The evolution of VDP in 2013

The power of variable data printing (VDP) and the world of personalised print are explosive. Creating a professional, personalised message not only captures the recipient’s attention, but also backs it up with content that is relevant. By Abby Vorster

There’s a definite wave surging in VDP as it adapts to become more of a multi-channel tool. Grant O’Conner, Adobe regional manager for sub-Saharan Africa and Israel says that in today’s media environment, core marketing messages must be reinforced across multiple customer touch points. ‘Print collateral remains a cornerstone of most cross-media campaigns, punching above its weight with high impact, graphically-rich, personalised messaging. Relevance is key to high response rates, both online and in print. Many VDP solutions offer personalised URLs where a customised landing page is available for every target recipient, and can be encoded in a quick response (QR) barcode to be scanned by a customer’s smartphone.

Transactional printing
According to HP, consumers have a tendency to spend more time reading statements than marketing material, so the area of transpromotional marketing is one that many corporates are fast moving into.

Many organisations are refocusing to convert traditional billing and statements to transpromotional messages because they understand the value of leveraging data they already have on their customers to create new opportunities for additional revenue.

O’Conner comments, ‘Transactional printing is moving toward transpromo printing, expanding the scope of an important customer touch point for upselling and cross-sell promotions. Monochrome printing of variable content on offset-printed colour “shells” is moving toward “white paper” workflows on full-colour high-speed digital presses, eliminating inventory management and wastage. Legacy VDP exchange formats are moving toward PDF/VT (“V” for “variable”, “t” for “transacational”), finally bringing all the well-known advantages of PDF workflow to the world of personalised print.’

Xerox’s transactional promotional solutions cross over to real cross-selling power by leveraging VDP to add personalised customer promotions to monthly transactional documents. Transactional interactions with customers can become a new marketing vehicle, increasing revenues and improving customer relationships. Studies show that 80 per cent of new business comes from existing customers; variable data printers can drive business and profits by adding targeted promotional messages to bills, statements, and invoices. Adding a marketing message to a monthly statement can have a huge effect, since 98 per cent of users read their statements once, and 85 per cent read them twice. Targeted messages included in the statement have a much higher impact than traditional stuffers that are often discarded.

Wide format
Traditionally VDP has had little or no application in the large format printing (LFP) market, yet ColorGATE is closing the gap in this area with the new VDP Creator in its portfolio. It is ideal for print service providers in wide format printing with medium and small runs. The easy-to-handle design software is the perfect tool to create professional, customised artwork master templates for the output of print jobs on digital printing systems, and it can be connected directly to ColorGATE RIP software solutions. Promising areas of application include digital label printing,
signs and displays as well as promotional items. And due to the versatile options, this software will definitely open up more areas of application in the future.

Equipped with a variety of functions, VDP Creator features an intuitive graphical user interface, enabling users to create professional customised print templates consisting of different static and variable elements (from a database for example) within minutes. Neither expensive, separate graphic design software, nor in-depth graphic design knowledge is required.

VDP Creator is ideal for print service providers in wide format printing with medium and small runs

Through a variety of professional functions even complex data structures and layouts can be merged by drag and drop, such as text, images and graphics, while transparencies and overlays are also possible, as well as barcodes and QR codes.

Up to now, current In-RIP and stand-alone VDP solutions available in the LFP market usually possess only limited basic functions or are very expensive. External solutions are mostly just available as plug-in for graphic design software. Users need to acquire an extensive knowledge in handling these tools and especially variable content. The VDP Creator from ColorGATE is unique in this form and covers the entire prepress process.

Solutions to suit varied budgets

Vaughn Patterson, sales manager of the production printing business group at Ricoh SA, says that VDP solutions are becoming more affordable and printers with small and medium runs can get good software for US$99 (approximately R896) and up to US$799 (approximately R7 233) for Fusion Pro VDP for example. ‘That’s a good range of pricing and even at $799 it is not prohibitive. Fusion Pro VDP is also available straight from the Internet so PSPs can get it up and running very quickly. That is for software to download or buy off the shelf and own outright,’ he comments.

In the LFP market, another factor to consider is the software-as-a-service model where the programs are available in the cloud. Patterson explains, ‘Custom-

ers pay per use and can input their data, via the web, into the cloud system, creating a once-off campaign and only pay for the service without the need to buy the software outright. That is especially useful for companies that want to run only one or two campaigns for the year. They get a file back from the cloud-based system that they can then take to a printer or the printer can manage the process for them. A third option is to rent the software, which again can be done per use or for a given period.’

The upshot of these solutions is that businesses with fewer requirements or smaller businesses with scaled down needs can access them without the capital outlay it required in the past. A small printer can offer the service to its clients without buying the systems and incurring the overheads previously associated with them. It’s a business opportunity for smaller printers and a market opportunity for customers to really differentiate their projects.

From the major, top-end VDP solutions with all the ‘bells and whistles’ to the less comprehensive yet fully functional ones, there is a diverse range of solutions available to meet the needs of typical mom-and-pop operations to the large corporates and principal print service providers.