# digitalprinter

Technology and business strategies in digital print

HP Indigo

Fluorescent

Digital Art

#myHPface
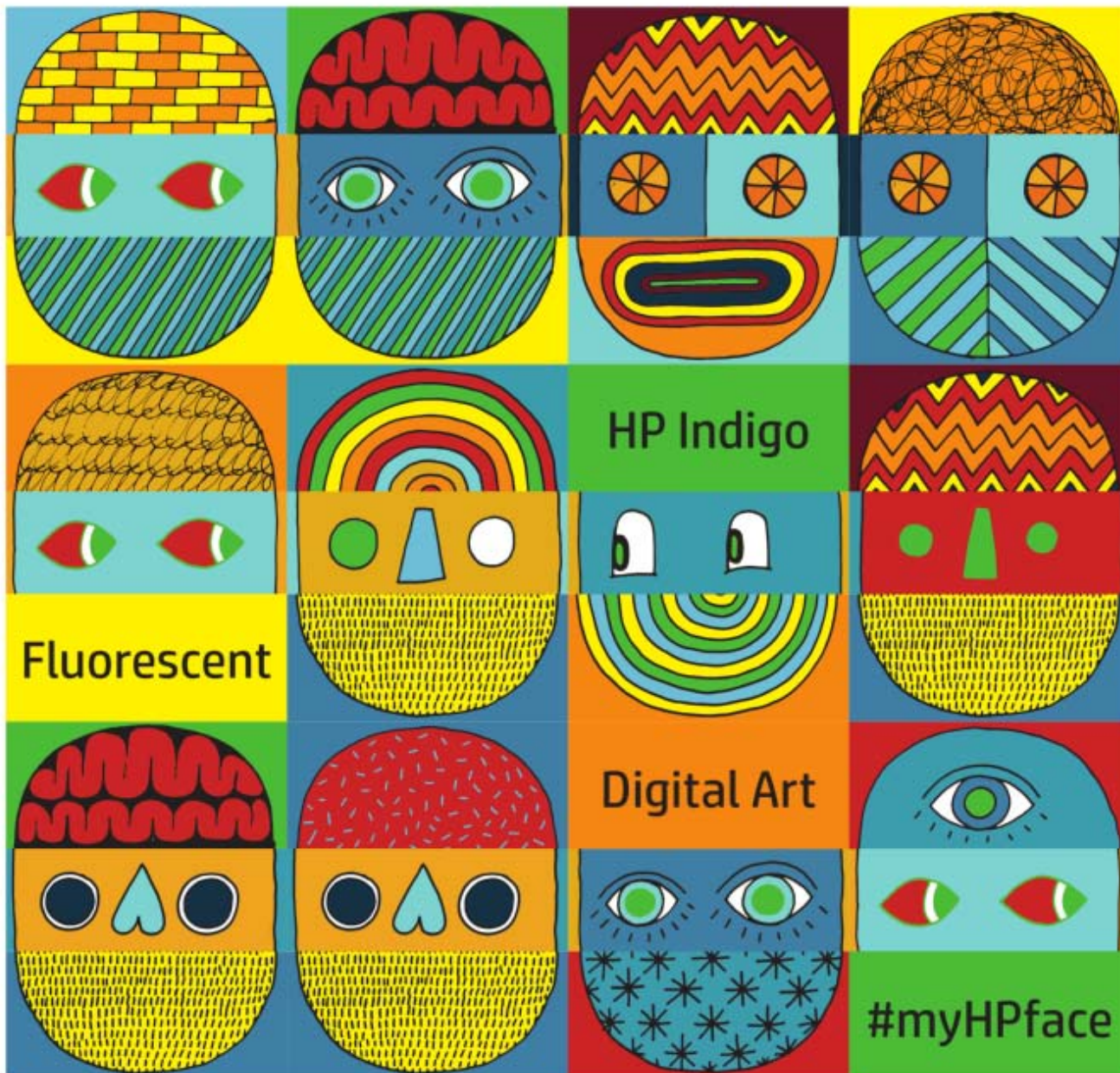
**Web-to-everything**
e-commerce grows its links

**Finishing focus**
Saving the best till last

**Give us a sign**
Extending into wide-format

**Wanna buy a press?**
Entry-level options explained

Integrating more closely with your customers' businesses is one of the unsung benefits of web-to-print. *Michael Walker* saw how moving into the supply chain helps

# Supply-side economics

You could say that the history of web-to-print has largely been one of failure. Early promises of copious business being there for the taking on the wild frontier of the internet were not borne out in practice; by some estimates, more than half of online portals built to tap this latent demand were abandoned within 18 months, having never delivered the benefits they were sold on. "Build it and they will come" didn't work.

While there were undoubtedly technical hurdles around setting up and running servers in pre-Cloud days, organising integration with prepress and MIS to price jobs and pass them into production without time-consuming manual handling, the biggest failures were generally those of planning: who would the print portal serve – passing trade or existing customers? How would it be found by the former amidst the cacophony of voices on the web? What would be the compelling benefits to the latter who were used to ordering in different ways that suited them?

However, a route that can work well for smaller printing concerns without the dedicated full-time IT teams of the online giants is to start by offering simple web-based stock call-off and repeat ordering facilities, then developing into template-based job design and submission that simplifies job creation and ordering for the customer while tying the printer more closely into their business.

## Worth a day a week

This is what Bradford-based Claremon has done. Having started out some 15 years ago printing swing tickets for textiles and small packaging, the company developed into general commercial print and developed its first online ordering capability in response to a specific customer need. Managing director John Conroy explains 'We printed 50,000 housing benefit application forms for Leeds City Council. The print buyer was on the fifth floor, the forms were stored in the basement. Every time a housing officer asked for a form, the buyer had to go downstairs to get



▲ *Peter Minchela (left) and John Conroy –  joining forces to combine W2P skills with press power*

it then take it to the person who'd asked for it. This was taking about an hour and a half a day, a whole day a week.'

Mr Conroy suggested that Claremon could make life easier by setting up an online system that allowed the buyer to call off stock that the printer could then deliver directly to the people who needed it. The system to do this was developed in-house and the idea was successfully extended to other customers but after a while was felt to be falling short in terms of additional desirable functionality to offer to customers in financial and retail sectors, so around five years ago, Mr Conroy and his colleagues decided to look for a commercial solution. A Google search led them quickly to various suppliers, including ROI360 who won the business.

'Budget control and approval workflow were the deciding ▶

## Technology – web-to-print



▲ Wyke Printers' Stephen Connor – outsourcing his customers' print and ordering

factors,' explains Mr Conroy. The former allows weekly or monthly sums to be allocated to users of the system, which is particularly useful in franchise arrangements where franchisees are allowed to spend up to a pre-defined limit for print on account, beyond which have to fund it themselves. 'Customers love it but in reality they don't use it,' reflects Mr Conroy, so even if it's a function for the future, it is helping Claremon win the business.

The approval workflow is very much in use, however. Template-based artwork is ordered by customers, who might be branch staff, franchisees, independent financial advisers or sales staff at a national flooring supplier, approved by the franchise holder if appropriate and press-ready jobs arrive to be printed. Claremon has just joined forces with another Bradford-based printer, Wheeldon Print, to add its web-to-print expertise to the latter's two B1 presses and new Xerox Versant 180 sheet-fed toner press, with both companies sharing the latter's premises and production facilities.

Established in 1946 to print slips for a local bookmaker, Wheeldon became a general jobbing printer and was the first in the north of England to install a Xerox Digipress. Today, 15% of Wheeldon's turnover comes from digital print. Wheeldon managing director and partner in the new joint venture Peter Minchela sees the W2P capability that Claremon brings as a 'bonus, an add-on'.

Files for litho print are routed into Wheeldon's Screen Trueflow workflow for preparation for CtP plate output on a PlateRite platesetter; jobs that are destined for the Xerox Versant are sent directly to its Fiery RIP. A small amount of poster work is also produced in-house on an Epson 7800 inkjet printer.

While there are no plans to move into e-commerce, the web-to-print capability has clearly had a significant impact for Claremon. Mr Conroy explains, 'We've had two significant wins, representing 15% of our business, based on those specific capabilities; one was even using web-to-print already and we were able to snatch the business from the incumbent.'

A printer that has used web-to-print services to embed itself even further into its customers' businesses is Wyke Printers. The Hull-based firm began by printing knitting patterns and books in the late 70s, which, like many other aspects of that decade, has recently become fashionable again, albeit with a more upmarket focus, requiring higher production values.

### Kitting beats knitting

While knitting may for the time be trendy again, what's more valuable for the company is kitting – providing complete sets of print items to customers in fields as diverse as educational coursework publishing and manufacturing. While one requires folders, reference, mandatory and optional course texts and assessment books, and the other calls for installer and user manuals, safety certifications, labels, stickers and warranty information, what they have in common is a huge number of permutations from a list of printed items.

'In one week we might print over 16,000 items for the local manufacturer,' explains managing director Stephen Connor, 'including orders for out-of-stock items as well as current products, pick and pack them and supply directly into the manufacturing plant.' The printing is done on either one of two six-colour B1 presses, or on a pair of Xerox Versant 2100 sheet-fed toner presses.

The educational publisher also has a complex set of products, many of which include common elements but offered in various combinations, with a range of options available to both students and tutors. Some kits may contain as many as 18 or 19 items, while tutors are entitled to some free items, subject to conditions regarding quantities of paid-for products.