

“One of the Most Impressive Aspects of the SigmaLine Is Its Scalability”

Three years after the first SigmaLine, Webcrafters in Madison, the capital of the US state of Wisconsin, invested in a second total solution from Muller Martini for the digital production of print products from data to the finished product. That means Webcrafters benefits from the great flexibility of the fully automated SigmaFolder II signature folder, which can now also be configured optimally for web widths from 20 to 30 inches, in addition to the established applications from 42 to 60 inches.



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► “We installed SigmaLine #1 in 2011 with the expectation of handling the majority of our short-run book production”, says Webcrafters’ Executive Vice President & Chief Operations Officer. “As run lengths continued to decrease, we needed more digital capacity to handle all this increasing demand for digital print. That led us to install SigmaLine #2. Line #2 is initially running between 20 and 35% faster than line #1 since day one. However, Muller Martini offers us upgrades for SigmaLine #1, which increase performance.”

“Significant New Features”

Speaking about Webcrafters’ digital system, John Filsinger is full of praise for the complete solution from Muller Martini for digital book production. “We’re very excited about the capabilities of our second SigmaLine, particularly since it’s able to keep up with the full operating speeds of the Kodak Prosper 5000XLi high-speed digital inkjet press. We believe our uptime percentage is going to continue to improve dramatically with the addition of the all-new system design of the SigmaFolder II

platform. It has some significant new features including a straight horizontal paper path, which provides excellent control of lightweight stocks. Muller Martini is also working with us on some special variable data printing (VDP) capabilities. One of the most impressive aspects of SigmaLine is its scalability, which enables it to accommodate wider and faster print engine technology if we need it to.”

It should be noted that the Prosper 5000XLi has a print width of up to 24.5 inches at speeds of up to 650 feet per min-

1 John Filsinger (right), Executive Vice President & Chief Operations Officer, speaking about Webcrafters' digital system: "We're very excited about the capabilities of our second Muller Martini SigmaLine, particularly since it's able to keep up with the full operating speeds of the Kodak Prosper 5000XLi high-speed digital inkjet press". Left: Eric Olsen, Sales Manager at Muller Martini North America.

2 With the second SigmaLine, which was commissioned this April, Webcrafters has further increased its productivity by 35 to 40 percent.



markets, using its two high-performance in-line systems – the three-year old SigmaLine is likewise connected with an inkjet digital printing press, the Kodak Prosper 5000XL. "We're probably the pre-eminent 'teachers' book' manufacturer in the country," says Filsinger.

The books tend to average around 600 pages/title and are frequently published for multiple grades at the same time and are spiral bound, case bound, saddle stitched (for which Webcrafters in Madison uses a Primera, a SH300 and two SH 235 machines from Muller Martini) or perfect bound (using four Normbinders from Muller Martini).

"Digital Printing Is Making Huge Bounds"

Digital printing has made huge bounds in the education sector, in particular, in recent years, says Filsinger. There are three key reasons for that. First, the increasingly short time windows from when titles are released before the start of the new semester or school year, which are compensated for by the higher speeds of the digital print-

ing presses without the make-ready aspect of conventional offset printing. Second, the constantly improving printing quality of digital printing presses. And third, the goal of publishers to reduce inventory obsolescence and print only what is needed. A seamless workflow is crucial to digital printing. The higher the degree of automation in print finishing, the more attractive digital in-line systems become."

That is why Webcrafters, which employs 370 people 24/5, or 24/6 during the peak season for producing teaching materials from May to August, prints the majority of runs of up to 1,000 copies digitally. While the lower limit can be as little as five copies on rare occasions, the maximum is often as many as 2,500 copies, and Filsinger is convinced that "it will continue to rise in the coming years".

Upgrades for the First SigmaLine

The main reason why the traditional company invested in a second SigmaLine after three years was its significantly higher job volume in the education segment and the field of B2B catalogs, where Webcrafters

ute. So Webcrafters needed technology that could keep up with these press speeds with four-color printing on lightweight, coated stocks. That was one of the main reasons why pairing it with Muller Martini's SigmaLine book manufacturing system made good business sense.

Education Sector First

Webcrafters, which was established 145 years ago, predominantly produces books in English and Spanish for schools and universities throughout the US and export

offers innovative products with customized and often personalized elements. The company has also used a range of options to upgrade the first line to keep the gap between it and the new system as small as possible. "Our flexibility in digital printing is now even greater," underlines Filsinger. "If we're under major time pressure, we can split a job between two lines, which we do regularly. And we have a backup machine, in case there's ever a problem."

The COO explains, however, that problems with the two SigmaLines, which are each controlled by two machine operators and are controlled comprehensively with the two printing machines by the System-Connex data and process management system, are very rare. "We're extremely happy with it, and the two systems are very

operator friendly. In sum, this solution is very favorable for us, and it pays off that we have a partner like Muller Martini that tackles all the challenges of digital printing together with us." ◀

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Webcrafters in Madison, WI installed its first SigmaLine in 2011, six years after entering digital printing.

Now with Web Width from 20 to 60 Inches: the SigmaLine Becomes Even More Flexible

The fully automated SigmaFolder II signature folder can now also be configured optimally for web widths from 20 to 30 inches (and every increment in between), in addition to the established applications from 42 to 60 inches. The variable SigmaFolder II signature folder, which is part of Muller Martini's SigmaLine, the first fully integrated and industrial total solution for the digital production of print products from data to the completed print product, serves as the flexible link between digital printing and print finishing. Thanks to its modular design, it is possible to choose from a range of elements such as split &

merge, various former folds, cross cutting, cross fold and chop fold modules.

As a result, the SigmaFolder II can be adapted even more readily to new market requirements and market segments. The optimal solution in each case is determined by the web width of the printing system and the sizes to be processed, as well as the required finishing style. That provides digital printing companies with the most cost-effective solution for their current and future needs and maximum flexibility for their print products.

Thanks to its scalability, the system can be extended later at any time to meet new

market requirements or new digital printing technologies, providing the customer with a high degree of investment protection. Furthermore, the SigmaLine can also tap into new market segments downstream of digital printing presses with smaller web widths (see also the augmented reality animation of the SigmaLine in "Panorama" 2/14).