



PCI Group: Joining the Inkjet Revolution



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BACKGROUND

Since its founding in 1970 as a family-owned and operated company, PCI Group has remained at the forefront of the document delivery industry. Recognized as industry innovators with an understanding of cutting-edge technologies, the Fort Mill, South Carolina-based company provides secure, fast and cost-effective compliant outbound document delivery, communications processing services and electronic and paper bills. Specializing in regulated industries that include collection agencies, financial institutions, insurance companies and others, the need to meet mission-critical communications requirements is of the utmost importance to PCI Group’s success. Attesting to its commitment to data security, PCI Group is also SOC I, SOC II Type II, PCI DSS, HIPAA and FISMA compliant.

CHALLENGE

Over the course of its history, PCI Group has adapted to an ever-changing business climate. In its first 20 years as a company, it focused primarily on data entry and creating large scale databases, and found success throughout the marketplace with technical expertise and an ability to turn large, low-bid projects into intricate applications. Yet as demands and trends shifted, so too did PCI Group’s mission. Interested in expanding the business and its offerings, PCI Group President, Christian Kropac, sought out the mailing industry as the company’s next pursuit.

“We performed data entry and created databases containing millions of address records, but as the industry evolved, it seemed the logical next step for us was to pursue the mailing industry,” comments Kropac. “Of course the transition from the data entry world to the mailing business was one that took time, but we knew the opportunities were endless.”

With that transition came the need for an investment in a more robust in-house printing fleet. To compete fully in the direct mail space, PCI Group understood the need to invest in technologies that could match the demands associated with critical document delivery and the security of data. As Kropac notes, “What is actually printed on the piece of paper is much more valuable than the piece of paper itself — in our world a mistake costs thousands of dollars to rectify.”



Christian Kropac, president, PCI Group

PCI Group's expansion into direct mail hit some barriers along the way, particularly with the market crash in 2008 that had a negative and resonating impact on the industry as a whole. "After making it through the challenging market crash, we knew our next step was to get involved with the emerging technologies for full color printing. I knew inkjet was the wave of the future. The market was moving to communications that were more personalized and full-color," says Kropac.

PCI Group's customers, however, didn't always see the underlying value of color — and they are very cost conscious. At that time, the only full color solution was toner based, which was very costly. According to Kropac, inkjet technology "wasn't quite there yet, and although it was cheaper, it didn't have the required quality. Our customers convey quality, but want it at a fair price. Even still, we knew the future of print was inkjet and that its time was right around the corner."

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SOLUTION

In 2015, a contract in set PCI Group up for exponential growth. The company itself grew from 80 employees June 2015 to 240 by October of the same year. The company used this contract to dive into the world of inkjet by installing two Canon Solutions America Océ JetStreams. The first Océ JetStream was installed in June 2015, and it immediately created enhancements in PCI Group's uptime and efficiency. The second one followed in October as demand increased. By November 2015, PCI Group worked with Canon Solutions America's Production Print Solutions division to upgrade its print fleet to include the Canon Solutions America Océ ColorStream 3900 and Océ VarioPrint i300.

"Our decision to go to inkjet was based off a number of things, but most importantly we knew the inkjet revolution was going to redefine the industry when it became cost effective and when the quality significantly improved," says Kropac. "Essentially we went from a toner based, roll-to-fold environment, to a full color roll-to-roll world in two months, and haven't looked back since. In our toner-based world we typically had to offset print the letter shells and print in black toner, thus limiting the offering and flexibility to our clients. In our new inkjet world, all backgrounds are printed full color on the fly at the same time as letter copy — suffice to say, our offerings are now unlimited to our valued customers."



RESULTS

According to PCI Group, in the three months following the installations of both the Océ ColorStream 3900 and Océ VarioPrint i300, the company went from printing 250 million to 1.3 billion sheets of paper a year. Less than a year later, PCI Group is now printing close to two million pieces of paper a day on the Océ ColorStream 3900, while producing nearly 1.2 million pieces of mail each day — an astounding increase from the 400,000 pieces of mail it was producing before its most recent inkjet installations.

Supporting everything from reprints and small jobs to high volume requests and complex applications, while providing outstanding flexibility and uptime, the Océ VarioPrint i300 and Océ ColorStream 3900 are an integral part of PCI Group's transformation from data entry business to full-fledged direct mail leader. It took three to four months to move all the work from four toner machines to the one i300 press. "The technology is very reliable," Kropac says. "We're seeing uptime in the high 90s for the i300."

"Before the Océ VarioPrint i300 we still had to print backgrounds and maintain a cutsheet inventory of these items," says Kropac. "After the installation of the new production printing press, we now just stock white paper and all cutsheet backgrounds are printed on the fly — a tremendous inventory savings."

For some of PCI Group's clients, however, convincing them to print full-color transactional documents was still an uphill battle. Their marketing efforts to their customers, though, are

gaining traction. “We are providing a marketing campaign that shows active tests, active jobs we’re currently running,” says Kropac. “In one instance, a full-color job had 33% more response than the same black-only campaign.”

The inkjet technology allowed PCI Group to offer full-color output to all of its clients in a very cost-effective way. “We are able to offer full color inkjet for half the price of traditional full color toner,” says Kropac. Even for the black-only work, PCI Group found substantial cost savings with the inkjet equipment over the toner.

PCI Group has been working closely with Canon Solutions America to differentiate itself even further by offering MICR. “We are the third company in the U.S. to be able to provide MICR on the i300. This is a brand new part of the business, and Canon has really done a great job with the MICR,” says Kropac.

PCI Group’s transition from black toner print to full color inkjet was one that was supported from inception to completion by Canon Solutions America. “From a color management perspective, Canon Solutions America was (and remains) a true leader and understood what we needed to do to be successful,” says Kropac. “They really stressed the importance of color management and the training of our staff — even insisting that we send our operators to the appropriate classes. While we didn’t realize it at first, this was a key factor that allowed us to adapt to, and become successful with, full color inkjet production in a short amount of time.

“The inkjet revolution is as alive as it’s ever been,” adds Kropac.

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