

# Printware

## Falls Cities Printing

### Streamlines Bank Form Printing with CTP



Falls Cities Printing replaced a room full of platemaking equipment with a PlateStream Platemaker

Few would suspect that the converted car dealership in this small Indiana town houses one of the country's leading bank forms printers. But [Falls Cities Printing](#) of New Albany, Ind., competes effectively with some of the country's largest printers to become a leading printer of deposit slips, counter checks, cash-out tickets and other documents. Its forms are sold to banks through brokers and other intermediaries.

Falls Cities owner Phillip "Mick" Alles attributes their success to his flexible, small-format web presses and a state-of-the-art computer-to-plate (CTP) workflow. CTP has dramatically changed their business by shortening their turnaround and cutting their costs.

Falls Cities has two Didde web presses which combine high speed with the flexibility of small format. The plant runs 75 to 100 plates per day, with run lengths ranging from several hundred to tens of thousands of impressions. Although most of their work is single color, with the critical tolerances of the magnetic characters (MICR) on most of their work, accuracy is critical.

Ten percent of their orders are received electronically on disk, most of the rest are composed by Falls Cities. When an order comes in, the form is composed in PageMaker, usually customized from their extensive library of standard forms. Prior to

CTP, Falls Cities would typically output the form onto RC paper with a filmsetter, create the 12-up flat on a step and repeat board, burn a metal plate from the resultant film, then punch the plate. The artwork had to be archived as a large portion of their work is repeats.

### **Selecting the CTP System**

An experienced pressman, Alles readily admits computers are not his forte. But he realized that to compete with the big boys, Falls Cities needed to automate imposition, platemaking, and punching. Unfortunately, it seemed the automation features Alles envisioned were only available on expensive, large-format machines which used expensive metal plates. While there were a plethora of large format platesetters, Alles was convinced small format was the best option. Small format required less capital investment in platesetters and presses, and provided more flexibility, especially for shorter runs. He also recognized the large potential savings possible with silver-halide polyester plates rather than metal plates. As luck would have it, in late 1997, graphic arts dealer Bluegrass Graphic Supply in Louisville, Ky., had just received a new Printware PlateStream silver-halide platesetter. Unlike other small-format platesetters, the PlateStream automatically punched and cut plates to length. Printware's below market factory lease program made the machine surprisingly affordable. In early 1998, the platesetter was delivered. The CTP system was up and running within a week of installation, and in less than three months, Falls Cities was virtually 100% CTP.

With the CTP process, the PageMaker file is printed directly to the platesetter. The platesetter images, processes, cuts, and punches the plate. The imposed files are archived instead of archiving artwork. Their film imager now sits idle in a corner of the prepress area, testament to the completeness of their transition to CTP.

### **A Smooth Transition to CTP**

The transition to CTP went more smoothly than Alles had anticipated, but it was not without problems. One early problem was a shortage of narrow-format digital plates in the quantities Falls Cities needed them. Distributor Bluegrass is now stocking the material, and the rapid rise of small-format silver-halide platesetters has plate vendors ramping up production and distributors increasing stocks. Alles considers this "chicken and egg" problem part of being a pioneer. Finally, press gain differences between metal and silver-halide plates required changing inks and press settings to preserve the critical MICR character weight.

### **A Number of Benefits From CTP**

Falls Cities realized four major benefits by adopting CTP: faster press make-ready, shorter turnaround time, lower costs, and less storage space.

*Faster press make-ready*—With the PlateStream, the plates are precisely cut and punched by the machine, so they roll up in register immediately. After trying different silver-halide materials, Falls Cities settled on Mitsubishi Silver DigiPlate. Although it isn't one of the manufacturer's recommendations, they mount the plates dry without conversion, and find they quickly reach ink-water balance. Alles notes that with faster

make-ready, they've cut paper waste in half and saved press labor.

*Shorter turnaround*—By eliminating paste-up, stepping, and other manual steps, Falls Cities has been able to cut a full day off of their order turnaround with the more efficient workflow. In a business where turnaround is critical, their goal is to cut another day as they continue to optimize their CTP workflow to bring their turnaround time down to three days.

*Cost savings*—The combination of eliminating film and changing from metal to polyester plates has dramatically reduced Falls Cities' supplies costs. They've also been able to reduce plant labor by about 15%.

*Less storage space*—By archiving electronic files instead of artwork and mechanicals, Falls Cities has reduced their storage space requirements while cutting the cost and time to do repeats.

Summarizing his experience, owner Alles has no regrets: "We've been able to cut our costs, and shorten our turnaround time. We couldn't have done that without CTP. No serious printer can afford not to have computer-to-plate in this day and age."

### **What's Next?**

So what's next for Falls Cities Printing? Although the overall bank forms market is flat, Falls Cities' growing market share has them looking at adding another press line. And Alles is thinking of trying his hand at short-run commercial printing with his highly-automated small-format operation. Given his success in forms, the competition had better watch out.

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For more information on **Falls Cities Printing**, call 812-949-9051, or visit [www.fallscities.com](http://www.fallscities.com).