

PRINTING STANDARDS AUDITS – WHO REALLY CARES?

by Dan Wilson

Mid January I travelled to New York for the first offering of the Printing Standards Audit (PSA) consultant training course. Who cares? Well, **Your Customers (maybe soon to be 'ex-customers')** are the people who care if your business is recognised as a company competent in producing print to recognised international standards. Major print buyers and global brands look for reliable and consistent print and packaging suppliers. They want to know their (ISO Standard) PDF/X file will be printed (litho, flexo, digital, screen) in such a fashion that it will match their remotely produced in-house ISO 12647-7 proof. The only way to achieve a match to the remotely produced ISO proof is if the printer has implemented the best practices and efficiency found in the relevant ISO standard(s).

The course in New York was presented by Professor Robert Chung, Gravure Research Professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Media Sciences. Professor Chung is also chair of the ISO Working Group researching if it is possible to harmonise a global approach across countries to recognising printers who have successfully implemented ISO standards into their every day production routines. All countries have different approaches to recognising a printer's 'ISO qualification'. From Germany there is 'Fogra recognition', Switzerland's UGRA certifies 'UGRA PSO', which covers a suite of standards, and the UK's British Printing Industry Federation has created a system based on ISO 9000 to validate offset print standards such as ISO 12647-2. Some systems are much more complex than others but they all achieve the goal of publicly recognising a printer's commitment to quality by implementing ISO standards. By far the largest 'quality recognition programme' is in the US where over 1,000 printers have been recognised as G7 Master Printers. The USA's take up of recognising 'quality printers' has been greater than all other countries' systems combined.

The North American flexo industry has also made extraordinary progress in adopting ISO standard's best practices over the last six years. I think they now lead the world in flexo packaging quality printing. Not only are America's flexo printers producing a better product more reliably, they are making more profit on

each job due to the inherent efficiencies of the FIRST 4.0 standardised production process, a process which uses ISO standards as its foundation.

The information imparted during the PSA Consultant training is at the leading edge of efficient print manufacturing practices being adopted in the most profitable printing, packaging and content creating businesses around the world.

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Who else cares about a Printing Standards Audit? **Companies That Want To Extract More Profit** from the work already coming through the door and those who are seeking a competitive marketing tool to get new customers. Litho, flexo, screen and digital printers adopting the principles and practices of PSA are all about efficiency, profit and marketing opportunities.

On a personal note, the PSA Consultant



training builds upon my earlier training and experience. Previously I qualified as a 'G7 PCC Expert' (Process Control & Conformance) – able to 'grey-balance calibrate any cmyk print process (using spectral values - from a spectro)'. I'm also qualified to implement 29 training modules addressing efficient print manufacture, from making sure everyone has the same settings in PhotoShop to Trending and Analysis of on-going print production. My other qualifications include recognition as an UGRA PSO Expert Consultant (Process Standard Offset - 12647-2). PSO is the European approach to press calibration using density and dot gain values from a densitometer. This is still a viable approach for a process control method but I think the future will be more focused on the printed products becoming the standard (using a spectro) rather than the European density/dot gain centric process control method.

Finally, I am recognised as a FIRST 4.0 Flexo Colour Implementation Specialist. Created by America's Flexo Trade Association, FIRST 4.0 (Flexo Image Reproduction Specifications & Tolerances - Version 4.0) is the most comprehensive best practice guide to flexo available. The American flexo industry continues to benefit dramatically from adopting the best practices outlined in FIRST 4.0. Now press operators are certified to different levels of expertise and entire plants are being recognised for their commitment to quality and efficiency by proudly being 'FIRST Certified'.

I am grateful to the NSAI (National Standards Association of Ireland) for their continued support of my role as chair of the Irish TC130 committee. All are welcome to join the Irish TC130, whose work it is to review and comment on ISO standards that are being updated. The Irish TC130's work load is not onerous but it can be a bit technical at times.

Enquiries regarding different certification options are always welcome, as are questions about ISO standards and requests to participate in the Irish TC130. For further information contact: Dan.Wilson@PressRoomColour.com.