



Mercury Print Productions: Two Decades of Innovation with GFI Ink Dispensing



When Mercury Print Productions was the first to install GFI Innovation's OPL Series paste ink dispenser in 2004, the Rochester, NY-based company was already known for embracing innovation.

Founded in 1969 by Valerie Mannix as a family-run business in the basement of her home, Mercury had grown steadily through six facility expansions before consolidating into its current 400,000-square-foot headquarters on Innovation Way. But the step Mercury took 21 years ago in ink dispensing technology would not only transform its own pressroom, it would also mark a milestone for the entire industry.

"We were the very first printing company to put one of these dispensers on the floor," recalls longtime pressroom manager Joe Del Vecchio, who recently transitioned into semi-retirement after 31 years with Mercury. "At the time, we were doing a tremendous amount of Pantone® color mixes. Mixing by hand meant pulling inks, weighing them on a slab, and spending hours blending. It took a full-time technician. The dispenser changed all that."

Cover Images: Joe Del Vecchio, longtime pressroom manager at Mercury Print Productions, holds the original 2004 case study documenting Mercury as one of the first commercial printers to install a GFI automated ink dispenser. Next to him is Dean Hitchcock, Mercury's new offset press manager.



Pressroom veteran Joe Del Vecchio (center) with INX International Ink Company's John Hrdlick and Ed Hart during the original installation in 2004.



2004

The year Mercury Print Productions, one of the first commercial printers, installed a GFI automated ink dispenser.

Nearly 100%
accuracy
(± 0.002 lb.
tolerance)



Operators
reallocated to
higher-value tasks

"These machines have stood the test of time. After 21 years, they're still accurate, reliable, and saving us money."



88%

reduction in special ink
batch costs

A Pioneer in Automated Ink Dispensing

The first-generation OPL dispenser developed by GFI was originally a bold experiment. The concept of automated paste ink dispensing had been proven in liquid ink systems, but paste inks required new technology to handle their heavy viscosities.

Mercury, with its entrepreneurial roots, was willing to take the leap. "We wanted to see what it was all about," says Del Vecchio. "The idea of being able to plug in a formula, hit start, and let the machine do the work while our people focused on other valuable tasks, it was a no brainer."

Early on, there was skepticism. Operators questioned its accuracy and supervisors wondered about ROI. But the results spoke quickly. The first case study GFI published on Mercury back in 2004 documented an 88% reduction in special ink batch costs, a 75% cut in mixing time, and thousands of dollars saved in labor, cleanup, and wasted ink.

"The real turning point was realizing how accurate it was," Del Vecchio says. "We thought the original machine was good, but every generation since has gotten better. Today we're hitting tolerances down to two-thousandths of a pound, with nearly 100% accuracy. That's not something you can do by hand."

Efficiency, Accuracy and Operator Buy-In

Mercury has since upgraded to GFI's MX6 dispenser and continues to use it weekly. Though the company's business mix has shifted toward educational printing, which is longer-run web-printing work that often relies on vendor-supplied inks, the dispenser remains indispensable for spot colors, short-run specials, and urgent replenishment needs.

"One of the nicest benefits is that if we order 100 pounds of a color from the ink company, and halfway through the run we need another 10 or 15 pounds, we don't have to wait for delivery. We just make it ourselves. And it matches perfectly," Del Vecchio explains.

The technology also plays a role in operator training and workforce development. With today's labor challenges, most new hires arrive with little or no prior pressroom experience. "Anybody who comes in and sees the dispenser for the first time is impressed," says Del Vecchio. "It's easy to learn, it saves time, and it makes their job better. New operators with print experience always say, 'I wish we had one of these where I used to work.'"





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Garret Frederick uses the MX6 dispenser to prepare a job before it is printed on Mercury's eight-color Heidelberg 106 press.

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Reducing Waste, Reallocating People

Ink inventory management has been another area of impact. By mixing on demand, Mercury reduced the tendency to over-mix, cutting down on leftover cans of custom colors. "We still like to have a little extra so nobody is waiting, but it's far less than before," Del Vecchio says.

Equally important was how the system freed up staff. Instead of dedicating people to weigh, mix, and clean, helpers were reassigned to press prep and stock handling, improving overall productivity. "The dispenser gave us flexibility to use our people where they added the most value," Del Vecchio notes.

Dependable Support

Two decades later, Mercury's GFI dispenser is still going strong. Regular software updates and occasional remote troubleshooting from GFI's service team have kept it running smoothly. "I can send a help request right through the software, and usually someone is dialed in within minutes," says Del Vecchio. "That's a great benefit. You don't lose time."

Durability has also impressed him. "These machines have proven to be rock-solid over the years," he says. "We've replaced computers and upgraded software, but the core system just keeps going."

A Legacy of Innovation

Looking back, Del Vecchio takes pride in Mercury's pioneering role. "We jumped in early because we knew it would make us more efficient," he reflects. "For printers that are mixing a lot of special colors, I don't know how they operate without a GFI dispenser on the floor."

As Mercury continues to expand its educational printing niche and invest in web and digital technologies, the ink dispenser remains part of its DNA of innovation. From a basement startup to a state-of-the-art 400,000-square-foot facility, Mercury has always been willing to try something new.

"Being first with GFI wasn't just about ink," Del Vecchio says. "It was about proving that innovation and customer commitment go hand in hand. And after 20 years, it's still paying dividends."



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GFI Innovations +1-847-263-9000 GFIis.com
2940 Miller Dr., Plymouth, IN 46563