Meeting Customers’ Color Expectations

By Eric Stohry

My role straddles the fine line between technical professional and direct link between supplier and customer. Think of it as a conduit from the printer to the customer. The customer always wants “perfection,” but due to the many moving parts in print reproduction, we often cannot achieve perfection. That is where I try and bridge the gap for our customer to understand the reality of their expectations. Our customers both internal and external don’t understand the technical details about how to get there; they just want a good print reproduction that meets their expectations.

At Hallmark, we’ve implemented the G7 calibration process in visual merchandising, in-store displays and store signage. Since we adopted this method in 2007, many of those who walked the G7 path with Hallmark have probably cursed my name in frustration. Nonetheless, I believe that those painful steps have helped us become better printers, publishers, suppliers and customers all along the supply chain. Moreover, adopting G7 has enabled many of us to market this new calibration methodology to our customers as a selling point for color consistency on four-color process designs from image capture to final product.

We have partnered internally with our Creative Technology group to utilize an RGB workflow to create a monitor display and a color target output that is calibrated to the GRACoL2006_Coated1 data set. We have also partnered with Global Procurement to specifically source from suppliers that are GRACoL compliant. When Global Procurement is looking at new suppliers, we require that the supplier perform the G7 calibration and provide us with a P2P25xa G7 Calibration target, along with an IT8.7/4 profile target output using their G7 workflow to the GRACoL2006_Coated1 data set. We do this to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and ability to calibrate to a specific standard and have a workflow in place to produce work for us. We will measure these targets and compare those measurements back to the published GRACoL2006_Coated1 data set. We share those results with the supplier and work with them to achieve an acceptable comparison.

Once the supplier has met that criteria, we notify Global Procurement and the supplier that the supplier is compliant and has demonstrated the ability to print to our expectations.

It’s critical that both Hallmark and our suppliers implement and perform regular PM and maintain good process control over their calibrated systems. Just because we are compliant on Monday doesn’t necessarily mean we will be compliant on Thursday. So we audit our system and suppliers output on a yearly basis and require everyone to provide P2P25xa G7 Calibration targets, along with an IT8.7/4 profile target output using their G7 workflow to the GRACoL2006_Coated1 data set. Obviously, when something comes in and it’s off-color, we will notify the supplier of the discrepancy and have them check their system and provide a target to insure they are back on track. We hope it never gets to this point because we are generally up against a ship date that cannot be compromised for retail. When this does happen, we can dig deeper into the technical areas of the image capture, color management, proofing and printing to nail down where the discrepancy occurred and put a corrective action in place to help prevent it from happening again.