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# Five Key Takeaways from the Inkjet Summit



Marco Boer gave the opening keynote at the 2017 Inkjet Summit.



By **Patrick Henry**



With a 73% compound annual growth rate for continuous-feed inkjet pages from 2008 through last year, production inkjet technology is something in-plants need to pay attention to. This was one of the key messages of the fifth annual Inkjet Summit, held last week in Ponte Vedra, Fla.

Nearly 30 in-plant managers from 24 different in-plants were at the event, joining more than 100 other printers. They attended keynote sessions, case-study workshops, user panel discussions and one-on-one meetings during two-and-a half days of intensive learning.

Here are five takeaways from the Inkjet Summit, all of which will be explored in more detail in IPG's conference coverage:



The room was packed with printers for the opening keynote at the Inkjet Summit.

- ▶ *Master the data.* Production inkjet presses run on it, and products printed on them have to deliver data to end users in ways that assure ROI. This is why data management has become a “table stakes” capability for printers who want to succeed with the new process. It also explains why printers with inkjet presses are as eager to hire IT specialists as they are to find qualified press operators.
- ▶ *Pay careful attention to the paper.* It’s referred to as the “fifth color” of conventional printing, but paper is the first color of what takes place on an inkjet press because of the different and sometimes unpredictable ways in which it interacts with water-based inkjet inks. Despite what the OEMs or the mills may say, paper stocks don’t perform identically from press type to press type. Continuous linearization and testing of substrates is a must.
- ▶ *Get over the cost of the ink.* As “engineered” printing fluids, inkjet inks can’t be priced at par with traditional litho inks. Nor should they be. The cost justification is in their value-adding special properties and the highly cost-efficient form of production that printing with them makes possible. In this sense, inkjet ink is an investment, not a cash drain.
- ▶ *Be prepared to overhaul your business model.* As one speaker put it, in embracing production inkjet, “the press is the easy part.” Everything else changes to accommodate the new capability: workflow, internal processes, quality benchmarks, customer relationships and more. The model evolves into one of selling outcomes and ROI instead of price per piece: a shift in thinking that will take patience and determination to accomplish.
- ▶ *Don’t fear obsolescence.* Always high on the list of objections to adopting a new printing technology is the worry that a device purchased today will be uncompetitive with systems coming to market six months or a year from now. A production inkjet press takes that sticking point away by being upgradeable in place with new software and expanded inkjet head arrays. Conference Chair Marco Boer, of I.T. Strategies, said that the forward compatibility of production inkjet equipment makes it a “relatively risk free” investment in terms of its useful life.



Production inkjet won’t make offset litho presses disappear (or digital toner boxes, either). But if what was learned at the Inkjet Summit is a reliable guide, the technology may finally be ready for a very fast break from the gate. Our advice: stay interested, and stay tuned.

To learn about press manufacturers’ views on the growth of production inkjet printing, Marco Boer interviewed a panel featuring HP’s Eric Wiesner, Ricoh’s Mike Herold, Xerox’s Robert Stabler and Canon Solutions America’s Erik Hawkinson.

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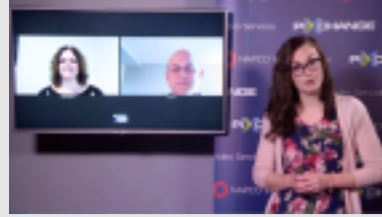
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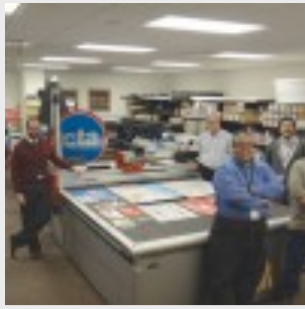
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