

The Top Questions Creative Agencies and Print Buyers Ask of Potential Print Providers

In a Digital, On-Demand World, It's about Much More than Price

by Bob Wagner

How well do you know your creative agency and print buyer prospects?

If you are like most digital print providers, the answer is probably, "Not well enough." According to a recent report by New York-based industry analyst firm, TrendWatch Graphic Arts, "Marketing to agencies and designers is a huge missed opportunity for digital printers. Only 10 percent of digital printers see this as a top sales opportunity. Designers specify print, and unless creatives understand and accept digital printing, the market will not grow."

In fact, about 83 percent of creative advertising and design agencies are involved in media buying decisions, according to a recent survey of 250 agencies by the Printing Industry Center at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT).



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Further, 89 percent say they play a significant role in client campaign development and direction. Digital printing — with its fast turnarounds, economical short runs, customization and personalization capabilities, strong integration with the Web and ever-improving image quality — can offer significant advantages in many of these campaigns. And digitally savvy print providers have an opportunity to not only provide these services, but to help agencies sell these programs to their clients.

A first step is to know what creative agencies look for in a print provider. Here is a ranked list of the eight top concerns agencies and print buyers have when selecting print providers,

according to the RIT survey.

1. How dependable are you? Creatives and print buyers will make promises to their clients based upon print provider delivery commitments. If you fail to deliver, they must renegotiate with their clients, a sometimes painful — sometimes costly — experience.

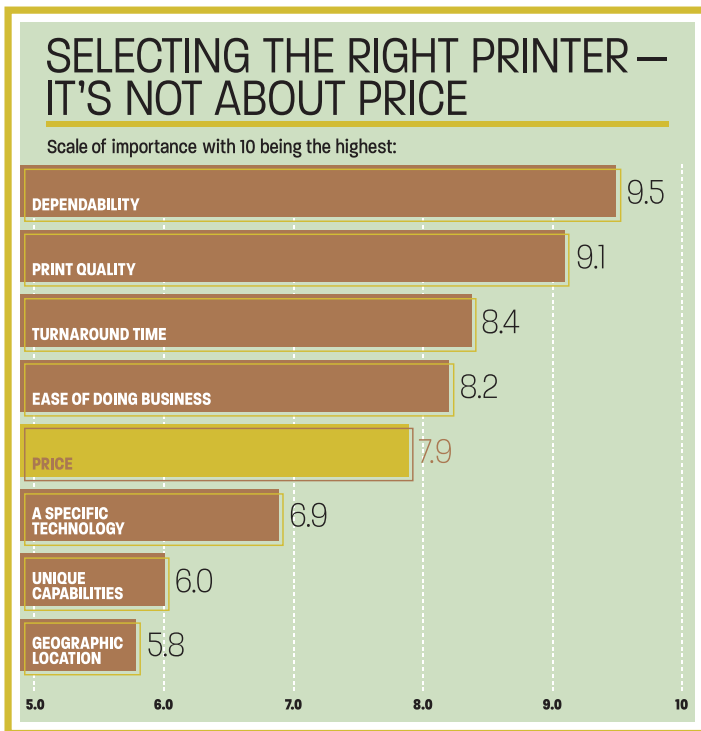
You begin demonstrating your dependability from your first contact with the prospect. If you promise to deliver, say, a print sample, provide it on time and follow up to ensure receipt. Demonstrate your commitment to ensuring that the desired result is achieved on time.

You should also be prepared to cite examples of successfully meeting difficult challenges for your clients. The best examples: highly regarded creative agencies.

2. Can you deliver outstanding image quality and color consistency? Digital printing technology has advanced rapidly in the last few years, and not every designer and print specifier is aware of the latest developments. Today's digital color production presses, RIPs and digitally optimized substrates deliver output that is nearly indistinguishable from offset — though many designers will need serious convincing.

A good way to make the point: offer to produce one of the prospect's designs on your digital press using their file and target stocks. Also, consider showing samples of the same application rendered with digital and traditional technologies. Applications that benefit from vibrancy often look better when digitally printed, while most other digital pieces are suitable complements to offset.

3. How quickly can you turn a job around? Digital print providers have a clear speed advantage over traditional printers. Because so many traditional steps are cut from job setup, same-day turnarounds are not only possible, but often practical.



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Dependability is the top factor in selecting a printer according to a survey of 250 advertising agency executives conducted by the Printing Industry Center at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). The chart shows the average score for eight factors that respondents rated in importance on a scale of one to 10.

You should also be clear that variable information printing — and cross-media programs that coordinate print and electronic communications — can require substantial advanced planning and programming, which can take days or weeks.

4. How easy is it to do business with you? Your people and their level of commitment to customer service determine how easy your company is to do business with. So do digital and Web-

based systems that facilitate estimate requests, job ordering, learning a job's status and tracking results. Digital presses also contribute. For example, color proofs can be printed on the same digital press that produces the production run, eliminating the color simulation proofs associated with off-set printing and ensuring that the final piece won't deviate from the approved sample proof.

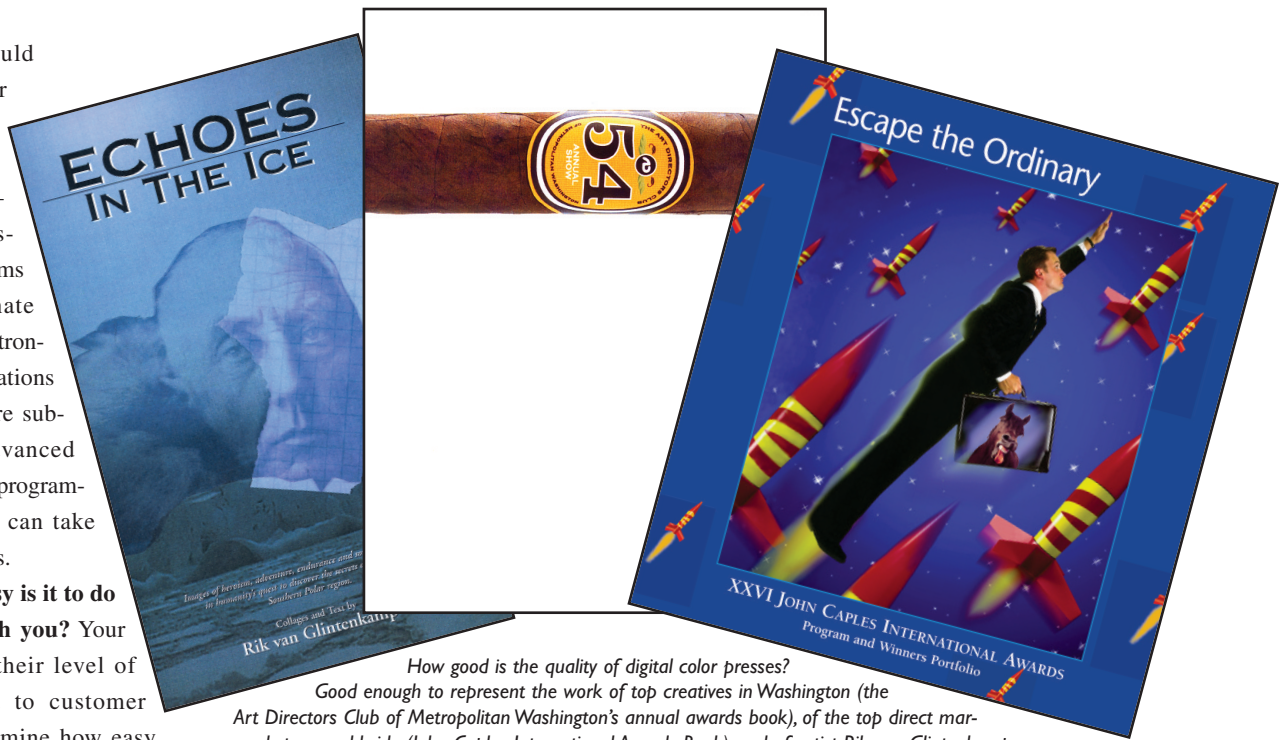
5. How much will it cost? Cost is not the top concern for creative agencies, but it is a significant factor. Most agencies are willing to pay for such values as dependability, excellent image quality, fast turnarounds and easy business processes. One reason: savvy agencies know that letdowns in these areas lead to greater involvement from the agency's account team, driving up the overall cost of the job.

6. Do you have <fill in the blank> technology? Some agencies are looking for specific technologies from a print provider, to match their internal systems or because they believe its performance excels. Good for you if you have the technology, but the game isn't over if you don't. Emerging industry standards permit more and more systems to play together, and your compatibility should be easy enough to demonstrate.

If the technology preference is more about performance, avoid future surprises by being frank about how your technology measures up. If your systems are deficient, consider investing in the client's preferred technology.

In any event, the technology discussion is an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that you are a source of knowledge about the value of digital services, setting the stage for playing a more consultant-like role in the future.

7. What do you offer that your competition doesn't? Today's offset printing is a commodity business, so most print-related differentiators are based upon digital technologies. Digital is differentiated from traditional printing by faster turnarounds, economical short runs, customized and personalized printing and tight Web integrations. They can save time and money, improve targeting and response rates and boost return on investment.



How good is the quality of digital color presses? Good enough to represent the work of top creatives in Washington (the Art Directors Club of Metropolitan Washington's annual awards book), of the top direct marketers worldwide (John Caples International Awards Book), and of artist Rik van Grintenkamp (*Echoes in the Ice*). All three books were printed on the Xerox iGen3® Digital Production press.

Many digital print providers further differentiate themselves within the digital population through Web-based job ordering and print on demand services, mass production of variable print and electronic communications in the same print data stream, cross media programs and industry-specific applications. These businesses often run like service organizations, using a consultant-style approach to clients to precisely meet their needs, improve business results and provide results measurements that resonate with corporate executives, such as sales improvements. It is an excellent path toward becoming a strategic partner to your clients.

8. Where are you located? Proximity can be an advantage, but distance is usually not a negative when many proofing cycles and client contacts take place in near real-time on the Internet. On-press proofing contributes further by largely eliminating the need for designer press checks.

Xerox also offers creatives and print production professionals fast and easy access to a global network of expert digital print services providers through the Xerox Premier Partners Public Portal (www.xerox.com/xpp). It helps you find companies with leadership graphic communications services and extends your reach to new locations, to solve almost any printing challenge.

Digital printing offers a great opportunity to tailor a new breed of digital-based services that improve business results for creative agencies — and their clients. Given that digital printing also represents the print provider's best opportunity for growth, you owe it to your business to treat the creative community as a prime sales target.

The payoff is that creative agencies can become your strategic partners for growing with digital-printing-related services. ♦

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