

# The power of variable data printing (VDP)

Contributed by Creo Print on Demand Services

More than a decade ago, when high-speed digital printing first appeared, the widespread assumption was that VDP would conquer the industry.

Although the potential marketing power of personalised messaging was obvious and compelling, VDP's time had not yet come. The technology of the day was not up to the challenge of combining variable data elements with huge databases and applying them in professional layouts, and the market was not ready for the revolution. As a result, VDP was relegated to a few marketing niches with sufficient budgets to exploit this powerful tool.

Today, however, the picture is much brighter. VDP technology has advanced: Powerful, easy-to-use, affordable tools are now available, and the market demand is stronger than ever. Personalisation sells

Amidst the clutter of marketing tools, personalised direct-mail marketing is one of the few that retains its power. Personalised direct mail is now a practical and useful tool, free of the issues that compromised it in the past and available to all with VDP technology.

Marketing specialists understand that personalised communications, which are tailored to each recipient, make campaigns much more effective. Many marketing studies show that in campaigns where the names of recipients are combined with an offer that is meaningful to them, response rates increase significantly.

VDP goes far beyond the traditional need to reduce the cost per printed page, by increasing the value of each printed piece-the ROI. Typical business-to-business mailings provide response rates in the 2-5 percent range, while targeted, personalised mailings, coupled with the right product offer, can yield results that are 500% higher.\* In addition, the personalised aspect of variable data marketing also increases customer loyalty. The VDP Workflow

Only digital print can offer VDP capabilities. It takes digital technology to personalise printed documents and make each page differ from the next in text, graphics, charts, and images. The VDP workflow includes the following components:VI authoring tool

For a direct marketing firm that wants to add VDP capability, choosing the right authoring tool is essential. This professional software tool optimises the process of merging variable database information with design. A good authoring tool should be fast, efficient, and easy to use and should not infringe on the creative freedom of the designer. It should be powerful enough to process complex jobs at relatively high speeds.  
Production: digital colour server and digital press

Production begins once the VDP file is ready. A digital press should be chosen for its ability to run high volumes of VDP jobs with consistent quality over a large number of print runs. The choice of the colour server that will drive it is even more important. Most of the digital colour servers in the industry today do a fairly good job. When it comes to VDP, however, three aspects of the colour server are paramount: performance, stability, and workflow.

Performance: Variable data print runs are extremely long. A good colour server can drive the printer at its rated speed while providing an extensive set of complementary features that save production time, such as:

- Caching reusable elements to save re-RIPing
- Allowing sharing between print runs
- Streamlining the process so the press can start a job while parts of it are still being RIPed
- Supporting dynamic page exceptions to allow the printing of different pages on mixed media

Stability: A colour server that runs VDP jobs should be extremely robust and stable. Long print runs consume RIP time and disk space, already stress most systems. Moreover, printing variable data jobs is innately a more complex process since each set is personalized.

Workflow: Direct mail pieces have the "standard" print requirements of imposition, colour management, and trapping, and this applies to VDP jobs as well. Creo Print On-Demand Solutions (Creo PODS) digital colour servers are an industry benchmark for VDP colour server solutions. Creo PODS colour servers are known throughout the industry for productivity, stability, and a unique feature set that enhances its VDP capability. They drive production digital presses offered by HP, IKON Office Solutions, Konica Minolta and Xerox Corporation,.

The Creo PODS advanced VDP workflow  
Creo Darwin VI authoring tool leads the VDP market

The Darwin VI authoring tool, a pioneer in the market, is recognised as one of the most powerful, widely used VDP applications available. It is employed by design, advertising, and marketing professionals in a range of industries to

enhance the value of their direct marketing efforts through personalisation. The feature-rich software, when combined with Creo PODS digital colour servers and digital colour presses, provides fast and flexible VDP job creation and completion. As the popularity of VDP has grown, the Darwin application has matured and its feature set has expanded.

The software is available in two configurations: Darwin Desktop, a widely-accepted industry standard, and Darwin Pro, with enhanced features for more complex VDP jobs. As a plug-in to QuarkXPress and Adobe InDesign, Mac OS X and Windows, Darwin software enables users to work in a familiar environment. With Darwin software, creating variable data documents is a simple, intuitive task, without the need for scripting or programming.

The Darwin application works seamlessly with large databases for the creation of complex, fully customised campaigns of unlimited length. Full-colour variable data communications can be created, previewed and printed, incorporating thousands of variable elements.

The software supports standard output formats, including VDP-specific formats for enhanced output speed: Creo Variable Print Specification (VPS), Adobe PDF, Adobe PostScript and optimised PostScript, Xerox VIPP, VDX, and PPML. The optimal printing results are obtained with a Creo PODS digital colour server and the Creo VPS file format, which allows for precise control of the VDP print criteria and output. The Creo PODS colour server interprets Creo VPS efficiently for high-speed output of lengthy, complex documents.  
Other VDP solutions from Creo PODS

Creo PODS offers a range of VDP and colour-management applications, from entry-level tools to robust, Web-based, distributed-print solutions. They are compatible with Windows or Macintosh, and QuarkXPress or Adobe InDesign. Additional offerings include colour technology software tools that achieve absolute colour integrity throughout the digital printing production process. Creo PODS solutions include:

- Web Composition Solution : A robust, fully-automated VDP solution that integrates seamlessly with any Web-enabled system.
- VI Toolbox : Designed for shell printing, proofing, and large-scale job creation using Microsoft Word Mail Merge.
- Optimised Mail Merge : Enhances the Microsoft Word Mail Merge workflow, shortens proofing cycles, accelerates variable data merge processes, and eliminates production bottlenecks.

For more information on Creo Print On-Demand Solutions, please visit [www.creopod.com](http://www.creopod.com) .

To test-drive one of the Creo PODS VDP solutions, go to [www.creopod.com/oda](http://www.creopod.com/oda) .

To purchase Creo PODS VDP applications, go to: [www.creopod.com/store](http://www.creopod.com/store) .