Tools That Tackle Papers' Look, Perception

BY HEIDI ERNST

LIKE ACTOR PAUL GIAMATTI in the movie "Sideways," newspaper executives sometimes may feel as though they're driving in circles, trying to figure out what direction to take. Maybe that's why one classified-ad-system developer at the NEXPO® conference was giving away a weekend in Santa Barbara, Calif., based on the award-winning movie.

But as much as we might like to solve an identity crisis with a bottomless glass of Pinot Noir, the real answers are available in innovative pre-press tools that affect not only a paper's look, from computer-to-plate technologies to color quality, but also how customers view the paper and its brand. Often the new systems simply provide a way to augment the assets a newspaper already has.

Classified ads were a hot topic at sessions and on the floor this year, due in part to increased competition. "The temperature has been rising for years, but especially this year," said Charlie Diederich, NAA director of marketing and advertising. "But the amount of revenue online through classifieds for newspapers has become so substantial that it has fueled an excitement and optimism to do even more. If anything, the competitive threat has heightened the sense of urgency for us all. But the more we accomplish, the more opportunity we see."

A number of vendors showed that papers can not only guard their position in the classified-ad arena, but also compete against online market-places—and even win.

David Rice, executive vice president of sales and marketing for AdPay Inc. in Englewood, Colo., reported heavy interest in the company's Click-N-Buy product that allows newspaper classified advertisers to sell merchandise online for a fixed price, a negotiated price or via an auction. Advertisers also can enhance ads with extended text, photos and multimedia.

CityXpress Corp. in Vancouver, British Columbia, debuted eMarket-placeXpress, a stand-alone online classified marketplace geared toward newspapers. Sellers can input a basic listing for free; more features are available for purchase.

IPIX AdMission in San Ramon, Calif., had the original contract to manage all picture services for eBay and is now offering its expertise to papers. The company previewed Spotlight Ads, available in June, which uses Interactive Advertising Bureau standards to let classified advertisers showcase their wares by using banners, leaderboards and skyscraper ads on a site. Brainworks Software Inc. in Sayville, N.Y., and My Ad Box Inc. in Baltimore released My Ad Box, software that gives sellers a toll-free number and e-mail address, so their contact information stays anonymous.

At the "Wanted: Classified Systems to Help Grow Revenue" session, nine speakers showed that you can't spell "classified" without two i's: interface and integration. And the Internet, of course...one tool some panelists believed papers aren't yet using to their full advantage. "As the industry evolves, the next step is in the ability to interface circulation and ad systems," said David Kraai, president of Advanced Publishing Technology in Burbank, Calif. "While a customer is placing an online ad, they can be sold a subscription."

Politics has often precluded such teamwork, but people are changing, said Richard Cichelli, president of Software Consulting Services LLC in Nazareth, Pa. "There's a lot you can do with integrated systems so that newspapers can focus on the customer. And when you do that—cha-ching. If we're doing our job right, you're talking to the customer and not each other."

The customer was king at other sessions, including "CRM Technology: What Works?" The list of customer-

Keith Roeske, director of operations at alphaQuest Technologies Inc., talks with an attendee about his company's violet and ultraviolet plate-setters.

relationship management products is overwhelming, said moderator Gail Provenzano, director of field systems for Knight Ridder in San Jose, and the end result of a search is often disappointing. The keys to getting it right, according to panelists, include choosing something that's easy to use with the systems you have, being careful when selecting a vendor, and understanding that this is one component of an overall marketing plan.

New pre-press workflow-management systems were as plentiful as ever on the floor, offering novel ways to, yes, increase customer service, lower costs and free staff members to concentrate on necessary projects rather than administrative tasks.

Poland-based AC&C HSH Group introduced PuzzleFlow, a 30-plus-module workflow system for automated PDF processing, to the U.S. market. MerlinOne Inc. in Quincy, Mass., unveiled Remote Scrounger, which lets bureaus keep photos locally but move them by server to the home office at a prescheduled time when network traffic is lower.

ETearsheet, from ppi Media US Inc. in Aurora, Ill., automates the process of sending tearsheets electronically by generating PDF files with a new layered version. Presteligence Inc. in North Canton, Ohio, released NewsXtreme, a pre-press system that includes modules for intelligent file routing, efficient bitmap management and cost-reducing ink presetting.

Marcin Streszewski, left, and Andrzey Czyz, right, both of AC&C HSH Group in Poland, explain their workflow system for automated PDF processing to John Windle of Package Design magazine.

Computer to plate also remains hot. One session, "The ABCs of CTP," discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each plating technology as well as associated workflow issues and the potential environmental, health and safety implications of each. On the show floor, alfaQuest Technologies Inc. in Rolling Meadows, Ill., showcased its violet and ultraviolet Panther FasTRAK plate-setters together for the first time at NEXPO.

The advent of computer to plate is one reason for the rise in color-management quality in the past half-decade, said John Nate, color specialist at Chromaticity Inc. in Grand Rapids, Mich. "Pre-press shops didn't want to do color management before that. But all of a sudden they started needing it."

At a session called "Color My World: Making Your Photos Look Better with Less Effort," color managers discussed the systems they've chosen to help keep quality under control: BluMunKee, the pre-press automation package from Morris Digital Works in Augusta, Ga.; IntelliTune 3.0, the image-processing system offered by Agfa in Wilmington, Mass.; and Color Factory 5.0, the server-based color-management system from FotoWare, sold by Software Consulting Services.