

# Optimizing Design with Digital:

How creative  
professionals are  
leveraging digital  
to take design  
to a new level

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By now, most of you have heard about the various capabilities of and advantages to printing your design pieces on a digital press. As designers you have embraced this technology and learned of both the benefits and struggles. We wrote this article to communicate how you can use digital to take your design to the next level, interviewing some of the country's leading print and design professionals to share their thoughts and experiences on what the digital press has done for their work.



## Paradigm Shift from Universal to Customized Design

Selecting stock photography that will resonate with multiple target audiences for a mail piece or print ad can be difficult, especially if you have limited space for imagery or a limited number of pieces. You've all had the client with the near impossible request of achieving universality within the same job, ultimately thwarting the creative process (e.g. a consumer campaign that represents varying consumer interests, income brackets and marital status). With digital print, you can end your quest for the elusive universal design. The variable data options of digital print can give a direct mail campaign an infinite number of pieces with different images to express various tones and appeal to different audiences. Make sure your client understands the realm of possibilities this brings to their piece.

## Pump Up the Volume

We all know that digital presses are subject to uneven reproduction of large areas of solid color, tints and blends. The solution is adding subtle patterns, graphics, or text — known as “noise” — to break up solid areas of color. But how do you achieve a simple, clean design while pumping up the noise volume? It might seem like an oxymoron, but the leaders on the forefront of the digital design movement are learning to master the art of simple design that includes the right balance of noise. When solid areas of color becomes the “old way” it will really challenge you to think about the various patterns or textures that might be relevant to your design — adding a whole new dimension of intrigue.

## The Evidence to Control Success

This point inspired me to suggest a twist on a popular cliché: In digital printing, the proof is in the proof. Unlike the simulated proofs generated by an offset press, digital proofs allow you to see exactly how the piece will come off the press. As a result, digital presses have brought much more peace of mind to designers as they enter the press production phase. If you're not happy with the proof, you can make changes until it meets your expectations. That level of real-time control leads to better design results.

## Designer Dish

Now that you have gathered some valuable information on how you can apply digital to your existing designs, we wanted to offer some specific commentary from the professionals on their encounters within the digital realm.

Wausau Paper interviewed four of the country's leading creative professionals:

## Robert Petrick

Graphic Designer and  
Owner of Chicago-based,  
Petrick Design

## Barbara Runde

Print Director at  
Pressley Jacobs,  
Chicago

## Jill Vaughan

Owner of Vaughan Design  
and Production Services,  
Kansas City

## Paul Wharton

Vice President of Creative  
for Larsen Design,  
Minneapolis

Throughout the course of our interviews we found that the recurring themes when discussing digital were the abilities of variable data and customization, experimenting with perfect proofs, short-run capabilities and quality. The benefits of digital are only increasing with time, and as **Barbara Runde** described is “the most exciting niche in printing these days and (I think) one that designers will go to and rely on more and more in the coming years.”

## What They Are Saying About...

### Variable Data and Customization

“Customization enabled by digital printing goes beyond the personalization of a customer’s name. To fully embrace the capabilities of the digital press, it requires some real thinking and planning on behalf of designers. What data would change, why and how? Are we talking about a female audience? Engineers vs. management? Employees vs. investors? It’s about changing the colors used and the messages sent. Subtle nuances in the imagery we apply based on the demographics

of the audience we’re trying to reach create a more thoughtful kind of visual customization, fully embracing the potential of what using digital can accomplish.” —**Wharton**

“The real power of digital printing lies within variable data and customization. When we start to think about data as modifying and customizing design, you can really capture the influence of digital printing. As technology evolves, printers will realize that their main target for selling digital is not designers, but rather CMOs, marketing communications managers and specialists within companies, in turn unleashing a plethora of opportunities for the design community. It takes a marketing mind to really understand what kind of data is necessary, how to gather and actually deploy it for marketing purposes.” —**Petrick**

“With the current state of our economy, we have been seeing an increase in digital with people that don’t have the large marketing budgets for mass production of pieces. My clients are noticing that the personalization enabled by digital has increased their ROI, allowing them to print several thousand more of their collateral after the initial smaller testing.” —**Vaughan**

## Proofing

“Digital printing has enabled designers to experiment with colored stock more so than if using a traditional press. Since the proof is the final piece, we create a test sheet with entire color palettes and images color-corrected in different ways, so we can find the stock and color combination that best works for our final design.” —Petrick

“Digital printers and designers should be thinking about color and texture if they want to stay at pace with the rest of the litho market. The ability to change the design to reflect a different finish or palette takes little effort on part of the digital printer and will in turn broaden the possibilities of how the press is utilized.” —Wharton

“One of the greatest benefits of using a digital press is the ability to see what the actual printed piece is going to look like before production. It allows me to get creative with my client by using more colored and textured stock, as corrections can easily be made if the outcome is not what was expected.” —Vaughan

Have you discovered an innovative way of employing digital in your design? Or do you have tips on how others can use digital printing with a fresh new twist? Whatever it may be, we want to hear from you! Visit the Wausau Paper booth (712) during the HOW Design Conference to find out how you can become the next designer to dish on digital!

## Short Print Runs

“Digital print has opened up a world where people can utilize short-run capabilities, while still having a print solution that is high quality and cost-effective.” —Runde

## Quality

“Digital technology has improved to a place where the quality level between the digital and a traditional press has become nearly indistinguishable. Designers are becoming more comfortable with the capabilities of the press and clients are realizing the environmental benefits that employing digital can have.” —Wharton

“One of the most surprising outcomes of using digital has been the availability of a wider color gamut. Digital has allowed the ability to consistently produce pieces with a greater color contrast, and with continuous updates to software, tools and technology, these capabilities increasingly get better.” —Runde

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