

# 7 Ways Corrugated Converters Can Provide Greater Customer Value with Digital Printing

**By John Ballentine**

Today's consumers are more visually driven than ever in a world of products competing for attention. This presents a significant challenge for the corrugated packaging provider who, in turn, must support brand owners in innovating product packaging and do it faster and faster. Traditional corrugated converters have a new tool in their bag that can help deliver substantial additional value to their customers, drive additional sales for their plants, and tighten relationships with brand owners.

Digital printing on corrugated provides converters with a proven technology that can augment their current production capabilities and increase sales. Here's how:

## **1. Reduced Lead Time**

Time is money... retailers and consumers want product sooner, and want to be able to respond to trends and trending ideas in timelines that are more and more challenging to converters. CPG's are innovating at an ever-increasing rate and are striving to streamline their concept-to-commercialization schedules. In instances when typical production lead times simply can't meet the customers' requirements, digital printing is the answer. Digital printing on corrugated material is now doing for packaging what FEDEX did for package delivery. Whereas traditional converting production lead times are measured in weeks, digital printing lead times are measured in days. This means opportunities provided to converters that were historically very difficult to support, such as retailers offering manufacturers the opportunity to fill gaps on the shelves and on promotions in very narrow windows, are now easily within reach. We can now welcome conversations like "If you can get us 48 pallets of product by the 18<sup>th</sup> of the month we have an order waiting for you!"

## **2. Print Quality**

Digital printing technology for packaging and corrugated has now reached quality levels that approaches and in some cases, is exceeding Litho print quality. Now 4 color graphics are available when in the past we could only consider 1 or 2 color options. Helping manufacturers reach the consumer with higher end graphics increases sales, and improves consumer engagement. Why deliver one or 2 color print when we can deliver photographic quality images on packaging in lead times that are significantly faster than lead times for just having printing plates made? Research has proven that our population is more visual than ever – it's no question that pictures and stimulating graphics sell. By working with a digital corrugated printer you can expand your graphics capabilities by converting printed sheets on existing die cutting operations and on 1 – 2 color analog equipment.

### **3. Flexibility**

Since digital printing for packaging requires no plates, and no set up time, we can now allow customers to run multiple arts or flavor combinations offering more flexibility in ordering patterns, reduced obsolescence, and the ability to respond to the changing demands of the markets, consumers, and retailers. While not able to print in extremely high volumes, runs of up to 10,000 pieces or more are now very common.

### **4. Access to Markets**

Using digital printing for packaging opens markets that are currently underserved. As production order quantities continue to decline, more and more new products and companies are being launched, and retail sales channels are expanding creating more scenarios for the application of digital print. Having a partner that can augment your traditional converting will help reach these growing opportunities. Converters capable of supporting the rising demand for flexible promotional marketing campaigns stand to capture significant business now being missed due to constraints in production. A large percentage of promotional ideas pitched by brand owners never make it to market – because of volume thresholds needed to justify the packaging spend. This is now a thing of the past. Because printing can literally be accomplished in a matter of days, digital printing for packaging essentially permits near “on-demand” packaging and promotional opportunities.

### **5. Access to Shorter Runs and Capacity Balancing**

Flexibility in order quantities and low to no entry costs affords the ability to equip manufacturers with tailored packaging for products that do not have high velocity or are in the early stages of the life cycle. Multiple flavors on the same structures are readily achievable leveraging digital print for packaging. Once the die cutter is set up for a particular package changing flavors is just a matter of feeding another stack of digitally printed sheets. Digital printing effectively allows for nearly zero “make ready”, so long set ups for short runs are eliminated. Capacity balance is more readily achieved by using the inherent flexibility in digital print to support production runs less efficient on analog machine centers.

### **6. Premium Offering**

Premium brand and ultra premium products often have lower sales velocity but have higher price points. Glamorous and attractive packaging is needed to gain consumers attention and effortlessly increase the value of the product. Digital package printing is capable of inside and outside printing, and gloss and matte finishes, including spot treatment of those finishes. The newest advances in digital printing technology can print deep blacks and rich line colors without streaking or mottling, all enhancing the perception of quality and creating an engaging consumer experience.

## 7. Delight your customers, and retain them

Maintaining the highest levels of service is constantly a key driver in determining the amount of business a brand owner provides a converter. Digital print partners allow you to expand your product offering to cover all ranges of print quality, lead time, and order quantities without sending the work to a competitor. Digital Print partners like Tango Press don't compete with traditional converters, but rather operate as an extension of the converter's production capabilities. This symbiotic relationship results in better customer relationships, better performance in the eyes of the customer and thus sales growth – all while providing a “5-Star” customer experience.

Digital printing to corrugated material offers an incredible opportunity for converters to add value for their customers procuring printed packaging.

### About the Author

John Ballentine is Co-Founder of Tango Press, a provider of digital print production on corrugated located in Norwest Arkansas. Prior to co-founding Tango-Press, John accumulated more than 20 years' experience in packaging and corrugated printing and converting with International Paper, The J.M. Smucker Company, and Campbell Soup Company. For more information John can be contacted at:

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