

Spec out a press with the works

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There are plenty of options available for digital presses, so what's your best bet – standard spec or fully loaded?

Nowadays vendors are more than happy to sell a raft of optional extras under the banner of adding value to your bottom line. But how much of it is worth the extra coin and what is just fluff?

The answer depends on the specific application of the digital press. Will it be used as a cheap 'n' cheerful workhorse churning out volume on jobs that don't require specialties, such as a fifth colour, varnish or other finishing? Or will it be a tech-savvy, bells 'n' whistles digital line not only adding refinements to the printed piece but also shaking hands with your bindery equipment in an integrated production line?

Add-ons come in all forms. There is a vast array of RIPs and related software, colour management tools, and inline finishing. The configurations seem limitless, though, of course, some are more common than others. When asked what was the most typical spec that move off their floors, the options lists came pouring from Australian digital hardware vendors. The only specification that was lacking, was, unfortunately, how much all of this would cost. Vendors remained resolutely tight-lipped on pricing.

But if it is simple configuration you are after, the application should decide the spec. Rather than point to one configuration, Kodak Australasia business development manager Michael Smedley says: "There is no typical solution; all are customised to suit the needs of the end user."

Standard spec

Other vendors point out a go-to spec for the average customer. For instance, a typical configuration for Ricoh's Pro C production devices would come with an SRA3 feeder tray, buffer pass, cover interposer, booklet finisher and Fiery controller, says Kathy Wilson, Ricoh Australia's general manager, business solutions & production. For the B&W Pro model, clients are more likely to want a decurl unit than a buffer pass. With continuous-feed machines, the popular setup comprises an unwinder, dynamic perforator, dancer unit, web merger, cutter, stacker and delivery belt.

Konica Minolta uses the term 'Professional Options' package to define the most standard configuration of its Bizhub Press range, which comprises the C6000, C7000 and C70hc. National service manager Brett Palmer says this includes an LU-202 large-capacity option, enabling a flowthrough of 4,250 sheets with air-assisted feeding; an RU-509 relay unit that cools prints with mechanical decurling and colour density sensor, and an FS-619 professional booklet staple finisher with saddlestitch, corner and two-point edge staple, half-fold and letter-fold.

Nigel Alexander, Ferrostaal Australia's general manager for the MGI make of digital presses, says there is a baseplate configuration for the French-made range, which the dealer recently took on board as a new agency. The baseline spec of the flagship MGI Meteor DP8700XL offers 3,600dpi resolution, 330x1,020mm format and produces 4,260 A4 pages per hour. It comes with a Fiery Pro80 V3.0 RIP and multi-substrate capability for paper, plastics and envelopes.

Some printers prefer to start out with a basic package, then add sizzle as the need arises, such as an increase in customers, an ongoing order or the launch of some new module. While much of this technology is retrofittable, most of the vendors ProPrint spoke to encouraged printers to get the spec right from the beginning. It seems to be the most cost-effective approach.

Get it right first

Konica Minolta's Palmer says options are usually sold as part of the original system for two reasons. Firstly, the system is normally required to produce a range of finishing output; this is discussed as part of a digital solution when quoting. Secondly, the client has seen the value of having options added to reduce issues or create extra efficiency.

Ricoh's Kathy Wilson agrees with choosing the optimal configuration when ordering go. "Ricoh works with both our cutsheet and continuous-feed customers to provide a customised, configured solution that suits their needs at the time of purchase."

But Ricoh can be flexible when a user's requirements evolve, and extras can be retrofitted, except in rare exceptions.

Ferrostaal's Alexander believes a bundle "is typically the most cost-effective way to get the best value rather than retrofitting. The entire solution is financed, saving the headache of refinancing".

Yet for Kodak's Michael Smedley, it makes more sense to add options when the need arises. He says retrofitting only becomes an issue with older models, where there are limitations based on the design of the original engine. As a rule, he finds options "are easy to add, as there is nothing that requires factory build".

Probably the most potent way to enhance a digital press is through finishing. There are two schools of thought – use your existing litho bindery kit, which keeps costs down, or invest in customised digital cutting, folding, stapling, stacking and sorting. There are convincing arguments for both approaches.



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