

# As Color Variable Information Printing Takes Hold, Name-Only Personalization Finds Powerful Niches

## *Name-Only Personalization Remains a Strong Performer and Offers Intriguing Possibilities When Incorporated in Art*

by Shelley Sweeney

As color variable information comes into its own for personalizing direct mail and other printed communications, we may have seen the last of “Dear Dave — You may be a winner!”

But while the “winner” slogan may well be history, that simplest form of personalization — name-only, often supplemented by mailing address — continues to thrive in many applications. Consider:

- By incorporating names in the text of books and the art in calendars and annual reports, some print providers are taking name-only personalization to a new level, producing highly coveted, personalized mementos. These applications are the foundation for what Daytona Beach, Florida-based DME calls, “MeMarketing — perpetual branding through ego response.”

- Color name-only personalization has been shown to boost response rates by 135 percent over a comparable static black-and-white piece,



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while adding the name in black-only delivers a 44 percent improvement. (Source: Romano and Broudy)

- While greater personalization increases relevance and response rates, less personalized pieces targeted more tightly on highly qualified recipients can have the same positive effect.

- Many successful and complex variable-information printing programs begin with name-only personalization.

Name-only personalization isn't going away. Rather it's gravitating to niches as the starter application, the meat-and-potatoes option and MeMarketing initiatives, where anyone's name can be in lights.

### **Success in Name-Only**

Once upon a time, automated personalization was limited to name and addresses. The capability first surfaced in the 1940s, with typewriters that used “piano-roll” technology to automatically type a letter's content after a typist keyed in a personalized salutation.

Mass personalization began in the 1960s with the introduction of inkjet printing technologies, and the capability to place a name anywhere on the page emerged with the first laser printers of the late 1970s. Today's digital color presses have upped the ante yet again, with excellent image quality and processing power to support full-page, variable color applications.

Specialist Printing & Direct Mail, San Diego, California, is among the firms that have achieved double-digit revenue growth by employing full-page, full-color personalized printing in direct mail. Name-and-address personalization accounts for about three-quarters of the volume on its Xerox iGen3® 110 Digital Production Press, including one highly targeted, ongoing offering of free meals and other high-value enticements to attend real estate seminars.



Rapid Solutions Group showcased its creative design and variable information printing capabilities with its personalized holiday card.

“With a strong offer and a targeted list, name-only personalization can work very well,” said Jay Pardo, vice president, Specialist Printing & Direct Mail. The real estate application is also instructive because it was long produced effectively by overprinting on offset shells. However, the client prefers digital printing, because it enables a print-on-demand approach, eliminating warehouse inventories and associated waste, while enabling more design flexibility.

“Many of our clients move to digital printing because they need only 500 pieces for a short run or a test, and the iGen3 press is the most cost-effective way to do that,” Pardo said. “When they see the piece’s quality, they realize that a lot more can be personalized, and they start thinking creatively about using variable information. It’s part of the learning curve that leads to more complex applications.”

### Personal(ized) Fulfillment

At Rapid Solutions Group, name-and-address-only personalization is largely for ‘lead-kit’ applications, such as fulfillment pieces, enrollment kits and reminders. Names are interspersed throughout the piece, “ensuring the recipient that our client really knows and understands them” — and to provide conveniences, said Julia Lombardo, vice president, Rapid Solutions Group (RSG). For example, names and addresses are already filled in on savings account contribution forms.

Most prospecting efforts use more complex personalization, which tends to generate significantly better results on those applications, Lombardo said. Indeed, tests by Romano and Broudy showed that adding personalized data and color to a static monochrome piece boosted responses at rates more than three times greater than those achieved by adding color and names only.

Among RSG’s more innovative recent applications was its holiday card, designed to showcase the firm’s variable information printing and creative design capabilities. The piece depicted the recipient’s name etched into pond ice by a figure skater. Names were created as images and incorporated into each card on the fly during printing on an iGen3 press. One measure of the piece’s success: while holiday cards rarely generate new business, RSG’s did generate new business, from new contacts as well as existing clients, Lombardo said.

### It’s All About Me

At DME, a related approach to personalization is behind its “MeMarketing” initiative. The first offering is a calendar, which incorporates the recipient’s name into the art displayed on each month’s spread. The sender’s logo and contact information are also incorporated, on the spread’s date page.

“We’re hitting the target where it counts the most, the center of the psyche, the ego,” said Alin Jacobs, vice president, creative strategies, DME,

who is leading the MeMarketing program. People who receive multiple calendars from businesses and fundraising organizations will tend to use the one that is personalized, he believes.

DME’s MeMarketing calendar is scheduled to launch in the first quarter of 2006. It initially offers a choice among a few dozen photos, which are personalized to include the recipient’s name on car dashboard logos, on a handful of heart candies and in other artful settings. Jacobs hopes to have more than 100 photos available by year-end, and, possibly, to arrange for custom photography.

The calendar’s personalization process uses fonts, which are prepared in Adobe Photoshop to blend seamlessly into the environment.

DME plans to introduce at least two more MeMarketing products this year. “When you do a mailing, you’ve got three seconds to get the recipient’s attention,” Jacobs said. “If we can do that by making the direct marketing into a piece of art and causing the recipient to stop to ask, ‘How did they do that?’ then we are bringing value to our customers.”

Make no mistake, DME, Rapid Solutions Group, Specialist Printing and Direct Mail, and many other

print providers are generating exceptional results by pioneering the frontiers of full-page, full-color personalization. But they also recognize that there’s still money to be made — and value to be provided — through that most fundamental form of personalization, name only. ♦

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A November calendar spread is personalized for the hypothetical “Jack Schmidt” in this “MeMarketing” calendar product from DME.