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It's a Sign: OKI Data Lets You Print Your Own

By [Adam Stone](#)

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The beauty of technology is that, at its best, it lets smaller businesses compete in the marketplace against much larger companies.

Here's a classic example: Signage. Big chain stores hang glossy promos in the windows. They place snappy tent cards on their tables between the ketchup and the salt, and they display brightly colored tags on shelves.

Up to now, if SMBs wanted professional-quality materials, they generally had to go to a commercial printer where pricing can be painful — especially for runs under several thousand pieces. Turn-around is another issue. It takes time to set the presses, and smaller orders aren't usually a printer's top priority.

New Jersey-based printer manufacturer [OKI Data](#) offers small businesses a way to print their own signage in-house with its Color Signage Solution. This high-end printer can run off shelf strips, table tents, banners and more — on premium glossy paper — at up to 30 pages per minute in color.

Don't Waste Time or Money

Terry Cruikshank, a retail industry-marketing consultant for OKI Data says the printer can change the competitive landscape for smaller businesses. "The Color Signage Solution lets our customers react very quickly," she said. "SMB owners can produce new promotional materials or revise old ones to reflect price changes and not waste time — as much as 10 days — waiting for a printer to print and ship the order."

The first such printer to hit the market, the Color Signage Solution produces promotional signs for about 22 cents a piece. Those same signs might cost 45 cents and up if you ordered 2,000 pieces or less from a commercial printer, Cruikshank said. According to OKI Data's cost-per-print analysis, the Color Signage Solution can help small businesses reduce their signage costs by 75 percent.

The size of a print run is also a big issue for small businesses. Cruikshank estimates that small businesses waste 60 percent of all ordered signage because they order big runs to bring down the cost per piece. Those signs become outdated or the unused excess simply ends up in the dumpster.

Nuts and Bolts

The Color Signage Solution comes in two models, the C9300dxn and the C9500dxn. Aside from the price tag, the only difference between the two is the [dpi](#) resolution and the amount of memory.

The C9300dxv costs \$5,279, comes with 192MB RAM and prints at 1200 x 600 dpi. The C9500dxn costs \$6,729, comes with 320MB RAM and prints at 1200 x 1200 dpi. Other features include:

- A 450 Mhz PowerPC processor
- Print speeds up to 30 [ppm](#) in color, 37 ppm in black and white
- 150,000 pages per month duty cycle
- 10/100 Base-T internal Ethernet Print Server
- Duplex printing
- Maximum paper size of 47.24 inches
- 650-sheet paper tray
- Single pass technology for printing on heavy media, up to 110 lb
- Custom color profiles and color matching software
- Direct PDF Printing
- One-year printer warranty; five-year limited warranty on LED print heads
- Live, toll-free technical support, 24x7x365

A Difference of Opinion

Traditional print shops say they have more to offer. "We are talking different techniques, different types of signage," said Cindy Hanson, owner of CLRB Hanson Industries in New Hope, Minn. "We have all varieties of inks, and we have people who have the knowledge of how to lay an image down correctly. It's not as simple as just printing."

Another issue has to do with the media upon which the signs are printed. Here, too, professionals like Hanson say they have an edge. "Our range is a lot wider. We can print on basically anything," she said.

Alert the Media

Unfazed, Cruikshank said the Color Signage Solution puts in a respectable showing. The OKI Data machine processes card stock or index stock (up to 110 pound weight) by feeding media feeding straight through from one end of the printer to the other. The printer also features special media settings so it can print on cling film.

The printer comes with the OKI Signage Media Collection that includes a variety of card stocks, 4-up labels, shelf strips, table tents and glossy paper. You can buy media from other vendors, of course, but Cruikshank said there is an advantage in going right to the source.



Sign of the Times — OKI Data's Color Signage Solution lets you produce promotional signs and materials in-house instead of relying on a commercial print shop.

"Papers vary from one to the other," she said. "One may give good results and the other may not give as good a result. In this case, we have actually tested this media, so it saves the customer trying to find the media that works."

Bottom line: If you plan to spend \$6,000 printing signs in the next one to two years, Color Signage Solution could make fiscal sense for you

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