

Hello,

Please see the latest release on behalf of Agfa. This article explores how folding carton producers are adapting to an on-demand world, where the most agile players are hunting for new opportunities in efficiency and profitability.

If you have any further questions please feel free to get in touch.

Kind regards,

Louise Henderson

Thought Leadership

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How printing's apex predator hunts for profit in an on-demand world

Folding carton production has spent years running on a model built primarily for volume. While this still makes sense for some work, it no longer truly reflects the way that brands

buy, launch, and localise packaging today. Greater versioning and tighter timelines have become routine, resulting in a production environment where the main question shifts from ‘how fast a press can run in isolation’ to ‘how profitably a plant can handle a job mix that keeps fragmenting’.

Offset production has previously held the advantage in folding carton because run lengths were long enough to carry the setup cost, but that balance is now shifting. Brand owners want more SKUs, more language versions, different regulatory call-outs, and smaller quantities spread across broader portfolios, so the average run length keeps falling even when overall volume does not.

A market in motion

Folding carton is moving from a sector that prioritises mass production toward mass customisation. That shift changes the rules for converters, because keeping accounts now depends on being able to handle both ends of the spectrum. Work is less divided into long-run jobs on one side and short-run jobs on the other and has moved toward a single, more fragmented production picture.

This creates a straightforward commercial problem. Converters need to be able to quote and absorb a more complex workload while optimizing margin. Brand owners notice quickly when a supplier can only handle part of the brief, and once they find a converter that treats small runs with the same confidence as larger ones, they often bring more of the relationship across.

Where digital fits

Digital inkjet is one way to deal with that pressure, but the value is in the detail. Agfa’s Speedset Orca 1060 is one example of a press that can help converters close the gap between today’s market challenges and what they can actually achieve. This machine can run in three modes depending on what the job calls for: up to 11,000 B1 sheets an hour in express mode, 7,000 in production mode, and 5,500 in its premium mode for jobs that need to prioritise image quality over raw throughput. That range matters because short-run profitability depends on having a press that can move quickly when needed, but still hold quality when the job demands it.

The Orca also removes much of the friction that makes short-run offset unattractive. There are no plates to cut or store, feeder and stacker changeovers take under five minutes, and the substrate range extends from 0.2 mm paper to 2 mm microflute. That means folding carton, shelf-ready packaging, and lightweight corrugated can sit on the same production plan instead of being spread across separate equipment and separate workflows.

Making short run work pay

The benefits offered by the Orca are made even clearer in changeovers. A six-SKU promotional campaign that would require six plate sets and six makeready cycles on offset becomes six file changes in a digital environment. That changes the way versioned work behaves financially, especially when jobs are small, urgent, and repeated across a wider product range.

The Orca's shorter setup times, reduced waste, variable data capability, and elimination of plate creation all help keep the numbers in line. Across a full schedule, that matters more than any single headline feature, because the job mix is what defines whether the plant stays ahead or gets stuck carrying cost on work that no longer suits its production model.

Workflow provides the heavy lifting

A press alone does not fix short-run complexity and workflow software is a key element of getting the most out of any investment. Agfa's Asanti workflow software handles job planning and color management in the background, which helps maintain consistency while reducing dependence on one highly experienced operator to prepare every job by hand. With new StackFlow functionality, the platform transforms the way high-volume, multi-destination print jobs are organized, automatically arranging printed items by their delivery location to cut costs and streamline fulfilment.

That becomes increasingly useful as the number of smaller jobs rises. Plants running this kind of mix need repeatability, speed, and control across more frequent changeovers. Automation does not remove skill from the operation, but it does make that skill less fragile and less tied to a single person.

The ongoing role of offset

It is important to note that this does not write offset out of the picture. A stable, high-volume job on artwork that stays unchanged for a long time still suits conventional production well, and that is unlikely to change soon. What is changing, however, is the proportion of work that fits that description.

The jobs that are migrating toward digital are no longer exceptions; instead, for a growing number of converters, they are becoming the common daily schedule. Those businesses that are treating digital as a parallel capability rather than a side project are the ones building pricing power across both ends of the run-length range.

This is why it makes sense to look at each business on its own terms. Some converters will find that short-run work already makes up a bigger share of their schedule than they expected. Others will still see offset carrying most of the load for now. The right answer depends on the customer base, not on a broad industry assumption.

Adaptation and evolution

The Orca name for this machine was chosen because of how its design ties back to adaptation. Orcas are intelligent, coordinated creatures moving with precision over a wide-ranging territory. These are the skills that are perfectly matched for the pressure facing folding carton converters today. As markets move and job mixes change, the plants that stay ahead will be the ones set up to respond quickly and efficiently without losing control over quality, cost, and consistency.

The SpeedSet Orca is designed for today's market realities and real production conditions. It gives converters the range to handle shorter runs, more versioning work, and faster turnarounds while still supporting the standards demanded by brands in today's packaging market. It is, put simply, a reminder that in a changing market, the strongest position is often the one that can adapt the fastest.

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Notes to editors

About Agfa

The Agfa-Gevaert Group is a leading company in imaging technology, with nearly 160 years of experience. Agfa develops, manufactures and markets analog and digital systems for the healthcare sector, for the printing industry, for the green hydrogen industry and for specific industrial applications. In 2025, the Group realized a turnover of 1,086 million euro.

About Agfa's Digital Printing Solutions

Agfa's Digital Printing Solutions aims to advance the use of inkjet printing technology across diverse industries, helping businesses become more versatile, efficient, and sustainable. By understanding the unique needs and challenges of each sector, Agfa partners with its customers to deliver innovative printing solutions.

Agfa offers a comprehensive range of high-quality inkjet printers, inks, software, and services. These products can be provided as fully integrated solutions or as customized components within larger production workflows, ensuring exceptional quality, productivity, and cost-effectiveness. With global service and support, Agfa helps businesses achieve outstanding printing results and drive growth.

To find out more please visit: www.agfa.com.

Please note that more information is also available in the Agfa Newsroom:
<https://agfa.thinkb2bmarketing.com/>

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