

# St. Louis packaging and display graphics company 1st with 2 EFI Nozomi printers

Boxes, Inc. and Mid America Display had a growing packaging and display business that was already benefiting from the digital capabilities of an EFI™ Nozomi C18000 ultra-high-speed, single-pass, direct-to-corrugated digital inkjet printer installed in 2018. The Boxes team was looking to boost its ecommerce business as a way to attract new customers and streamline workflow, but understood the need for redundancy, greater digital production firepower and leading-edge back-end capabilities to capture important, growing eCommerce opportunities. The first Nozomi was performing well, and the company saw an opportunity to add a second one to accommodate more volume and speed production.

In addition to acquiring its second EFI Nozomi C18000 printer, which went online in December of 2019, Boxes also acquired EFI MarketDirect PackCentral web-to-print software and an EFI VUTEK® UV LED hybrid flatbed/roll-to-roll superwide format printer for printing samples, mock-ups and smaller orders. These acquisitions are critical to the development and launch of Xceed, the company's print-on-demand ecommerce solution for corrugated production, and Xceed Pro, a solution developed specifically for brands and agencies needing more-comprehensive online package ordering capabilities.

Founded as Boxes, Inc. in the late 1970s, the company has a traditional converting background, but has evolved to have three divisions, including Boxes Inc., which is a corrugated brown box manufacturer, and Mid America Display, a manufacturer of high-end displays. The company's third division, Xceed, is a fast-growing eCommerce offering that has three business operations:

- An e-commerce site;
- A partner division; and
- A Pro division that serves other packaging manufacturers with digital printing.

All three divisions at Boxes are experiencing growth with digital. "The digital conversion is happening in all aspects of our business – product packaging, pallet displays in big box stores, signage,



## Challenge:

"The digital conversion is happening in all aspects of our business – product packaging, pallet displays in big box stores, signage, everything is starting to convert to digital."

TIM KORTE,  
CIO



Established in 1977, Boxes, Inc. has been dedicated to providing excellent service, equipment and quality for over 40 years. The company's focus and commitment to the customer is what drives them to continuously innovate and expand their capabilities. In 2005, Boxes, Inc. formed Mid America Display as the company's dedicated custom product display and signage division. By the end of 2019, Boxes, Inc. and Mid America Display's newest e-commerce division, Xceed, was fully operational and driving significant volume.

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*Thanks to the company's two new Nozomi C18000 LED corrugated digital presses, production time for corrugated display projects has been rapidly improved from two to three weeks to a maximum of five days.*

everything is starting to convert to digital," says Tim Korte, the company's CIO.

"After putting in the Nozomi, we expected 60% of our litho to switch to digital; and I am now seeing it go that way. The majority of our customers have gone over to digital for at least some of their work."

Within the Mid America Display business, digital is especially important as the Nozomi printers have provided solution for an operation that once relied heavily on less-efficient litho lamination for high-graphic production. Likewise the company's Xceed operations can fully leverage the short run-length, design flexibility and fast turnaround times only possible with high-end single-pass inkjet.

### ***Changing the conversation on turnaround times***

"In the past, we were used to a three-day turnaround on standard brown boxes and one-color items, and in our litho operation, it can take seven days just to get the litho sheets in," Korte says. "In our display division, turnaround was often two to three weeks with

### **Solution:**

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approved art. Now with our digital portfolio, everything is a five-day turnaround and under."

Boosting digital capacity was essential to building the company's Xceed ecommerce business. "If we didn't have digital printing capability," Korte says, "we could not even think about going into eCommerce."

eCommerce was a key driver in the decision for a second Nozomi C18000 printer. When it was installed in late 2019, the company became the first business in the world to run two Nozomi printers at a single production facility. The 71-inch wide, LED-inkjet Nozomi C18000 prints high-end, direct-to-board production at speeds up to 246 linear feet per minute, or approximately 10,000 35x35-inch boxes per hour two up. It is a groundbreaking production device that has earned multiple industry awards for its high quality, efficiency and productivity.

The second Nozomi C18000 printer has allowed the Xceed operation to thrive. "Our Xceed implementation went from nothing to generating \$200,000 per month in revenue in a short time," Korte says. "There's no way we could have handled that volume in the timeframe our customers expect without our two Nozomis."

In early 2021, the company expanded its digital capabilities further with the installation of a Beam 2C from Highcon, an advanced digital cutter that is helping the company further improve turnaround times.

As it pursues further growth, Xceed will also become one of the first in the world to implement EFI's award-winning MarketDirect PackCentral software, which provides seamless online design and web-to-print order submission on a wide range of package types. The software will be part of Xceed's Pro offering, creating an end-to-end workflow from online job submission to printing through the Nozomi C18000s' EFI Fiery® digital front end.

### ***Making the impossible, possible***

As it stands today, the digital production firepower behind Xceed is creating remarkable results, delivering volume and creating new, highly satisfied customers. Many times, customers are getting jobs through Xceed that just were not feasible before. Korte cites a customer that provides 10 art files every Friday for a job that has to be turned around by the following Tuesday. "In the past," he says, "the prep work for 10 files would take a day and a half. With the system we now have in place, it only takes 25 minutes. Now we can process files Friday night and the printing starts Saturday morning. The job can be done in 24 hours – that's what the Nozomi has done for us."



### **Result:**

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In another situation, the company received 26 files on a Friday that would have taken two to three hours prep time per file in the past. "We also prepared those files in 25 minutes," he says, "which is not even a minute per file in prep time. The message to our customers is, if you work with us up front in establishing a system where we can get and prep files faster, you'll know we can get the job to you faster than anyone else."

While the pandemic was not a factor in the company's 2019 decision to add a second Nozomi printer, the crisis has significantly increased the need for eCommerce-related digital corrugated packaging.

Up to 40% of the company's work on the Nozomi is double-sided, and a good portion of the double-sided work reflects the growing demand for subscription boxes. In addition, the company is seeing doubled-sided work producing specialized boxes being produced in lieu of events that have been cancelled because of the pandemic. In the education market especially, Xceed has helped colleges and universities produce graduation boxes to ship degrees at the end of the academic year following the cancellation of in-person graduation ceremonies. And some of those same customers have come back to order welcome kit boxes for incoming students in the fall.

The Nozomi printers' UV LED inks have more than held up for the heavy-coverage, double-sided printing required on these types of specialized mailer boxes, so finishing the boxes has not become a problem. "We don't have any issues with cutting or creasing Nozomi prints," Korte says. "If anything cracks on a box, it is the fiber tearing, not an issue with ink flaking off."

The Nozomi printers' high quality is key to growing demand for digital. Korte notes that his company's conventional litho customers often come into the plant for a pack-out check on their litho jobs. "Before they arrive," he says, "we print a digital sample of their job and place it side-by-side with the litho job. When they see the two prints, it is hard for them to tell the difference. One customer even said to us, based on where the technology is going, that she would have picked digital for her job."

"Printing on the Nozomi is not an exact comparison to litho, but an increasing number of customers tell us that whatever differences do exist do not present an issue," Korte says. For example, for corrugated signage and displays that are most often viewed at a two-, three-, or five-foot distance, the difference between litho and Nozomi digital printing is very difficult to notice.

Some customers have said they would not convert to digital, "but," says Korte, "then they get a job they need that week, so we print it on the Nozomi out of necessity, and they are convinced."

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