

# Graphics of the Americas, 2005

Review of Digital Imaging Equipment and Services



Tim Brown





A Trade Show Review

# **The Graphics of the Americas Trade Show, 2005**

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## Introduction

The Graphics of the Americas (GOA) trade show is designed to bring companies and their consumers together in the graphics and printing industries; specifically, companies and consumers that deal in Latin America. This year, it was held in Miami, FL.

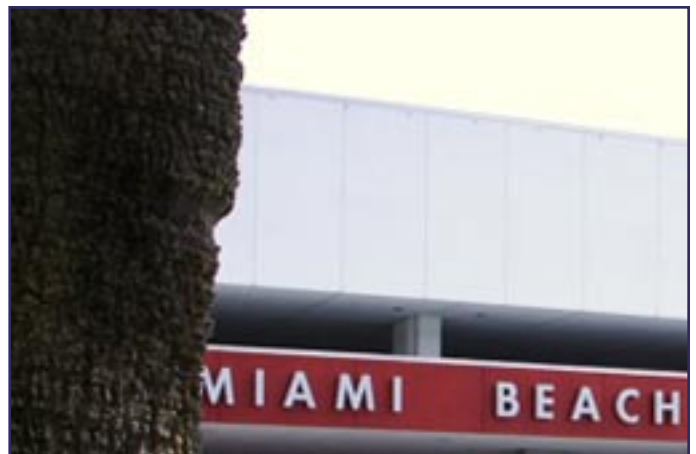
The trade show was very well attended; thousands of attendees represented over a dozen countries in North, Central, and South America. From FLAAR's point of view, however, GOA is only a mildly beneficial show. As you likely know, FLAAR focuses specifically on digital imaging technologies including wide format digital printers (UV, solvent, aqueous, etc.) scanners, and high-end digital cameras. At GOA, digital printing was only one of many markets that was showcased. Whereas trade shows such as SGIA, ISA, and PRINT are distinctly focused towards technologies that FLAAR evaluates, GOA was very diverse.

## Adobe Systems, Inc.

Adobe had a very large and impressive booth that included "The Adobe Theatre", a workshop area where Adobe representatives gave presentations and product demonstrations every hour. FLAAR review editor Ryan Christ attended several of Adobe's presentations, and he was very impressed. In particular, he attended the "Variable Data Publishing as a Solution with XMPie" presentation. Ryan explained that the XMPie presentation was attended primarily by people who are not involved in variable data printing (VDP), but who would like to get into the market and incorporate VDP into their existing businesses.

Ryan described the presentation as well-organized and useful, but it was not a tutorial of XMPie – rather, it simply highlighted the program, defined VDP, and explained how XMPie could be used with InDesign for a solid workflow.

The director of product marketing for XMPie was



Miami Beach Convention Center; the location for the Graphics of the Americas tradeshow in 2005.



Overlooking the tradshow floor.



the presenter, and she was very extemporaneous and knowledgeable. She did not handle the presentation like an infomercial; rather, she used case studies and demonstrations to highlight the significance of VDP to the printing industry, and didn't focus overwhelmingly on Adobe products.

Ryan was very familiar with VDP and XMPie going into the presentation, and he feels that the presenter hit the appropriate highlights and explained them clearly. He described the Adobe booth representatives as "great sales people with an honest approach." He highly recommends future presentations from Adobe Systems, Inc.

## CGS

One of our most exciting "finds" at GOA was in the CGS booth. CGS is distributing a new ink that is patented by Stadler. The after-market ink is very unique, because it is a water-based solvent ink that can print on literally any material and it can theoretically be used on any printer. CGS representatives showed us sample prints from a Mimaki JV4 that included vinyl, satin, wood, mesh, and even aluminum foil. All of the prints were extremely scratch resistant (even on vinyl). If the printer can print on rigid material, the ink will stick to it with no problems.

The CGS inks will be manufactured in cartridges that are compatible with various brands of printers; however, in order for the ink to adhere properly, it must be heated as it is jetted onto the material. To accomplish this, CGS is manufacturing a heating unit



The CGS booth where Stadler's impressive new ink was on display.



Dr. Hellmuth with Trevor Haworth, the Director of Marketing and Communications for CGS.



that can be designed to fit nearly any printer. We saw a picture of a retrofitted Mimaki JV4, and the heating unit was descretly attached to the printer – it required no extra space, and it did not appear to be a “cheap modification.”

The only apparent limitation to the CGS ink system is that it can only work on piezo printers. This is because thermal printers already require heat to work, and the additional heating unit could damage or disrupt ink flow.

## ColorSpan

Compared to the company’s typical tradeshow fanfare, their booth at GOA, 2005 was reasonably small. Nonetheless, Colorspan continues to sell outstanding products. At the forefront of the ColorSpan booth was the DisplayMaker 72s Solvent Inkjet Printer (nicknamed the “Gator”). The 72s is a four-color true solvent printer, and ColorSpan is advertising three to five years of life for outdoor prints.

The 72s uses four piezo-electric inkjet printheads made by Hitachi (600 true dpi heads, 1200 x 1800 optical) that each have 387 nozzles. ColorSpan advertises a drop size of approximately 30 picoliters. The printheads can be costly to replace at \$1500 per head; however, the representative justified the cost of each head by citing two points:

- The user can easily replace a head without the assistance (or excessive cost) of a service call from a technician.
- All of the original models that ColorSpan has



Ink tanks for the ColorSpan 72s “Gator”.



Sample prints from the ColorSpan 72s.



produced still have their original printheads; therefore, the printheads have, thus far, proven to be indestructible.

The printer comes in two models: a flexible model which costs \$54,995, and a rigid model which costs \$59,995. The user can easily convert a flexible model into a rigid one in about 20 minutes. The printer can print on any non-coated media up to 3/16 inches thick. ColorSpan advertises an ultra-fast speed of 400 square feet per hour in *Billboard quality mode*; however, only *Production* and *High quality mode* prints were available for inspection at GOA.



Dr. Hellmuth inspecting a rigid print from the ColorSpan 72s.

FLAAR has reviewed the 72s at several tradeshows over the past year, and we believe the printer offers an outstanding printer for its pricetag.



The Contex Hawk-eye Cx Color wide format scanner.

## Contex Scanning Technology

Contex was showcasing their 36-inch “Hawk-eye Cx Color” wide format scanner. (Contex is the manufacturer of this scanner, although I’m not sure whether or not it is a rebranded model.) The Hawk-eye is designed for CAD and AEC professionals, and it appears to be a well-constructed scanner.

Contex has three US distributors in California, Massachusetts, and Maryland, as well as one in Canada; however, the booth representative told me that there are “hundreds worldwide.” Contex has offices in Denmark, China, Japan, and California.

## HP

The HP booth was one of the largest manufacturer booths, and it was extremely popular. One of



Dr. Hellmuth taking notes at the HP booth.



my responsibilities at each show is to photograph relevant booths. Because HP's booth was consistently crowded, it was difficult to capture good images. Nonetheless, the HP representatives, were for the most part, very friendly and knowledgeable. More importantly, their printers, which were constantly printing, produced beautiful results.

The HP 5500 ps, which we have evaluated at our facilities in Bowling Green, OH, was connected to a workstation running Onyx's RIP system. The booth attendant operating the printer and RIP was an Onyx employee. At one point during the show, Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth, FLAAR's managing director, submitted a few image files to RIP and have printed. We were anxious to see how well the RIP and printer would handle our images. (Typically at trade shows, all we see are pre-determined images that are guaranteed to print beautifully – its rare to see anything spontaneous in a trade show booth.) We were pleased to see that Dr. Hellmuth's images looked spectacular. There was no trace of any printing defects such as roll marks, banding, or bronzing, and the color was outstanding.

HP was also showcasing their relatively new 130 printer. The 130 is a smaller unit that can print from sheets and rolls. FLAAR has published a report on the 130 based on our experiences with it last summer. Our evaluation was very positive, and we feel that it deserves all of the positive attention it has been receiving.

In addition, HP's new 4000. HP has agreed to send us a 4000 for extensive testing, which will begin this



The HP 5500 ps prints several of Dr. Hellmuth's images which were sent through the Onyx RIP.



Nicholas reviews the prints from the HP 5500ps with an Onyx representative.



Dr. Hellmuth reviewing the HP 130.



spring. Although we have not had an opportunity to evaluate the 4000 hands-on, it seemed to produce beautiful images at the show. It too appears to be very popular.

## Infiniti

Infiniti is a Miami-based wide format solvent ink printer manufacturer that had a fairly large booth at GOA, 2005 with several printers that printed continuously. In March, 2004, FLAAR editor Nicholas Hellmuth reported that, "Infiniti was poor several years ago but appears steadily better each year. So, it is probable that in a year or so, Infiniti will have reached an acceptable level." Based on my evaluation of Infiniti at GOA, 2005, Infiniti is not there yet.

Perhaps Infiniti printers perform poorly because they use Xaar piezo printheads, or perhaps the printers are just cheaply made. However, there is no denying that Infiniti employees were the friendliest, most knowledgeable, and most helpful booth representatives at the GOA tradeshow. I spoke to three representatives, and they were happy to answer my questions promptly and thoroughly. Nonetheless, their printers appear to be sub-par.

Infiniti exhibited their FY 3360 grand format solvent ink printer, which produced very splashy colors with minimal banding. At the time I visited the booth, it was printing on vinyl, and the prints were very nice. This was the finest printer I saw from Infiniti.

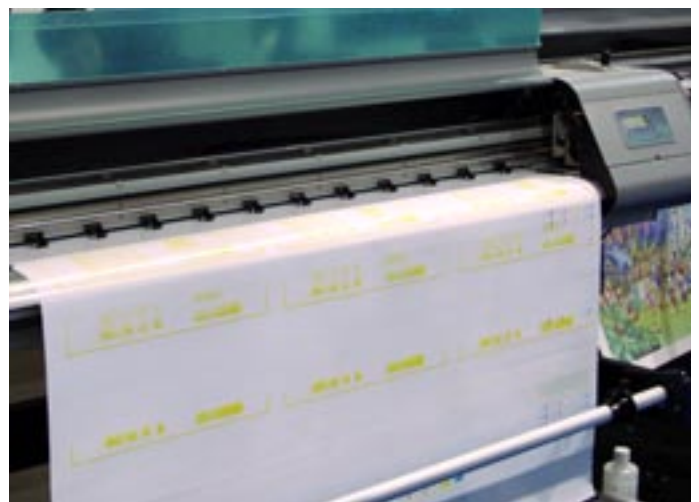
The FY 6150C was having major problems during



The FY 8250C in the Infiniti booth.



The Infiniti FY 3360 grand format printer.



The Infiniti FY 6150C printing only yellow ink.





my time in the Infiniti booth. Specifically, the printer was only printing yellow ink. The booth technicians appeared to be confounded, and it looked like the printer had printed nearly five feet of yellow-only before the technicians apparently gave up on trying to salvage the print.

The FY 8250C, which looks very similar to Mimaki's JV4, produced attractive colors, but again, its prints had terrible banding. You'll certainly never see a JV4 with such sincere defects.

### Oce (Gandinovations)

Oce had a reasonable presence at the tradeshow. The printer that received the most attention was their JETi 3300 (manufactured by Gandinnovations). This printer (available in either four or six color models) has been shipping for a little over a year and a half.

Perhaps the most impressive component of this printer is that almost everything is automated. The printer features an automated flushing and capping system. (According to the booth representative, this is the only grand format printer with an automated flushing system.) In addition, the user can set automated nozzle checks to run at specified times during the day.

The booth representative explained that, while the printer cannot perform "one run" duplex printing, it is designed to feed media through a second time (to print on the opposite side) without scratching or damaging the print. The feeding system is specifically designed to make this possible.



Obvious banding on a print from the Infiniti FY 8250C.



The Gandinnovations JETi 3300 solvent ink printer on display in the Oce booth.



The rear media feeding area of the JETi 3300.



Naturally, this jumbo solvent ink printer requires some manner of ventilation system, but Océ does not provide one – the user must deal with this (presumably by purchasing a hood). According to the booth representative, using the printer without ventilation would not necessarily be harmful, but it would result in a bad odor. This statement is questionable though, because many solvent ink printers are banned in California and Europe because they are known to be dangerous. However, to our knowledge, there are no restrictions on the Océ JETi 3300 anywhere in the world.



The JETi 3300's ink system.

## Wit Color Digital

Wit Color Digital is a Miami-based distributor for Shanghai Wit-Color Digital Printing Equipment & Technology Company, Limited in America. Despite its large booth and splashy machines, the Chinese printers do not appear to be well-constructed. Wit had four clunky, solvent ink printers on display in their booth, and all of them were printing continuously.



The Wit Color Digital ULTRA 3308 solvent ink printer.

A thorough inspection was not necessary to see that the Wit printers produce low-grade results. For example, the ULTRA 3308 printer, a four-color solvent beast, had sample prints that, on vinyl, exhibited a noticeable dot pattern at a viewing distance of ten feet and more. Granted, solvent ink printers printing on vinyl should not be expected to produce flawless images, but these prints were just plain bad.



Distinct banding on a print from the ULTRA 3308.

The ULTRA 3320 grand format printer was even



worse; the colors were under saturated and flat. It was printing sample prints on a mesh-like material, and there was terrible banding.

Because I did not interview a Wit booth representative, I have no idea whether or not the price of Wit printers makes the sacrifice in quality worth the while, but from a simple, visual evaluation, these printers are not capable of producing high-quality, sellable results.

## X-Rite

X-Rite had a reasonably small booth, but it was always crowded; so crowded that I was never able to steal a booth representative for a brief interview. However, X-Rite was promoting their ever popular Monaco Color Management Series software that is an industry leader for building ICC profiles for printers, scanners, and monitors.



A Wit technician and booth representative discussing the banding on prints from the ULTRA 3308.