

The 'Print Buyer Drupa'



WARNING! I am about to get on my soapbox!

Having recently returned from Drupa, where the printing industry gathers for its global Olympics every four years, I had a strange sort of déjà vu (or premonition) type of experience.

Remember 1984? Not the book, but the year Apple stormed the world with the breakthrough Macintosh and its PostScript printer? Desktop publishing heralded disruptive change for the printing industry and started a shift that has turned into a virtual avalanche today. The avalanche gained steam

as the Internet became ubiquitous through the 1990s.

While we can blame the economic downturn at the beginning of this century for some of our industry's woes, it is generally agreed that the Internet took desktop publishing to the next level, putting even more power in the hands of the content owners, and moving capability and control upstream.

Show and Tell, Then Sell

Drupa, more than any other show, is about trends more than it is about products. Suppliers to the industry take advantage of this global

gathering to show their wares, but, perhaps even more importantly, to talk about their strategies for the future. This Drupa was no exception. And, in fact, it was perhaps more so with the expanded Drupa "innovation parc" that featured more than 100 companies, many of whom were small and would otherwise have been unable to participate in this costly two-week event.

A speaker at one of the press conferences mentioned that 2000 was considered the digital Drupa; 2004 was considered the workflow Drupa; and 2008 was indeed the ink-jet Drupa. Of course, this supplier was unveiling some significant ink-jet announcements, so there may have been some bias! But if you think about it, from a trends perspective, 1995 was the digital Drupa. That's when production color digital devices really began to gain steam; by 2000, digital was already here.

The same with workflow—2000 was the year that saw the birth of CIP4 (albeit in September, after Drupa was long over) and the beginning of the development of JDF. This was driven in part by the increasing number of workflow products coming into the market (and being shown at Drupa), none of which could effectively talk to each other. So, it would be reasonable to tag Drupa 2000 as the workflow Drupa, where important workflow trends were starting to emerge.

By 2004, we were seeing significant advances in ink-jet on a number of fronts, not the least of which was Kodak's very high speed Versamark ink-jet production press. Perhaps from a trends perspective, we should think of Drupa 2004 as the ink-jet Drupa.

So where does that leave Drupa 2008? And what does that have to do with 1984? In addition to the expansion of the Drupa innovation parc in 2008, the show organizers also invested significant dollars in attracting print buyers and specifiers to this exhibition. In fact, they even built a separate, two-story building, the DrupaCube, to host

these new attendees, including agency staff, designers and corporate marketing folks. The first floor was set up in a club-like environment, with displays of ways that major brands are effectively using print as part of their communications mix, while upstairs featured a series of educational seminars presented by industry experts.

In this first year, the focus was largely on German print buyer attendees, as the show company believed it would be difficult to convince this constituency to travel long distances for the educational opportunities offered by Drupa-

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Cube and accompanying customized tours of the fairgrounds.

But, by all accounts, DrupaCube was a success, and it is likely the show company will expand that effort in 2012. In addition, Drupa innovation parc had an entire section devoted to software designed for use by print buyers and specifiers.

With this in mind, I think we should be calling this the print buyer Drupa. It signals another major shift for our industry. With 1984 and the 1990s still somewhat fresh in our memories, and a clear view of the impact of many firms in our industry failing to recognize their significance, I wonder if we are in for a repeat, or alternatively, whether as an industry we will rise to the challenge in a timely fashion this time.

Let me give you an example. A small German company, Mehrkanal, was showing one of the most interesting applications I saw in the Drupa innovation parc. Called BISON, it stands for Brand Integrating System Online. The demo example featured a chain of franchise hair salons called StudioCUT.

In the background, the franchisor had provided a range of templates for various types of ads and marketing campaigns that could be

used by the franchisor. This benefits both parties, since the franchisor—the brand owner—can control the messaging, look and feel, and content of materials used to market its brand. The franchisee has access to effective, professionally designed marketing materials that can be customized and deployed with the click of the mouse in a few short minutes.

Innovative Applications

Of course, online Web banners, e-mails and a printed direct mail campaign were among the choices, but the application also manages content to be used for point-of-sale materials, mobile communications and ads on the franchisee's Website, newspapers and television. The franchisee simply logs in, selects the campaign and a haircut price, and is presented with a selection of advertising mechanisms. This has taken less than 30 seconds at this point.

For each of the eight communications options offered, only three of which are print, the franchisee has the ability to test the campaign. If he or she selects an SMS or e-mail campaign, a test message can be sent to the franchisee's phone or e-mail box. For printed pieces, a PDF proof is available. Television ads are shown online, and can even be converted to Flash to be shown on monitors in the shop. Once the selection of ads is complete, lists are uploaded as appropriate—and that is it.

Fast. Simple. Painless. Fun! And, yes, the printer will be delivering the printed communications. But keep in mind that up to this point in the process, the printer has had no involvement. Mehrkanal collaborated with the franchisor to design and load all the materials and customize the site. The printer, however he or she is chosen, gets a PDF to print and mail or ship.

Since there is so little value-add on the part of the printer, you can be assured that, behind the scenes, there have been tough price negotiations, because the marketer will consider—rightly so—that the output is simple commodity printing, and that anyone should be able to handle this job.

This example barely scratches the surface of what is coming at us as an industry. I was told more than once by these innovative, fresh companies in the print buyer section of the Drupa innovation parc that they were inspired to develop their print buyer-oriented solutions because printers were too slow in adopting Web-to-print and multi-

channel communications. While we do expect Web-to-print adoption rates to climb steeply over the next couple of years, applications like BISON are much more than Web-to-print, and their sizzle and ease of use may make "Web-to-print" a category quickly obsolete in the minds of marketers.

What messages will you take

from the "print buyer" Drupa? What will you do to ensure the future of a strong and profitable business? Now is the time to give these questions serious thought.

If you think 1984 heralded disruptive change for the printing industry, I think it is safe to say: "You ain't seen nothin' yet!" **PI**

—CARY SHERBURNE

About the Author

Cary Sherburne is a well-known journalist, author and strategic marketing consultant working primarily with the printing and publishing industry. She is a frequent speaker at industry events, a regular contributor to printing industry publications and has written three books, which are available for purchase through the Bookstore section on PRINTING IMPRESSIONS' Website (www.piworld.com). Sherburne can be contacted at Cary@SherburneAssociates.com.