



Midwest Print Provider Expands into Folding Cartons with the Xeikon 3500



Based in the Kansas City suburb of New Century, Kansas, Stouse is a trade-only specialty print provider. It supplies applications such as labels, decals, magnets and signs to promotional products distributors, commercial printers and marketing and advertising agencies. The company opened its doors as a screen and flexographic printer in 1977 and has since grown into a market leader with 40+ years of consistent sales growth. At any point in time, there are some 3,000 active jobs in the shop.

Clearly an innovator, Stouse has used digital technology in a variety of ways to optimize the shop's efficiency. Stouse began its digital journey in 2003 and, today, the volume of digitally-printed pieces exceeds that of analog. The company offers an e-commerce platform for ordering and job submission that seamlessly interfaces with its digital presses to produce the product, then digitally communicates with their back office systems for functions such as shipping and invoicing. Some jobs process through the shop with very limited human intervention, sometimes even exchanging data with their customers' ERP systems.

In 2019, as part of its ongoing market research, Stouse identified the need for a provider that could profitably handle short runs and offer quick turnaround in the folding carton market. "There were plenty of shops that serviced the big orders that could be run on analog equipment, but those shops were less than enthusiastic about the small or medium size runs," said Nikkie Freeman, Chief Commercial Officer at Stouse. "As a result, there was a salient customer pool that would react favorably to a printer who could offer what they needed. We wanted to be their printer."



Freeman and her colleagues did their homework, examining various digital press options and quickly concluding that the Xeikon 3500 digital press was particularly well-suited for folding cartons. “Xeikon was a natural and it was an easy decision to make,” she said. “They’re the clear leaders in the digitally printed folding carton space.”

The Xeikon 3500 is a proven performer in the Xeikon solution line-up as a wide web press for packaging, producing output as wide as 20.3 inches (516 mm) with a resolution of 1200 dots per inch (dpi). It can print on an exceptionally wide range of substrates without pre-coating/treatment. With no frame limitation, folding cartons can be run without concern for length restrictions.

Stouse’s Xeikon 3500 was installed in late 2019 and Alexis Hobbs, one of Stouse’s graphic designers, was identified as the press’s principal operator. Hobbs began her new job with two weeks of one-on-one training at Xeikon’s Innovation Center in Itasca, Illinois. That was followed up with additional training on Stouse’s 3500 press in New Century. “Xeikon made the learning process efficient, and it was time well spent,” said Hobbs. “It’s good to know the Innovation Center staff is always available to help with any specific questions that arise.”

Although slowed somewhat by the COVID-19 pandemic, Freeman points out that Stouse continues to put the Xeikon 3500 through its paces, pointing out that the company “work[s] all three shifts, five days a week. Our strong digital equipment base allowed us to react quickly when COVID struck and keep our revenue loss to a minimum.”

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The future prospects are very bright for Stouse. “We see tremendous growth potential in the folding carton space,” said Freeman. “and I’m starting to look into harnessing another major strength of Xeikon presses: heat transfer applications. That would be a perfect fit given our specialty products focus.”

She offers sage advice to other shops considering an entry into folding carton market. “Do your homework, understand the full cost of operating your new equipment, visit sites of other print providers and be efficient.

“But don’t be afraid of the investment. Digital presses generally pay for themselves in about 12 months!”



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