

In-House Printing

Deal or No Deal?

By Dennis Walthers



Church leaders must continually look for ways to broaden their reach in their communities and expand their memberships. One key decision is how to handle their printing needs.

First, let's explore some of the printing needs your church likely has, starting with the church bulletin.

It's a church's single largest printing need. From weekly bulletins to special bulletins for holidays and special events, these require considerable effort and time each week. Bulletins are highly customized, with rapidly changing content. As such, double-sided printing is important, as is being able to handle various media sizes.

Letterhead and envelopes are two more important needs. In the past, it was considered most economical to outsource this printing; with new technology, however, this is no longer the case.

Besides day-to-day correspondence, there's also a need for media duplication labels for CDs or cassettes, presentation materials, and other in-house on-demand printing needs.

Outsourcing. You'll find many options when it comes to outsourcing your printing. Your local office supply store, pack-and-ship outlet and copy shop would all like your business.

Here are a few key advantages to outsourcing:

- **Convenience:** You can send it by e-mail, or drop off a disc and pick it up later in the day.
- **No equipment necessary:** Let someone else invest in the equipment.
- **No service:** Let someone else handle the service headaches.
- **No supplies:** You won't have to maintain the supplies.
- **Flexibility:** It's easy to change from different sizes of media.

So, what are the disadvantages?

- **Cost:** If outsourcing was used only occasionally, the cost might not be a big deal. In most cases, however, there's a weekly need for printing that can quickly add up to a rather large expense.
- **Volume:** To get a price break, usually you'll

need to print in larger volumes. This might not always be necessary.

- **Timing:** You'll need to plan further in advance to properly use outsourcing. Larger print jobs should be scheduled ahead of time.

In-House Advantages

If outsourcing sounds less and less attractive, there's good news: You can do it yourself. One key advantage of in-house printing is cost, since this approach will provide the lowest cost-per-page in most cases. This might not be the case if you have large print jobs in excess of 5,000 pieces, however, then the job could be outsourced for less.

Convenience is another benefit since the equipment will be onsite and ready when you are. Plus, staff workers are more efficient when they can print in-house. And if you select equipment with color copying and color-scanning capabilities, it provides greater benefit to your church.

Add to these payoffs flexibility — the ability to make small print runs with very little lead time — and a consistent cost-per-print, and you've got an attractive alternative to outsourcing.

Of course, there are disadvantages as well:

- **Equipment cost:** Depending on your needs, this can be a formidable factor. There are, however, programs that provide the equipment and service at no charge.
- **Service:** I strongly advise that you ensure your product is covered with onsite service.
- **Supplies:** You'll need to maintain an inventory of supplies, including ink, toner and paper.
- **Personnel:** In-house printing might demand additional time of staff.
- **PC or Mac systems:** You will need an up-to-date PC or Mac to take advantage of the latest printer technology. Processing color graphic images requires more processing power, and you might need to upgrade your systems. →

• **Location:** You'll need an area for the equipment that's accessible to the users.

If you decide in-house printing is the best solution for your church, you must consider the type of equipment you'll need and what features are necessary.

Here are a few of the things you should expect from your in-house printer:

Desirable Key Printer Features

Network-ready: To be easily shared, the printer needs to be network-ready. A network-ready printer will allow access for multiple people.

Duplex-ready: Be sure your printer can handle automatic two-sided printing. This will save you

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the hassle of printing one side and then flipping over a document to print the other side.

Speed: I wouldn't accept less than 20 pages per minute in full color.

Duty cycle: The duty cycle is the measure of what a printer is rated to handle. Consider it the "reliability factor": The higher the number, the more reliable the product. Look for a duty cycle of 80,000-plus pages per month.

Paper handling: Look for flexibility and versatility to handle envelopes and letter-, legal- and custom-size media. Also determine the thickness of stock the printer can handle (preferably 85-pound card stock or better).

Time to first page: The time to first printed page should be shorter than eight seconds. Any longer than that and you'll feel like you're always waiting on the printer.

Mac- and PC-compatible: I'd look for printers that can handle both PC and Mac.

Copy and scan: Look for these features in the latest high-end color printers.

In-House Printing Technology

The three primary types of in-house printing technology are:

Inkjet technology: Not likely the best alternative for a church due to the speed and cost-per-page. It is, however, a good alternative for personal printers and everyday correspondence.

Laser technology: Some of the most recent entries into the market with color laser look awesome. Prices continue to come down, and print quality and speed are very respectable, although they can still carry a high cost-per-page and a higher overall maintenance expense. Check the cost for all consumables, not just toner.

Solid-ink technology: Offering speed, print quality, reliability, low cost-per-page, and a low overall maintenance expense, these printers deliver a lot for the money. They are also available with color-copier and color-scanner functionality, providing multiple ways to improve overall efficiency.

Deal Or No Deal?

Be assured that printing and its related costs will remain a factor of constant consideration. Whether you choose to use in-house on-demand printing or are leaning towards outsourcing, you'll need to weigh the pros and cons.

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