Consolidating small dailies go doublewide into flexo with America's first Cerutti newspaper press and laserless CTP

FAITH in FLEXO

New Cerutti S4 presses in Didcot, England (top left), will print the *Daily Mail*., Blue S4s, in Bologna, print *il Corriere della Sera*, Italy's biggest daily.

BY JIM ROSENBERG

A FLEXO PIONEER THAT STARTED OUT with converted letter presses has decided that what's good for a colorful multimillion-circulation mid-market national daily in England is good for a couple of small community dailies — and commercial printing customers —in New England.

When flexography was new to newspapers, New England Newspapers (NNE) was among the first to adopt the process, buying factory-converted presses in 1989 from Publishers Equipment Corp. for its two New Hampshire plants. Since becoming familiar with, fine-tuning, and eventually favoring the printing process, its *Concord Monitor* has consistently turned out award-winning print quality.

A few years ago, NNE was the first to test a singlewide, two-around flexo unit designed by Tech-Energy to run with the Goss Urbanite at its Massachusetts property, *The Recorder*, in Greenfield. After bugs were worked out and the Cibolo, Texas-based manufacturer designed a four-high flexo color tower, *The Recorder* was ready to order the towers for a new plant it was about to design.

Those plans changed after NNE purchased the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* in nearby Northampton, Mass., two years ago. Also facing replacement of that paper's Urbanite, the parent company decided to put a new pressroom in Northampton that will print both papers.

But instead of the new four-high color towers, that new pressroom will be the home to North America's first

Cerutti S4 — a doublewide flexo press consisting entirely of four-color satellite units — and the newest, automatic computer-to-plate technology for newspaper flexo, imaging the newest, thinnest photopolymer plates.

If NNE's preferred printing process and, given its papers' size, its choice of a doublewide press put it in the minority of North American newspapers, the type and maker of its new press make it unique among that group. But in its underlying drive to production consolidation, NNE is very much a part of an industrywide trend (May EP) — most recently evident nearby, in Rutland and Barre, Vt., at Journal Register's dailies in suburban Cleveland, and at Black Press' Sound Publishing, near Seattle.

New publisher, new production

New ownership means more than a new printing process and press for the *Gazette*. A change to morning delivery last September "has been a resounding success. Circulation's up," says new publisher Aaron Julien. The former partner in a Portland, Maine, law firm served as NNE's business development vice president and general counsel, as well as *Gazette* general manager last year under former owner Peter L. DeRose, who continued as publisher until January. Julien still travels to New Hampshire about once a week to perform some general counsel functions.

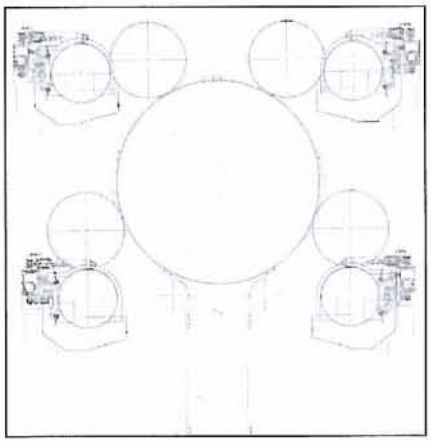
Gazette circulation stood at 17,552 (19,391 Saturday) when it switched from afternoons to mornings. But with a "press that's so much faster than before," says Julien, no scheduling difficulties are anticipated in also printing the 13,786-circulation morning *Recorder*. "We should hit pretty much the same deadlines we hit now," he adds.

Also helping will be the *Gazette's* GMA (Muller Martini) SLS-1000 inserter, which will provide improved inserting for the *Recorder* compared with the carousel inserter now used in Greenfield. Neither newspaper publishes on Sunday, and no Sunday editions or redesigns are planned.

Most of the 7,000 square feet to be added to the building will be devoted to printing the paper. The new pressroom will be connected to the front of the building because "there wasn't enough room where the existing pressroom was, and we have to keep printing the whole time," Julien explains.

At the same time, the lack of room to expand at the back of the building means being able to make the new press visible to anyone on the road out front.

Inside, it means a longer conveyor run from the press folder to the mailroom. Other



To put process color on each side of a web, stacked S4 units use one impression cylinder (above) and a Tech Express tower uses four.

than that, however, the design should enable the operation to "keep the same traffic patterns inside and outside the building," Julien says.

NNE retained Dario Designs of Marlboro, Mass., for final architecture and engineering on the project, which won approval from local authorities in March. "They have a planning and zoning permit," says President Dario DiMare, whose firm earlier had been tapped to design a new plant for the *Recorder* (E&P Online, March 24, 2004). "So we have to keep it as similar-looking as we can" to the original design work supplied by Arc-West. DiMare was to meet with Cerutti representatives in Northampton and again at Nexpo.

Latest in plates, platesetting

The new pressroom is slated to be in regular operation in the fall of next year, after which the old pressroom will serve as a storage area for some equipment and for the larger quantity of newsprint required to print both newspapers and any commercial work.

Platemaking will occupy some existing offices and such currently unused areas as the old darkroom. CTP came late to newspaper flexo, and Northampton will get the latest – two laserless basysPrint ultraviolet imagers sold by MacDermid Printing Solutions. Germany's basysPrint, a unit of Belgium's Punch Graphix, relied on technology it already had developed for its digital imager for UV-sensitive litho plates in designing for flexo's UV-sensitive photopolymer. Rather than writing the imaging (or non-imaging) with a laser, as all other newspaper platesetters do, basysPrint machines employ a high-output conventional UV lamp in combination with digitally controllable micromirrors from Texas Instruments.

Now available in a continuous-scrolling automatic model, the basysPrint machines are an alternative to the UV-laser-based NAPPflex CTP device build by PerkinElmer Optoelectronics (E&P, Oct., 2004; E&P Online, Aug. 17, 2005). "We pulled the PerkinElmer [beta] unit back and replaced it with the basysPrint" at the *New Hampshire Union-Leader*," says MacDermid Printing Solutions Sales and Marketing Manager for NAPP Systems Ed Bennett. Running two machines, the Manchester operation was the first to use the new model form basysPrint, according to Tom Moore, MacDermid Printing Solutions' U.S. sales manager.

MacDermid will continue selling both platesetters, says Moore, noting that *The Providence* (R.I.) *Journal* is running one NAPPflex CTP unit and installing a second. Both New England sites got their new platesetters at the beginning of the year.

England will be the next big NAPPflex site, when *Daily Mail* publisher Associated Newspapers Ltd. (ANL) opens it second large production plant, in Didcot, where four NAPPflex imagers will output plates.

"We're still debugging the NAPPflex," says Moore, explaining that its software had to be revised to reflect a conversion from landscape to portrait operation. "Overall, it's doing well," he adds.

Also as in Didcot, Northampton's CTP lines will expose MacDermid's newest, thinnest NAPP plate, which has been in testing on the KBA presses at ANL's Harmsworth Quays Printing plant, located in London's docklands.

Most customers have converted to a thinner plate, says Bennett, noting the change from 0.022 inch to 0.020 inch. The newest is 0.0165 inch, which Julien hopes will speed throughput and provide better image definition from higher line screens. For MacDermid—long the only supplier of newspaper flexo plates—and its customers, a thinner plate also "is the only way for us to contain

costs," adds Bennett. "It's the polymer, mainly."

That the 0.0165-inch NAPP plate already is used on Cerutti flexo presses in Italy should afford some confidence to ANL, which is installing S4 presses in Didcot and to NNE, which will mount them using non-magnetic Barenschee locks.

Common-impression color

With a press at *la Repubblica* in 1985, Cerutti was perhaps the first to put flexo into regular newspaper production. Headquartered in Casale Monferato, in northwestern Italy, where it began as a machine shop, Gruppo Cerrutti's first presses were rotogravure machines, which it still manufactures. Today it counts 384 flexo couples printing at least nine newspapers in Italy (not counting a combined flexo-gravure site in Sardinia).

Until the mid-1990s, Cerutti was represented at the annual Nexpo trade show. But through flexo's best years it never sold a press in the U.S., though it has equipped large flexo plants in Italy. Acquistions brought the company two U.S. sites, one of which, in Rochester Hills, Mich., hosts its U.S. sales and marketing, service and parts, according to Daniele Temporin, Cerutti's flexo technology vice president and former R&D chief.

Besides the S4's design and suitability for other, lighter paper, Cerutti said in March that the advent of news flexo CTP and the arrival of a second plate supplier made the timing right to re-enter the market.

Julien dates NNE's connection to Cerutti from the late 1980s, when the *Monitor* narrowed its choice of press maker to PEC or Cerutti. "I guess that would be the start of their relationship. Now, we have two papers that are very close, about 18 miles apart," and both need to replace their Urbanites, Julien says. While offset and flexo were both considered, he continues, NNE has had a very good experience with the latter (Concord's "very large commercial business...has done very well," he says) and with MacDermid's NAPP Systems.

So NNE consulted ANL, which had long investigated flexo options and was impressed with Cerutti, a press maker "completely committed to flexography," says Julien, adding: "When we looked at the presses from Cerutti, we were blown away."

NNE bought six shaftless S4 doublewide satellite units configured as three stacks, with each level of each stack capable of four-color printing on one side of a web owing to the common-impression design: four sets of inker, engraved anilox roller (to transfer the ink) and plate cylinder around a single large impression cylinder.

In capacity, Northampton's S4 will equal three doublewide eight-couple towers, and will be able to produce a 48-page collect run. Separate former boards will "accommodate the quarterfold market," Julien says of certain commercial products. With a 2:3:3 jaw folder, the press can operate at 70,000 copiers per hour, though it is rated at 80,000 cph with a larger folder option.

While cut-off will be 21-1/2 inches, web width will have some variability, with newspapers on the upper formers at either 48 or 46 inches and webs for quarterfold work at either 48 or 50 inches. The commercial operation also will benefit from a stitcher and trimmer, though no vendor has been selected yet.

A photo illustration shows how the new pressroom will face the road and parking lot in front of the *Hampshire Daily Gazette* building.

An important reason for the choice of the S4, says Julien, was the short distance the web travels around the common cylinder between impressions of four process colors, which promotes "dead-on" color register because it does away with fan-out. The publisher also pointed to the press' ability to come up to speed quickly with little waste. Finally, he noted that with packaging and gravure presses in this country, Cerutti offers domestic support: "So when we looked out and saw everything that was going on, we felt comfortable."

For its part, Cerutti promotes the compact units' reduced manning, make-ready, and maintenance. The press offers end-of-run and on-the-fly automatic wash-up and ink system wash-up. Options include automated reel handling, stitching at the former or folder, quarter and double-parallel folders, angle-bar arrangements for special sections and inserts, and infrared dryers between first and second print units.

Selling singlewide

For sites that don't need doublewide printing volumes, MacDermid has been giving demos of the singlewide two-around Tech Express tower, which, unlike Cerutti's stacked satellites, prints both sides of a web with one color on one level using impression cylinders, then does the same for the remaining three colors on three other pairs of printing couples. The tower is nevertheless compact, rising less than 14 feet, and capable of producing eight four-color pages at 50,000 copies per hour. With 36-inch webs, it can be configured to print three pages across, for 12 four-color pages.

In Greenfield, the shaftless tower's performance was hobbled by its connection to the Urbanite folder. To function with Greenfield's equipment, it ran off an encoder but the original idea of adding the tower to an existing Urbanite and allowing the existing drive to control it just didn't work, according to Tech-Energy President John E. Pickard. When using the encoder, he says, register could be perfect in one place and off as much as a quarter inch just six inches away.

Now, he continues, "we're not really thinking about adding it on." Sales will be as stand-alone installations with an Urbanite folder that uses the same kind of drive motor as the press. In addition to such flexo benefits as water-based inks with no rub-off, low start-up waste, vibrant color, and less training and manning, the console-controllable Tech Express with two-pin, no-bend, magnetic lockup is being marketed for printing more than just newspapers.

Some newpapers sites with commercial customers want near-heatset quality on small presses, says Pickard. They either cannot do it, or must run on separate units or on a certain schedule, as with UV inks. In contrast, flexo will do the job for newspapers and other products on other, heavier paper or supercalendered stock. Regardless of whether a shop is printing ion newsprint or supercal, says MacDermid's Bennett, "the ink is the same" on a flexo press.