

# Case Study

production

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## Graphic Partners

The RICOH Pro C9100 Helps Graphic Partners Move Its Business Forward



*"We quickly recognized that the RICOH Pro C9100 would give us the ability to expand into B2C applications at an attractive price point. Due to its longer sheet size, auto duplexing and variable print capabilities, we can print banners, two-sided signs and point-of-purchase displays—all of which provides us a competitive edge in the B2C market."*

—Kirk Larsen,  
Partner,  
Graphic Partners



### ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

Located in Zion, Illinois, Graphic Partners has delivered quality printing products and services for over 100 years. From its roots as Zion Printing and Publishing, an office supply, office furniture and printing company, the organization is now a full-service commercial printer, and changed its name several decades ago to Graphic Partners. What hasn't changed over the years is the company's mission to provide customer-focused service and innovative solutions.

What has changed are customer expectations on how they want information to flow. Today, technology expectations are at an all-time high, from campaigns that include personalized URLs and image personalization to requirements for an automated digital workflow. Additionally, expectations for higher quality print for less—less time and less cost—have upped the game as well.

Graphic Partners recognized that in answering those customer demands it could differentiate itself from the competition by offering much more than a "one size fits all" approach. As more and more requests came in for print-on-demand jobs of all shapes and sizes, the company began to look for technology that could move them in the direction they wanted to go.

### CHALLENGE

"The printing business is highly competitive so we are always looking for ways to stand out," said Kirk Larsen, one of four partners at Graphic Partners. "While we have been primarily a B2B company, we wanted to venture into B2C applications so we invested in a web-to-print solution to extend our reach and gain more exposure in retail markets.

#### CHALLENGE

- Differentiate company from the competition with expanded options
- Make the move into B2C applications
- The ability to print specialized applications

#### SOLUTION

- The RICOH Pro C9100 Color Production Printer
- A digital solution that accommodates longer sheet size and auto duplexing
- The ability to print on a variety of substrates and thicker stocks

#### RESULTS

- New applications to print using longer sheet and auto duplexing
- Producing successful POP solutions for a large retailer
- Unique packaging applications on new substrates to capture more business

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In that same timeframe, we also acquired assets from another printing company that decided to close shop and the owner of the company joined our sales force. With her came a Konica Minolta Bizhub system and the ability to print small color runs at an attractive price point. That started changing the game for us.”

While Graphic Partners already had two other digital presses on its floor, the company soon saw how quickly its sales people embraced the nimble digital capabilities of the acquired machine, doubling its clicks in just the first month. The smaller printing system offered pleasing color capabilities at a lower cost and meant the sales force would not have to lose cost-sensitive short-run business that cost more to run on the other two digital presses.

However, as the demand for complex variable data applications kept growing, so did the need for a wider range of capabilities. None of the three digital presses the company had in operation could produce the cost-effective, specialized applications Graphic Partners wanted to offer.

“Seeking more ways to expand our business led us to look at what other equipment might be out in the market,” said Larsen. “While several manufacturers could accommodate the longer sheet size we wanted, another requirement for us was the ability to auto duplex. This led us to take a close look at the RICOH Pro C9100. Not only could the Ricoh digital press deliver on those two features, it also offered the capability to print on thicker substrates. We immediately saw the opportunity to have the type of performance that would allow us to produce more creative products—products that would differentiate us from other companies in our space.”

### SOLUTION

Graphic Partners chose the RICOH Pro C9100 color production printer for its ability to produce a wider range of high quality digital output that met the company's goal to expand its business. With its ability to create personalized campaigns using variable data printing, customize each job with a wide range of substrates and create automated workflows that minimize prep work for more affordable printing, once Graphic Partners installed the RICOH Pro C9100 it immediately began to take advantage of all these features to expand both creativity and revenue.



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“We quickly recognized that the Pro C9100 would make it possible to produce B2C applications at an attractive price point. Due to its longer sheet size, auto duplexing and variable print capabilities, we can print banners, two-sided signs and point-of-purchase displays—all of which provide us a competitive edge in the B2C market,” said Larsen. “We are also looking at other unique products in the B2C market we couldn’t do before since we can now print on so many different types of substrates, like metallic, coated, transparent and other synthetics.” These advanced capabilities made it possible to support Graphic Partners’ growing B2C portfolio.

With the high performance and high quality output of the machine, Graphic Partners is able to move many of the applications it was running on its offset presses to the Pro C9100. Offering exceptional image quality with its 1200 x 4800 dpi resolution, the ability to move offset jobs to the Pro C9100 drives many advantages for Graphic Partners, such as faster time-to-market, more diverse runs and near offset quality at an affordable price—expanding their business and dramatically improving their bottom line.

“We want to offer every idea we can to customers that will move their business forward. We like to say we can deliver a big impact for less, and having the RICOH Pro C9100 as part of our technology infrastructure is helping us do that.”

The ease of use on the Pro C9100 has been equally as positive. Operators like the fact they can access critical information quickly with the ability to see print details and make adjustments from a raised color control panel that features animated guides and fingertip control. Additionally, with Ricoh’s TCRU (Trained Customer Replaceable Units) program, key components such as drums, rollers, fuser cleaners and more can be swapped out in only moments without technical assistance, taking the stress out of meeting critical deadlines.

“The Pro C9100 fills a niche for us in many ways. For example, there is a brochure we print for a customer that is a 12” x 27” piece and it normally runs on our offset press. We got a call at 4:00 pm one afternoon that they ran out of them. The company was changing the look and feel of the brochure and needed the new copies to share this information at a meeting the next day. It was a perfect fit for the Ricoh—in fact, they ran in the morning and were on their way to meeting the deadline of noon that day—with a color match that was quite comparable to offset that impressed us all,” said Larsen.

### RESULTS

Graphic Partners’ goal to find new business opportunities involved looking for different avenues to deliver information and products that are meaningful to customers and meet their growing requirements. Having the Pro C9100 on the floor is allowing the company to stretch its creativity when it comes to producing unique applications aligned with customers’ smaller budgets, while still garnering more opportunity and revenue for the company.

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“The biggest thing about customers across the board today is that everyone is working with fewer resources now and wearing more hats. So we want to offer creative ideas that will move their business forward. We like to say ‘Graphic Partners delivers a big impact for less’ and having the Pro C9100 as part of our technology infrastructure is helping us do that,” said Larsen.

Ideas flowing for new products that the Pro C9100 can produce include annuity printing like medical labels and shelf tags for retail. The company’s focus on delivering solutions to the retail industry resulted in capturing the business of a large beverage retailer with 32 locations in the Chicago area. Along with printing their shelf tags and some traditional point-of-purchase displays, Graphic Partners is taking advantage of the Pro C9100’s 13” x 27” size to create different prototypes to spark the retailer’s interest in doing more business with them.

“This retailer prints a lot of their materials internally on smaller equipment, so we are working on developing ideas for them that can only be accomplished on the Pro C9100. In the retail world, it is critical to be efficient and deliver in a timely manner. With the speed of the Pro C9100, meeting that requirement is easy, but its capability to handle special substrates also allows us to be more creative.”

Creative options in the hopper include the ability to produce six pages of two-sided variable data applications and colorful postcards for personalized direct mail that are unique and attract attention. Other “outside the box” thinking includes creating short run packaging applications that can be personalized, capitalizing on trends like the craft beer craze or unique parting gifts for weddings.

“We love that this machine allows us to create more sophisticated options,” said Larsen. “For example, we can realistically produce a personalized four or six-pack container to be used in a number of ways—but our opportunities are bigger than just that one piece. What we can offer to a customer now is a variety of applications customized to promote their brand, from coasters to personalized packaging to items we can run in-sync on offset to create a full brand package. The Pro C9100 allows us to create a host of different types of products that help them promote their businesses. And our reward is more business if their businesses are doing well. At the end of the day, for all of us at Graphic Partners, that is simply what it’s all about.”

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