

Beyond the Click

Production print demands a different sales strategy

by: German Sacristan, Keypoint Intelligence

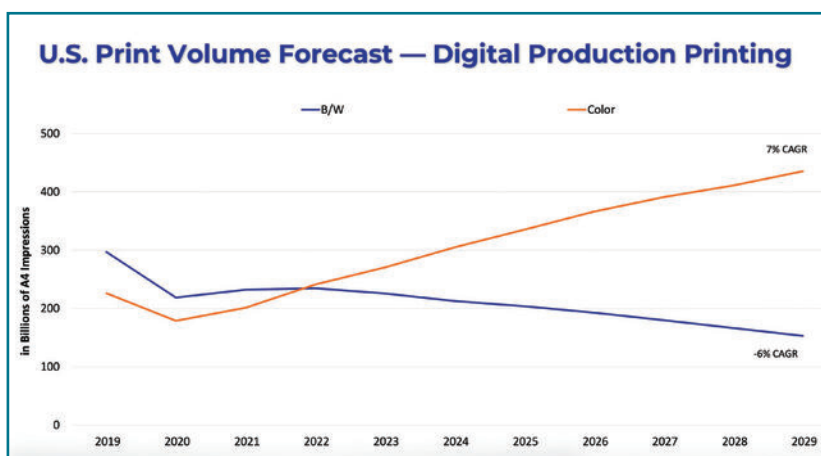
When I speak with dealers about moving into digital production print, the same truth always surfaces: This is not simply a bigger version of office print. The conversations are different, the buyers are different and the motivations driving a purchase are worlds apart. Office print equipment purchases are often about efficiency, convenience, cost savings or even security reasons. Production print, on the other hand, is about something far more fundamental — something that generates revenue from the printed products being produced. For print service providers (PSPs), a press is not an internal tool — it is the heart of their business models. For in-plant operations, it is often the engine that delivers speed and savings to the enterprise.

This distinction matters because it reshapes the sales dynamic. Dealers entering the production space must do more than pitch technology; they must demonstrate how that technology supports profitability. That shift is a challenge and an opportunity.

Opportunities in Production Print

A significant opportunity lies in the continued expansion of digital production printing (see the graph above). Color volumes that once sat comfortably on offset presses are steadily migrating into the digital printing realm. The crossover point between digital and offset has shifted as total cost of ownership (TCO) falls and print buyers demand shorter, more flexible runs. For dealers, this means growth potential. A production press can deliver an annuity stream per press that far outpaces the office side of the business. While the click rate per impression is often lower, the scale of each impression and the size of capital investments make the business financially attractive. With every impression, the dealer has an opportunity to deepen the relationship.

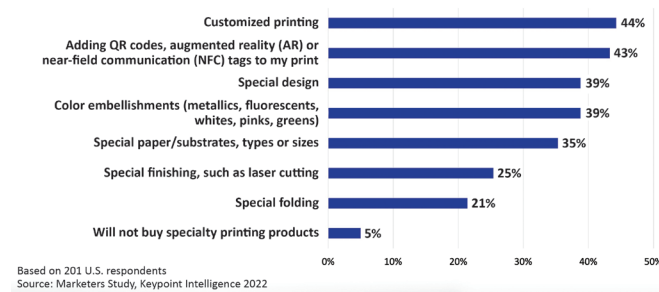
However, production print is not a high-velocity sales game. The pool of production print opportunities is smaller



and the investments are larger compared to office devices. Each sale represents a significant commitment — not only for the customer, but for the dealer tasked with supporting that investment. This is where the real work begins.

To that end, it is important to look for opportunities outside the box, such as the ability to offer something distinctive. Specialty (i.e., high value) print applications like metallics, textured finishes, foils or embellishments are increasingly in demand as brands search for ways to stand out in a crowded market (see the chart below).

The Majority of Print Buyers Want Specialty (High-Value) Printing



Other techniques used include e-connectivity (e.g., quick response [QR] codes or near field communication [NFC]

technology), augmented reality (AR), special design, finishing and substrates. Customization has moved beyond simply personalizing a name, as it now extends to packaging, decor and experiential marketing. Dealers who can help PSPs access these capabilities are not just selling print engines, they are enabling their customers to command higher business opportunities and margins. In many ways, the future of production print will be defined less by speed or cost per impression and more by the creative value of what comes off the press.

Budgets are tight, workforces are aging, and expectations for speed and quality continue to rise. In this climate, automation is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Challenges for Dealers

PSPs do not only want to hear about “speeds and feeds.” They want partners who can talk about market shifts, business models and revenue streams. They expect their service providers/suppliers to understand the broader forces shaping the industry, which spans the rise of online print providers with centralized hubs to the pressures driving smaller PSPs to outsource commodity work. The consolidation from print buyers to purchase from a smaller number of PSPs is another factor.

It is easy to underestimate just how much perception shapes this market. Some PSPs may still view traditional dealers as office equipment providers and not graphic arts partners. Overcoming that barrier requires more than persistence — it demands expertise. Dealers need to invest in people who can have strategic conversations with customers, not just professionals who can technically support the technology. Building or buying this expertise can be time-consuming and costly. It is a long game, but credibility builds over time (also with the support of strong marketing, etc.). Even the creation of a dedicated production division or brand identity can accelerate the process.

While the opportunities afforded by production print are powerful, they also come with higher expectations. PSPs still judge technology by its core metrics, such as print quality, speed and cost, but now it is more than just speed. Productivity is the most important and, therefore, uptime, ease of use and workflow automation are nonnegotiable, while cost is about return on investment (ROI) and sustainability is increasingly part of the buying equation. Just as in the office print market, production buyers want equipment that supports a sustainable future, making green credentials an imperative rather than a bonus.

Large Production Market Trends

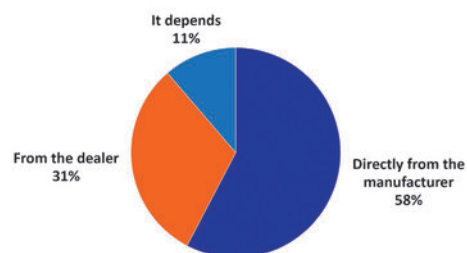
The digital production print market itself is in flux. The center of gravity is shifting from low-production equipment (MFP-level devices) to large production inkjet presses and

B2-format equipment. The drivers are clear: Buyers increasingly order online, shifting volume toward large-capacity providers and away from copy centers and quick printers (and, therefore, their low-production devices). Franchises consolidate output in production hubs with larger devices. Trade printers absorb commodity runs from smaller PSPs, reducing the risks of capital investment and further moving volume to high-pro-

duction presses. Meanwhile, migration from analog to digital only accelerates as the economics and productivity improve on the digital printing side. Rising tariffs, paper costs and postal fees make long offset runs less viable, while customization/personalization gives digital an unassailable edge.

For dealers, understanding this landscape is essential. It explains not only where the opportunities are, but also why PSPs are so selective with their partners. Recent surveys show that many PSPs still prefer to buy directly from manufacturers (see the chart below), but those that do work with dealers cite very clear benefits. They value local presence, faster service response and the flexibility that comes with negotiation on their terms. They appreciate comprehensive postsale support and the peace of mind it brings. And they recognize that dealers often understand the nuances of the local market in a way a manufacturer never could.

Most PSPs Would Prefer to Buy From the Manufacturer



N = 71 businesses in the U.S. that produce digital color print
Source: ODS Primary Research, Keypoint Intelligence 2025

So how should those selling digital production equipment approach their customers? They should start with recognizing the realities of today's PSPs, including in-plants. Budgets are tight, workforces are aging, and expectations for speed and quality continue to rise. In this climate, automation is not a luxury, but a necessity. Dealers who can streamline workflows and free staff members from repetitive tasks bring more than efficiency; they give managers the data and insight needed to demonstrate their value to the wider organization.

Listening is just as important. Walking into a print shop with assumptions rarely works, as every operation has its

own pressures — from technology transitions to institutional oversight. Asking the right questions and taking time to understand these pressures will place you as the best choice in offering meaningful solutions.

Education is the third critical element. Dealers and software providers alike must be prepared to offer ongoing education — not only for the operators who run the devices, but for the decision-makers who run the business and must justify investments.

Looking forward, there is no denying that production print represents one of the most promising growth areas for dealers willing to adapt. Offset volumes will continue to decline. Digital printing will continue to gain ground — powered by cost efficiency, productivity and the demand for shorter, more personalized runs. Equipment buyers will keep looking for quality, productivity, flexibility and better cost/value. The dealers who invest in expertise, re-define their identities and commit to the long term will

Looking forward, there is no denying that production print represents one of the most promising growth areas for dealers willing to adapt.

find themselves in the right place at the right time. ■

German Sacristan is principal analyst for production printing at Keypoint Intelligence. He supports customers with go-to-market strategy, market research, forecasts, consulting and editorial content in digital and production printing. With more than 25 years in digital printing, Sacristan has held roles at Xerox, Creo, Kodak and Hiti Digital, where he drove market adoption, customer growth and technology innovation. At Kodak, Sacristan led business development in Europe and the Americas; at Xerox, he was a sales MVP; and at Hiti, Sacristan expanded printer sales and photo technology use. A recognized thought leader, he has authored a book and white papers, and has delivered seminars worldwide. Sacristan can be reached at german.sacristan@keypointintelligence.com. Visit www.keypointintelligence.com.

