

New York Times moves to high-strength ink

N&T Staff Report

The New York Times made the switch from regular to high-strength black ink in a bid to improve print quality and reduce production costs.

The Times converted its College Point, N.Y., plant late last year to US Ink's Spectra High-Strength Black, said Sanat Hazra, executive director, production. A similar conversion at its Edison, N.J., plant will be completed this month.

"The goal was to increase the black density of the ink without increasing the ink film thickness on the web," Hazra said of the project.

The Times began evaluating the use of high-strength black inks last spring. The results were promising, Hazra said, with the newspaper determining that it could obtain SNAP density with less black ink volume and less water if it switched over to a high-strength formulation.

Since converting the College Point

plant, Hazra said the high-strength black is yielding 15 percent more mileage than regular black and that print quality "is meeting expectations." Times press operators and technicians now plan to optimize the ink and water balance to further improve performance, he said.

SNAP densities

"We're getting to SNAP densities without having to load up (the presses) with ink," he said, adding that The Times ultimately will evaluate the use of high-strength color inks if it makes economic sense.

The Times' use of high-strength black is the latest in a series of improvements in which the paper has invested to improve its production. Last year, The Times said it would add color couples from Goss International Corp. to boost color capacity at a number of its owned and affiliated printing facilities.

It also wrapped up a digital inking upgrade at its Edison plant, adding digital devices to 228 couples across multiple presses.

US Ink introduced the high-strength black inks in 2003, saying that the formulations are 20 percent stronger than conventional coldset black ink.

The inks come in two versions: Spectra High-Strength Black and Spectra Max Black. The max variation is a modification developed to produce a bluer print tone.

Todd Wheeler, US Ink's marketing services manager, said the high-strength inks are gaining in popularity. "There is less page-to-page setoff, less ink, less water, and if you're putting down less ink and less water you tend to have fewer web breaks," he said.

The high-strength formulations are more expensive than regular grades of coldset inks, but their mileage and print attributes offset the price premium, Wheeler said.▲