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Classifieds

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Buyer's Guides

Print Facts

Print Glossary

IPEX 2006

e - PacPrint

e - Drupa

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CONTRIBUTORS > ANDREW TRIBUTE

March 16, 2006

Don't listen to the competition

Andrew Tribute November, 11 2005

One benefit of my background of the past 40 years digitising the graphic arts industry, including when I directed the marketing activities of one of the major suppliers to this industry, is I can often look at a piece of technology from a non-graphic arts related industry and anticipate how it could be utilised within graphic arts

When I first read about the planned use of violet (then called blue) laser diodes in reading and writing to DVDs, I saw their potential for imaging CTP. When I read about violet diodes for DVDs I immediately thought of the opportunity for these to replace expensive argon ion and frequency doubled YAG lasers for use in visible light CTP. This was long before Agfa announced it was working on such violet diodes for imaging plates.

The reason I bring this up is to show the reaction of companies likely to be adversely impacted if such technological changes take place and are successful. When I wrote about the potential of the violet (then called blue) diode in generating a new class of fast low cost effective visible light CTP units, before the first units has been announced, my comments were derided as stupid by key executives in Creo, the then market leader in CTP.

Creo expounded a thermal only policy for CTP and derided anybody whose views were not in accord with this. Since that time violet diode CTP units and a range of violet sensitive plates have come into the market with significant success.

One thing this shows is that sometimes companies who are brilliant with technology, as Creo was, are often blinded by their own view from understanding developments in competing technologies. Creo had a totally blinkered view of anything not developed by them, and refused to accept there were any alternatives to their approach.

Despite a deluge of disparaging comments about violet technology, many suppliers kept their faith and have prospered by bringing out violet CTP products. With rapid developments in the power of violet diodes, this part of the CTP market will continue to develop quickly.

An example of this is chemistry free violet plates that can be imaged on low cost CTP units, will be in the market within around a year. I remember, following writing about the potential of process or chemistry free violet CTP plates after drupa last year, to be told by the thermal bigots that such things were an impossibility for a very long time.

Andrew Tribute



International Analyst
Andrew Tribute is a world-renowned print media journalist and delivers insight on the industry around the globe, as well as new technology movements. He is based in the UK.

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Why am I bringing this up?

Firstly, it is to never believe any supplier if they are knocking proposed technology from the competition if it is counter to what that supplier offers.

Secondly, it is to draw attention to what is happening with developments in drop on demand inkjet printing, and how it may impact on the world of high speed continuous inkjet printing.

The market leader in continuous inkjet printing is Kodak Versamark, whose products set today's standard in what can be achieved in high speed inkjet operations. If I comment on how I see a development in drop on demand inkjet printing coming into the high speed printing area, I am advised by Kodak Versamark executives, I have to say with both politeness and courtesy, that such technologies cannot challenge what can be achieved with continuous inkjet technology.

At Print05 I was highly impressed with the Screen Truepress Jet520 digital press. While this is not going to be available in the world's markets for around one year, it shows the challenge to come from drop on demand technology.

This reel fed printer can operate in full colour at a speed in excess of 400 A4 (letter) pages/min with an excellent quality. No doubt with a second linked print engine it will operate in duplex mode at double that speed. This printer uses print heads from Seiko Epson, the largest manufacturer of piezo drop on demand heads in the world.

At drupa we saw the amazing Riso HC5000 sheet fed press running at 105 A4 (letter) pages/min with average quality using Toshiba Tec heads. I believe within a year we are likely to see presses with a similar or faster speed and higher quality from a range of companies, probably including Agfa, using print heads from Spectra or Xaar.

Recently HP launched its new scaleable print architecture thermal drop on demand print heads that are very fast in operation. I would not be surprised to see HP, possibly through their Scitex Vision subsidiary, developing a fast printer using these heads. We may also see Scitex Vision using their as yet to announced second generation Aprion piezo heads in such a product.

Much is being suggested on the ongoing potential of continuous inkjet using Kodak's STREAM technology. This technology, while offering great promise for speed and quality, unlike all those mentioned, is still in the laboratory and a few years away from commercial introduction. If it works as projected it will be brilliant and will replace the existing Versamark printhead technology.

While Kodak's Versamark sets the speed standard for very high speed printing today, we can expect to see significant challenges coming from the suppliers using drop on demand technology in the next year or so. This will be one of the most fascinating technological battles to watch over the next few years.

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Andrew Tribute 16. 03. 2006.

NE SLUŠAJTE KONKURENCIJU

Jedna od prednosti moje prisutnosti 40-godišnjoj digitalizaciji grafičke industrije, uključujući usmeravanje marketinških aktivnosti jednog od velikih proizvođača, je da mogu često da primetim nešto od tehnologije industrija nevezanih za grafiku i predvidim kako bi to moglo biti upotrebljeno u grafici.

Kada sam prvi put čitao o planiranoj upotrebi violet (tada zvanj plava) laserskoj diodi za čitanje i pisanje po DVD-u, video sam njen potencijal za osvetljavanje u CTP uređajima. Odmah sam u violet diodi za DVD video priliku da zameni skupe vidljive argon-jon i YAG lasere iz CTP. To je bilo mnogo pre Agfine objave da radi na takvoj diodi za CTP.

Razlog što ovo iznosim je da pokažem reakciju kompanija koje mogu biti neprijatno pogođene ako se takve tehnološke promene ostvare uspešno. Kada sam pisao o potencijalu violet (tada zvanj plava) diode u stvaranju nove klase brzih, jeftinih i efikasnih CTP, pre nego je promovisan prvi uređaj, moj komentar je bio ismejan od ključnih ljudi iz uprave Creo-a, tadašnjeg vodećeg proizvođača CTP.

Creo je zastupao termalnu tehnologiju kao jedinu smernicu za CTP i ismevao svakoga čiji stavovi nisu bili u skladu s tim. Od tada su se violet CTP uređaji i čitav asortiman violet osetljivih ploča probili na tržištu sa značajnim uspehom.

Ovo pokazuje da su ponekad kompanije briljantne u tehnologiji, kao što je bio Creo, često zaslepljene sopstvenim gledištima za razumevanje razvoja konkurentnih tehnologija. Creo je imao totalno sumnjičav pogled na bilo šta što nisu oni razvili i odbio da prihvati bilo koju alternativu njihovim načelima.

Uprkos poplavi omalovažavanja violet tehnologije, mnogi proizvođači su nastavili svoju bitku i uspešno razvili violet CTP proizvode. Rapidnim razvojem snage violet diode, taj deo CTP tržišta nastaviće da se brzo razvija.

Primer toga su violet ploče koje se razvijaju bez hemije, osvetljavaju se na jeftinim CTP uređajima, a biće na tržištu za oko godinu dana. Sećam se, u nastavku pisanja o potencijalu violet CTP ploča (razvijanih sa ili bez hemije) posle prošlogodišnje DRUPA-e, bilo je tvrdnji od zadržanih zastupnika termalne tehnologije da su takve stvari nemoguće u skoroj budućnosti.

Zašto ovo iznosim?

Prvo, nikada nije verovati proizvođaču ako kritikuje predloženu tehnologiju konkurencije ako je u suprotnosti od njegove ponude.

Drugo, da skrenem pažnju na dešavanja u razvoju inkjet štampača...