

# Greetings from The New Business of Printing: The New Art of the Personalized Postcard

## *Variable Information Printing on Latest Generation Digital Color Presses Turns Postcards into Powerful Response Generators*

by Shelley Sweeney

What's not to like about postcards? With bite-sized content suitable for the instant messaging generation; feature images that shock, humor and grab attention; and environmentally friendly packaging, the postcard has a friendly, benign presence.

Further, they are gold for direct marketers. Offers are visible without opening an envelope. Costs are less than standard direct mail. And reminder cards come "refrigerator-magnet ready." How can you improve on that?

How indeed! Many marketers are taking a fresh look at the postcard in light of recent advancements in digital color printing. They enable full personalization of postcard content — making both images and text more relevant — with image quality that rivals offset.

This new breed of personalized postcard plays a central role in many direct marketing communications programs, including service reminders, customer acquisition and relationship management, and cross-media com-



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munications. They are well suited to the customizable template approach used in the growing number of Web-to-print ordering systems for dealer or franchise networks, in which corporate-approved design is tailored by representatives for local audiences.

The timing is right, too. With recent legal restrictions on telemarketing calls and extremely low response rates from e-mail, direct mail is on the rise. U.S. direct mail spending grew by 8.5 percent in first quarter 2005, according to Robert Coen, senior vice president and director of forecasting with leading media services company, Universal McCann. He

projects that spending for the year will rise by 8.5 percent, to \$56.6 billion. The increase in postal rates scheduled for 2006 are expected to further stimulate this year's market, Coen said.

### The Postcard Revolution

The latest generation of digital color presses are enabling the current postcard revolution. These presses have the processing power to run at rated-speed on complex variable images, print reliably on a range of postcard stocks and provide outstanding image quality.

Accurate colors are achievable today, even in variable printing. For example, three Xerox presses have dedicated PANTONE® digital chips books, which provide controller settings and tear-out chips for easy color matching. Pantone, Inc., recently endorsed the concept by using variable postcards, printed on a Xerox iGen3® 110 Digital Production Press, as part of a cross-media direct marketing program that boosted sales by 81 percent. The postcards also rendered the accurate colors upon which the company stakes its reputation.

Some postcards are coated or laminated to toughen them for mail handling. Still, many companies successfully distribute uncoated digitally printed postcards. When shopping for a digital press, John Green, president of Automated Graphic Systems, Inc., White Plains, Maryland, said he found that the iGen3 press showed superior rub and scuff resistance — "better even than offset litho output on similar stock."

The iGen3 press also offers the industry's largest sheet, 20.5" x 14.33" compared to 18" x 12", enabling 16-up production of 21.9 percent more postcards per hour than standard 10-up. A recently added iGen3 press option accommodates even larger sheets, as long as 22.5 inches.



QuantumMail.com was founded in 1986 to provide marketing services for the real estate industry, and the business continues to grow today with personalized postcards like these.

## Postcards in Action

“We feel that postcards and self-mailers can provide better response rates than envelop mailings,” said Freddie Baird, executive vice president, QuantumMail.com, a marketing services company in Austin, Texas, which devotes 80 to 85 percent of its print volume to postcards and direct mailers. “Your piece has only a few moments to make an impression on the recipient, and postcards make a good, quick impression.”

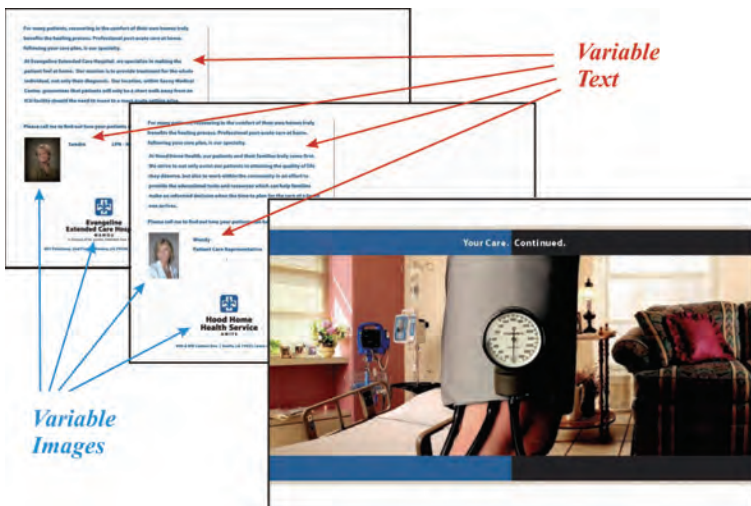
The company ceased offset production two years ago, ramped up digital production to be among the top five iGen3 volume producers in North America in 2004, and now uses four iGen3 presses. Digital printing has helped QuantumMail.com to more fully automate its production workflow beginning with a Web-to-print capability for job orders.

These ever-improving efficiencies have helped the company keep postcard pricing steady for the last decade, while establishing a platform for growth. For the last two years, QuantumMail.com has successfully followed a strategy of targeting new franchise industries beyond its traditional real estate market. While its real estate business continues to grow, it now accounts for about 80 percent of overall business, down from 99 percent two years ago. And the company has grown by 50 percent or more each of the last three years.

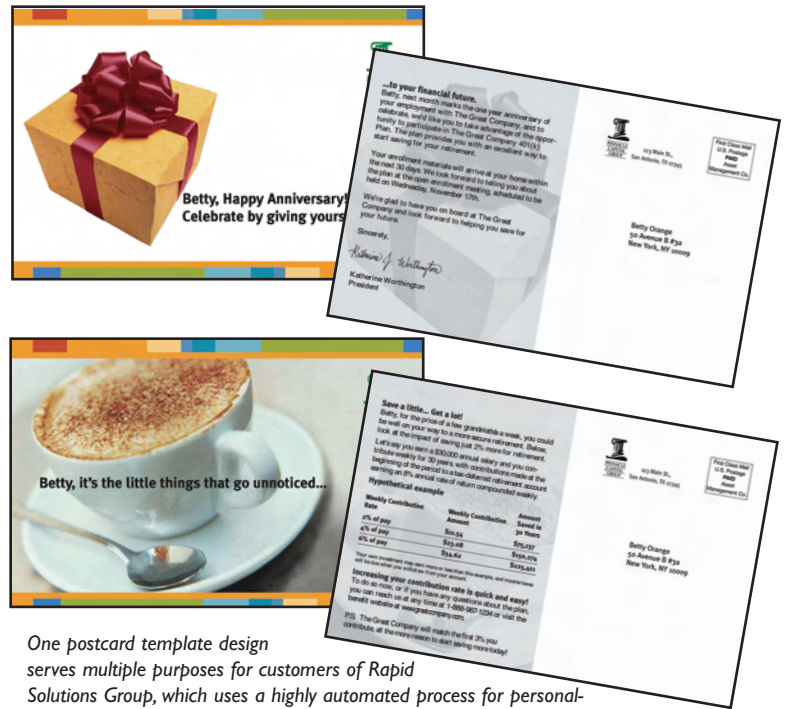
Postcards are also part of the growth strategy at Pel Hughes Printing & Direct Mail Solutions, a full-service print and mail house in New Orleans that has experienced double-digit growth every year for more than a decade. “We’re constantly looking for new vertical markets to enter,” said Clark Theriot, director of special projects.

Like QuantumMail.com, Pel Hughes recently established a Web-to-print capability, with Press-sense iWay, graduated to an iGen3 press for its color variable information printing, and now is adding XMPie software to boost its variable information composition capabilities. The automated platform helps the company develop and easily roll out services to new markets.

For example, Pel Hughes cracked the healthcare industry by selling a personalized postcard customer acquisition program to a company that provides home health services on behalf of physicians and clinics. “The marketing vice president believes that direct marketing postcards, personalized for regional areas, have been key to the program’s success,”



Pel Hughes has successfully penetrated the healthcare industry with personalized postcards like these, printed on its iGen3 press.



One postcard template design serves multiple purposes for customers of Rapid Solutions Group, which uses a highly automated process for personalized postcard production on its Xerox iGen3 press.

Theriot said. “He says postcards have landed business in areas they hadn’t been able to penetrate with other methods.”

## Postcard CRM

Postcard programs also fit well in customer relationship management programs. At digital communications company Rapid Solutions Group, with headquarters in Melville, New York, personalized postcards are a recent addition to the communications mix. Financial institutions running retirement plans, in particular, now use Rapid Solution Groups’ postcards to remind plan participants of upcoming deadlines, to help them better allocate their assets, and even to wish them a happy birthday.

“The goal is to build brand loyalty, to make the plan participant want to remain with the plan sponsor as an investor when the participant retires,” said Lynn Balcius, director of client services, Rapid Solutions Group. “It’s a relatively inexpensive way to get good bang for the buck.”

Rapid Solutions Group keeps costs down with a highly automated system that ties to the plan sponsor’s participant database to trigger postcard production in advance of key milestones, such as a birthday. Standard postcard templates are filled with personalized messaging and an appropriate image for the occasion during printing on one of six iGen3 presses.

“Postcards are truly adding value,” Balcius said. “Our customers tell us they see the payback — their participants are making better investment choices, and the institutions are growing their assets.”

Such is the impact of today’s full-color personalized postcards — delivering profit and growth for print providers, while helping marketers boost sales, improve response rates and build customer relationships as an integral part of the marketing communications program. Put another way, at these and other companies, postcards are helping to deliver on the promise of The New Business of Printing. ♦

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