

# GraphicArts

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### CASE STUDY

by KEVIN WILEN, Executive VP, Wilen Direct



**W**ilen Group is a pioneer in using variable data and digital printing to enhance results. The parent company's three separate, branded Wilen divisions, operating in New York and Florida—Wilen Direct, Wilen Media Corp., and WILopEN—offer everything from direct marketing and printing to data management. We started out as a marketing agency and although we did not initially own a print manufacturing operation, our evolution has given us a fantastic opportunity to deliver a number of cutting-edge marketing and printing services and cross-media programs to our growing client base.

Most people remember the cable television guides in the late 1970s. Those are the products on which we built the original business. The product and marketing strategies were originally designed around the premise of a retention business—getting cable subscribers to continue their subscriptions through the mass promotion of TV listings. Under the name of Pubmark back then, we laid the groundwork for how broadcasters promoted their shows and channel packages, and today we are still the leader in this space. This business really started to grow for Wilen Group in the 1980s with the launch of a cable TV listings guide called *Premium Channels*.

In the 1990s, as more of the Wilen family began to get involved, we formally established the Wilen Group. We continued to grow and expand. Since 1991 we've handled direct mail marketing for every major sporting event for the cable industry—every Holyfield fight, every Tyson fight and every other Pay-Per-View event.

“Until about 1997, we were buying printing services from five or more different printing companies, and in some cases we were actually the lead customer in these printing facilities,” says Darrin Wilen, president of our Wilen Media Corp. unit. “We were outsourcing a majority of our work, but we worked very closely with our suppliers and had a good understanding of the printing business. Because most of the cable

Wilen Group's marketing services blend offset, digital.

Wilen Direct personalizes high-profile projects at full web offset press speeds using the first Prosper S10 inkjet imprinting system.

# A PERFECT MEDIA MIX

## Transpromotional Commercial Work

Imprinting high-speed variable inkjet personalization and versioning inline on offset presses also added process efficiency. We use digital black to reduce or eliminate black plate changes.

guides were typically inserted in customer statements, they had to be printed on extremely lightweight papers and posed a number of challenges for printers.”

As we worked to push the envelope as far as what could be done in the printing of these guides, it became harder to collaborate and coordinate with our print providers. “We switched suppliers a number of times, but began to feel like we weren’t in control of our own destiny,” Wilen explains. In 1997 we made the decision to buy a press and a new building and do the printing ourselves. Starting with an 8-unit Harris M1000 double web press, we immediately began shifting our print volume to in-house production.

From there, we continued to expand our printing capabilities, purchasing a Baker Perkins G14 press with in-line finishing in 2000, and using Agfa equipment for prepress. We were producing 5 million to 8 million pieces monthly during those days.

In early 2005, we started talking internally about getting involved in variable data printing and wanted to explore the options on the market. At the PRINT 05 show we looked at a lot of different technologies and realized that by adding a digital imaging head to one of our existing offset presses, we could effectively have our own digital print solution that still gave us all the advantages of offset. We decided on the Kodak Versamark 6240 Printing System and installed it on our press.

The advantages of running a digital imaging head on an offset press are two-fold: we can personalize each piece that we produce, or we can simply use the black-and-white imaging capabilities to reduce our black plate changes by printing very short runs of many versions. In fact, the real reason we bought the first imaging head was to eliminate low-volume plate changes by addressing all the black print needs with just the head. As our needs changed over time, the technology was a key factor for our growth in the VDP business sector, providing our clients new direct marketing tools.

“This market is extremely competitive, so we need every advantage we can get,” says Wilen. “By implementing the newest technology and offering innovative services, we are able to help our clients achieve their goals and find new ways to enhance their results.” The latest addition to our arsenal of tools is the Kodak Prosper S10 Imprinting System, which we have installed on our presses. With the S10, we are able to produce 80,000 pieces per hour (1.6 million per day), on just one of our presses. We use the solution to produce our inline LetterPak pieces in a single process without

the need for laser printing and inserting steps. LetterPak allows a direct marketer to include a letter, buckslip or other tactic inside a formed envelope that wraps around any one of these freestanding pieces, and it’s all produced completely inline.

We’ve been pleased that the Prosper S10 is easy to move from press to press. We can use it wherever it’s needed. The process is similar to preparing for a press makeready. Once it’s running it has no problem keeping up with our press speeds of about 1,050 fpm.

Another area that represents a big opportunity for us is cross-media promotion. Using our expertise in database mining and management, we help our clients leverage their data to more accurately target and measure their efforts, and drive a higher response. “With PURLs and other 1-to-1 trackable strategies, we are able to establish a trail of communication with a consumer, tailoring those messages, finding out more about the likes and dislikes of the consumer and using digital printing to personalize the materials that are sent,” says Wilen. Today, we are focused on maximizing



The Prosper S10 inkjet is easy to move from press to press. Makeready is similar to offset. And it keeps up at 1,050 fpm.

the digital technology we have in place to bring our business to the next level. Over the coming year, we expect to add more capacity and position ourselves to build on the success of our accomplishments to date.

Over the years, the mission of our business has remained consistent: to help our customers find the most effective way to deliver a message and achieve the results they desire. By tailoring the messages and using the latest digital technologies, we are able to accomplish that goal and continue to push the envelope in regards to how marketers increase the effectiveness of their messages. ■

**FREE WEBCAST:** Wilen Group's Darrin Wilen explains Kodak Stream technology used in the S10 Prosper imprinting system. [graphicartsonline.com/webcast](http://graphicartsonline.com/webcast)

Wilen Direct employs four Kodak S10 imprinting systems to print variable information simultaneously on both sides of the web. We are able to produce 80,000 personalized pieces per hour—1.6 million per day—on just one of our presses. The print heads (right) can be used on both Goss and Baker Perkins (far right) press lines and quickly switched between them. On occasion, the black Stream-based inkjet can replace conventional black offset plating, eliminating the need for low-volume plate changes on highly versioned color offset runs. Over time, a key growth factor has become variable digital printing.



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