

Go Reconfigure - version Sept 14 2003

Most of the comment style text I have written seems to fall into the same pattern - a look at some theory such as Adobe claims for Network Publishing, then some news or recent facts about the state of printing, then some argument about some other views and then some sort of conclusion that fits with the facts and suggest something will be clarified soon.

This text is no different except that it will be revised over the next few months as there may be a consensus UK view on digital printing by the end of 2003. There are two major trade shows, each coming from a different direction. Digital Print World is based on a PIRA conference so has a base audience in senior print management. Digital Solutions claims an audience of 'production professionals' and is expanding in scope to take in litho workflow as well as inkjet. I have attended Digital solutions previously so may be biased in my expectation that it is more likely to be relevant. The current agenda for Digital Print World seems likely to change.

For one thing, the Heidelberg presentation may once have been intended to gently introduce digital options for an audience that continues to regard litho as mainstream. Questions around Heidelberg have been raised in various media, including *Printweek*. The question now is not whether there is a mainstream future for digital print but whether Heidelberg can compete with Xerox and other suppliers with IT connections. Andrew Tribute returned to his suggestion that Heidelberg give up on digital after quoting figures from Frank Romano on general trends in print and electronic communication. (*Printweek* 21 August) (See the comment page on this site) Unusually, George Clarke from Heidelberg UK saw fit to respond at length (*Printweek* 4 Sept). "When odd or outlandish theories are expressed in trade magazines generally it is better to let them pass without comment, relying on the readers' intelligence in sorting out the wheat from the chaff. However, one hopes that someone will challenge the more extreme or nonsensical views". He admits that there has been some substitution from litho to digital for transactional print but in general he sees the current print industry problems as being caused by the global economic situation rather than digital technology.

Andrew Tribute's writing turns up on his website at www.attributes.co.uk. after a reasonable pause for print publication. Earlier articles develop his view that Heidelberg lacks the computing background or range of products to compete with companies used to selling to enterprises. There may well be further articles later.

The September 4 issue of *Printweek* also included an interesting column by Lawrence Wallis who argued that the technologies required for a future print industry have already reached a plateau. Film could be defunct by 2015. Look out for widespread acceptance of ICC profiles and colour management. However, there is some complexity in predicting 'increased use of the internet for workflows and transacting business' while describing the competition for print from electronic media as 'febrile'.

The internet can be seen as feverish. George Clarke reminds us that 'the dotcom bubble burst during some time in 2000'. Looking at e-books there is a contrast between claims and setbacks. According to Wired, Frank Romano at Seybold predicted that "by 2015, a laptop will cost a mere \$300, compared with \$1,500 today". "A tablet PC in 12 years will cost \$40, a PDA \$20, an electronic book reader \$30, a pocket TV \$10". This in the same week that Barnes and Noble decided to discontinue e-books as there is not the demand as expected in 2000.

However, the print industry could look for ways to support and work with the internet. This is what 'network publishing' is about. Adobe have announced a webcast at the end of September that may add some detail to this kind of claim.

The publicity for Digital Solutions refers to 'wide-open workflow' as print companies take full advantage of broadband. This can only be possible as broadband is used for other purposes as well.

The description of the internet as febrile or feverish is not entirely misleading. The most upbeat keynote at Seybold seems to have come from Rob Burgess of Macromedia. "Tomorrow's Web experience will bear little resemblance to today's browsing, thanks to new interactive tools already emerging". It may be alarming for some that the Macromedia share price has more than doubled over the past year with a current price to earnings ratio of just over 160. (cbs.marketwatch.com) Others may find it strange that for Xerox the equivalent figure is just over 170.

Content from Seybold San Francisco has already started to spread. There are copies of several PDF presentations on PlanetPDF. The Seybold-Romano Future of Print Conference will provoke comment and interest in the UK at least until the next Seybold Amsterdam when some of the same issues will come up again. In the Wired report (Elisa Batista, 'Paper Trail Not Dead Yet' Sept 9th) Frank Romano is quoted as insisting that digital media will happen and will have an effect on the printing industry.

"It doesn't mean that the industry dies. It means it reconfigures itself."

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