



Lumber yard beats the competition in tough times thanks to faster distribution of blueprints



HP customer case study: HP/Large Format Printing Division/Masters Color success story

Industry: Pre-press printing and post-production

Streamlined process opens up new market

Big C Lumber Company Inc. is a US supplier of lumber, other building materials, and finished windows and doors. It has expanded its added-value drafting and structural design services from focusing solely on residential homes to facilitating also the construction of commercial buildings such as shopping malls and medical clinics. Expansion into this faster paced market, in which proposals and plans need to be processed and quotes made more quickly to be competitive, would have proved extremely awkward without the company's investment in a fleet of HP Designjet multi-function printers—one in each of 14 of the firm's 15 locations spread over as many towns and cities in a 250-km (150-mile) radius on either side of the Indiana-Michigan border.

Previously Big C Lumber had relied on a non-HP blueprint copier that had no memory or storage capabilities. It was not possible to archive or share blueprints digitally. Salespeople were spending time coming to the corporate offices to use the copier and delivering copies to design, engineering, and manufacturing departments in other towns.

The network of large-format scanning-printing-copying

solutions has oiled the communication process within the company. Dallas Austin is Drafting and Structural Design Manager at Big C Lumber's headquarters in Granger, Indiana. "What we like about the HP solutions is the versatility of having everything in digital," he said. "In the commercial-building market, big drawings need to be distributed faster and quotes made faster. We get our quotes out quickly because we can scan blueprints, transfer them electronically around the company, and print them remotely. Our sales force can also get on with the job of selling instead of having to drive prints physically from one location to another."

As the building industry faces hard times, Big C Lumber finds itself already in possession of the streamlined systems needed to weather the storm and is forging ahead, leaving regional competition lagging far behind. "Our competitors don't have the HP equipment that we have," said Austin. "We made the investment in our network of HP Designjet multi-function printers before the economy went down, and we're now in a stronger position to compete."

Decentralized design and engineering

Distribution of specialization over multiple sites in



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— Dallas Austin, Drafting and Structural Design Manager, Big C Lumber, Granger, Indiana, USA



different towns and cities is a result of the way Big C Lumber has grown. Typical of the industry in the US, the firm has acquired other companies along the way, each with its own area of expertise. Although most sites are also retail stores, they all have kept their design, engineering, and manufacturing specializations so that existing facilities and knowhow can be harnessed and every location remains active and creative.

As well as scanning and marking up existing blueprints supplied by clients, Big C Lumber designers draw their own plans using architectural design software such as SoftPlan and KeyBuild. Any of these plans may need to be shared electronically and printed remotely at the firm’s truss and panel plant, its custom mill shop, its kitchen department, or its other specialty divisions.

So successful has the improvement in workflow been thanks to the company’s 12 HP Designjet 815 MFP devices, two HP Designjet 1050 Printers, and two HP Designjet 4020 Scanners, that management jumped at the opportunity to test out the new 44-inch (~ 112-cm) HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP Multi-Function Printer to discover how communication and productivity could be enhanced even further.

Meeting clients’ urgent needs

“The HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP is much faster than our current machines,” said Robert Sherman, Management Information Systems Technician at Big C Lumber. “It scans faster, with better quality and smaller file sizes. The lines on the drawings are excellent. Printing is faster too. I raced the printer against one of our HP Designjet 1050 Printers. The new machine is between two and three times faster. That can make a big difference when a client calls up and says ‘I’m on my way over. I need those prints.’ We find we don’t

have to make excuses; we simply have the drawings ready. When we’re printing, Draft mode is the one we use most. Draft print quality on the HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP looks better than the Normal-mode quality on the other machines! Lines and text are very clear. We’re very pleased.”

Sherman was also impressed by the processing speeds of the new printer. “The HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP processes the second page while the first one is printing,” he said, “so the second one prints immediately afterwards. The printer stays running, and it stays running quickly and spits them out.” He highlighted too a number of other features that increase productivity for Big C Lumber: “Batch jobs are handled efficiently,” he said. “We can take multiple drawings and scan them together without having to name every file. And then, suppose there’s a queue of 6 prints of 10 pages to be printed. If a customer comes in for job number 4, we can change the order to print that job next. Clients are not left waiting. They see that we are efficient and professional. We can also look at the print-job history and print something from yesterday by simply pressing reprint – that’s way nice! That’s what we were looking for. The HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP is less labor intensive all round. People expect results and they expect them fast. The new solution gives us a better drawing capture service.”

Smooth integration and reduced costs

“We have a large variety of users who need to transfer information around the company,” said Austin. “Some of them are not computer savvy. With our other printers we had to train people at every location. Based on the experience we’ve gained using those printers, the HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP was real easy to setup, make work, and insert into our type of environment. We had it out of the box and running in

At a glance

Industry sector: AEC

Business name:
Big C Lumber Co. Inc.

Founded: 1921

Number of employees:
Approx. 240

Headquarters:
50860 Princess Way
P.O. Box 176
Granger, IN 46530
USA

Telephone: (+1) 574-271-3540

Web site: www.bigclumber.com

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two or three hours. We switch users to it, and they're ready to go."

In the past, when the Drafting and Structural Design Department in Granger has had to print large projects consisting of 100 to 200 D-size (~ A1) or E-size (~ A0) pages, it has sometimes resorted to sending the work out to an external print shop. On experiencing the increased speed of the HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP, Austin commented that it would enable the department to take on these big print jobs in-house, saving not only time and hassle, but also printing costs.

Immediate and on-demand access to scanned drawings

With Big C Lumber's existing HP Designjet multifunction printers, scanned files are transferred around the company by e-mail message. The new printer however includes a facility that places scanned files directly onto the company's network. "Competitiveness is further increased," said Austin, "thanks to the scan-to-network facility of the HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP. It gives designers and sales people on-demand access to blueprints scanned at any site of the company. They are not waiting for files to be sent by e-mail. This sort of efficiency helps win deals in the high-paced commercial-building sector. It streamlines processes and also means designers and engineers can work from home and access drawings on the server even at late hours."

Big C Lumber has been able to scan, store, and backup over 10,000 pages of blueprints using an HP Designjet 4200 scanner and HP servers at its headquarters in Granger alone. The company has always had a good experience with the quality and durability of HP products. Apart from HP Designjet MFP devices, the firm has many HP Color LaserJet Printers for workgroup printing and small HP black-and-white workgroup scanners. Its main, workhorse servers are HP too. "HP makes the best printers," said Sherman. "When we went out to buy large-format multi-function printers, it was a big investment for us. We looked at a lot of products, but we kept coming back to HP. Other printers were more expensive without adding worthwhile features. From experience we knew we could trust HP's reliability. With such a big investment we didn't want to take the risk with another brand. In the future, whenever we buy more equipment, HP will again be the first place we go."

Challenges:

- Be more competitive by getting proposals, plans, and quotes out faster
- Streamline transfer of blueprints among sites in 14 towns and cities

Solution:

- 12 HP Designjet 815 Multi-Function Printers
- 2 HP Designjet 1050 Printers
- 2 HP Designjet 4200 Scanners
- *Test-driving* of the new HP Designjet T1120 SD-MFP

Results:

- Expansion of business into the commercial-building market
- Company in a stronger position to compete during hard times for the industry
- Salespeople get on with selling, instead of driving physical prints around
- Urgent blueprints printed before clients arrive
- Savings in time, hassle, and costs by not having to outsource big print jobs
- Immediate and on-demand access to scanned prints, even from home and late at night.

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