

FALL 2023

thINK FORWARD

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR GENERATIVE AI IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY

Learn how generative AI differs from previous artificial intelligence technologies and how it can be applied to the print industry.

thINK AHEAD 2024 SAVE THE DATE!

For our 10th thINK Ahead event, we're going big! Save the date!

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT: UNITED DIRECT SOLUTIONS

A continuous improvement strategy changes the game (and the name!) for United Direct Solutions.



Production Notes

Paper: 100 lb. Moorim ProDigital Text

Press: Canon varioPRINT iX sheetfed inkjet press

thINK is an independent community of Canon Solutions America production inkjet customers, solution partners, and print industry experts and Canon Solutions America is a proud executive sponsor. Led by some of the most successful inkjet service providers in the country, it provides a forum for members to network, gain knowledge, discuss common challenges, and share best practices.

Visit [thINKForum.com](https://www.thinkforum.com) to learn more.

NEW ON [thINKFORUM.COM](https://www.thinkforum.com)

Explore the brand new Marketing Toolkit for resources to help you generate more inkjet leads.

INKJET INNOVATION: IPG INK

Learn how IPG Ink's humidity control system enables their Canon varioPRINT iX sheetfed inkjet press to run uninterrupted at full speed while producing fully saturated pages with stunning quality and color coverage.

A LETTER FROM **thINK BOARD PRESIDENT**

LORI MESSINA

As we wrap up 2023, I want to wish you all a very happy holiday season and all best wishes for a successful 2024!

In this publication, you will find a variety of tools, training, programs, and learning resources featured that are all available to you on thINKForum.com, and all designed to help you accelerate your success with inkjet.

thINK AHEAD 2024

thINK Ahead 2024 will be held July 15-17, 2024, once again at The Boca Raton in beautiful Boca Raton, Florida. It will be our 10th annual conference and we have some new things in store for attendees, in addition to our beloved inspirational keynotes, educational sessions, press demos and tours at the Canon Americas Customer Innovation Center, live discussions in the Partner Pavilion, and, of course, health and wellness activities. You won't want to miss this special 10th annual event so be sure to save the date!

NEWS & RESEARCH

Did you know that thINK purchases market research from key industry sources and makes it all available FREE to you on thINKForum.com? Log in and navigate to News & Research/Market Research to see the large variety of market research that can help you identify new marketing opportunities and plan for success in 2024.

PROGRAMS

thINK programs are a way for you to extend your marketing budget by tapping into thINK-funded opportunities, like the Paid Search program, Customer Spotlight article, or the Inkjet Innovation article and video. Learn more about these free programs by visiting thINKForum.com and navigating to Programs.

SERVICES

Free of charge to Canon Solutions America production inkjet customers, Project 360° is designed to provide support beyond your initial installation — even several years later — to help you identify opportunities to transition more of your work to your installed inkjet press, ways to reduce touchpoints and inefficiencies or decrease costs, outsourced jobs that could be brought back in house, and business processes or workflows in need of optimization.

TRAINING & EVENTS

thINK offers several training options including, of course, our live in-person thINK Ahead conference. In addition, you can register to join us to learn from industry experts and chat with your peers in live thINK Academy Zoom classes hosted throughout the year — choose from Business, Marketing, Sales, or Technical sessions. Be sure to check out the on-demand online learning library to view thINK Ahead and thINK Academy classes, press operator training, customer spotlights, inkjet innovations, and webinar replays.

TOOLS

We have a “toolkit” for every role, from the Press Operator Toolkit that features media packs and profiles, the latest evaluated papers for each press, and press operator and AIC training to the Marketing Toolkit that features downloadable application samples, direct mail campaign templates, email templates, blog posts, social media posts, Canon logos, press images, and more — be sure to check out what's available to you to leverage for your success in 2024! Visit thINKForum.com and navigate to Tools.

STAY UP TO DATE ON ALL THINGS thINK!

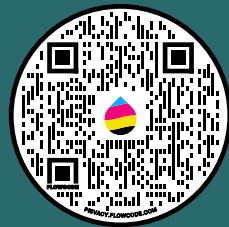
- ▶ Add me to your contacts so that you receive the monthly thINK eNewsletter highlighting new resources available to you.
- ▶ Request a thINK Member Demo. Make sure you know about ALL of the tools, training, and resources available to you as a Canon Solutions America inkjet customer and thINK member. Visit thINKForum.com to schedule a thINK Member Demo with your team.

Wishing you all the best for 2024!



LORI MESSINA

thINK Board President
President, Access Direct Systems
lmessina@thINKForum.com



Schedule a membership demo at thINKForum.com/membership-benefits

thINK FORWARD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- A LETTER FROM thINK BOARD PRESIDENT, LORI MESSINA 1
- PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY 3
- EXPLORE THE NEW thINK FORUM WEBSITE 7
- thINK MARKETING TOOLKIT 9
- CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT — UNITED DIRECT SOLUTIONS 11
- INKJET INNOVATION — IPG INK 13
- LOOKING FOR MORE INKJET INNOVATION? 15
- DID YOU KNOW? 17
- SAVE THE DATE FOR thINK AHEAD 2024 19
- STAY UP TO DATE ON EVERYTHING thINK! 20
- HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM thINK 22



“As we look forward to 2024, we are excited about all of the opportunities for thINK members to not only network with one another, learn, and grow but also to generate more inkjet leads and close more business by using the resources available on thINKForum.com.”

TONYA POWERS

Director of Marketing, Production Print Solutions
Canon Solutions America

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY

By Elizabeth Gooding, Inkjet Insight

Generative AI can be used to enhance employee experience as well as customer satisfaction, but don't expect to replace your workforce with robots just yet. At this stage, the technology is best suited to enhance human productivity rather than replace jobs in any significant number.

Let's take a look at everyday work across roles in your organization that can be enhanced with generative AI tools:

CREATIVE DESIGN

AI can help designers focus on their creative skills and remove time-consuming administrative and technical tasks. For instance, AI tools can:

- ▶ Upscale low-resolution images, removing artifacts and improving image quality.
- ▶ Remove backgrounds from photographs.
- ▶ Create multiple, iterative arrangements of text and graphics for rapid prototyping.
- ▶ Conduct automated checks to ensure design consistency, accessibility, and adherence to brand or other standards.
- ▶ Track and update expired content such as logos and licensed content, or based on campaign parameters.

AI tools like Midjourney,¹ Stable Diffusion, and Open AI's DALL-E can also generate wholesale content such as line drawings, graphics, and even photos on design parameters. Creative teams can leverage tools like Pictory, Synthesys, and Synthesia to streamline video editing and create subtitles, music tracks, sound effects, or voice dubbing.

Using tools to generate new content requires the user to define a query that specifies the type, subject, and format of the content with enough detail to guide results. The content might be a photo, line drawing, or other type of digital art. The system will provide multiple responses which can be further edited and refined.

Generative AI can also extrapolate new images from existing ones, such as generating a new photo based on a person's face, placing an image of a product in a new location, or combining components from various images.

MARKETING TEAMS

Beyond the potential for visual media generation, AI has tremendous potential to improve efficiency for marketers from strategy through execution. Consider the potential for your company and your customers' marketing teams, and how you can work together more effectively supported by generative AI solutions. For instance, you and your customers can:

- ▶ Analyze vast amounts of customer and prospect data, including social media and other online content, to derive valuable insights about target audiences, market trends, and consumer preferences.

- ▶ Help focus marketing on the most lucrative segments by detecting patterns in customer data and defining characteristics to support effective targeting of marketing content. These capabilities can also help to prioritize high-quality inbound leads (lead scoring) and tailor relevant lead-activation campaigns.
- ▶ Evaluate competitors' brand messaging, advertising, online content, and market data to identify gaps and opportunities.
- ▶ Generate concepts for direct marketing or statement marketing messages including drafting compelling copy with variations to address different target segments.
- ▶ Craft tailored marketing messages, product recommendations, or offers for individual customers or customer segments based on customer data, behavioral indicators, or defined rules.
- ▶ Automate A/B testing by generating different variations of headlines, copy, visuals, or offers, and testing against different customer or prospect segments.
- ▶ Streamline the generation, posting, and tracking of social media content.
- ▶ Translate individual pieces of content into multi-channel campaigns by adapting to different lengths and formats and recommending visuals.

Translating content into multiple languages is also an emerging capability, but localization, cultural adaptation, and appropriate tone are not fully developed.

Similar to the outlook for creative professionals, generative AI can automate or streamline many of the more mundane administrative functions for marketers. It can also help marketers to keep an eye on market shifts and emerging trends and get ahead of potential customer churn. In some cases, this does not even require an investment in new technology. Many widely used marketing tools like HubSpot, LinkedIn, and Salesforce are adding generative AI capabilities to their systems to help marketers draft content more quickly, understand optimal posting times, and analyze social media trends from within their platforms.

SOFTWARE ENGINEERS AND OTHER SYSTEM DEVELOPERS

Code generators are not a new thing. Well before the introduction of AI to the mix, there have been tools to automate development tasks. Any non-programmer who has taken advantage of a "build your own website" tool has experienced a level of code automation. While the list of generative AI tools aimed at developers is growing rapidly, none have reached the capability to generate consistently correct code, a fact that companies like

OpenAI are proactively transparent about. They recommend not using any code that has been automatically generated before a qualified human has reviewed it. Similar to applications in design and marketing, the tools can save time in developing "first drafts" of code according to guidelines set by a programmer. Conversely, there are tools that will offer suggestions to improve code developed by a human coder in real time, autocomplete repetitive segments of code or provide helpful references on Application Programming Interfaces (APIs). They may also be used to more quickly clone and repurpose existing code for new customer onboarding scenarios where a significant portion of the technical process is repetitive across customers. A programmer will still need to review and finalize the code, but with the proper prompts, AI can fill in many of the necessary variables throughout the program.

However, there is more to coding than code, and this is where generative AI tools can boost programmer productivity by automating repetitive tasks such as:

- ▶ Generating test data
- ▶ Automating unit testing
- ▶ Troubleshooting code errors
- ▶ Drafting documentation

As tools mature and development teams gain experience working with them, there will be further efficiency gains. Generative AI tools are designed to learn from developers by processing feedback and ingesting code samples that reflect corporate standards. For now, don't expect to run AI-generated code without reviewing, testing, and debugging — and asking your development team if the code that has been generated will be efficient to maintain.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE — ESPECIALLY PRINTERS

While many generative AI tools are intended for a particular task or type of user, there are aspects that can be used by anyone. Like the AI "bots" intended to make customer service faster and more efficient, internally directed tools can help organize emails, maintain calendars, and even draft correspondence and reports. These tools are being built into the productivity suites used in corporate offices every day to help make information easier to find, summarize reports, detect patterns in data, and define escalation workflows to alert the appropriate individual when needed.

Workflow automation is an area of keen interest for printing companies and one where past iterations of AI technology have already made inroads by analyzing production data and operating costs to identify inefficiencies or proactively schedule maintenance. In an inkjet environment, AI tools have been used to anticipate printhead failures and optimize quality. Generative AI



tools are emerging that will be able to streamline the automation process by allowing tasks and goals to be described in natural language and letting the tool generate a workflow template. The process of defining current state and desired state workflows is incredibly time consuming for printing organizations and generative AI has the potential to dramatically reduce the time to delivery of proposed workflow upgrades while laying the groundwork for continuous improvement.

Another highly valuable application of generative AI in production printing environments is test data creation. The value of test data for programming staff was noted earlier but the application to printing companies extends far beyond the IT department. Everyone from transaction printing companies to direct mailers struggles to attain adequate test data to mirror all the use cases that a particular application is intended to support. Many companies fall back on running real end-customer data through test environments. In addition to being risky, there is no guarantee that all the potential scenarios exist in any batch of data. AI tools provide the opportunity to use live data as the training model while eliminating any personally identifiable information from specified generation scenarios. The resulting datasets can be used for system testing at the printing company and their customer's IT operation, by marketing to look at all combinations of variable data and content, and for customer acceptance testing on new systems as well as regression testing of any changes. As data drives more print applications, better test data becomes increasingly important to efficient operations and more collaborative customer relationships.

BALANCING RISK AND OPPORTUNITY

There are tremendous opportunities to make work more efficient for many professionals using generative AI but there are also perceptual, technical, and legal risks. From a legal perspective, technology development and adoption has dramatically outpaced relevant legal and regulatory standards. Here are just a few key issues that could impact creators of AI tools and their customers:

- ▶ Photo and graphic library services, as well as individual content creators, are suing AI image generation platforms for using their content as part of the data used to train their systems without permission or compensation.
- ▶ Open-source software tools are making similar claims against code generation tools that were trained on open-source code, but do not market their products according to open-source licensing agreements.
- ▶ News outlets have also raised legal arguments against the use of their content to train text generation tools.
- ▶ Finally, there is the question of whether AI-generated content of any type can be copyright protected. A recent copyright submission for images generated using AI tool Midjourney included in a graphic novel was rejected by the U.S. Copyright Office² stating that "...the images in the Work that were generated by the Midjourney technology are not the product of human authorship."

Lawmakers around the world also have to grapple with issues concerning who is liable for the creation or publication of inaccurate, harmful, or defamatory content. While this is an issue of global concern, it is also an immediate internal concern for any company using AI to generate content for customer service or any other publicly consumed purpose. Like many automation solutions, the output from generative AI is only as accurate and appropriate as the foundation model, training algorithms, and human prompts used to generate it. While the opportunities are attractive, corporate leadership should expect to invest time learning about how introducing these tools can impact operational and risk management processes.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

As companies are deciding when and how they want to take advantage of generative AI solutions, they may find that their employees have already started using various tools on their own. OpenAI reported that ChatGPT had acquired 1 million users within five days of its launch. By June 2023, Similarweb data³ showed that the platform had 1.6 billion visits during the month

with an average duration of over seven minutes. Chances are good that there are some emails, reports, and other content being drafted using a generative AI tool at your organization. Corporate leadership must put guidelines in place, even before formal adoption of any tools. Here are some thoughts on where to start:

- ▶ **Guidance:** Create policies for the use of free, web-based generative AI applications in the workplace. If use of tools is allowed, the policy may require generated text-based content be reviewed and approved by an internal subject matter expert prior to use, ensuring that all facts referenced are verified and source citations located. A more conservative approach may ban the use of any AI tools that have not been explicitly approved for use by the corporation.
- ▶ **Communication:** As tools are approved to enter the work environment, communicate with employees about the intended use and any impact on job descriptions, responsibilities, and approval workflow. Employees may be concerned about having their jobs made redundant.
- ▶ **Training:** Adapting to an AI-supported environment requires a two-pronged approach to acquire expertise with the selected tools while providing opportunities to upskill or retrain portions of the workforce affected by automation. Education should begin in advance of technology adoption. This scenario should be familiar to printing companies who have undertaken other types of workflow automation.
- ▶ **Application:** Start slowly by using generative AI tools for tasks short of creating final content. For example, expediting research, idea generation, summarizing internally-generated data, automating repetitive design tasks, auto-filling templates for technical specifications, generating test data, and automating internal testing processes. These capabilities can make individuals and teams more effective while falling short of automatically generating any portion of the end product sold to customers.
- ▶ **Data protection:** Since these tools rely on large datasets for training and ultimately generating output, it is essential to handle all data ethically, ensuring privacy, data protection, fair use, and compliance with relevant regulations. Customers

should be informed about opportunities related to data usage (such as test data generation) and have control over how their data is utilized. This protection should extend to the use of visual training on customer's proprietary or licensed imagery and copy.

- ▶ **Pricing:** Similar to the adoption of inkjet, printing companies should be prepared for arguments that AI efficiencies should drive price reductions for their customers. Look for ways to focus the discussion on value creation and educate customers on the role that human subject matter experts play in deriving value from AI tools.
- ▶ **Regulation:** Stay abreast of proposed legislation to govern the use of generative AI solutions, ownership of work product, and liability for incorrect or defamatory results. This is a critical time to be following print industry lobbying groups and commenting on proposals that could impact business.
- ▶ **Insurance:** Similar to the impact of data privacy regulation over the past decade, AI-related regulation will have a domino effect on the cost and availability of insurance coverage.
- ▶ **Contracts:** Printing companies should be prepared for customers to push any contractual risk related to the use of generative AI back onto them as the service provider. As these tools are introduced, contracts must be updated, and printing companies will need to be informed and proactive to ensure that their own interests are protected as customers seek to protect themselves from uncertainty.
- ▶ **Experience:** Anyone who expects to be in a position to make decisions about the use of generative AI in their company should get hands-on experience and learn the basic terminology necessary to understand the potential benefits as well as the hazards inherent in the technology.

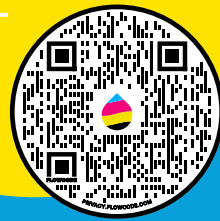
In order to create value, companies must address a range of ethical considerations around transparency, fairness, and accountability with employees and customers. Taking a step-by-step approach to navigating the use of generative AI tools responsibly is important to fostering trust and mitigating risk.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Midjourney
www.midjourney.com
- 2 Originally reported by Reuters. See letter from U.S. Copyright Office:
<https://fingfx.thomsonreuters.com/gfx/legaldocs/klpygnkyrpg/AI%20COPYRIGHT%20decision.pdf>
- 3 Similarweb.com, June 2023
www.similarweb.com/website/chat.openai.com/#overview

EXPLORE THE NEW thINK FORUM WEBSITE

Tap into FREE tools, training, programs, services, and resources — all designed to help you accelerate your success with inkjet.



Request a thINK Member Demo at thINKForum.com/membership-benefits

thINK MEMBER BENEFITS

There are advantages to being a Canon Solutions America production inkjet customer — and thINK membership is one of them! Request a thINK Member Demo to learn how you can tap into the tools, training, programs, services, and resources all available FREE to you and your entire organization on thINKForum.com!

The thINK website has something for every member of your organization — from sales and marketing to press operations and leadership.



Take a look around!
thINKForum.com

NEWS & RESEARCH

Explore current market research and expert insights from industry analysts to determine how to better serve your current customers — and gain new ones!

PROGRAMS

Take advantage of free programs including:

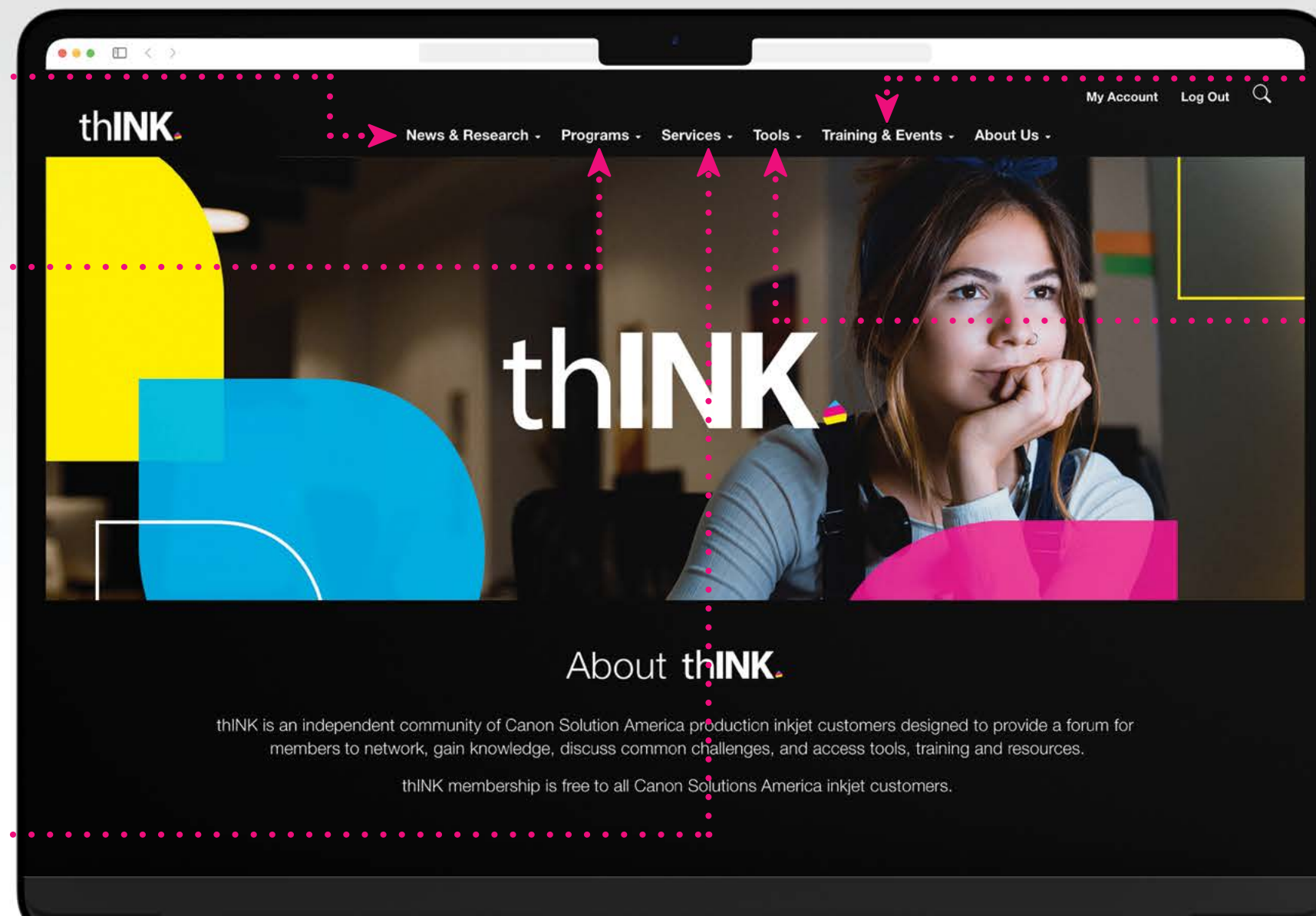
Professional Writing and Video Services: Request your own customer or inkjet innovation spotlight (and Canon and thINK will help you promote it!).

Apprenticeship Program: Through our Print[ED] program you can hire high school vocational students trained on Canon production inkjet.

Google Paid Search Program: Participate in the Canon Solutions America-funded Google paid search program to drive traffic to your website.

SERVICES

Looking for additional support with sales, marketing, business development, and more? Your thINK membership gives you access to a variety of professional services, including the popular Project 360° program, which is complimentary to all thINK members.



TRAINING & EVENTS

Accelerate your inkjet success, participate in live thINK Academy classes, or explore the online learning library to access courses across every role, including leadership, marketing, sales, and production!

TOOLS

Tap into our toolkits to design for, market, and operate your Canon production inkjet press, including:

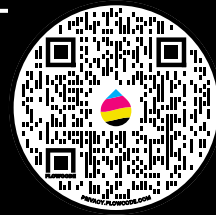
Designer's Toolkit: Learn best practices for designing for inkjet and browse inkjet projects to get inspiration.

Marketing Toolkit: Application samples, direct mail templates, blog posts, email templates, social media posts, Canon logos, inkjet press photo library, press skin templates — and more!

Press Operator Toolkit: Media profiles and packs, evaluated inkjet media, and training designed just for press operators.



think. MARKETING TOOLKIT



Leverage these free resources to promote your inkjet capabilities, generate leads, and accelerate sales.

Access the Marketing Toolkit at [thinkForum.com/marketing-toolkit](https://thinkforum.com/marketing-toolkit)

MKTG LAB

Download free application samples, direct mail templates, email templates, blog posts, social media posts, Canon logos, press images, and more.



CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

Allow us to put a spotlight on YOUR company! Request a customer spotlight that features the competitive advantages of your company and use it on your website and in your marketing materials. In addition — think and Canon Solutions America will publish it to help you get the word out!



ONLINE LEARNING

Sharpen your marketing skills with on-demand webinars and video courses.

INKJET INNOVATION FEATURED PROJECT

Submit your most innovative inkjet projects to be featured on the Print Innovation Wall at the Canon Americas Customer Innovation Center (CIC), then use your featured project in your marketing to promote your company.

Inkjet Innovation

POSSIBILITIES

OPENING NEW WORLDS

PAID SEARCH PROGRAM

When someone searches for print services, we want to guide them to a Canon Solutions America production inkjet customer, which is why think offers a fully-funded Google Paid Search program. Make sure your company is included!



MARKET RESEARCH

Tap into exclusive market research and gain insight on new applications and industry trends to help you identify opportunities and increase sales.



MARKETING SERVICES

Do you need additional marketing support that is not already available in this marketing toolkit? Let us know how we can help.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT STRATEGY CHANGES THE GAME (AND THE NAME!) FOR UNITED DIRECT SOLUTIONS



United Direct Solutions recently rebranded, changing their name (from United Mail) to reflect the company's evolution into a technology-driven entity that offers a wide array of services beyond traditional direct mail.

Founded in 1980, United Direct Solutions' directive has remained unchanged: to enrich connections between companies and their audiences. With locations in Louisville, KY and Cincinnati, OH, United Direct Solutions serves small-to-medium businesses and Fortune 500 companies nationwide. With more than 150,000 square feet of office and warehouse space, 250 employees, an expansive logistics network, and an array of traditional and digital services, United Direct Solutions delivers on the promise of relevant and meaningful communications at any scale.

Recently, United Direct Solutions was honored with the prestigious Printing Impressions "Innovator of the Year" award for their outstanding leadership in harnessing cutting-edge inkjet technology and their unwavering commitment to fostering a thriving company culture.

Casey Hendrick, Chief Operating Officer of United Direct Solutions, shared the secrets to their success and details of their journey. "Initially we were known for our printing, direct mail, and production of physical marketing materials, but we have continuously evolved over the years and expanded to offer a wider array of services to provide our customers with the ability to create a personalized relationship through a direct marketing experience, which includes digital, email, and online solutions, in addition to, of course, billing, data, and document security." United Direct Solutions is an ISO 9001:2015 certified direct mail and marketing company with SOC 2 Type 2 and HITRUST CSF certifications, which is critical for serving the print needs of their customers in the healthcare, health insurance, and financial services industries. "Our name is just catching up with our full-service offering. The rebranding publicly states our commitment to industry-leading innovation and service, as well as the industry's highest focus on data and document management, privacy, and security."

Casey, a 20-year print industry veteran, shared his insights on the successful evolution of United Mail to United Direct Solutions. "Success is all about continuous improvement. You strive to get a little better every day. To do that, you have to consistently evaluate what you can do better, and then do it." As an example, when Casey found they couldn't offer competitive pricing on self-mailers and postcards using toner devices, he knew there was an opportunity for significant improvement — not only to support their customers with better pricing and gain a competitive advantage, but to improve operational efficiencies as well.

"Our decision was easy once we ran the numbers. We did our homework, and the answer was obvious: the Canon varioPRINT iX inkjet sheetfed press. We are pleased with how it handles coated stocks and the inline finishing, and it has enabled us to bring in outsourced shell work to run a white paper solution. The varioPRINT iX has been sold out since we installed it — we've been working 6 days a week, 24 hours a day," Casey said.

Casey applies the same 'continuous improvement' philosophy to the company culture at United Direct Solutions. "By nature, I'm very competitive; I like to win, and I like to build the teams that win." To achieve this, he places a strong emphasis on creating a work culture that fosters ongoing growth. The culture is based on core values including optimism, determination, teamwork, integrity, respect, trust, excellence, and the commitment to continuous improvement. According to Casey, cultivating the right culture is key. Such a culture is built upon trust, and it allows for vulnerability, which in turn stimulates both personal and professional growth. "Take care of people, stay focused on and live and die by your core values — that is my recipe for success." In addition to his professional career, Casey and his wife have instilled the same passion for mental and physical excellence into their three daughters, ages 15, 16, and 18, all of whom play competitive soccer.

"I cannot agree more with the high priority Casey puts on cultivating the culture at United Direct Solutions. Company culture is the foundation for success, and, with a strong company culture, everyone wins," said Francis McMahon, executive vice president, Production Print Solutions, Canon Solutions America, Inc. "With this type of leadership, it is evident why United Direct Solutions was named one of the best places to work by Printing Industries of America."

When asked what recommendation he has for others who wish to gain a competitive edge with inkjet, Casey replied, "Start by documenting your business needs and the needs of your customers, then take inventory of the investments you already have. Once you fully understand your needs and where the gaps are, start talking to a lot of your peers in the industry and take a hands-on approach to explore the different solutions available to determine what fits you and your company best. Be sure to evaluate all factors, including the market share they have, the culture they have, the service they offer, and of course the price — it's a research-driven decision."

ABOUT UNITED DIRECT SOLUTIONS



United Direct Solutions provides clients with the most effective methods to connect, engage, and communicate with their audiences. Since 1980, their marketing solutions have grown from direct mail service to digital marketing, billing, data, and document security, embracing and engaging the latest platforms and technologies. At the forefront of innovation, automation, and expertise, United Direct Solutions develops and implements communications strategies that demonstrate the value of connection and the power of personalized communications. For more information, visit udsolutions.com.

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHT

- ▶ Download the **think** Customer Spotlight Booklet
- ▶ Request a Spotlight on your company

thinkforum.com/customer-spotlight



INKJET INNOVATION

OPTIMIZED PRODUCTION OF HIGH-QUALITY GRAPHIC ART BOOKS WITH SUPERIOR COLOR COVERAGE



COMPANY:

Independent Publishers Group (IPG Ink)
Merlin Technology Inc.

PRESS:

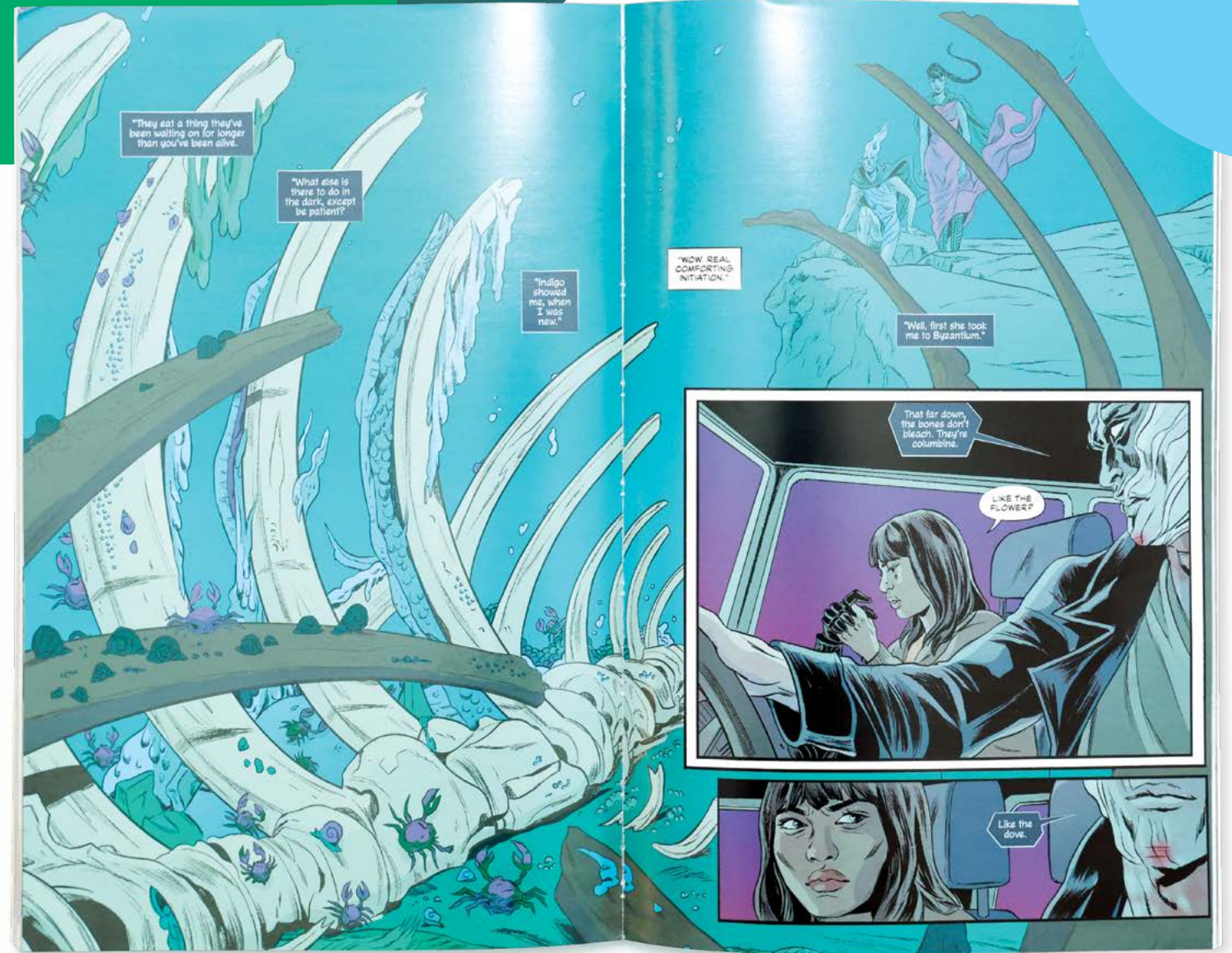
Canon varioPRINT iX sheetfed inkjet press

PAPER:

60 lb. uncoated for advanced review copies
80 lb. Gloss Text for market copies

STANDOUT INNOVATION:

Expedient high-ROI print process on Canon varioPRINT iX sheetfed inkjet press supported with Merlin Technology Inc.'s humidity control system enables press to run uninterrupted at full speed while producing fully saturated pages in graphic art books with consistent, stunning quality and color coverage.



Independent Publisher Group (IPG) partners with book publishers across the country to print and distribute a variety of titles ranging in quantities from 500 to 15,000 copies, often with relatively accelerated turnaround times and full coverage pages. IPG needed the ability to facilitate continuous print cycles and the flexibility to accommodate a wide range of book genres and formats without print defects such as color streaks or jetting errors.

The Canon varioPRINT iX sheetfed inkjet press proved to be ideal for the job, particularly with two new graphic novels where the content of each demanded the ability to print highly saturated color and black and white pages with consistent coverage. Plus, the superior process efficiency of the Canon varioPRINT iX streamlined the production time necessary to print 500 copies of each graphic novel quickly and without incurring delays.

Printing the high-quality graphic books at fully optimized press speed was supported by the innovative humidity control system by Merlin Technology Inc. Merlin's humidification equipment helped ensure a consistent humidity level of 47% on the press room floor, which is ideal to optimize the print speed and quality of Canon's digital sheetfed inkjet presses.

LOOKING FOR MORE INKJET INSPIRATION?




See more innovation from industry peers and submit your own project to be featured | [thinkForum.com](https://thinkforum.com) /inkjet-innovation



Congrats to Canon Solutions America production inkjet customers and think members **Access Direct**, **United Direct Solutions**, and **Phoenix Innovate** for being named 2023 Innovators of the Year by Printing Impressions!

Why were these three companies nominated by industry experts and chosen for this honor? Each has embraced new technologies, systems integration, and workflow automation to evolve and thrive.

ACCESS DIRECT

Printing Impressions praised Access Direct's "dedication to data and willingness to dive into new technology," as well as its "homegrown system of AI-enhanced software" and significant technological updates made to its finishing, bindery, inserting, commingling, tracking, and data and content management.

John DiNozzi (left), owner and CEO of Access Direct, has been business partners with Lori Messina (right), owner and president of the company, for three-and-a-half decades.



PHOENIX INNOVATE

Printing Impressions described Phoenix Innovate as a "data-led technology and marketing innovator that can be counted on to use its passion and creativity to identify and solve business problems through tailored solutions that produce transformative and sustainable results for its customers." The company was nominated in part because of its successful transition from a traditional printing company to an omnichannel marketing agency.

UNITED DIRECT SOLUTIONS

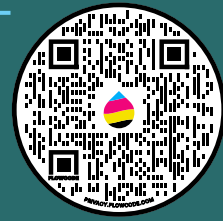
Recently rebranded from United Mail (see the customer spotlight feature in this issue for more!), United Direct Solutions has embraced production inkjet technology, which has enabled the company to say yes to much larger projects. Printing Impressions also cited the company's innovative "issues tracking" process, which "gets employees involved in identifying issues and their remedies."

The United Direct Solutions management team (shown left to right): Casey Hendrick, COO; Connie Burns, CIO; Tom Clines, CEO; Dayna Neumann, CSMO; and Chase Kirkwood, CSO. | Credit: United Direct Solutions



DID YOU KNOW?

As a Canon Solutions America inkjet customer, you have free access to over 150 research reports and market trend white papers, available to you on [thinkForum.com](https://thinkforum.com). Here are just a few:



Access the think Market Research Library at [thinkForum.com/market-research](https://thinkforum.com/market-research)



FIRST THINGS FIRST: AUTOMATING JOB INPUT

In a highly-competitive market, print service providers are always seeking ways to stand apart from the crowd. Meanwhile, they are constantly being hounded by print industry vendors and consultants who urge them to automate their processes. Even so, the path forward is never very clear. What should PSPs be looking for when they strive to automate? One step whose implications cascade through workflow processes is job input. The exchange between a customer and a PSP can present numerous challenges. This document highlights three different subsets of PSPs and explains how they are adapting their workflows to achieve higher productivity and improved profitability.



PRINT PROVIDERS: MASTERING THE ART OF SELLING PROGRAMS VS. PRODUCTS

As print communications continue to evolve, new technologies and software platforms make it easier to produce print and meet the needs of today's customers. The ways in which print service providers (PSPs) are going to market are also changing. Businesses that are focused on tangible products like brochures, flyers, and business cards struggle to differentiate and are therefore forced to compete on price. As a result, industry leaders are taking a new approach and are becoming far more focused on selling programs vs. standalone products. This article explores the concept of selling programs versus selling products and discusses the art of successfully navigating this important transformation.



SUSTAINABILITY: TRENDS IN CLIMATE NEUTRALITY

Recent discussions on sustainability in print have focused on the topic of climate neutrality. Print service providers want to know about the eco-friendliness of the substrates and consumables that they use, but they also want to do everything that they can to minimize the impact of energy consumption and the creation of greenhouse gasses. This evolution has PSPs looking deeper into the impact of the work conducted within their facilities, the products they create, and the overall supply chain. This document explores the concept of climate neutrality and discusses how PSPs are factoring that into their short- and long-term plans.



APPLICATIONS EXPANSION: NEW SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Today's print service providers (PSPs) are facing challenges that are in large part due to the impact of electronic delivery of information that has resulted in fewer opportunities for print. Because of this, the number of print service providers of all types is in steep decline. Those that remain can no longer operate on old business models. As a result, PSPs are expanding the range of print services that they provide and are also branching out into other service areas. In this white paper we explore the trends in application expansion to help PSPs find ways to expand their business with existing clients and open new service opportunities.



WHY WE LOVE EMBELLISHED PRINT

We humans just love bright and shiny things, from jewelry to cars to holiday décor. Glimmering objects have a way of catching our attention — in addition to standing out from ordinary products, people tend to associate shine with higher quality. The opportunity to quickly and easily enhance printed products with special effects has never been more accessible. Many of today's digital print devices come equipped with specialty inks, inline or near line spot coating, varnishes, or finishing methods that make it easier than ever to produce high-value printed products in short runs. This article explores why consumers love embellished print, and why your buyers should as well!



THE REALITIES OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE PRINT INDUSTRY TODAY

All AI systems use large amounts of data and machine learning algorithms to achieve the goals for which they were designed. To date, most systems have been designed with the goal of improving data analysis by recognizing patterns and making predictions. The most widely known of these AI systems is ChatGPT. The goal of this white paper is to provide printing executives with an understanding of how generative AI differs from previous approaches and how it can be applied to the print industry, while also being mindful of related business risks.



TRIGGER COMMUNICATIONS IN 2023

From personalizing messaging to making advice digestible, brands' trigger communications looked to stand out amidst consumers' inboxes. Learn more in this market research report.



PERSONAL LOANS LANDSCAPE UPDATE: OPEN TO OPTIONS

In 2023 personal lenders looked for innovative opportunities to reach and relate to new audiences. Learn more in this report.



THE NEXT WAVE OF DIRECT MAIL

An inside look at the opportunity brands have to rethink their approach to direct mail. This cross-sector exploration uncovers how brands across categories such as Financial Services, Insurance, Telecom, Travel, and Retail are navigating and evolving their direct mail strategies to keep up with the ever-changing landscape.



DRIVING SMALL BUSINESS LOYALTY

While SMBs continue to struggle, brands should deepen relationships by promoting ecosystems over products, highlighting savings, and supporting diverse communities. Learn more in this market research report.



2023 TRAVEL CARD LANDSCAPE UPDATE: AMPLIFY ADVENTURE

As consumers looked to continue to travel on a budget in 2023, brands helped make dreams a reality and maximize travel experiences. Learn more in this market research report.

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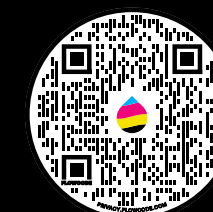
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All classes take place on Thursdays at 2 PM EST.

BUSINESS TRACK

JANUARY 18
ROADMAP 2024

FEBRUARY 1
FINANCIAL SERVICES MARKETING TRENDS

FEBRUARY 29
OMNICHANNEL MARKETING TRENDS

MARCH 28
2024 INSURANCE MARKETING TRENDS

MAY 9
PRODUCTION INKJET: PROFITABLY
EXPANDING BUSINESS

MAY 23
2024 TELECOMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA
MARKETING TRENDS

AUGUST 8
TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS:
SALES TAX MULTISTATE COMPLIANCE

SEPTEMBER 12
TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS:
INCOME AND GROSS RECEIPTS TAX

OCTOBER 24
TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS:
STRATEGIC ACTION PLANS

NOVEMBER 14
TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS:
ECONOMIC NEXUS

TECHNICAL TRACK

APRIL 4
USING ANALYTICS TO MANAGE YOUR BUSINESS

JUNE 13
DIGITAL PRINT: DRUPA DELIVERS

SEPTEMBER 26
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE PRINTING INDUSTRY

OCTOBER 10
MAKING THE MOVE TO OMNICHANNEL SERVICES

DECEMBER 5
SUSTAINABILITY...IT IS EVERYONE'S JOB

SALES TRACK

JANUARY 25
LOOK WHAT INKJET CAN DO: CASE STUDIES & SAMPLES

FEBRUARY 8
SELLING THE BENEFITS OF INKJET

MARCH 7
INKJET PRINT BUYERS: WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE &
HOW TO REACH THEM

APRIL 18
THE INKJET ADVANTAGE FOR VERTICAL MARKET PRINT

MARKETING

MARCH 21
DELIVERING PERFORMANCE: DIRECT MAIL IN THE U.S.

JUNE 27
CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: THE KEY TO
OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCES

JULY 25
THINK MARKETING TOOLKIT DEMO

AUGUST 22
FROM DATA TO INSIGHT: THE OUTLOOK FOR
MARKETING ANALYTICS



ONLINE LEARNING

DID YOU KNOW?

In addition to the live thINK Academy classes you can access other valuable learning on thINKForum.com, including:

CUSTOMER SPOTLIGHTS

Get to know other Canon production inkjet customers and what they are doing to accelerate their success with inkjet.

INKJET INNOVATIONS

Take a look at the innovative inkjet projects printed on Canon production inkjet presses.

LIVE CLASS REPLAYS

Did you miss a live thINK Academy class you wanted to see? View it on-demand.

MARKETING TRAINING

Dive deep into how to build a best practice marketing plan, CMS systems, the impact of AI on marketing analytics — and more!

PRESS OPERATOR TRAINING

From the latest evaluated paper for your press to press operator training — it's all here!

SALES TRAINING

Looking for training for your sales team? Look no further. We have a variety to choose from on-demand.

TECHNICAL TRAINING

Dive into inkjet technical and application training.

thINK AHEAD

Did you miss a thINK Ahead session you wanted to see? We have them all online for you to view on-demand.

thINK FAST

Got 5 minutes? Get key takeaways on industry trends and new market opportunities in just 5 minutes or less!

WEBINAR REPLAYS

Take a look at the learning available to you from the latest industry webinars.

BUSINESS TRACK

JANUARY 18

ROADMAP 2024

Each year, Keypoint Intelligence explores the trends, challenges, and opportunities that are facing our industry. In this live class you'll learn about how today's changing business world is reshaping our industry. Join us for an engaging and thought-provoking session highlighting the things you must know and do for a successful 2024.

FEBRUARY 1

FINANCIAL SERVICES MARKETING TRENDS

Learn how marketers can break through the noise with revitalized marketing strategies that call on pre-digital tactics, disrupt linear funnel thinking, and demonstrate a true commitment to action. In this live thINK Academy class Comperemedia will share three omnichannel marketing trends that are set to impact companies, brands, and marketers in 2024 and beyond. The 2024 omnichannel marketing trends are rooted in competitive intelligence, industry expertise, and shifting consumer behaviors and are a result of in-depth conversations among competitive intelligence analysts. We will discuss developments in the industry, as well as consumer-reported behavior and attitudes, and share the forecast of the year ahead. This year, trends were driven by key themes in 2023: economic uncertainty, the rise of new social media channels, and backlash to corporate social responsibility initiatives.

FEBRUARY 29

OMNICHANNEL MARKETING TRENDS

In this live thINK Academy class Comperemedia will share three financial services marketing trends that are set to impact companies, brands, and marketers in 2024 and beyond. The trends are rooted in competitive marketing intelligence, consumer behavior, and industry expertise, and offer a comprehensive look at the momentum and forecast of the financial services industry over the next year. Aspects of the trend predictions were driven by four key themes that shaped the landscape in 2023: economic uncertainty, changing demographics, outside disruptors, and regulatory actions.

MARCH 28

2024 INSURANCE MARKETING TRENDS

In this live thINK Academy class we will have an in-depth discussion of insurance marketing trends and explore how P&C insurance brands will reestablish their trust among consumers and engage with younger customers, and how you as a print service provider can help them.

MAY 9

PRODUCTION INKJET: PROFITABLY EXPANDING BUSINESS

Production inkjet printing adoption is enabling in-plant, commercial, and direct mail print providers to both create new revenue streams with emerging applications and improve profits with operational excellence. This live class will discuss key new application opportunities as well as the impact of inkjet on operational efficiency to expand profits. Key topics include:

- New product applications that could not previously be done profitably until the firm invested in inkjet.
- How inkjet technologies are enabling the transition from offset and digital toner applications to high-speed color production inkjet printing.
- The impact inkjet adoption has on workflow efficiencies, reduced labor cost, improved reliability and overall increases in profitability.

MAY 23

2024 TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA MARKETING TRENDS

In this live thINK Academy class Comperemedia will share three telecom and media marketing trends that are set to impact companies, brands, and marketers in 2024 and beyond. The 2024 Telecom and Media Marketing Trends are rooted in competitive intelligence, industry expertise, and shifting consumer behaviors and are a result of in-depth conversations among competitive intelligence analysts. We will share recent developments in the industry, as well as consumer-reported behavior and attitudes, and the forecast for the year ahead.

AUGUST 8

TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS: SALES TAX MULTISTATE COMPLIANCE

Multistate sales tax compliance for printers was an unintended side effect of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2018 Wayfair decision. In the five years since that decision, state tax agencies have begun auditing printers and direct mail producers for use tax even though these companies don't step foot in the state! The taxman is on the prowl, and for printers and direct mail producers, the time for burying one's head in the tax compliance sand is over. Don't be caught unaware about how your mailing activity, postage payment, and client billing might be exposing you to tax liability. This live class will address the multiple unique aspects of multistate sales tax compliance for printers, from taxability of the components of your production line to just what type of data you need to maintain to comply correctly.

SEPTEMBER 12**TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS: INCOME AND GROSS RECEIPTS TAX**

Lest you think that states are stopping with sales taxes, think again. Now that enough time has passed for states to implement sales tax enforcement post-Wayfair, they are turning their attention to income and other business taxes on companies that have nexus. And for many companies, the post-COVID pandemic hiring market has led to a shift in operations with many businesses adopting hybrid or remote work policies. In this live class, we'll discuss just what types of taxes print producers could be subject to based on their sales revenue, what protections are available, and how to think about multistate business tax compliance

OCTOBER 24**TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS: STRATEGIC ACTION PLANS**

Now that we've explored the different aspects of tax compliance obligations for printers who have nexus, we'll put the whole thing together to discuss what a multistate tax compliance action plan looks like. We'll cover what considerations go into evaluating where a printer has tax compliance obligations, options and programs available to address and mitigate any historical liabilities, and strategies for legally minimizing obligations going forward.

NOVEMBER 14**TAXES FOR DIRECT MAILERS AND PRINTERS: ECONOMIC NEXUS**

In the world post-Wayfair, the U.S. Supreme Court gave states the greenlight to turn the concept of nexus on its head. Just what is "nexus" to begin with, and why is it so important for the print industry to understand? At its core, nexus means connection. Through this live class, we'll explore just what it takes to establish a strong enough connection with a state to be on the hook for tax compliance on a tax-by-tax basis. We'll also cover the special nexus rules out there that apply uniquely to the print industry.

TECHNICAL TRACK

APRIL 4**USING ANALYTICS TO MANAGE YOUR BUSINESS**

- Are you looking for clear, data-based insights into how to improve productivity across your production printing fleet?
- Would more facts about printer performance help you increase efficiency and reduce costs?
- Do you need to allocate printing costs accurately to multiple internal or external customers, departments, or accounts?

In today's environment everyone is under pressure to raise productivity and safeguard margins. Businesses are looking to manage print performance more holistically. By using real-time data in clear tables and charts, print service providers can leverage the PRISMAlytics Dashboard, an easy and secure cloud-based management information tool that helps to provide comprehensive overviews for a variety of Canon presses. In this session, you will hear from Canon experts as well as your peers on techniques for leveraging PRISMAlytics Accounting and PRISMAlytics Dashboard to more effectively manage operations.

JUNE 13**DIGITAL PRINT: DRUPA DELIVERS**

Being the leading trade fair for print technologies, drupa is associated with innovations and new approaches for all facets of printing. In this live class, key industry analysts will share their perspective on drupa critical trends emerging for 2024 and beyond as well as strategies to capitalize on current market conditions. Key areas of focus include print technology trends, streamlining workflows, artificial intelligence, expansion into digital marketing services, customization and personalization, emerging applications, substrate expansion, application opportunities and key market segments for focus, sales and marketing strategies, diversification, and market consolidation.

SEPTEMBER 26**ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE PRINTING INDUSTRY**

AI is everywhere these days, from the biggest enterprise computer systems all the way down to the predictive text function in your phone's keyboard. The print industry is no exception in their approach to leveraging AI. Print service providers are using AI technology to cut down on waste, speed up production times, provide customization, and streamline operations. In this session, experts and your peers will discuss some of the ways AI will revolutionize the print industry. Topics include smart layouts, press monitoring and adjustments, workflow automation, automated die cut algorithms, target marketing, and security.



TECHNICAL

OCTOBER 10

MAKING THE MOVE TO OMNICHANNEL SERVICES

We are rapidly moving to a world where every advertisement, email, direct mail communication, store visit, mobile offer, and website visit is personalized. This is just the type of experience that today's consumers are expecting. Market leaders are evaluating and assessing techniques for delivering more accurate, relevant, and personalized touchpoints across all forms of communication. These companies are optimizing customer interactions through print, mobile, social, and online platforms. In this session, we will hear from your peers about the strategies, tools, and techniques they are using to support marketing clients in the delivery of an omnichannel experience.

DECEMBER 5

SUSTAINABILITY...IT IS EVERYONE'S JOB

As a transactional, direct mail, or in-plant printer, how comfortable are you with your environmental credentials? Are they solidly green or perhaps still a work in progress? Have your customers or prospects started to ask you about them yet? If not, they likely will soon. Sustainability is not a trend, but a revolution of all industries and business sectors. It is now driving our decisions and actions. Across industries, companies are looking for innovations that reduce their environmental footprint on an almost daily basis. This live class is focused on sustainability goals and making clear advances towards achieving them with inkjet. In today's market, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability could give you a real competitive advantage. And potential customers will be more likely to view you as the kind of progressive company they want to work with. Key topics we will discuss include the digital advantage, environmental benefits of inkjet, eco-friendly inks, and energy consumption.

SALES TRACK

JANUARY 25

LOOK WHAT INKJET CAN DO: CASE STUDIES & SAMPLES

Join us for an exclusive thINK Academy live class showcasing the impressive capabilities of Canon production inkjet technology. Learn how businesses from multiple vertical markets utilize inkjet to achieve critical business objectives, including customer acquisition and retention. In this class, you will:

- Explore case studies highlighting the successful use of inkjet technology in various industries.
- Gain insights on how inkjet technology can elevate print applications designed to engage customers, streamline campaign cycles, and maximize budgets.
- Learn how to identify prospects who can benefit from moving offset or digital applications to inkjet production.

FEBRUARY 8

SELLING THE BENEFITS OF INKJET

Join us for an insightful thINK Academy live class designed to help print sales professionals tap into the hidden potential of your Canon production inkjet equipment. Join industry expert Kate Dunn to discover the key selling messages that get the attention of marketing and print buyers today. In this live class, you will learn:

- How to clearly articulate the benefits of Canon's production inkjet presses to prospects and existing customers.
- Key selling messages that effectively convey the advantages of inkjet technology.
- How to utilize Canon's advanced capabilities to gain an edge over your competition.

MARCH 7

INKJET PRINT BUYERS: WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE & HOW TO REACH THEM

To maximize the impact of your Canon production inkjet investment, sales teams must learn how to identify and engage their target audience — print buyers. Join industry expert Kate Dunn for a thINK Academy live class that will unlock the secrets to effectively targeting and engaging print buyers most likely to utilize inkjet technology. In this live class, you'll learn:

- The characteristics of print buyers who are likely to see value from Canon production inkjet technology.
- Tactics for identifying potential buyers.
- Critical strategies for engaging target print buyers in today's market.

SALES

APRIL 18

THE INKJET ADVANTAGE FOR VERTICAL MARKET PRINT

Production inkjet is rapidly becoming a game-changer, offering significant benefits over traditional printing methods. Successful sellers help their customers understand how production inkjet can help them achieve critical business objectives. This thINK Academy live class will focus on the key trends driving inkjet volume in the retail, insurance, and financial services markets. In this live class, you will learn:

- The critical trends that impact the vertical markets and customer communication.
- How these trends influence the growing demand for personalized and interactive communication.
- How companies can benefit from adding print to their digital communication strategies.

MARKETING TRACK

MARCH 21

DELIVERING PERFORMANCE: DIRECT MAIL IN THE UNITED STATES

Based on an exhaustive primary research effort incorporating input from hundreds of marketers and supply chain industry leaders, in this live class you will learn more about:

- U.S. marketers will invest more than \$39 billion in direct mail this year.
- Some marketers and early-stage direct-to-consumer brands are increasing their direct mail investment as a means of supporting their customer acquisition and incremental sales needs.
- Improvements in the integration of data and creative content are allowing direct mailers to achieve long-promised value from on-demand production, personalization, trigger-driven programs, retargeting and more.

JUNE 27

CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: THE KEY TO OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCES

Get clarity on the complex and rapidly evolving landscape of content management systems (CMS). In the process of developing this paper, Winterberry Group surveyed more than 150 decision makers across the U.S. and conducted in-depth interviews with influencers in the CMS market. The result is an evidence-based examination of the use cases, considerations, tradeoffs, and value of different CMS platforms while exploring the investment, technology, and strategy trends that impact the content and digital experience landscape these platforms support.

JULY 25

thINK MARKETING TOOLKIT DEMO

The thINK Marketing Toolkit offers print service providers a variety of marketing materials designed to help them accelerate their success with inkjet. In this live thINK Academy class, we will share how you can leverage the thINK Marketing Toolkit to quickly ramp up your marketing efforts, and we'll take a deep dive into the MKTG Lab tools including application samples, Canon logos, direct mail and email campaigns, infographics, inkjet press photography, social media – and more!

AUGUST 22

FROM DATA TO INSIGHT: THE OUTLOOK FOR MARKETING ANALYTICS

Marketing analytics play a crucial role in helping marketers understand their target audience, reach them effectively, and evaluate the success of their marketing efforts. The history of marketing analytics has shown a steady evolution and improvement through iteration, but we are now experiencing a revolution driven by multiple factors, such as seismic shifts in privacy, rapid changes in storage and processing power, and access to data infrastructure technologies that allow structured and unstructured data to be integrated. Additionally, analytical techniques have advanced to include machine learning, deep learning, and advanced AI. These developments have enabled marketers to harness the full benefits of more advanced analytics to enhance multiple areas of activity. There are significant obstacles to growth, however, as the loss of data identifiers, privacy regulation, and entrenched organizational cultures force marketers to innovate in understanding what drives value. These challenges will be overcome, and will result in more widespread use of analytics to innovate how companies identify, understand, and engage with prospects and customers. In this live class we will share current and emerging marketing analytics use cases, industry challenges, and factors for success as demonstrated by companies that are utilizing analytics most effectively.