

This is an article written by Kevin Karstedt for Boxboard Container Magazine. Mr. Karstedt has a monthly article titled "Digital Connections" which he discusses issues of importance to Packaging Printers and Converters related to Digital Pre-Press and related technologies. His firm consults with Consumer Product Companies, Packaging Converters/Printers and Graphic Service to execute package graphic development in the most efficient manner possible. They also provide marketing and product research for System Developers with products and services targeted at the Packaging Marketplace.

We hope you find the information contained in this article valuable. This and other articles on Digital Pre-Press and related technologies can be found at www.karstedt.com. Find out how Karstedt Associates can help your company by calling 716-992-2017.

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2001, The Year In Preview

Well, it is that time of year again. Each client I talked with over the past month or so has asked me the same question "Kevin, where do you see the industry going over the next few years?" Judging from the feedback I have received on the past two Digital Connections topics Digital Printing and E-Commerce Opportunities I can only assume that this question is on most of your minds as well. Lets take a sneak peak at the next 12 months.

The next few years will see an increased introduction and implementation of ECS systems and processes. What is an ECS system or process you might ask? Well ECS stands for Enhanced Customer Service and any system or process that enhances a companies ability to provide quality customer service is an ECS system or process. As it relates to digital graphics in 2001, ECS systems will fit into five related categories; Digital Prepress, Digital Printing, Digital Asset Management, Remote Collaborative Viewing and Proofing and E-Commerce.

Digital Prepress – All the major prepress systems providers are hard at work developing and modifying ECS systems that will enhance workflow, throughput and quality. Inherent benefits to improvements in these areas will be cost effectiveness which will generate positive ROIs. For packaging converters who are looking to expand their prepress capabilities or get into prepress afresh 2001 could be your year. For other companies looking to expand your ECS offerings through the use of outsourced prepress service providers the time could be right for you as will.

On the workflow side, automation of all the prepress functions from preflight to archival are being incorporated into one continuous ECS solution. Prepress departments will be able to bring a job in at one end of the process, run it through preflight diagnostics, correct problems in the file, document all changes, combine with preexisting scans, apply traps and bleeds, output a proof (on-site and remote), perform step and repeat functions and output plates all automatically in a single workflow with little or no operator intervention.

Computer-to-Plate for offset and flexo has been getting most of the prepress press. These systems are maturing in the packaging arena extremely fast particularly in offset facilities. On the manufacturing side the promise of process constancy and print quality enhancements are the major reasons for adopting CTP. On the business side many consumer product companies are looking for suppliers to have this capability and are strongly recommending that their suppliers have a CTP strategy. I look for installations of ECS systems that include CTP to break all the records in 2001 both in offset and flexo plants.

Digital Printing – Over the next few years digital printing will catch on in a major way with consumer product companies and early adopting packaging printers. The most obvious and traditional use of digital printing is for short run of as little as one impression up to a few thousand. This is most used for test markets, focus groups, sales samples and similar uses. This use will continue to grow at a better than modest pace in 2001.

The area of digital printing growth with the most potential over the next few years, is for the inclusion of variable data. I see the use of personalized packaging and “active” or “intelligent” packages being used in product promotion and marketing by mail. An active or intelligent package will include coupons with customer unique bar codes. Information about the redeeming customer is extremely valuable to the consumer product companies and will be used in a variety of ways. This capability is enabled by advances in both digital printing and data mining technologies. My crystal ball says that this is an area to watch closely.

Digital Asset Management – Referred to as DAM this an area that is becoming increasingly important to consumer product companies over the past few years. End users are wanting to have control of all their digital assets such as logos, images, package structures, legal copy and much more. Packaging prepress providers have been developing DAM solutions and providing this value added service to their customer for a number of years. Some consumer product companies are bringing this capability in-house and combining it with other business solutions including workflow and project management solutions.

Remote Collaborative Viewing and Proofing – In the context of digital prepress this area of ECS solutions enables end users to more effectively execute package design and production. Decision makers from anywhere in the world can view, proof, approve and collaborate on packaging graphics. If implemented correctly this ECS solution can save time and money for all parties involved.

E-Commerce – This will be another area of growth in 2001 however there are still a lot of questions that need to be answered before total acceptance is achieved. This will be a shake out year for ECS solutions that are E-Commerce oriented. There has been a lot of venture capital spent in this arena over the past two years and there are more companies than there is market.

This year will be an exciting year in our industry. Key growth opportunities will focus on providing value added services to your customers. The ECS solutions mentioned above will be discussed in detail throughout the year in Digital Connections.

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I invite calls and e-mails on this and all Digital Connections topics and will include your comments were possible. In the mean time....think digital.