



TOP 10 REASONS TO DO A plant tour

STORY: MARGIE DANA

I know you're busy. Who isn't? But if the responsibility for getting things printed is yours, you need to get out and visit printers' facilities. Plenty of professional print buyers and creatives wouldn't think of giving a printer a job until they've done the plant tour and seen for themselves the equipment and the people there.

A printer's website and collateral can use all the right words and show dozens of fascinating photos of presses and building facades. Why bother, you ask? Here are the top 10 reasons why you should visit a printing plant if you're a buyer or graphic designer.

ONE To see the equipment. Does this facility have the right presses and other equipment for your needs? Are there redundant (duplicate) presses in case one goes down? Or if another customer's work is running when your job is ready to roll?

TWO To meet the press people. Most professionals work with a core group of print providers for a long, long time. Your work will benefit if you build relationships not only with the sales and service reps, but also with the press people.

THREE To meet your prospective CSR (customer service rep). In many cases, once you're a client, you'll be dealing with your CSR and not your sales rep much of the time.

FOUR To see if there's camaraderie between your sales rep and the pressmen. Presuming your sales rep is leading the plant tour, pay attention to the vibes between him or her and the people in the plant. If it seems friendly, breathe a sigh of relief. If you sense tension, watch out. Good relationships inside the plant bode well for your work.

FIVE To get a sense of the synergy inside the plant. A well-run print facility is abuzz with noise, activity and people. You'll love it. It's like those kids in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory getting a private tour of the place by Willy Wonka. No, it's not candy, but it still mesmerizes.

SIX To learn something new. Every time you go, you'll learn something you didn't know before. This is your chance to kick tires. Ask questions. Be curious.

SEVEN To find out the differences between different types of presses. Don't be too timid to ask. What's different about that offset press and those digital presses? What's up with the proofing systems? How does that bindery equipment work? Watch and learn. It'll make you better at your job.

EIGHT To take in the big picture of a plant you're considering. What kinds of jobs are running on the presses? How are the samples you're seeing? Does the equipment seem to be in good shape/well maintained? How busy or slow is the plant? How clean is it?

NINE To meet management. When you visit a plant, you should expect to be introduced to someone in power. It's nice to feel like you're a valued customer. A little hullabaloo is good for the ego.

TEN To ask your sales rep why your work belongs here. You may not really care about the equipment, but you do care about what this company can do for you. Use this visit to find the answers to this question.

So when you're invited to take a tour, go for it. A guided tour in a printing plant is always educational and always fun, especially for us print geeks. When you do, you'll have a much better appreciation for what it takes to get something printed.

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