

BUILDING BOOM FOR BOOTH NEWSPAPERS

Dario Designs Inc. tapped for five of group's eight Michigan dailies

BY JIM ROSENBERG

AGAINST THE INDUSTRY TIDE, *THE GRAND RAPIDS Press* prints on letterpress for afternoon delivery by kids. For the six-month period ended Sept. 30, the *Press* reported its circulation, year over year, rose 0.24% daily, to 140,135, and 0.54% Sunday, to 192,477.

Despite this solid showing, operations need to be upgraded. But if it means the same kids will bring customers cleaner, crisper, more colorful, and better-zoned papers, maybe the trend line won't flatten, and the new plant being built to house those operations will one day make use of a design that provides for expansion to twice its size.

In a huge plant and equipment modernization program at Advance Publications' Booth Newspapers, Dario Designs Inc. is designing four buildings that will produce five of the group's eight Michigan dailies, of which the *Press* is by far the largest.

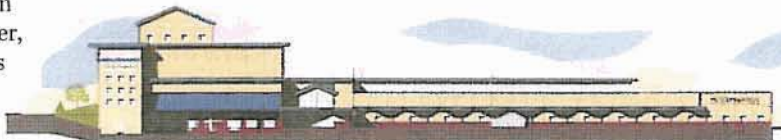
The *Press* signed Dario Designs to create a greenfield, 170,000-square-foot production and distribution plant in neighboring Walker, "approximately seven miles from our downtown location," said Operations Director Robert W. Pierce, who expects to be "fully operational in the summer of 2004."

The Framingham, Mass.-based architects said the site's "undulating topography" and the structure's design suggest the Grand River, symbolizing the city's origins. Lighting in its 528-foot-long, 60-foot-high automatic storage and retrieval system's (AS/RS) enclosure will illuminate a representation of the river's rapids on translucent paneling of a highway-facing wall.

A part of press maker MAN Roland's Aurosys roll-handling system, the AS/RS will have 2,250 spaces for newsprint and inserts. "There are several flavors of [Aurosys]," said Pierce. "We are buying a stacker

crane" for seven-high storage in a design "very similar" to that at the *Dayton* (Ohio) *Daily News*. Storage is parallel to the press, with an eight- to 10-foot transfer distance.

MAN's Geoman press will consist of 64 couples in eight four-high towers over 12 reelstands, with two forming sections — a two-high and a three-high — in a layout



East elevation of *The Grand Rapids Press*' production and distribution plant in Walker, Mich.

expandable to 12 towers, 12 reelstands, and a third folder. From Monday to Saturday, Pierce expects to run the line as a single straight press; for Sunday mainsheets, he foresees running it as two collect presses.

The Geoman will feature DynaChange on-the-fly plate change. In thinking about managing that, said Pierce, "a whole new vista opens up for you." It means dealing with edition changes on a press that doesn't stop, but merely offers brief gaps in the copy stream when pasters are made. If that efficiency isn't matched in the mailroom, it disappears. Software is the way "you have to make that happen," said Pierce, pointing

out that otherwise all on-press savings are spent in packaging. So products must be properly identified for direction to appropriate post-press equipment.

To preserve production efficiency, the *Press* will rely on buffering between printing and packaging. For that and the software to manage it, "we're negotiating a contract with GMA," Pierce said.

He plans to have three buffering systems dedicated to three 30-head SLS3000 inserters, with dynamically updated software to balance the load on inserters. "On the zone changes," said Pierce, it will know where best to direct the new edition, based on current conditions and efficiency of processing the next edition. He added that although "GMA doesn't have that software completely written," no other vendor has it and GMA was the only one to offer it.

Conceding it is a "bit of a leap of faith," Pierce added, "If we, with GMA's help, can pull this off, then I think it will be unique."

The paper now has three editions, "and we're looking to expand to six," he said, explaining that the one metro edition "would be broken up into four separate ones."

But even DynaChange and post-press programming won't yield efficient edition expansion "without anyone needing to make a sacrifice," said Pierce (referring to shorter deadlines or longer in-plant time) unless prepress information is integrated into production management. Such integration could, say, inform platemaking of what plates are needed and when. (The *Press* will wait to see how the group's namesake *Staten Island* [N.Y.] *Advance*

evaluates basysPrint's UV Setter 57 exposure unit before committing to a computer-to-plate solution by spring.)

To get there, said Pierce, "we're leaning

toward PPI" — the developer of production planning and management software that MAN acquired last year. It reflects the belief that integration is most reliable when performed by a single supplier — MAN for prepress, press, and paper handling, and GMA for buffering and inserting machinery and software.

As for the latter, noting how much easier bulk shipment would be, Pierce remarked, "If we were going to distribution centers, all this fancy software ... wouldn't be necessary." But the *Press* creates odd-count bundles for its mostly young carriers, and "that odd-count just drives you nuts." ■