

Paper that's glossy, digital, sustainable

Printers and their customers are reevaluating the coated stocks they may have been using for years and asking, "Am I getting the best value for my money with what I am using?" With competition fierce among printers, print sales reps and paper merchants are offering new cover stock alternatives that offer performance and improved overall value.

Economic impact on coated market

Industry volume is still off considerably from pre-recession levels; however, shipments year to date for coated papers and coated bristols are up nicely vs. 2009. Industry shipment data indicates general commercial printing is bouncing back faster than the publishing side, so you are seeing more cover stock going into brochures and advertising collateral, vs. covers for magazines, books and catalogs. The ratio for shipments of sheetfed vs. web has held pretty close to historical levels, but within sheetfed we are seeing the demand for digital continue to increase.

Despite the volume decline, operating rates are quite high right now because North American coated paper suppliers have continued to shut down older, inefficient paper machines. Since 2007, the industry has taken out more than 1.7 million tons of coated paper capacity, impacting pricing in terms of supply vs. demand.

Digital print upsurge

Our research indicates the digital coated cover market is the fastest growing segment we participate in. The print technology has come a long way, both in terms of reducing cost and improving print quality. While some of the growth of digital printing is coming at the expense of offset, what has us excited is that digital is creating many new categories for print.

For example, one of the biggest growth categories is digitally printed photobooks—an area that has become the sole focus for a number of printers. Another example is the use of variable-data direct mail materials that were cost prohibitive just a short time ago. Inkjet has made inroads, but for commercial printing it seems that production-volume, toner-based digital presses will remain at the forefront for the time being.

Coated paper usage tips

This year's industry data indicates a shift back to gloss finish papers. As print buyers are looking for ways to save money, I have heard more printers advising clients to go with a standard gloss stock, because it tends to be a lower cost than a dull finish or cast coated finish, then let them achieve the desired effect by applying coatings or UV on press.

In terms of runnability, the biggest headache I hear from printers is mottle. If there's mottle in the sheet, there's just about nothing a printer can do on press to "hide" it. If you proceed with printing, the customer is bound to be unhappy. If you replace the stock, you are sure to throw off your production schedule. Based on input from printers, we have placed a lot of emphasis on developing Tango Advantage to be mottle free. We're pleased to report that in a recent independent analysis using unmarked samples, we were ranked best in class for being mottle free.

Regardless of brand, if coated paper is scored improperly, there will be unsightly cracking at the fold, particularly if a dark solid is used on the spine. Fold cracking can be compounded based on the humidity levels of the pressroom, which can swing dramatically from winter to summer. For any cover stock, we recommend that the job be matrix scored to ensure the best quality look for the finished piece.

The ecofriendly front

We have seen greater emphasis being placed recently on fiber certification and source reduction, and somewhat less demand for recycled content. At present, less than 10% of global forest land has been certified as sustainably managed. The North American paper industry overall has done an excellent job of helping to ensure forestland remains a renewable resource, as evidenced by the fact that America has 12 million more acres of forest than it had in 1987. MWV only sources fiber from responsibly harvested and managed certified forests.

We see some printers taking advantage of our inherent stiffness to support environmental source reduction. For example, our Tango Advantage 10 pt C2S offers comparable tactile feel to a traditional 100-lb. coated freesheet cover, yet our weight on an equivalent 20x26 basis would be 87-lb., which means simply by switching to Tango Advantage a customer could achieve 13% source reduction while maintaining print quality and stiffness. Now that's a green strategy any brand owner would love.

The value of print remains intact. Some applications make sense to shift to electronic media. But the economics of print are still undisputed, in its ability to deliver an effective message that helps build a powerful brand and provides the level of connection that drives consumers to buy. MWV plans to do its part by continuing to provide the latest in innovative products and services that support printers in profitably growing their businesses. ●

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Take the challenge

The Tango Advantage Challenge program lets printers see for themselves, on their own presses, what Tango Advantage can do to improve their print performance and productivity on press. "We ask that they place a small order for Tango Advantage and tail it in on a critical job against whatever coated paperboard or coated freesheet cover they are presently using," Clark explains. "We've conducted over 100 challenges now, and our double-digit volume growth speaks for itself on how well they are going." Watch a demo at www.mwv.com/tangoadvantage, or contact your local merchant to arrange a challenge.