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The ‘Ripple Effect’: Johnson/Anderson reaps multiple benefits from ink on-demand with GFI dispensers

Gurnee, IL – May 21, 2015 – Get the colors right and keep the presses running. It leads to happy customers, a growing business with a healthy bottom line, and it’s what every shop strives for, every day.

Johnson/Anderson & Associates (J/A), Shakopee, MN, has honed its operation to deliver on both ends. J/A prints envelopes of all types and sizes up to 6 colors, with runs from 2500 to more than 8 million, for local customers and major marketers from coast to coast. Part of their success stems from streamlining workflow, saving time, dollars and hassles, eliminating ink waste – even clearing once-cluttered floor space – while creating dead-on accurate spot colors with in-house ink dispensing technology from GFI Innovations.

“Getting the exact color ink you need when you need it is critical for pleasing customers, maintaining press schedules and coping with 11th-hour changes or rush jobs that inevitably occur,” says Phil Huxhold, J/A production manager. “Central Ink Company (CIC, in Minneapolis) serves us well; but short lead times sometimes forced us to keep presses on-hold until ink arrived. Being able to prep spot colors in-house using GFI dispensers changed all that, while helping us gain additional pressroom efficiencies.”

It started with installation of a GFI Mx6 computer-driven paste ink dispenser in 2009. The pace picked up considerably a year ago, when J/A added a GFI AccuBlend-LV to the flexo side of its operation.

Brand-specific colors in 2-3 minutes with AccuBlend-LV water flexo dispenser

“Put a bucket in – program the color – stand back and watch,” says production assistant Deb Hara. AccuBlend-LV speed, ease and dead-on color accuracy has been a godsend for several reasons.



“Often we don’t get color requests from converting for flexo runs until they’re nearly ready to go to press. I order all of our ink and was constantly having to ask Central (CIC) for rush deliveries. Now we can mix whatever we need at the time we need it. I can make a 5-gallon ‘kit’ in 2 or 3 minutes.”

Quick prep is usually the order of the day at J/A, whether serving small customers or mega-brands. Hara and production supervisor Dale Hunter peg the average batch size at about 4-1/2 gallons of ink. For longer runs, particularly jobs requiring a lot of color coverage, they order the bulk from CIC. If they project, for example, needing 35 lbs., they’ll order a case (six 5-lb. kits = 30 lbs.) and make up the rest using the AccuBlend-LV.

“Matching the colors from CIC is no problem,” Hara asserts. “I keep a stock of 8 base colors and can make anything I need in short order. It’s a lot easier to keep 8 than about a thousand. Point is: now we never have to go on hold because of base colors.

“And, of course, we’re on-spec. Customers want their exact color; if it isn’t right, they’ll come back at you. We can, if they wish, even show them the formula on-screen.”

J/A’s GFI Mx6: less than an hour to make 17 different colors

Meanwhile, Hunter is in his sixth year of creating dead-on spot colors with J/A’s GFI Mx6 paste ink dispenser. It’s no secret that hand-mixing inks takes a lot longer, is far more tedious and – even for a veteran like Hunter – can be a bit iffy when trying to precisely match brand specs.

Press schedules can sometimes suffer, too. “We have a lot of presses and a lot of ink to mix, and there’s only so much you can do,” says Hunter. “If all of the hand-mixed colors weren’t ready, your press was down until they were.”

No such delays since the Mx6; the dispenser has cut mixing time in half. “I can set up the next job, because I’m not spending time mixing by hand.” More than that, he can process 17 different colors in less than an hour with the GFI unit – all on spec. Noting relatively small amounts needed for many runs, Hunter says “I mix 3 to 5 lbs. of colors



we use a lot, then replenish as needed. Sometimes I mix a small amount out of the can by hand (almost ‘for old times sake’); but the vast majority comes out of the GFI machine.

“Anything over 5 lbs., we get from Central. And if we need 2 or 3 lbs. to finish up a job, we make it here and get an exact color match, rather than overstock.”

Keeping presses running virtually nonstop; cutting setup by 20 minutes per job

A normal week keeps three J/A shifts going 24/5, “with quite a bit of work on Saturdays,” Hunter notes, as they deliver throughput with more than 15 machines.

J/A’s contingent includes seven high-speed Halm jet presses and three sheetfed (a 6-color Komori, 40-inch Heidelberg and a Ryobi for 2-color work). Envelope converting machines include three FL Smithe RA models, plus W&D (Winkler & Dunnebier) units: two high-speed 102s, a 527, and the latest addition, a W&D 249, which enables J/A to make its own 9”x12” envelopes, rather than ordering off-site and printing in-house.

And time is money. Hara notes that, before the AccuBlend-LV arrived on the flexo side, adjusters who were setting up presses for a run would have to stop in order to go mix their ink – then go back and finish press prep.

“Now they can just concentrate on setting up the machine – which probably saves about 20 minutes a job, on average.” Job after job, day after day, faster turnaround adds up to a hefty amount of “extra” productivity.

Three shifts also call for more than one ink-making guru, and about 30 minutes of training with GFI dispensers’ simple, intuitive touch-screen driven software is all it takes to turn just about anyone into a color technician. At least two J/A coworkers efficiently generate the right ink on either machine.

Bye-bye, leftover flexo ink inventory – Hello, floor space and inside tints

Most GFI customers recoup costly ink inventory by using AccuBlend technology to precisely process excess ink into new ink colors. J/A’s initial foray into inventory reduction has taken a different tack: “dumping together” leftover ink to create black.



“Any ink colors that don’t have red, we can combine to make black,” says Hara. “Many customers require inside tints on their envelopes, and this ink fills the bill. We do not use it to print the outside of envelopes. But ‘the new black’ is perfect for inside tints.”

In the process, J/A has recouped a considerable amount of floor space. “We don’t have a collection of miscellaneous colors sitting around anymore,” remarks Hara. “We removed at least one hundred 5-gallon buckets after we got the dispenser.”

Quick GFI tech assists, when and where needed

Still another plus with the AccuBlend-LV, asserts Hara, is direct on-line access to GFI Innovations tech specialists. “If something comes up, I can type to a tech over the unit. They’ll work me through any problem right there at the machine. It’s like instant chatting back-and-forth with GFI.

“It’s not a huge thing, but I’ve used it several times and it is a big help if the machine goes down and I need ink. Their response is very good; I’m not waiting all day.”

Brand-specific ink on demand: ‘We don’t have to wait anymore’

What is huge, everyone at J/A agrees, is being able to make exact-color ink when it’s needed, without overstocking. “Customers judge us by our ability to deliver their brand-specific printed material on time, every time,” sums up Huxhold. “GFI dispensers help us do precisely that.”

About GFI

GFI Innovations is a leading provider of precision formulation dispensing solutions used by printers of all types. GFI systems help printers favorably position themselves with their brand-owning customers, resulting in increased revenue. The systems also help printers save time and money by solving problems associated with delivering spot color inks to press. Whether dispensing, mixing or proofing, the systems automate those tasks to make print shops more efficient. For more information, visit www.GFlis.com or call (847) 263-9000.



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J/A production manager Phil Huxhold and production assistant Deb Hara with the firm's AccuBlend-LV water-flexo ink dispenser. While generating ink colors precisely to spec when and as needed, the dispenser has virtually eliminated press run delays and job switching, and reduced press prep time by about 20 minutes per job.

Now in his 6th year working with the GFI Mx6 paste ink dispenser, Johnson/Anderson production supervisor Dale Hunter can make 17 different colors in less than an hour – a far cry from tedious, time-consuming hand-mixed color prep. With ink mixing time cut by half, he can prep presses for the next run, shortening job turnaround time and boosting overall shop throughput.

