

Paper by Damien

Coming Together as an Industry

I don't need to tell you that 2021 was a year full of challenges for the graphic communications industry.

On the one hand, demand for print was strong. On the other hand, just as demand for print came roaring back, we found ourselves battling through the ongoing pandemic (and ever-changing regulations around it), supply chain complications, staffing shortages, paper price increases and domestic paper mill allocations. We learned to be flexible around our paper choices, and were forced to help our customers find alternate ways to achieve their goals. In sum, it was not an easy year.

Something wonderful did come out of all this: Collaboration

In spite of all of the negatives I witnessed, I also saw something that I think should give us all a reason to cheer: Collaboration. The collaboration between distributors, printers and print buyers has been amazing. It seems that adversity has brought everyone together.

In the past 12 months I have seen distributors reaching out to help print buyers, printers helping other printers to share inventory or press time, and more. Even better, this collaboration has not just been local. We're seeing people helping others across different geographies and time zones, too.

Another helpful thing came out of this as well: Communication

Another thing I've been seeing is that printers have stepped up and started providing forecasts and information about upcoming jobs to their distributors. During this time of shortages and allocations, I cannot over-emphasize how incredibly helpful this has been.

Remember, your distributor's goal is to help you get the paper inventory you need to run your jobs. These forecasts give us a better line of sight and clearer understanding of your upcoming needs, which has enabled us to focus our attention with our mill partners on finding the right inventory to meet these needs.

A great example of both collaboration and communication is a Los Angeles-area printer that early on realized and understood the enormous supply challenges our industry is facing in sourcing product. This printer took the initiative to protect *their* customer's business, which is based in the Mid-West, by convening a meeting between the printer, distributor and customer. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the realities of availability/allocation, increased lead times, price increases, etc.

As a result of this meeting the printer's customer had a much clearer understanding of these challenges and responded by providing forecasts that went well beyond six months. This allowed everyone to work together to create a plan for a more seamless operation of the business.

I'm proud of our industry

The bottom line is, what I'm seeing is that everyone has been resilient, patient and flexible through the ongoing challenges that we are facing. The way that we've come together at this difficult time is a reflection of what an excellent industry we are in. While I anticipate it will continue to be tough moving forward into 2022, by working together we'll get through it.