



## **The printing/creative industry – looking forward**

(After Frank Romano: Transforming Today's Print Business for Tomorrow's Marketplace—The View From 2020)

The market for print and for specific printed products has been changing dramatically. By 2020, the marketplace will have changed even more. As an industry, we cannot remain focused on “the way things have always been done.” The industry needs to rethink their businesses, and the products and services they produce. A lot of that involves rethinking the approach to buying equipment, as well as rethinking the entire company culture.

Markets are dynamic. What products or services that are in demand today will likely not be in demand tomorrow. We should not be surprised that the market for print—and the technologies and people employed to produce print—are no less dynamic

It's tempting to think that these are only bad forces, but they can be good forces as well and a lot of these same forces can also be used to *help* the industry.

At some point, we should have put “the Internet” here, but the Internet in general is not a new technology, and it's only but one aspect of a larger network of technologies. It's not necessarily “the Internet” that is impacting the industry, but the applications enabled by the Internet: email, websites,

downloadable files like PDFs, social media, online video, and more. These are all specific applications that have helped erode the demand for print. There are also more subtle “stealth” technologies that, it could be said, are weaning us off print—electronic boarding passes, emailed purchasing receipts, online statements, PDF-based forms, and more. Even restaurant menus are in danger of going electronic, from the dynamic digital signage used in new fast food franchises, to an emerging trend of using iPads even in sit-down restaurants.

So while the Internet and electronic media have done their damage, they also provide new opportunities for printers. This is not just in being able to offer communications services that use these non-print channels, but also in adding efficiencies to one’s own workflow. Web-to-print streamlines the file intake process, but also enables printers to take advantage of online proofing and delivery.

Effectively using data, whether it be for true marketing automation or other kinds of targeted or customized print applications, will become the paramount issue for the industry as we head toward 2020. Transactional printing may be the emblematic applications, but data-driven printing—especially via production inkjet—is penetrating into other types of print applications as well. In Europe and Asia, newspaper printers, publishers, and advertisers are using inkjet printing or imprinting to print “interactive” ads that contain unique, variably-printed codes that are used by the advertiser to determine where the ad was seen. Insurance companies, for example, can create personalized welcome publications for new policyholders that are a mix of variable and static content. The result is heightened brand loyalty, increased customer satisfaction, and more

## The Marketplace in 2020

To transition or build a business geared toward 2020—rather than 1990—you will need to acquire not just flexible equipment, but flexible staff, or employees who have the skills that new products and services will require. Employees who are skilled in database management and analytics, programmers, IT experts, social media mavens—depending upon what you

want to get involved in, you will need to recruit or train.

Here are some practical steps you can take to future proof your business:

- Talk to your customers; ask them about their printing needs beyond what you provide for them. If there is a common denominator (posters? labels? signage?), think about expanding in that area.
- Ask your current customers about the full range of their needs, even if you do not currently provide them. Again, if there is a common denominator (email marketing? marketing automation? social media? mobile?), think about expanding in that area.
- Use new production technologies for your own business.
- Think about creative ways of marketing your own business.
- Never stop seeking information, following trends, and asking questions.
- Always look at the skills mix in your business; do you encourage the entrepreneurial spirit to be developed?

To be able to successfully play in the new marketplace of 2020 will require a rethinking of a current print business, and, in many ways, a rejection of everything that has gone before with new skills and entrepreneurial spirit to the fore.