

SUPER SIZED SHEETFEDS

Extra large presses are staging a comeback. Is the market ready?

Over the last decade a new crop of automated large-format presses has steadily spread into the printing industry. Inch by inch, suppliers have been expanding automated sheetfed presses up to, and now beyond, 64", a trend that resonates in the printing industry. Up until the 1970s, printers were demanding and getting bigger presses to compete in the commercial market. Book printers were commonly using 56" to 77" presses. The wider the press, the more pages they could gang up to gain a competitive advantage against shops with smaller presses. Then in the early '70s web offset came into its own and blew the doors off large-format sheetfed. Sheetfed sales receded to 40" widths. Now, however, suppliers are inching larger and larger again and this time size is complemented with automation.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF SCOTT

Daniel Robson (left), owner of Forest City Graphics with his sons, Karl Robson, plant manager (centre), and Scott Robson, sales manager, in front of the company's KBA Rapida 162A 64" press

“It was long thought that large presses didn't print the same quality as the small presses. The truth now is that you can print as good a quality on any size machine”