

WHERE HAS ALL THE GOVERNMENT PRINTING GONE?

By Frederic G. Antoun, Jr., Esq.

Government printers continue to lament the loss of volume placed with the private sector through the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO). Many believe there simply isn't as much printing as there was over the previous decade because of the use of digital files, e-mail, the internet, etc. While there seems to be no doubt that more information is being delivered over the internet every day, there is not any reliable evidence that this distribution has dramatically cut back the volume of government printing that should be procured from the private sector. The U.S. budget for printing and duplicating has remained fairly constant at about \$2 billion over the past 5 or 6 years. However, during that same time, GPO's printing volume procured through the private sector has fallen by approximately \$150 million.

Where did that printing go? One obvious answer is that it is going to high speed electrostatic or digital output which is not being procured through the GPO. Some of this volume is being produced by agencies in-house on Docutechs and other high speed electrostatic printing equipment. DAPS (Defense Automated Printing Service) which owns approximately 130 Docutechs in addition to their other electrostatic printing equipment, has seen volume increase over the past several years. Obviously any volume going to DAPS internal plants is volume not going to the private sector. However, at least for DAPS work, the current A-76 outsourcing competition should result in all of that work (approximately \$140 million) going back to the private sector. The concept if one large company is used is that it would employ small business and small disadvantaged business subcontractors to produce the output needed by DOD throughout the United States. This makes a lot of sense, since one of the DAPS A-76 outsourcing components is document management – which cannot be done effectively by hundreds of different small providers. On the other hand, no one large company capable of designing and managing a document management and access system has the output capability nor all of the locations necessary to meet DOD's current need for “duplicating”.

Hopefully, as other agencies review the DOD outsourcing of its internal “duplicating” they will follow suit, in order to reduce their FTE's (full-time employees) and get better service, better products, and better pricing.

Many printers have asked PIA how electrostatic or digital printing typically classed by the government as “duplicating” ever got away from the GPO in the first place. Unfortunately, some of the blame for this can be placed on the Joint Committee on Printing, which many years ago exempted duplicating and copying less than 25,000 copies of a single sheet or less than 5,000 copies of a multiple page publication from going through the GPO. The idea was to allow the agencies to produce that work in-house. There were then no high speed Docutechs or high speed laser imagers. While the JCP's intention was to authorize agencies to have their own internal plants, without

getting JCP or GPO approval, the 25,000/5,000 limits are sometimes ignored. With dramatic improvements in quality and speed which would occur in the digital printing industry today, many agency buyers believe they have the right to have “small jobs” produced in their own internal plants, or sent out to a private sector company without GPO competitive bidding.

PIA has attempted on a number of occasions since 1992 to have the definition of printing changed so that it would include “duplicating”, “copying”, “laser imaging”, and “electrostatic printing”. However, on each occasion, the proposed language changes never made it out of the Joint Committee on Printing either because the JCP at the time didn’t agree with the change, or because it was made clear to JCP that that language would not be acceptable to other Committees or the Congress. The result is that the definition of “printing” that must go through GPO seems, by interpretation of congressional intent and legislative language change efforts, to exclude the type of “duplicating” that the JCP wrote the exemption for many years ago.

As speeds continue to increase, and click charges on high speed electrostatic and laser printing continues to drop, more and more publications will be shifting to “duplicating” output. This shift has been and will continue to be accelerated by the need – whether real or perceived – to have everything done by yesterday.

To its credit, GPO has adopted a PIA suggestion for a simplified purchase agreement type of contracting vehicle under which agencies could order smaller jobs from one of a number of approved vendors (basically a best value decision) directly – without going through the GPO first – in order to have a relationship with a supplier and, more importantly, to speed up the procurement process. Unfortunately, however, this process has been bogged down in GPO administrative testing and red tape, and has not gotten off the ground except for one or two test agencies. Until and unless it does, GPO will continue to lose digital printing or “duplicating” jobs at an alarming rate, seriously impacting its viability as an agency, and depleting the volume available to government printers who support GPO’s operation.

A final thought: output or printing classed as “duplicating” under the waiver originally granted by JCP that is produced for federal agencies annually, outside of the GPO system, amounts to over \$350 million. This is a staggering figure, when you consider that GPO’s total outsourced printing for 2000 will probably be under \$450 million.

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