

# RT Associates

HP Indigo presses, along with lean manufacturing program, boost digital print quality, productivity



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—Bob Radzis, President, RT Associates

**HP customer case study:** RT Associates becomes world-class digital printer with HP Indigo presses

**Industry:** Printing/marketing

## **Objective:**

Bring offset quality and high-production workflow to digital printing tasks

## **Approach:**

RT Associates has moved its digital printing to HP Indigo 7000 Digital Presses with an HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server digital front end

## **IT improvements:**

- Faster RIP speeds
- Ability to process multiple-variable data jobs without compromising press productivity
- Expanded PANTONE® and PANTONE Goe color matching

## **Business benefits:**

- Faster press speed, longer-lasting consumables combine to double productivity
- Digital printing competitive at longer press runs, even for static jobs



RT Associates in suburban Chicago has embraced new technology throughout its quarter century in business. Today, it offers online media solutions and unique print capabilities to enable marketing outlets to maximize results. One of its core capabilities is high quality digital printing from two HP Indigo 7000 Digital Presses.

“Our Indigo digital print solutions provide vibrant color and offset-quality results,” notes Bob Radzis, President of RT Associates. “The uptime is great, the speed of the press and throughput are both excellent. And with a

## Customer solution at a glance

### Primary applications

Direct marketing and variable data printing

### Primary hardware

- HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press
- HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server

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### Technology creates opportunity

RT Associates has re-invented itself more than once to take advantage of technological trends. The company started out in 1982 as a typesetter and transformed itself into a digital printer some 10 years later. RT continuously strives to stay at the leading edge of digital print technology; and has, over the years, added online media solutions coupled with print to help enhance their clients’ marketing programs.

The company first invested in another brand of digital presses. But those presses didn’t offer “the same look and feel of offset,” says Radzis. “When one of our largest customers said they had a large project that required high-quality digital printing, we knew it was time to switch to Indigo presses.” The company also deployed an HP UV coater and HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server digital front end. The UV coater helps print materials stand up to the rigors of mailing and the SmartStream Production Pro Print Server helps eliminate RIP bottlenecks.

Even before the switch, Radzis had been on the HP digital print advisory board for two years. “I was the only one on the board without HP equipment,” he recalls. “I kept hearing how loyal all the other customers were, and seeing how HP was taking input from users. Now I see all that input reflected in the Indigo 7000 Digital Press, and it’s making a big difference.”

He says the HP Indigo 7000 Digital Press’ larger sheet size, longer blanket life and changes to the operator console, all reflected user input. For direct marketing projects, the larger image size (12.48 x 18.26 inches) means the difference between printing 6- x 9-inch postcards four-up, rather than three-up on a 13- x 19-inch sheet. “That change alone makes us more

competitive for work we might not have done until now,” Radzis says.

### New emphasis on total throughput

RT has also changed how jobs are driven to the press with an improved digital front end and workflow. “In the previous generation, the emphasis was short-run digital printing. You were building jobs a lot at the console,” he notes.

When HP came out with the Production Manager digital front end, Indigo production increased significantly, he continues. “Now, with the HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server, you have all the features you need to run a high-speed production environment. What HP is able to do as a computing company makes the front end far more powerful. The focus now is on total throughput.” The HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server also supports improved PANTONE color matching, with both four-color and six-color PANTONE emulation, even PANTONE and PANTONE Goe spot colors.

Variable print jobs with six or seven variables on a page once caused bottlenecks in production—particularly if the job included variable images. But Radzis says the HP SmartStream Production Pro Print Server can RIP the same jobs and have them in queue for the presses.

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When the Chicago Cubs finished the 2007 season as baseball’s winningest team, RT was chosen to print the postseason guide based on price and turnaround.

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Bob Radzis, President, RT Associates



When some of the data was delayed, RT had to print and bind the guide overnight. It met the deadline easily.

“For most printers, digital print jobs are all rush,” Radzis notes. “But with the right systems in place, everything just flows through. Fast doesn’t have to mean rush.”

He notes the digital print process at RT Associates now includes a Job Definition Format (JDF)-driven workflow and includes a total bindery line. RT Associates has also developed a web-to-print front end for customers to submit jobs. When jobs enter the workflow via the company’s web-to-print workflow, software automatically routes the work to the print server, then the presses and bindery, builds the invoice and determines shipping information, all summarized on a one-page job ticket.

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The company has eight Fortune 500 companies submitting work using the web-to-print workflow, most doing straight variable data print jobs to support direct

marketing programs. Variable data printing accounts for roughly three-quarters of RT’s 5 to 6 million impressions produced each month on HP Indigo presses. Radzis says the company is capable of doing 10 million impressions.

#### **Lean manufacturing**

For many printers, that might be ambitious, but Radzis is confident RT Associates can implement the lean manufacturing processes successfully. The company brought in a consultant to facilitate meetings designed to re-engineer the company to maximize production. But it’s the employees, Radzis notes, who contribute the ideas.

“With employee input, we broke down the business in three days and cleaned up the office procedures. The next month, we went into the bindery and re-arranged equipment for more efficient throughput. It’s the first business improvement plan that we actually have implemented with positive results,” Radzis acknowledges. “We hope to continue achieving 2 to 4 percent improvement per month. We’ll be able to do significantly more work as a result of this process, while maintaining our pricing and our quality.”

HP Indigo 7000 Digital Presses have twice the throughput of the digital presses RT replaced, thanks to longer-lasting blankets, higher print speeds and fewer ink changes. But that alone didn’t double production,



Radzis notes. "It took re-organizing the shop to make the most of the potential gains." That includes a bindery operation to support the Indigo presses that includes a cutter, creaser and folder all supported by a JDF-protocol in-line connection.

"Even when we're really busy, we know we can keep up. The paper is staged right behind the press, the files are ready to load, and then we have a press that runs twice as fast. It all adds up."

Making the most of potential gains also meant re-evaluating existing investments. RT recently shut down and eliminated its Heidelberg QMDI offset direct-to-press workflow, which had been used for static print runs of 3,000 to 5,000 impressions. "Now those jobs get pushed to the Indigo 7000 Digital Press, or up to

our larger offset press," Radzis says. "On the QMDI, it took 12 minutes to image the plates, and with make-ready included, it would take a half hour to get into production. For jobs that were 4/4, make-ready was a full hour. The Indigo 7000 Digital Press can print 3,000 sheets in that same hour."

Looking ahead, Radzis is planning to expand the company's web-to-print front end with online templates for marketing programs "so that we're driving our own destiny," he notes. RT has developed [www.GR8print.com](http://www.GR8print.com), a site where users can go online, take a template and develop a marketing brochure at low cost that will be printed by the next day. "With that kind of product, we'll never be fully dependent on a commodity-type price per piece model. And the Indigo presses are the key to making that happen."

To learn more, visit [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)

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