

# DIGITAL PRINTING FOR THE GREETING CARD INDUSTRY

The evolution of digital printing has made fundamental changes to the printing process and these changes have had a dramatic effect on the greeting card industry.

It is now possible for you, as a greeting card publisher to print what you want in the quantities that suit you and your business needs.

Digital printing can help new publishers establish themselves quickly and easily without the massive financial commitment associated with traditional printing methods.

Short run digital printing enables the greeting card publisher to 'test market' new designs whilst 'on demand' digital printing means cards can be printed and finished quickly and in quantities that suit your business needs which makes sense for your stock control, planning and most importantly your cashflow.

More established publishers use digital printing, in conjunction with lithographic, to smooth out those 'peaks and troughs' frequently associated with the greeting card market, as varying quantities can be printed of different designs.

## **The Quality Question – Is digital as good as litho?**

There are different types of digital printing, which will give differing quality results.

Dry toner based imaging can make the images look 'contrasty' and appear as a relief image on the card so may not suit fine art or detailed reproduction. There can also be problems with the image cracking on the fold with this type of printing. It is unlikely that you will wish to use type of printing for greeting cards.

For best quality results find a printer who uses an ink based system such as the HP Indigo press.

These presses use a liquid ink process. HP ElectroInk is the single most recognizable difference between HP Indigo digital printing and all other forms of digital printing. HP ElectroInk produces the 'look and feel' of traditional offset printing, it is able to reproduce subtle tones, solids and tints easily and consistently.

## **The Quantity Question -**

With traditional offset litho printing where printing plates are used, it is generally accepted that to get the best value for money the plate area needs to be fully utilized. This means that with a large B1 litho printing press you will need to have, for example, 16 120mm x 170mm size cards or 12 150mm x 150mm size cards. As all the cards are on the same plate then you have to print the same quantity of each card. Lets say you have 1000 sheets run from that set of plates you will end up with 16,000 120mm x 170mm cards or 12000 150mm x 150mm cards.

This is all very well and good if you are confident that you are able to sell all of those cards in a reasonable period of time. But if, as so often happens, two or three of your designs are not as popular as you hoped, then you could be left with a lot of unsold cards that you have paid for.

There will be a time when your most popular card designs will need reprinting, and you don't have enough designs to fill the whole of the plate, so what do you do?

Digital printing handles individual design files making it possible to print varying quantities of each design within one print order. You can order and have printed the quantity of cards you know you can sell. This means you do not have unsold stock lying around for months or even years tying up space and cash.

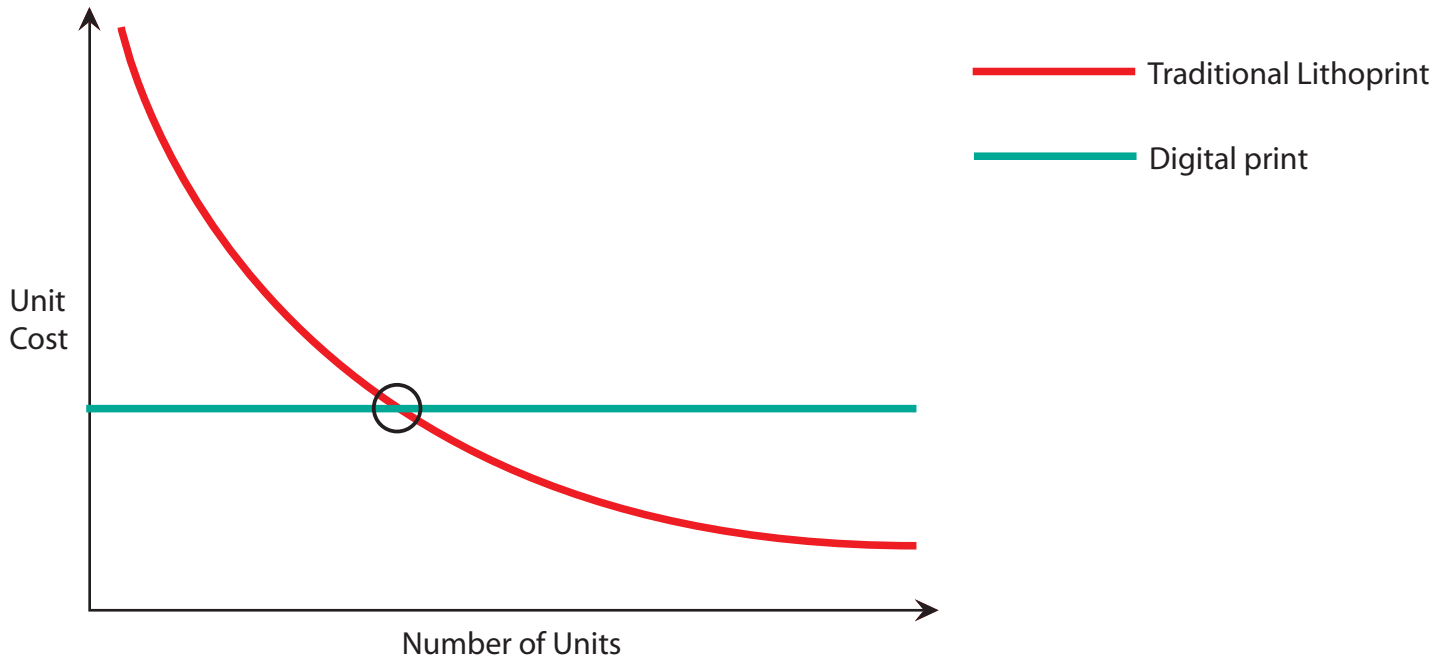
## **So the million dollar question**

### **The Price**

### **Litho printing or digital printing, what do I choose?**

When having cards printed on a traditional litho press the printer has to prepare plates, set up his press (called 'making ready') and then run the job. He has quite high cost involved in the platemaking and make ready of his press so to have a few cards printed the cost will be high but the more you have printed the lower the unit cost becomes.

The digital printer, on the other hand, has no platemaking or make ready to speak of, so his costs are generally fixed, if he prints 10 cards or 1000 cards the unit cost will be the same.



The diagram above simplifies the situation but basically what you need to find is the point at which it is better to have your cards printed either by a digital printer or by a litho printer.

As a rough guide we have already seen that if you are happy and confident enough to have 1000 each of your designs printed, it is better to have them printed by a traditional litho printer, checking of course, how many of each design can be fitted onto the plate.

At this point the unit cost of a card can be around half that of a card digitally printed, depending on plate size, substrate (the board you are printing on), and finishing.

For quantities less than this it is advisable to explore the digital route.

#### **Digital printing offers you:**

- ★ Very short runs of new designs for shows and exhibitions, avoiding costly design mistakes.
- ★ Proofing on the same material as the finished job, so what you see is what you get.
- ★ Varying run quantities within one print order, enabling better stock control.
- ★ Fixed Prices. So you can better manage your costs.
- ★ Easy Change of Design - so you can expand your market potential with for example different languages.
- ★ On demand printing and finishing – some digital printers do the whole job – print, pack with envelope in cellophane wrap and dispatch finished orders to your customer, freeing up your time so you can get on with what you do best, creating new designs.

**The right use of digital printing will save you space, time and money.**