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Mexico City's El Universal boosts color, quality

Staff Report

A little more than a year after it commissioned its press and migrated to more vibrant inks, Mexico's largest daily is now laying the groundwork to shore up other parts of its production.

Mexico City's El Universal flipped the switch on its RegioMAN press from MAN Roland Inc. in January 2003, in the process substantially boosting color and print quality, said Alberto Alvarado, El Universal's project manager. The paper uses ink from US Ink.

Big press runs

El Universal churns out more than 500,000 copies each day at its production plants, producing the flagship El Universal as well as three other dailies: El Grafico, El M and The Herald, a publication jointly produced with The Miami Herald.

El Universal also produces a number of weekly and monthly publications.

The wide variety of products dovetails with the press' design, Alvarado said, allowing El Universal to print either broadsheet or tabloid with little change needed. It can produce as many as 24 pages of full color for special sections or 16 pages of color in a 48-page folio.

The rotary 4-by-1 press is configured as four towers with 12 printing couples, a double folding unit and seven reel splicers. It's rated at 70,000 copies per hour.

Now that the migration to the new press is complete, El Universal is evaluating other parts of its operation, Alvarado said. Among the possible upgrades: a new ink storage and pumping system and computer-to-plate technology to replace El Universal's current film-based workflow.

In the meantime, the paper wants to exploit its market position as being one



Photo: Sergio Aranda

El Universal Project Manager Alberto Alvarado, second from right; with maintenance techs Aaron Torres, Pedro Alfaro, Eduardo Alvarez, Telex Cruz and Sergio Aranda.

of the most technologically sophisticated in Latin America.

El Universal is the first Mexican daily to purchase a RegioMAN press and it's working with MAN Roland and US Ink to further hone print quality, Alvarado said.

Vendor help

"One of the biggest advantages we received during the commissioning is that MAN Roland and US Ink had previously worked together in Germany to properly formulate the ink," Alvarado said.

That close coordination enabled the publisher to avoid start-up problems that can plague a newspaper that switches to a new press technology, he said.

"They had already tested the combination of machine and ink," Alvarado said. "When we commissioned the press in Mexico we were

able to take advantage of the work they'd already done."

US Ink continued to tweak the ink after the press was commissioned, Alvarado said. "Once we began running the press we saw that (the ink's general) fluidity was a bit low; it wasn't flowing as well as it should be."

US Ink technicians reformulated the ink, quickly eliminating the problem, he said.

"They took samples. They took some tests and we (are now using a) special formulation."

The flow issue cropped up again last summer with the magenta ink, Alvarado said. Again, US Ink technicians engineered a special formulation that solved the problem.

"We're very satisfied with the quality of the paper and how the ink is performing," Alvarado said. "We believe that based on daily quality that we are the quality leaders in the Mexican market."▲