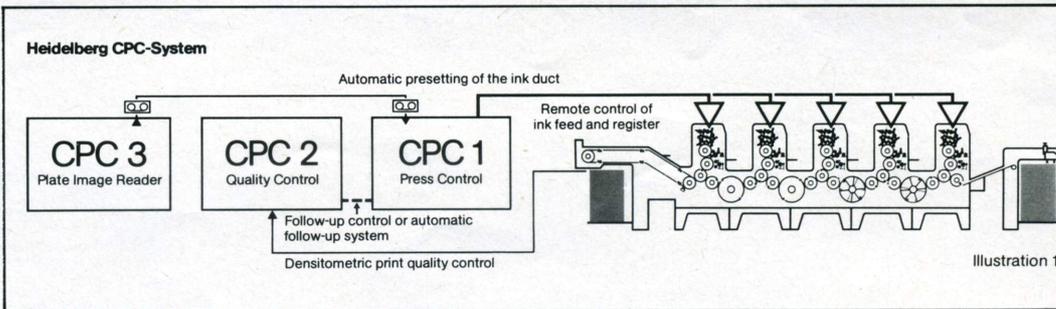


Heidelberg Computer Press Control System.

But there is a great deal of activity from independent organisations who see the potential for 'add-on' ink control systems. At Drupa we saw the Tobias SCR system demonstrated on the Miller stand and on the OMCSA stand together with its Automatic Control System (ACS). Dainippon displayed its Demia plate scanning system. IGT showed its in-line press densitometer, and Color Metal had its Integrated Continuous Colour Control System on demonstration.

There will certainly be an increase in this sphere giving press buyers a choice of ink control systems for new equipment, as well as the ability to add on an ink control system to existing presses. Bearing in mind the fact that it is not necessary to have a separate system for each press, the economics of automated colour control continue to look very promising.

What next? With a greater understanding of the relationship between press conditions and pre-press capabilities we should be able to make more accurate and



more confident predictions about press settings at an early stage. Press variables — such as ink tack, colour sequence, pressure settings, hardness of blankets, plate properties and the effect of damping solutions — are becoming more quantifiable. Much work has been done in recent years in such areas as dot gain, densitometry, control strips and digitised pre-press information.

The data acquired from all of this work is available to the designers of ink control systems and should lead to more and more certainty about the pre-conditions for ink control settings. This aspect alone will dramatically reduce the amount of time spent tediously running stacks of paper through the press in order to 'let the colour settle down'.

Better predictability, coupled

with more stable press conditions should reduce the time taken to prepare a multicolour press down to a matter of minutes instead of the hours currently required.

Experience with the bigger press installations will steadily filter down the scale until even the smallest of presses will be able to take advantage of an automatic colour control system.

'Closed loop' control, however, is another matter. This idea would suggest a complete self-diagnosing and correcting system, independent of operator intervention. While I would accept that a closed loop system is theoretically possible and even practicable I am not so sure that it is as yet desirable.

It must be remembered that when the printer receives a sheet from the delivery of a press he

examines it not only for ink density but for a number of other quality values such as register, backup and the absence or presence of printing faults such as tinting, scumming, hickeys, doubling, slur, etc.

There seems to be little point in developing a closed loop system which will control one variable only. A complete system which will automatically compensate for and control all printing variables would make much more sense. It may be that we will have to move towards this in stages. In order to complete the loop it will be necessary to develop a machine which can look at a sheet or web with the eye of an experienced printer and say either 'yes, that's OK' or 'No, there are corrections to be made' and then make the required corrections.



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