## Symbols on Media

*by William J. McCalpin, EDPP*

"Symbols on Media" was the phrase that Xplor President Dr. Keith Davidson, Ph.D., EDPP, used 20 plus years ago when he tried to describe what laser printers like the Xerox 9700 were really doing. No, laser printers weren't simply printing—they were putting symbols on a particular medium.

Farsighted people asked themselves questions 20 to 25 years ago when the first laser printers became commercially available. What are these printers? Are laser printers simply replacements for existing line printers? Is there something more to printing than just putting characters on paper? Here we are on the boundary between millennia, and we still don't have a sure answer to these questions.

We now have a wide variety of ways of presenting symbols on media—including paper, microfilm, optical storage, magnetic tape, and the Internet. Too often, we think that document presentation differs from medium to medium. But a document is a document, no matter what medium it exists in. Xplor members once had an easy answer when asked what business they were in: printing. But now many of our documents never see paper at all—they are presented in COLD systems, on corporate Intranets, and on the Internet.

So what do we call what we Xplorers do in the 21st Century? Electronic document presentation? Electronic statement presentment? Electronic statement delivery? Why don't we call it what it really is: electronic printing or e-printing.

**E-printing**

At first, you might think that the ability to display documents electronically has turned the print world upside down. But aren't most of the issues that we Xplorers struggle with in the printspace—font and graphic selection, layout, orientation, message clarity, and so on—still perfectly valid in the e-printing world as well? E-printing refers to the same design and decision processes that we considered with paper printing—it is just the medium that has changed.

Which brings me back to symbols on media. That's what we Xplorers do: We use p-printing and e-printing to communicate information by placing symbols on various media.

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what we have learned in our professions over the last 30 years is just as applicable in the Internet world as it was in the print world. Take a look at the article on web site revision control. Can't you easily imagine the consternation caused when Internet customers have copies of erroneous documents displayed by a company which dynamically creates every web document and doesn't keep copies? And look at the articles about service bureaus moving to the Internet. You can bet that service bureaus aren't going off into totally new fields; they're expanding on what they already know.

We hope this issue of *Xploration* helps you understand that none of us is obsolete. What's the phrase—you're not losing a daughter, you're gaining a son? When you apply that to our dynamic industry, the phrase becomes: You're not losing paper, you're gaining new outlets for your information. P-printing or e-printing, we are still uniquely poised for the future. ■

*William J. McCalpin, EDPP*
*Editor-in-Chief*