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Best design? 'I don't know,' is the answer

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SPECIAL TO NEWSPAPERS & TECHNOLOGY

You're going to buy a new press and you start to ask yourself some questions with regard to where it should go.

Unless you do this all the time, typical answers usually come from your own past experience. What did we do the last time? What did we do at our sister newspaper? What did the competing newspaper do? So which one of these if any should you copy?

The answer is, I don't know.

Any and all of these could be great or disastrous solutions to the problem. The correct answer is that it depends on the individual newspaper's philosophy, needs and goals, as well as the current situation with respect to the existing equipment, property, leases, budget and timing.

So when purchasing a new press, is it best to:

- Add on to and renovate your existing facility?
- Build a new production facility on a nearby brownfield site?
- Build a new production facility on a new greenfield site?
- Build a new office and production facility on a new greenfield site?
- Buy an existing building and convert it into a new production facility?
- Buy an existing building and convert it into a new office and production facility?
- Join up with another newspaper and build a joint production facility?
- Build a new office and production facility and joint production facility with another newspaper?

First, I owe you a couple of defini-



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tions. A greenfield site is nothing more than an undeveloped piece of land. It could be a new site in an industrial park, or simply some farmland.

A brownfield site refers to a site that has already been fully developed in the past and is now going to be stripped down to the ground and redeveloped. It is often a city block in a downtown area, or a large piece of land in an old industrial park that had been built on in the past.

So which option is the best for housing a new press? I don't know.

It really does depend on the newspaper's philosophy, needs and situation.

We are designing and constructing nine new homes for nine new presses for nine different newspapers.

So, which of the eight building options was the best? You got it, I don't know.

The truth is, that of the eight options above, we are actually doing one of each. There were no cookie cutters here, although we just finished 12, double-width press tower additions for The Wall Street Journal that included several cookie cutter projects.

I found it especially interesting that five of the presses are for the same parent company — Booth Newspapers — in the same state, Michigan, and yet all of the projects are vastly different.

At the Kalamazoo Gazette, as well as the Union-News in Springfield, Mass., it made the most sense to choose the first option from above, which was to add on to the existing facility. This was due to cost and timing of the project, as well as a commitment to the city.

The Flint Journal chose the second option, which was to build a new production facility on an adjacent brownfield site. This was based on cost, function and a commitment to the city.

The Grand Rapids Press selected option three, which was to build a new 165,000-square-foot facility at a new greenfield site. This decision was based on cost, function, flexibility, future growth and a commitment to the downtown. The commitment was in leaving

the office operations in the city.

The Bay City Times started off with option five, which was to buy an existing facility and convert it into a new production facility. After further investigation, The Saginaw News decided to join forces with the Bay City Times in forming a new company called Valley Publishing. Valley Publishing chose option seven above, which is a joint production facility. This was based on cost, function, flexibility and the desire to still have a presence in the two downtowns.

As mentioned earlier, The Wall Street Journal color project speaks pretty loudly to the cookie cutter approach that includes several very similar building types with the same owner, the same news content, the same deadlines, the same product, and the same needs and goals.

There are many things that can be standard or cookie cutter in nature such as a flexible design, a functional layout, durable materials, low maintenance, materials and building systems, mailroom and office heights, restroom and locker details, ink tank pit design and lighting.

However, all of the projects we discussed were different. One should not reinvent the wheel for every detail, but should always look at each of them just in case the old way is no longer the best way.

In retrospect, one can see that the answer to what type of a facility is best for housing a new press is dependent on that particular newspaper's needs, situation, and philosophy. So my answer to this question is, and probably always will be, I don't know.▲

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