Web-to-Print Technologies for Digital Packaging

Customer's Canvas
by Aurigma

Digital revolution
in packaging

Good packaging is one of the most important factors when customers are choosing between several related products. That's why so much emphasis is put on packaging design today. Manufacturers are always coming up with new ways to grab the customer's attention with the presentation of their products. After all, you can make a high-end product, but if it comes in a modest box, its sales will be lower than you might expect.

In the past, packaging production was a long-term process. The existing technologies at that time were perfectly suited to reduce the production costs of packaging, but this was achieved in long runs and demanded a long life cycle of one approved packaging design. The costs of prepress were high, and the manufacturers simply could not afford to frequently change the design of their products' packaging.

However, this is something that is rapidly changing today. Due to increased competition and the improved sophistication of marketing communications, there has been a shift toward shorter packaging cycles with several different designs. In addition to this, legislation has introduced new requirements for the information that must appear on packaging. In this current environment, traditional long-term packaging printing workflows would quickly inflate costs for manufacturing companies.

Here's where digital printing technologies come into play. The exponential increase in affordable yet professional digital printers has naturally resulted in more print service providers adding digital printing to the traditional packaging process.

According to recent forecasts, the market for digital printing for packaging will reach $22 billion USD by 2022 compared to just $13 billion USD in 2017, and continued growth is predicted for all packaging categories.

Who need web-to-print for packaging

The principle customers of digital packaging can be divided into two broad categories:

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The first is small local businesses – or online retailers – for whom ordering their own packaging was previously out of reach due to the high cost of such projects. Digital printing has allowed them to hold their own against larger companies and sell products with their own customized packaging.

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The second category is large companies that used to rely on long-run projects for their packaging needs. For these companies, digital printing is an opportunity to integrate packaging closely with their marketing communications. Clients can now experiment with multiple versions of packaging, apply variable data printing technologies, and offer seasonal or limited editions of their products. From a marketing standpoint, it's a whole new opportunity that clients are eager to embrace to help them stay ahead of the curve with a unique competitive edge.

Both of these categories of customers can take advantage of digital packaging technology, but not without some challenges. In contrast to long-run projects, the ordering costs of short-run projects are relatively high. That's why many printing companies are trying to optimize their business processes in order to be more competitive in this niche.

Benefits of web-to-print for packaging applications

Web-to-print solutions have become the de facto standard to process short-run retail orders and allow printers to keep costs in line. Fewer labor hours are required, and a higher level of quality can be expected with a greater level of consistency. The central idea behind all of these benefits is that the web-to-print system allows customers to design products and submit orders themselves, limiting the number of interactions with the printer's staff.

Until very recently, web-to-print technologies were not a realistic solution for packaging applications, as they were long-run projects that cost a significant amount of money. No one bothered to automate the ordering process because its cost was too small compared to the entire workflow. However, now that digital printing technologies are gaining popularity in the packaging segment and short runs are becoming more feasible, printers have started seeking opportunities to automate the ordering process.

Of course, printing a package is a bit more complicated than printing a business card. In order to successfully implement web-to-print for packaging, vendors first need to solve several major tasks.

Powerful technology is part of the solution, but its accessibility determines its usefulness. An online editor should enable end-users to create the packaging designs themselves without needing to overcome a high learning curve.

Among the customers of short-run packaging products, there are both large companies as well as small ones, such as pizza places, local coffee roasters, carry-out restaurants, and others. Not all users can be expected to be tech-savvy, but even they have to be able to order personalized packaging products using the web-to-print technology. In order to be accessible to everyone, the technology must be as intuitive and easy to use as possible. For example, our solution for digital packaging comes packed with a very user-friendly HTML5 editor that allows users to create packaging designs. They can upload their own logos and pictures, add text layers and packaging symbols, as well as place QR and barcodes into the design. All of these elements can be manipulated interactively in the web browser on both standard desktop computers and tablet devices.

> "An important feature of any web-to-print packaging solution is the ability to generate die cut templates based on parameter values like width, height, depth, thickness, and others. These parameters are passed to the software for creating folding cartons and corrugated products. It is also vital to support the custom parametric models as well as FEFCO and ECMA standards."
>
> Dmitry Sevostyanov, CEO of Aurigma – a W2P vendor providing solutions for digital packaging.

What defines a good web-to-print solution for packaging?

3d preview

The complexity of a package compared to flat printed products presents yet another challenge that needs to be addressed. You need to have a very good imagination to picture how a flat sheet with die cuts will really look when assembled. The ability to generate the finished design in 3D and view it from different angles can help identify possible flaws at the design stage and correct them without wasting valuable time on countless edits and approvals.

Export to print-ready outputs

It is also necessary that the user-generated package design can be converted into a print-ready file in one click to save time on prepress operations. Customer's Canvas can convert files to true CMYK, apply the correct imposition, and generate a PDF/X-4 output that is compatible for the press and ready to be run.

Easy integration

Finally, in order for the process to be built and implemented as cheaply and painlessly as possible for the printing company, the ideal web-to-print solution must be able to integrate seamlessly into both new and existing websites. Dmitry reiterated the importance of easy integration:

Customer's Canvas Packaging can be directly embedded into the HTML code of an existing website using the API, causing little to no disruption in existing setups. Easy integration allows the printer to have all the benefits of a web-to-print solution without stressing over how it will affect its current operations.

Conclusion

With the right web-to-print solution that can confront the above challenges effectively, it is possible to create a customized package just as easily as creating a printed T-shirt or mug. This is an exciting future for several groups of people – web-to-print vendors, printing companies, and their customers all stand to gain a greater level of flexibility in what they can achieve, while saving time and money in the process.

This is a very serious shift in the packaging printing market and we forecast further growth, both quantitative - including new consumers - and qualitative, with the use of new marketing techniques to increase sales of goods through the design of packaging using digital technologies. To summarize, the adoption of W2P technologies for printing packaging should be considered a high priority for printers who want to be successful in the future.