



Case Study



Sandy Alexander Prints Consistent Color on both Digital and Offset presses with Alwan

Challenge

«We recognized some years back that in order to efficiently achieve the color quality our clients were looking for we had to print to standards and we had to work with color management tools,» states Gregory Hill, Manager of Prepress Systems At Sandy Alexander.

“Today, most printers know that ICC profiles are beneficial when you have different printing processes (like offset lithography and digital) and print on a variety of substrates. I like to describe the two problems printers face as “source” and “destination”.»



Profile

Everything in the way of campaign - related printing from digital to wide & grand format and everything in-between. Being platform agnostic, Sandy Alexander will print the most impactful marketing piece in the most environmentally efficient manner possible regardless of size, quantity or substrate.



3 HP Indigo
Offset sheet fed and
full web
8-color Heidelberg



ColorHub

Source problems

«Printers today are challenged by being supplied with PDF Files from graphic designers who are using the defaults settings for color management», states Hill. (The default profile in Adobe Photoshop is SWOP US Web Coated Profile.) «SWOP is a profile that was generated years ago for printing publications. We’re not printing publications. We’re printing different products on offset and digital presses using coated and uncoated stock, along with vinyl and mesh. But, probably 75% of the files we get (“source”) comes in with that default color profile because graphic designers don’t understand color management.»

Destination problems

«GRACoL was created for offset lithography. It wasn’t created for a digital press,» continues Hill. «For example, we have HP Indigo digital presses here at Sandy Alexander. The magenta ink on the HP Indigo press is not the same color as magenta process ink on a lithographic press that meets G7 specifications and that would be used for GRACoL. Even when printing offset, the cyan ink on a litho press looks darker and redder on an uncoated stock than on a coated stock. The “destination” information, more times than not, is based on a custom ICC profile». Sandy Alexander recognized that in order to efficiently satisfy the color demands of its clients, they had to work to specific printing standards with color management tools and ICC profiles. What Sandy Alexander needed was an automated way to resolve this problem of “source” and “destination”.



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Solution

«If we were printing a billboard of a red car in our wide format division and a companion piece in the litho department, we needed those colors to match,» Hill said. «The ability to automate all of this is what Alwan ColorHub brought to the table. Think of it as a piece of magic that allows you to match color if it goes from a grand format digital press that prints on a rigid substrate or uses an inkjet process on a digital wide format device printing on a roll of vinyl for signage. ColorHub is the means for letting ICC profiles talk the same language to a multitude of devices.»
“To work with a PDF file with color management tools can be rather difficult. But, with the Alwan product it’s really quite simple. It handles color management for PDF files. What is unique is that we’re able to control images and line work independently from one another. When a client provides a PDF file, we may want to handle the type one way, and the images a different way. We can do that with Alwan ColorHub.»

«Another very big benefit is the ability to control the black channel. In offset litho printing particularly, and also in digital printing, the control of the black channel is supremely important. Alwan ColorHub has an elegant control for black generation and gray component replacement (GCR).»

Results

Let’s go back to the original problem of “source” and “destination”. «I’ve got source information now and destination information and I’m adjusting from one to the other,» comments Hill. «I can take that sub-standard SWOP file that comes in and turn it around and make it suitable for a variety of different output conditions. For example, this morning, I’m working on a women’s clothing catalog. This particular clothing catalog is going to be printed litho. The images have grayish neutral backgrounds. But, of course, the models that are wearing the clothes, have skin tones that have to be taken into consideration. The ability to control the black generation differently in the skin tone areas versus the neutral backgrounds is, typically, extremely difficult to do. Alwan ColorHub makes it easy.

«The approach here at Sandy Alexander has always been to satisfy a client in both quality and service. The turnaround time is really quick in the commercial printing world right now. I think that in commercial printing it’s almost like newspapers use to be. The job comes in at night and it’s got to be out the next morning. Years ago, we used to have days to get things done. Today, the turnaround is often overnight. If I have 64 pages that need to be turnaround very quickly we’re able to actually assemble the job, have it all ready to go, and then an operator drops it in a ColorHub hot folder and it just eats it right up. It chews right through it. From a speed standpoint it’s terrific because we’re able to turn things around very quickly in a way that we would never be able to do if we had to handle it manually.»