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The Print Finishing Experts

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## Virginia Corrections Offers Inmates a Fresh Start with Digital Finishing

Although some prisoners today still make only license plates, many are doing more useful things with their time while “doing time.”

At Virginia Correctional Enterprises ([VCE](#)), inmates manufacture products from furniture and apparel to bed linens and binders. And for some, the daily regimen includes learning some of the most advanced digital prepress, printing and finishing technology currently available.

Operated by the Virginia Department of Corrections, VCE was established by the Virginia General Assembly more than 75 years ago as a work program to produce goods and services for tax-supported agencies of the Commonwealth and authorized non-profit organizations. A self-sufficient entity, VCE is supported by revenue retained from the sale of its products and services, rather than by tax dollars from the state’s General Fund.

### Quality products and promising futures

More importantly, the VCE vocational programs and work opportunities help instill a work ethic and teach skills that enable offenders incarcerated within the Department of Corrections to become productive members of society upon their release, and reduce the rate of recidivism, which in the U.S. averages 60%.

The expansion to printing in 1998 was the idea of VCE Director Don Guillory, who believed that offenders needed to learn how to make more than hard goods like clothing and furniture. Guillory consulted with XEROX Corporation, which embraced the idea.

“After searching for the location, Xerox presented an opportunity for assuming the responsibility for the entire copy work of the State Corporation Commission (SCC),” Guillory recalled. This initial collaboration led to a contract (now in its second generation) and expansion to VCE Digital Works. “VCE’s mission and vision is to grow and expand the opportunities for offender growth, and we hope to continue to grow with additional work programs similar to the original at the SCC,” said Guillory.

The three printing facilities operated by VCE Printing Services group serve as prime example of this concept – especially the group’s two [Digital Works printing centers](#) located in Richmond and South Park, each more than 20 miles from the high-security Powhatan Correctional Center that houses the VCE offset printing operation.

Of the two digital operations the facility in South Park factors more prominently. It offers a state-of-the-art prepress department, the most advanced press Xerox offers among its stable of digital presses, and an on-line C.P. Bourg booklet making system to match its output, says Stephen Palmese, VCE Group Manager, Print Services.

Palmese joined VCE in 1993 as supervisor of the bindery division, following a 10-year career on the New York commercial printing scene and a five-year stint at commercial shops in Virginia. At the time, VCE's only printing facility was the offset shop in Powhatan.

In 1999, Palmese was promoted to manager of the Powhatan facility. He was promoted again in 2005 to his current position as Group Manager responsible for all three facilities reporting to Don Guillory.

### **Making a break**

"Through the 1990s, our customers constantly wanted their jobs faster and we were unable to meet that demand with offset, which is time-consuming to start with," says Palmese.

In 1995, Palmese convinced VCE management to purchase a Xerox DocuTech® 135. "We had that system for a while," says Palmese, pointing to prison procedures that foil any advantage of turnaround time.

"Nothing moves fast inside a prison," he explains. "If you want something quickly, you have to plan way ahead, or find an alternative. For example, when paper stock needs to be ordered, it can take two days to schedule and go through security screening, plus an additional two days for the paper to acclimate to the shop's climate-controlled environment."

By 2001, Print Services' offset turnaround times of two to three weeks were colliding head-on with customer demands for finished jobs in 24 to 72 hours. In response, Palmese, who also has an associate degree in business management, suggested opening digital printing centers outside the prison walls.

The novel idea, which hadn't been attempted before, has proved quite successful.

### **Binding evidence**

In downtown Richmond, the smaller of the two outside VCE digital facilities operates as a convenience printer for the SCC and other local government offices. Here, a Xerox® Nuvera® 120 EA Production System and two Xerox DocuPrint® 4100-series printers are used for monochrome work, while a Xerox DocuColor® 252 color printer handles small color jobs.

At the larger digital facility in South Park, an impressive array of printing technology led by the shop's state-of-the-art Xerox iGen4® Press makes quick work of everything from posters to pamphlets, brochures, booklets and manuals, says Palmese.

The Xerox iGen4 Press is connected online to an evenly matched Bourg BCMx Bleed Crease Module and Bourg BDFx Document Finisher. South Park's supporting cast includes a Xerox Color 1000 and DocuTech 128 HighLight Color, as well as a Nuvera 288 EA Perfecting Production System and two standalone Xerox DocuPrint 4127 printers.

The C.P. Bourg finisher is a fully automated stitch-fold-trim booklet making system designed for on-demand, full-bleed production. In operation, jobs sent to the BCMx can be created and bleed-trimmed at the full speed of the iGen4 before they are passed to the Bourg BDFx.

The Bourg BDFx finisher can top or corner stitch documents with variable data from two to 55 sheets of 80 gsm, and saddle-stitch booklets up to 88 pages (22 sheets). In this way, booklets of one or thousands can be produced by the BDFx with zero waste and at rates up to 4,200 sets per hour.

"I've been familiar with C.P. Bourg forever," Palmese says of his choice, also citing Bourg's reputation for having the best finishing products to work online with Xerox presses.

A prepress department with two Apples, three PCs and the latest publishing software including Adobe Creative Suite rounds out South Park's digital tour de force.

The offset facility in Powhatan – easily the largest of the three – has been upgraded over the years and now sports three Apples and six PCs sending jobs to computer-to-plate imaging for the shop's 15 1- and 2-color offset presses that feed a well-equipped off-line bindery. Printed output runs the gamut from letterhead, business cards and pamphlets to brochures and posters, and from B&W to double-run 4-color process.

### **A lesser learning curve**

Seven full-time civilian staff supervise the Powhatan workforce of 45 male offenders, many of whom serve long sentences and can stay on the job for 15 to 17 years, Palmese notes. In contrast, each of the digital facilities is operated by female offenders closely supervised by knowledgeable staff and Corrections officers and who are bused in and out each day to and from nearby minimum-security facilities.

With average impressions of 16 million B&W pages and 4 million color pages per year, the digital facility at South Park generates 67% of the Group's digital print volume, says Palmese. Despite a total digital volume of more than 30 million pages per year, the offset operation generates two-thirds of the VCE Print Services group revenue, suggesting significant volume.

Although digital efficiency comes at a higher price to customers, the more advanced digital operation makes it easier for offenders to learn binding and finishing skills more quickly and to gain the proficiency needed to retrieve and load jobs, operate the presses, and troubleshoot problems without intervention, says Palmese citing a study recently conducted by the Print Services Group.

According to the study, inmates typically learn basic skills on the digital presses in two to four weeks – or seven to 13 times faster than on comparable offset equipment. They can become proficient using the digital monochrome presses in 12 weeks, and on the color presses in about one year – or four times faster than the time needed to learn the corresponding offset process.

The learning curve for the smaller bindery equipment is comparable. Inmates need only four weeks on average to learn the basics, and 12 weeks to become proficient. This compares with eight weeks learning the ropes and 52 weeks, or a full year to become proficient on the larger cutters folders and off-line binders, reports Palmese.

### **A life-changing situation**

"Our time estimates include learning a work ethic and developing the good habits that come with it – like getting up on time, having a good attitude and taking pride in the job.

“Keep in mind that many of the female inmates employed at the digital facility have never operated equipment before – let alone sophisticated printing and finishing equipment – and many have never held a job,” he cautions.

The decision to send a job to Powhatan or one of the digital facilities depends on the quantity the customer needs, their budget and how fast they want the finished product, says Palmese.

“We offer 24-hour turnaround at the digital centers, compared to two to three week turnaround at Powhatan. If somebody needs a 4-color job quickly, there’s just no way to produce it offset,” he says. “Then again, if a customer wants 15,000 4-color brochures, there’s no way we can do it economically on the digital presses,” he explains.

Palmese credits the Digital Works program with having equipped hundreds of inmates with the skills needed to land jobs outside of prison, contributing to Virginia’s 27.3% recidivism rate – one of the lowest rates in the U.S.

“That may not sound like a lot,” says Palmese, “but the opportunity to have their own place, their own car and their own bank account is a life-changing situation for the former inmates who apply the skills they’ve learned here to become productive members of society.”

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To see a program about “Ellen,” one VCE Digital Works success story, click on the following link to a video program produced by Virginia Currents: <http://www.ideastations.org/video/virginia-currents-2020-2011-04-28>.