



## A PACKAGE DEAL

Digital package printing holds distinct opportunities and challenges.

By Mike Antoniak

If you've been evaluating potential profit-center additions for your wide-format digital press, you might need to look no further than packaging prototypes and short-run packaging.

Digital technologies have been making some significant inroads when it comes to packaging in the past few years. As research group Smithers Pira ([smitherspira.com](http://smitherspira.com)) reports, "digital printing significantly reduces the need for prepress and make-ready, greatly reducing costs, and there is a strong desire among brand owners and retailers for customization and shorter, more targeted press runs." Smithers Pira projects that digital printing for the packaging market will show compound annual growth rate of 23 percent come 2014, and the overall market is set to be worth \$6.8 billion by next year.

How can shops with wide-format technologies play a role in what seems to be a lucrative market? We asked that question of five companies now utilizing wide-format in their own package-printing endeavors:

- Centrix Innovations in North Kansas City, Missouri;
- Mark/Trèce, Inc. in Baltimore;
- Create-It Packaging in Arlington Heights, Illinois;
- DiTech Group in York, Pennsylvania; and
- Core Color Graphics in Fallingston, Pennsylvania.

### Centrix: Expanding its capabilities

Most print companies in the packaging business add digital capabilities in response to client calls for one-off



*Centrix Innovations' digital press and cutter capabilities have allowed it to expand its package-printing offerings. At left, the shop used its Durst Rho 750HS to produce 400 multicolor packages for soap produced by the sisters of the Benedictine Monastery in Kansas.*

mockups and short-run specialty containers. Centrix Innovations ([centrixkc.com](http://centrixkc.com)) in North Kansas City, Missouri, has its packaging roots in entirely different arenas.

CEO Marc Radasky launched the company to add a new dimension to his family's multi-faceted packaging businesses. His grandfather started Columbia Burlap and Bag back in 1950, then followed with Koch Bag and Supply in 1980 to produce poly and plastic bags as well as packing materials.

"A couple of years ago, he began looking for opportunities to diversify and branch out from bags into more upscale industrial packaging," relates Larry Miller, whom Radasky hired as director of operations for Centrix Innovations. "He believed the corrugated business needed a company with short-run capabilities. The larger companies wouldn't go after clients who wanted to print just 50 displays or pallet wraps."

Radasky and Miller brought in-house a Durst 750 HS Corrugated Display Printer along with a Zund G3 XL-3200 cutter, and the new Centrix officially opened its doors in January 2013 as a regional supplier to the container companies and converters in Kansas City area. It's been hitting its mark ever since. "We've done a lot of one-offs for prototypes or mockups, but our comfort level is in the 50- to 200-piece short runs," says Miller.

"Our niche is really where it's *not* cost effective to consider die cutting. Digital printing can be an economical alternative for producing as many as 750 pieces. Beyond that, it's better to think about going to the more traditional printing methods."

The capabilities of Centrix's press-and-cutter combination have allowed the company to expand services beyond its original focus. Sixty percent of the shop's digital production has been packaging; another 15 percent in displays and P-O-P; the rest is in varied types of signage.

"The Durst has given us a really versatile machine for printing on a variety of substrates," he notes, "and the Zund has proven to be very versatile as well – easy to set up for work we do and materials we work with."

Although the original intent was to print on corrugated materials, the combination of the press and cutter has allowed Centrix to produce jobs on other media, too: acrylic, banner material, SBS paper board – whatever a client requires, says Miller. He cites that versatility, along with digital's quick turnarounds, graphic quality and durability, and the ability to print only what's needed as needed, as all factors contributing to the company's success.

"With traditional printing, it can be weeks just before the dies are cut and the plates are ready," he elaborates. "But with our digital capabilities, a client can come to us with their art file and have the finished product back to them that day, if that's what they need."

By using digital for some customers, Centrix has been able to produce some projects that simply were not budget-feasible with offset. One client, for instance, needed only 40 corrugated pallet wraps for its specialty wines. Centrix printed and assembled large two-piece boxes with full coverage graphics that featured an antique look. "That's the kind of thing smaller companies just couldn't afford to do before – and we can make decent money, too," he notes.

A sporting-goods manufacturer employed Centrix's digital capabilities for a sales presentation it was making to one of the nation's largest retail chains. "The retailer wants to see an actual sample of the packaging and how it would look on store shelves. It had to emulate the real thing," explains Miller. Utilizing the client's design files, Centrix printed and delivered 10 mockups, 10 more of a revised design two weeks later, then 10 of the final design used in the actual sales pitch.

Another example of the shop's digital work: Centrix now provides affordable multicolor packaging for handmade soap produced by the sisters of Benedictine Monastery in Atchison, Kansas. It's printed on mottled white paperboard in manageable quantities. "They only have to buy a couple hundred at a time instead of 5000 or 10,000," notes Miller. "And, we can turn them around pretty quickly, so they order only what they need to fill orders."



*Above: Create-It Packaging printed this flexible bag onto 2-mm OPP, then die-cut, formed, filled, and sealed. Cover: Create-It's Bobble project was output onto pressure-sensitive vinyl, mounted to a specified material, die-cut, glued, and fully assembled.*