion. And the company that was first to announce it would offer the conversions now plans to be the second to supply a collecting folder for three-around printing.

In all, St. Louis-based printing equipment rebuilder and upgrader Pressline Services, printing and packaging equipment manufacturer Goss International, and register and plate-handling systems maker Nela offer to convert presses from printing two pages on two plates around the circumference of a plate cylinder to printing three pages on one long plate mounted on a



*Oklahoman* VPs Bart Williams, left, and Pat Dennis are weighing the benefits and costs of conversion.



modified two-around plate cylinder (see April *E&P*, p. 48).

The objective is to squeeze 50% more pages from a two-around press, enabling, for example, a four-page-across (doublewide), two-page-around press

unit or color tower to print three copies each of eight pages straight or 24

different pages in collect mode.

Of course, the resulting pages are one-third shorter than those printed using plates mounted two around the cylinder.

In all cases, a single long plate around the entire circumference of a cylinder needs only one plate lock-up mechanism. So conversion requires removing half the lock-ups on a two-around cylinder, filling each resulting space with a mass equal to that of the remaining lock-up halfway around the cylinder in order to preserve balanced force during high-speed rotation, and machining each filled space's surface to match the cylinder's curvature.

Pressline conversion technology includes a dual-feed option for production at the two-around cutoff and the three-around modification, and it has been working on a folder that will allow production in the collect mode. Nela claims "considerable experience" helping European and Asian newspapers satisfactorily convert to three-around





printing. And Goss offers both conversions and new presses for three-around printing, as well as a folder for collect production, adjusted to an asymmetric fold that gives the final product both a larger presentation that fills a newsrack window and full enclosure of freestanding inserts.

Advantages may include time for later press starts, earlier finishes or other jobs, color on more pages with improved register, and use of less equipment and labor to produce the same runs on the same schedule.

Because plates are priced by the square foot or meter, there should be little or no difference between what is charged for a given quantity of full-circumference (three-page) plates and for twice that quantity of half-circumference (single-page) plates, according to Lane Palmer, newspaper products vice president at Fujifilm Graphics U.S.A.

Given the variety of installed presses' ages, models, sizes and configurations, no one will hazard even a ballpark guess of the per-couple price of conversion.

"There is going to be an extremely wide variance in cost," mostly owing to differences in cylinder lock-ups, says Web Offset Services President Sam Wagner. The range of work and its cost, from relatively simple to very complex, "would almost be indefinable," says the Sarasota, Fla.-based press consultant, adding that only case-by-case estimates would be meaningful.

## OK in Oklahoma

Pressline's first newspaper test site was in Oklahoma City, where it was working on *The Oklahoman's* three 10-unit Goss Metroliners. About 10 years ago the *Oklahoman* added two Goss Global Newsliner towers, an RTP and a 2:3:3, folder, then put all the equipment on the same new EAE controls system. Last fall, it brought in Pressline to reduce the web width to 44 inches.

While there, Pressline asked if it could isolate two print couples from regular press runs for a week of testing. The newspaper agreed, and Pressline installed one-around plate cylinders, replacing the original cylinders when it was finished.

"We just ran one unit testing the new-design plate cylinder" for vibration, recalls *Oklahoman* Production Vice President Bart Williams.

"We're interested in anything that'll

offer opportunities to produce a quality product while reducing the amount of newsprint we must use" and providing the equivalent of extra capacity, says Pat Dennis, operations vice president at the 179,783-circulation (243,379 Sundays) *Oklahoman*.

"This could be a road to get there without all new equipment," adds Williams.

Still, noting that at this point, everyone in the industry is careful about spending, Dennis remarks, "There's a heavy investment to get you there." So the *Oklahoman* right now is assessing all aspects of a conversion to get a better grasp of the true costs, he says.

The paper has "had some additional talks" with Pressline about conversion possibilities, Williams adds.

"We're kicking the tires on it right now," Dennis says. "We were impressed with the opportunities it offers. We'll just have to see if it fits."

Williams directed questions about the tests to Pressline, where Vice President/General Manager Jim Gore says only that information from the tests was being used by Pressline engineers "because there had to be some changes made." Citing pending patents, he says his firm is not yet prepared to discuss test results or engineering details.

The testing likely looked at more than vibration. "We did have plates mounted and we were printing," says Gore, who declines to identify the plate supplier.

In the meantime, the bigger news may be Pressline's work on



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— JIM GORE/Vice President/GM, Pressline Services Inc.

its own collect folder for pages printed three-around. In development "for probably a year," says Gore, the folder is not yet ready for testing, but has a willing test site.

"Its sister has been tested quite a bit," Gore continues. While "the production model hasn't been tested, a version of it has" — a prototype of sorts that "mimics our model folder."

## Folders and formats

Whether designed or modified for the purpose, a folder is as important to three-page-around production as the cylinders

engineered to carry the full-circumference plates, and is recognized as an expensive component of any conversion.

"The key to the three-around concept is in the folder," says David E. Preisser, vice president of operations at *The Cincinnati Enquirer*. A collecting folder "is one of the things we certainly said we'd need and want," he continues, adding that Pressline recognized that from the very beginning.

While the *Oklahoman* press tested cylinder conversion, Gannett's 188,956-circulation (273,433 Sundays) *Enquirer* tested the format that such a conversion would create. "It'd be more like a Berliner," says Preisser, referring to the sort of small broadsheet adopted by two U.S. dailies and planned for a third.

The first U.S. Berliner also is a Gannett paper, the *Journal & Courier*, printing on a manroland press in Lafayette, Ind. The second is the *Reading (Pa.) Eagle*, rolling off a KBA press since February.

But while a Berliner measures approximately 12 inches by 18½ inches, pages from a converted two-around cylinder would range from 10¾ to 12 inches wide and 14 to almost 15¾ inches deep, depending on cylinder circumference and web width.

The *Enquirer* prefers the format, says Preisser, because it "retains individual sections." A prototype for internal and external review was created in the smaller format from a day's edition and printed, at another Gannett site. To produce pages matching those from a converted press, he explains, "we centered the page on

the cutoff of that particular location, and then cut the copies by hand to the appropriate size."

Cincinnati is in no hurry to make a decision about possible conversion, consideration of which "is open-ended at this point," Preisser adds.

Gannett has variously outsourced and consolidated some newspapers' printing, upgraded equipment at the plants it uses, and led the move to further reduce web widths to 44 inches, producing 11-inch-wide pages on doublewide presses. But with consolidation or outsourcing not viable alternatives at its two sites still



running older, wider presses, the company sought cost-effective equipment upgrades that can produce editions in a smaller format.

Running Gannett's last letterpress, one of the two sites is Shreveport, La., where *The Times* will install a remanufactured Wifag press built for the Berliner format. The other site is Cincinnati.

## Smaller pages around, across?

Beyond pressroom work from plate cylinders through folder, the *Enquirer* is in some ways in a better position to convert to three-page-around printing. In post-press, it operates several different inserters, at least one (a Goss NP630) and possibly all of which can be modified to carry and insert the smaller-format product.

Still, for the mailroom, says Preisser, "there's a lot of questions on that side." Modification may not be necessary or even desired. The *Enquirer* is contemplating the option of pre-packaging its inserts in a standard-size jacket. A paper could itself produce a section for such a jacket on units with unmodified plate cylinders or, as is commonly the case for Sunday editions, continue inserting into standard-size color comics sections supplied by an outside printer.

In prepress, the *Enquirer* already was looking at an upgrade expenditure. "In our case," says Preisser, "it's equipment we would have to replace anyway." Unlike probably every other Gannett site except Shreveport, Cincinnati never converted to computer-to-plate output. So, before selecting that equipment, "we are going to wait to see if we go with this approach," Preisser says, referring to printing on the longer three-page plates.

The larger CTP equipment that those

plates require is "not entirely revolutionary," he says, noting that commercial printers have sizes close to what a newspaper would need. Very few newspaper CTP systems vendors now offer the required size, but for some of the others, compatibility with the longer plates is less a matter of complete re-engineering than it is resizing their existing equipment, according to Preisser.

The *Enquirer* has four 10-unit Goss Metros, with half decks, dating from late 1970s, but today runs only two of those lines owing to the folding of the jointly operated *Cincinnati Post* at the end of 2007 and the industry's and general economy's declining fortunes since then.

The age of that equipment means the *Enquirer* has another serious alternative to weigh: Rather than modifying four-across cylinders to print three



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— DAVE PREISSER/Operations VP, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*

pages around, it could restore the press from its 50-inch cut-down to its original 60-inch web width and print four or five tabloid pages across and four around. It now prints four broadsheet pages across and two around.

With the Metros' 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cutoff, the option would produce near-square tabloids at five across (about as wide as New York's *Daily News* and as deep as the *New York Post*) or 15-inch deep tabs at four across (roughly the dimensions of an old *Life* or *Look* magazine).

That's exactly the approach advocated by at least one press consultant, whose

most recent projects have had him working for several years in tab-friendlier Europe.

## Using all the iron you paid for

While three-around conversion may be viable for a few newspapers, says Web Offset Services' Wagner, "all of a sudden this can become a substantial investment," one that limits future product types and contract work. "The whole key to that is not to pigeonhole yourself," he says. The assumption is that most newspapers that continue printing will do so because they print more than their own editions, and probably more than just newspapers.

Wagner sees three-around printing as a radical continuation of self-imposed limitations, such as repeated web-width reductions or, in his view, often unwarranted adoption of 1-by-4, straight-only

presses — all of it forfeiting the flexibility that newspapers will need to continue printing into the future.

"Everyone's been focused on cutting down," he says, rather than utilizing equipment to full capacity.

Not that Wagner necessarily imagines a return to big broadsheets. In fact, he sees a future for newspapers in compact formats — especially the tabloid. But U.S. publishers would first have to overcome the poor image the word conjures for many in the U.S., even though this country's 40 or so mainstream daily tabs (a quarter of them in Colorado alone, and to say nothing of far-smaller Canada's 20 tabs) are no less newspapers than their twice-folded counterparts.

Wagner thinks it just makes more business sense to squeeze the most from an existing investment in iron by running at full capacity. Most singlewide presses and many doublewides, he argues, can print very close to a Berliner's dimensions — a "faux Berliner," as he calls the shorter pages of three-around printing — with little or no modification. The editions, however, will print as tabloids.

That could be accomplished by returning a press to its full web width. For a 56-inch press with a 22-inch cutoff, for example, prepress could image two

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Full-circumference plates are nothing new in some newspaper markets. Here, an operator in a South Korean plant prepares to mount a doublewide press with double-long Fuji plates.

11-inch-wide, 14-inch-deep pages on each plate at 90°. The plates would be mounted four across and two around, producing 16 conversion-size pages per couple.

Further, a singlewide press, Wagner notes, can achieve something much closer to real Berliner size. Though many such presses have been cut down to run 22- and 23-inch webs, more than 80% of North America's installed singlewide capacity, he says, "is capable of doing between 34 and 35 inches" as originally engineered, with several different cutoffs, most probably at 22<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches.

Those presses could run 34-inch webs to produce four 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>-inch-wide pages with 17-inch cutoffs for each printing couple on a one-around press or eight such pages per couple on a two-around.

"The difference is it's a tab and not a broadsheet," Wagner points out, owing to the pages' orientation relative to the web's direction: pages from top to bottom are along, not around, the plate cylinder. But in terms of dimensions, "it's almost a dead ringer for a Berliner," says Wagner.

Assuming its readers and advertisers will accept a tabloid, a newspaper choosing that approach with a doublewide press not only does not have to buy a Berliner-size press or pay to convert its existing press and folder, but also regains a significant percentage of capacity utilization, printing four more pages per couple than it would from a three-around conversion at cut-down size.

Reversion to full width, Wagner says, may require some clean-up to the portion left unused after a couple of cut-downs and work such as roller replacement.

"You gain 30 to 40% of color," he says, by going back to full width and running at a smaller size.

In the singlewide, one-around category, a



**"Everyone's been focused on cutting down," rather than utilizing equipment to full capacity. — SAM WAGNER/Web Offset Services**

10-unit Goss Community press could run two webs at full color (four units each) and two in black to produce 16 broadsheet pages, half in color. But at tabloid size, just eight units run at full web width can produce the same number of pages, all in color. Most page-area loss is recaptured by the faux-Berliner's dimensions, and, of course, the two remaining mono units are still available.

In defense of the format, Wagner says that a "garden-variety" one-around press will deliver a 11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>-inch page width, making it almost identical to today's broadsheet page width, and just a few inches shorter, thereby eliminating the "necktie" or "noodle" look created when older presses with long cutoffs were cut down for narrower web widths.

For this reason, he argues, such

tabloids will wind up looking better than long, narrow broadsheets, appearing more like full-size magazines and leaving no ink on readers' laps.

Where a large number of pages or other considerations may make it desirable, physically separated sections are possible with a tabloid. Index notches or pull-tabs may be cut (as *Newsday* tried in Long Island, N.Y.) or advance-printed sections may be inserted side-by-side into news/sports jackets (as the former *Rocky Mountain News* did in Denver).

Separate tabloid sections also may be glued or stapled. "Section stitchers are relatively easy to put on a folder," Wagner says. Used in European newspapers and helping create the image of a daily magazine for colorful tabloids, the stitchers are not that complex, difficult or expensive — certainly less than a new folder, he adds.

Wagner further suggests that in a time when broadsheets have fewer total pages, often in consolidated sections, an absence of separable sections in a tabloid may be less of a drawback than it once seemed.

One more advantage of restoring width while retaining two-around printing is that the option by itself probably would not require new platemaking equipment. Plate lines installed before cut-downs could still be used. Any installed after cut-downs could probably accommodate

the new plate and page size.

For newspapers that "wanted to stick with a broadsheet," Wagner joins a small chorus that formed at least 10 years ago: They probably can print three across on a singlewide press and may be able to print six across on a doublewide. But there are more opportunities to print half again as many pages on a full-width singlewide press than on a doublewide, for the simple reason that most 60-inch-wide presses are long gone. Most of the cut-downs were to newer, already narrower models.

So, as Wagner sees it, in at least some important respects for presses, "the older and the wider, the better." ■



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