Maintaining Your Press For Profitability

In order to have a successful print operation, the presses must be kept running with a minimum of downtime. Whenever there is downtime due to poor print quality or mechanical breakdown, it will affect your profitability. Properly maintained equipment is essential to quality printing and fast turnaround. It will also provide benefits such as extended roller and blanket life and fewer service calls. The key is to implement a thorough cleaning regimen that will prevent process problems from ever occurring.

Glazed rollers are a common problem usually associated with a buildup of hard ink, fountain solution, blanket was, gum or paper contaminants and is identified by a visible glaze. This glaze reduces the ink receptivity characteristics of ink rollers and results in poor copy quality and/or stripping. If permitted to remain on the rollers for a long period of time, glaze could crack and damage the roller surface. The recommended solution is to use a daily roller deglazer (4-4978), being careful not to leave on the rollers for a prolonged period of time for doing so may cause roller swelling.

Another problem is that of sensitized rollers. This condition is not visible since the contaminants have entered the pores of the rollers, but is manifested by poor copy quality, stripping and sometimes ink piling on the water rollers of integrated presses. A preventative measure is to use a product such as AB Dick Ink Roller Desensitizer (4-4970) on a weekly basis.

Ink Roller Conditioner (4-4976) is a good product to use following the application of desensitizer or when running a lot of short-run, repetitive duplicating. This product restores maximum ink receptivity to the rollers and is also useful in removing particles of paper sizing.

Maintaining the super aquamatic rollers on alcohol or alcohol substitute systems is best accomplished with Suredot Metering Water Roller Cleaner (4-1249). This non-abrasive product decontaminates both the rubber fountain roller and chrome ductor roller while enhancing water receptivity. A final coat of Blue Etch (4-1015) will help repel ink on these rollers as well as on chrome cylinders.

Choosing the ‘correct' blanket wash is sometimes not as easy as it seems with all of the products available today and their differences in drying time (evaporation rates), solvent strength, odor (fragrance), VOCs and flammability. Avoid fast drying or ‘hot' blanket washes if possible as these have less time to suspend the ink before being wiped from the rollers and blankets. Extra strength solvents can also have a negative effect on the rollers and blankets since they remove plasticizers and cause the rubber to swell.

Using a water miscible blanket wash gives you the benefit of dual cleaning action since it helps remove solvent soluble (ink) and water soluble contaminants (paper, gum) in a single step. Because they are not a pure solvent product, they also help extend the life of rollers and blankets and are lower in VOCs.

As with any roller cleaner or blanket wash, roller contamination is always a possibility. Traces of chemicals left in the rollers react with inks, fountain solutions, plates and the rollers themselves leading to problems such as swollen rollers, stripping, emulsification and plate blinding. A good practice is to always follow an application of any roller cleaner with blanket wash and clean-up mats. As a final step, follow-up the last application of blanket wash with a warm water wash in order to flush all chemicals from the system.