

# Card slitting technology: A little known business with big advantages

**I**doubt the average person who participates in a Trivial Pursuit game ever considers what it takes to create the game cards that are used to play each time. Or, for that matter, the hundreds of baseball

## POSTPRESS REPORT

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trading cards that children hoard in special albums meant for safekeeping. Only someone in the printing and postpress fields might look at the combination of cards in either scenario and wonder whether such a job is a printing and binding nightmare. I know from experience they can be just that.

If a finisher is using conventional methods (which is sometimes still the case), producing a deck of cards from printed images requires countless trips from the cutter to the collator just to accommodate so many different images. Ensuring each pack is complete and accurately sorted is no easy task and leaves room for significant error.

Portions of jobs are left sitting for long periods of time while pieces of the project are completed and the sets can finally be

assembled. (Whether the packs are accurately collated and completed is always a risk.) On the other hand, for a printer trying to handle such a job in-house, it is an even worse nightmare because once the tedious work of printing numerous press sheets is complete, the task of cutting and assembling them is daunting. Such a job requires a great deal of equipment, space and labor commodities rarely found in the typical printer's postpress room.

### **Pain relief**

Ironically, there is equipment that can relieve many of these headaches. This Slipstream technology, as it is called, is not new (it's been around for about 10 years) and has dramatically improved the process by which many types of card sets are produced.

Although this little-known technology is very specialized, I've always felt that my company would be a good match for this type of service and could definitely use some card slitting and collating equipment. Until recently, however, this type of machinery was unavailable through the used equipment or auction market. A few months ago, I got lucky when a card slitting operation in New York City closed its doors and I was able to purchase two of its 10 Rollem Slipstreams. They've been sitting in trailers on our parking lot for some time waiting for space to be built to accommodate them but we anticipate having

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them up and running by the time this article is published.

With this equipment, the operator can cut, score, perforate and collate up to 200,000 pieces in one hour all in-line on a machine that can handle a wide variety of paper stock and sheet sizes. Nearly any type of card set, especially those that must be merged in a particular order, can be done quickly and accurately, and in one pass, using Slipstream technology. Even more convenient, they are produced using press sheets that contain all of the pieces of the set on the same sheet. Amazing stuff! For example, two complete sets of playing cards (totaling 55 in a pack) are printed on a single 28x40" sheet with the images running 10 rows across and 11 rows down. The Slipstream trims the cards on all four sides, cuts them in both directions to create two decks of 55 pieces, each 2x3", then collects and merges them into individual decks (sets), all complete and in order by color, face and number. The imposition of the images on the sheet dictates the order of the cards after they are cut. Once setup has taken place, press sheets can be completely finished with the touch of a button. After the stacks are created, the same machine can transfer those sets in-line through round-corner, shrinkwrap and overwrap systems. This is particularly important in a postpress finishing operation such as ours, where jobs often pass through numerous processes before completion.

### **Need for accuracy**

I've been focusing on playing cards because it is familiar, and we understand

the need for accuracy. This technology, however, can be applied in numerous types of card slitting jobs. I'm sure most of us receive a constant flow of product card sets (shrinkwrapped and delivered via direct mail) meant to entice us into inquiring about particular things advertised on each card. Those sets, which represent a pretty big chunk of the direct-mail business, can be produced much faster these days. At one time, a set of 40 product cards required 10 press runs of four cards each. Each sheet was sent to the guillotine to be quartered and then on to a conventional collator. Once all runs were complete, these sub-sets were then merged together (most often manually) with one more trip to the guillotine to produce the size of the final product. This system was a recipe for potential disaster because there was so much room for error.

Beyond playing cards and product cards, Slipstream technology is used to create many other products including card sets for games (Hasbro owns such technology to create its Monopoly cards), trading cards (remember the Pokemon craze?), educational flashcards, recipe cards, bingo cards, coupons, business reply cards, greeting cards, event tickets, lottery tickets, scratch-off cards, time cards and currency. (And the list goes on and on.)

While some card sets require extreme order and accuracy, others need to be random and unlike any other packs in the lot. Trading cards, for example should be produced so buyers receive a different assort-

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ment in each pack of cards they select.

Traditionally, accomplishing such a task was difficult and more likely to produce duplicates. Slipstream technology, however, can enhance mixing capabilities downstream by providing a wide range of pack combinations prior to the mixing process.

The downside to all this is the constant need for better equipment. But some things just make sense. In the words of Richard Nigro of Rollem International, the company that markets this machinery, "Slipstream technology eliminates many of

the dormant stages created waiting for a job to be completed. It also dramatically reduces press time, bindery time, warehouse space and labor."

How can I argue with all that?

For more information about Slipstream technology, contact Rollem International at (800) 272-4381 or online at [info@rollemusa.com](mailto:info@rollemusa.com). **P&G**

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