

## Editorial/Production Office

795 Folsom Street, 6th Floor  
San Francisco, California 94107-1243, USA  
phone: (415) 905-2300  
fax: (415) 905-2612  
web: [www.Seybold365.com](http://www.Seybold365.com)

Managing Editor: **Chuck Lenatti**  
e-mail: [chuck.lenatti@mlii.com](mailto:chuck.lenatti@mlii.com)

Contributing Editor: **Steve Edwards**  
Correspondent: **Kurt Wolf**  
e-mail: [kwolf@uitikon.ch](mailto:kwolf@uitikon.ch)

Contributors: **Stephen Beals, C. Clint Bolte, Joel Breckenridge, Claus Christiansen, L. Carol Christopher, James Felici, Mark Fleming, Molly Joss, Chris Lynn, Anita Malnig, Michael Mittelhaus, Bill Rosenblatt, Ron Roszkiewicz, Bill Trippe, Bernd Zipper**

Graphics: **Gary Suen**

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## Seybold Seminars

795 Folsom Street, 6th Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94107-1243  
phone: (415) 905-2300  
fax: (415) 905-2FAX

## The Seybold Consulting Group

The Seybold Consulting Group advises both users and vendors on an individual project basis. Please direct inquiries to Andrew Miller at (415) 905-2598, or [andrew.miller@mlii.com](mailto:andrew.miller@mlii.com).

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## The Latest Word

# NAPL/R&E Pressroom Productivity Conference: Profiting from Specialized Markets

BY C. CLINT BOLTE

**T**he National Association of Print for Printing Leadership's 31st annual pressroom productivity seminar, held Nov. 1-3 at the Marriott O'Hare Hotel in Chicago, drew nearly 140 attendees. Unfortunately, three-quarters of them were supplier representatives and consultants rather than printers.

Suppliers were overheard discussing what type of meeting format would better draw their printer prospects. Their more restrictive budgets simply cannot justify support for venues that don't provide them with greater exposure before decision makers. Nonetheless, the content discussed at the gathering was outstanding and very timely.

## Responding to Challenges Through Education

Keynote presenter Joe Davis, chairman and CEO of Consolidated Graphics, described the challenges facing the printing industry and his company's response. A special team of experts markets all of the company's nonprinting services, such as variable data one-to-one, cross-media and fulfillment services, as CGX Solutions. But finding quality management, technical staff and journeymen operators is an increasing problem. Consolidated Graphics' answer is to hire four national recruiters to interview at 70 colleges located near its various printing plants.

Newly hired college grads enter Consolidated Graphics' Leadership Development Program for a structured two-year training program. After spending three to six months in a department learning and making meaningful contributions, they are given a written exam covering what they should have learned. The program began in 1991, and by 2000, 130 of these associates were hired into this program. This year, the company has accumulated 225 new lead-

ers, or about three per regional site.

Davis also challenged NAPL to become more aggressive in attracting craftsmen to the printing industry. Consolidated Graphics, meanwhile, is not sitting idly by; its national recruiters are paid commissions to hire journeyman craftsmen from competitors. In response to competitors' complaints about this pirating practice, Davis said, "If your employees want to stay with you, you won't have a problem."

## Color Management

Various panels and presentations touched on state-of-the-art applications and several successful benchmarking case studies for color management and closed-loop color control. Larry Warter, director of new business development for Enovation Graphic Systems Inc., described the progress toward a GRACoL Version 7, which is expected to be released after the first of the year. More than eight printings have been prepared on differing papers and qualified inks in preparation for this update. Further tests are planned for Germany and Japan. Printing Across Borders has been anticipating the update so that this GRACoL standard for general commercial printing can be adopted throughout the globe.

Warter outlined the key steps that printers must follow to ensure successful implementation of GRACoL as part of a thorough color management program:

- Make sure the press is mechanically sound.
- Use only ISO standard inks and papers.
- Print within the GRACoL ISO density tolerances to consistent gray balance.
- Compare "CMY neutral print density curve" to standard PDC.
- Adjust PDC to standard using CTP curves.

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- Print to target value for midtone gray patch.
- Use process control points (density and dot gain) to determine printing is within a reproducible range for future prints.
- Profile new printing condition for other colors.

Color management has helped printers achieve the strategic goal of being a manufacturing-driven rather than craft driven business. “We used to wrestle the press into proof compliance,” said panelist Mike Graff, senior executive vice president at Sandy Alexander. “Our former 6-plus percent plate remakes are now down to 0.6% due to color management and all within months of the transition,” Graff said.

“The weakest link,” said Graff, “are pockets of resistance against color management, which can unravel the entire effort.” The key is to have a stable platform. At color management meetings to address potential problems, the first question asked is, has anything changed? “The theory and practice work,” concluded Graff, “but it requires a way of thinking” and even an ingrained culture. “We’re selling workflows now, not printing,” Graff said.

Jim Sewell, VP of Technology at L.P. Thebault Co. in Parsippany, N.J., also endorsed color management saying, “Historic plate remake experience tracked for 12 years fell by 75% in less than a year” after implementing color management.

A repeated vital application where color management proves its worth involves the more complex printed jobs. For example, eight-color printing with UV coating has no contract proof available. With client education and color management, expectations are being met. Sewell added that by following the international density standards of 50 for cyan, 40 for magenta and 40 for yellow, the midtone gray densities are the same for all substrates. Therefore, SNAP, SWOP and GRACoL are getting closer to one another, he said.

Closed-loop color (CLC) control is becoming more popular, according to Bill Pope of Rochester Institute of Technology’s Printing Application Lab. He said that there were 980 CLC installations in 2005, up from 273 in 2001. “Forty-six percent of these are in publications and catalog printers and 32% in general commercial printing operations,” he added.

Banta support specialist Allen Nielson said that at his company’s Liberty Press Missouri plant, make-ready times have fallen from 25.2 to 21 minutes, which totals 183 press hours a year and is worth \$32,000 annually. Startup waste reduction of 530 impressions/make-ready will total 1,387,000 impressions saved in 2005. The result is that customers now demand CLC presses, Nielson said.

### Offshore Printing

In discussing globalization trends and print moving offshore, George Dick, owner of Four Color Imports Ltd., described how he started his business to find less-expensive foreign printers that could produce high-quality coffee table books, calendars and diaries. He owns All Systems Color in Dayton, Ohio, to control the necessary prepress so that acceptable PDFs can be delivered to his foreign printers. Despite the more than 50% cost savings in China compared with the U.S., the disadvantages of producing offshore are considerable: long shipping times (15 days to the West Coast and 25 days to the East Coast), customer service limited to e-mail that is 12 hours out of sync, good paper but limited choices (white and smooth only) and an image problem involving labor abuse, environmental disregard and piracy of the material being printed.

These disadvantages are so significant that Dick now does half of his business in Canada, mostly with Friesens.

Ed Ball described his experience buying print in China as part of Hallmark’s Print Procurement team. The greeting cards that involve handwork and ornamentation are less expensive when produced in China, and the gift-wrap and wallpaper printed on Chinese rotogravure presses represent great values. “The Chinese printers have world-class digital workflows and less than 5-year-old, very high-tech equipment,” said Ball.

Interestingly, the Chinese do not buy the automated make-ready features on these new presses, but instead, “make-ready teams come out of the woodwork” during form or job changeovers. Ball said the Chinese government reduces duties on new technology imports, but has higher duties on used equipment. Hence, printers are encouraged to buy only the latest and greatest technology.

The biggest challenges Chinese printers face are distance and delivery times; incon-

sistent power grids, which limits production to one shift; and labor shortages as the Chinese government encourages people to stay on the farm. Tough anti-pirating regulations (international copyright protection) and the environmental laws on the books in China are simply not being enforced.

### Security

Kevin Harrell, director of Kodak’s Global Business Development for Security, Brand Authentication & ID Systems Division, delivered a presentation on security and authentication. The pharmaceutical industry has one of the highest profiles of losses in this area. For example, Harrell described a government investigation that concluded that 90% of drugs sold via e-mail, which are assumed to be from Canada, are in fact Chinese counterfeits. Government agents have apprehended \$150 billion of these counterfeit goods, which are estimated to be barely 5% of the total theft.

Kodak’s acquired Taggant Technology via its acquisition of Creo. The Web site ([kodak.com/go/traceless](http://kodak.com/go/traceless)) has in-depth explanations about how these forensically invisible taggants can be used to mark items so that counterfeiters, forgers or gray market diverters cannot even determine the existence of the taggant. The system can be used for simple pass/fail brand authentication, or it can uniquely identify each item using the taggant particle positioning that is as unique as a finger print to each item, correctly titled the “taggant image signature.” (At less than two parts per million, Kodak taggant is invisible to even the most sophisticated forensic analyses, including ICP-MS.)

The taggant image signatures can then be used to track and trace individual items, packages, labels, injection-molded plastic or metal items, ID documents (including drivers licenses), checks, printed credit cards and other security printed documents. The total system consists of taggants, readers and the Infinity software database, which tracks the individual items.

This taggants system costs about 2.5% of the value of the carton to which it is applied. While Creo had difficulty selling this fascinating technology, Kodak’s marketing approach is to persuade the U.S. government to mandate the use of the product as a deterrent to the liability issues. Obviously, this applies only in the United States.

**TSR**