

CASE STUDY

RUNBECK ELECTION SERVICES

Lake Image Systems enhances integrity for Vote-By-Mail ballots at Runbeck Election Services

Headquartered in Phoenix, AZ, USA, Runbeck Election Services provides election solutions that include ballot production, election printing, ballot sorting, postal voting solutions, as well as custom software, hardware and technical consulting. With more than 47 years of election services experience, Runbeck serves over 43 million voters in 18 states and in 2018 alone, produced nearly 31 million ballots in the run-up to the US mid-term elections!

The company prides itself on meeting customer needs by delivering a service that is efficient, accurate and transparent. Ballot and election-related printing and mailing services are some of the most complex projects in the industry, requiring the highest levels of mail integrity, process automation and postal tracking to ensure the right ballot gets to the right voter - at the right time.



VOTE BY MAIL

Americans have traditionally voted in neighborhood polling places, but since the 1980s many states offer voters "Vote-By-Mail" or "Absentee" ballot options. This allows voters to complete their ballots at home and returning them either via postal mail, through a secure drop box, or at a voting center. In the 2016 US Presidential election, approximately 33 million ballots were cast via "Vote-By-Mail" ballots (about 25% of all ballots cast).

Vote-By-Mail (or VBM) provides an effective way for election administrators to cut costs, increase turnout, and respond to voter demands for greater convenience. Recently, however, there has been a perception that postal ballots are more amenable to both fraud and manipulation - following a number of controversies surrounding postal voting. Ballots were either lost, had incorrect information, sent to the wrong voter, or failed to return to election offices. Under such allegations, the printing, inserting and mailing of VBM ballots and election materials has come under extreme scrutiny with increased compliance requirements.

As a consequence, Runbeck Election Services has invested heavily in building a 90,000 sq.ft. state-of-the-art print and mail facility specifically to produce high quality ballots and election documentation to satisfy their client's stringent processing and accountability requirements.

"We must ensure we prepare, print, track, insert and mail ballots with the highest levels of transparency and security, while achieving 100% mail accuracy and integrity at all times," said Jeff Ellington, President and COO at Runbeck Election Services. "Even one incorrect ballot can have serious consequences for our business, and the resulting publicity can potentially destroy voter confidence in the entire election process."

100% MAIL INTEGRITY

To print, enclose and mail several million ballots per election cycle, Runbeck's new production facility was equipped with the latest in data management, digital inkjet printing and inserting technologies, operated under rigorous, well documented procedures to deliver the highest levels of accuracy and integrity.

"Technology drives our ballot production process and we rely on automation to eliminate any manual touch points which can introduce errors," explained Ellington. "Even with four, state-of-the-art W&D BB700S2 mail inserters, we still needed an extra layer of verification and integrity to mitigate any risks due to human, mechanical or data processing errors. Nothing is 'too much' when it comes to ensuring 100% integrity and 100% accuracy."

To produce VBM ballots efficiently and economically, inkjet printers are deployed to print the voters address on the carrier envelope, insert it with a ballot sheet, a ballot booklet and relevant election materials, and a return envelope addressed according to the voter's local precinct. Both envelopes also required the printing of local county and state logos, other informational text, specified postal indicia markings and a unique IMB barcode to allow both the voter and/or voter administrator to track the status of every single mail packet. In such a dynamic, time pressured mailing environment, errors due to duplication, incorrect printing or an incorrectly enclosed ballot, had to be virtually eliminated.

"We regularly print 2-of-5 and 3-of-9 barcodes and our inserters are equipped with readers and integrity software to manage mail integrity. But we required a final verification check to match the printed information against the input data file to ensure what was printed was correct and accounted for," concluded Ellington.



CUSTOMER PROFILE

- Founded in 1972, Runbeck Election Services offers a wide range of election printing and consulting service as well as custom software and hardware solutions
- Clients include US State & local county election administrators and officials
- 90,000 square feet purpose built production site housing a wide range of mono and color digital printing, enclosing, finishing and mail processing equipment.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

- Ballot and election-related printing and mailing services are some of the most complex projects in the industry
- Recent controversies surrounding "Vote-By-Mail" has led to stringent regulatory compliance requirements
- Runbeck purchased four of the latest W&D BB700S2 Inserter systems incorporating built-in mail integrity and tracking
- To satisfy compliance, a final verification check to match the printed information with the input file was required.

SOLUTION SUMMARY

- DISCOVERY Multiscan with embedded linescan and areascan cameras were deployed on the four W&D BB700 S2 intelligent inserters
- Lake Image's Linescan cameras read 2D barcodes visible through the window on front and back of the envelope. DISCOVERY Multiscan matched this data against the input file to ensure correct integrity was maintained.
- DISCOVERY Multiscan in combination with the BB700's CLIP technology provided the highest levels of mail integrity, tracking and logging required
- If a mismatch or a duplicate was detected, the mail is diverted for further investigation without the inserter stopping to maintain productivity.



CASE STUDY



SOLUTION

Runbeck knew they needed specialized reading, matching and integrity management technology to satisfy their requirements. Along with W&D, Runbeck implemented the DISCOVERY Multiscan solution from Lake Image Systems. The marriage between the W&D inserter's Closed Loop Integrated Processing (CLIP) system and DISCOVERY Multiscan's embedded camera technology - gave Runbeck the additional integrity reassurance it needed to meet all of their operational and compliance requirements.

By reading a unique 2D barcode from each ballot on input, the ballot and selected inserts, which included a return envelope are inserted into a carrier envelope. The unique barcode drove the Inkjet controller to look up the voter information to print on the outgoing envelope. This included the voter address, a 3of9 barcode and IMB on the front side. In addition, the unique voter ID also drove the inkjet to print the corresponding information on the return envelope, with a 2D barcode visible through the window of the carrier envelope. This way, every insert was correct, verified, and accounted for to ensure 100% accuracy and integrity!

At the end of the line, two Lake Image linescan cameras are used to read the 2D barcode on the front and on the back of the envelope. DISCOVERY Multiscan then matched and verified these against the input data-file to ensure the right ballot is sent to the right voter with the right return envelope. With everything recorded and date and time stamped, the system also provided 100% accountability!

If Multiscan detected a mismatch or a duplication issue, the suspect mail piece is out-sorted without the inserter stopping. This allowed the operator to investigate the suspect envelopes, whilst production continued on with no loss of productivity. Ellington added, "The verification system from Lake Image works beautifully with our W&D inserters and gives us, and our clients, the reassurance that our operational processes are working correctly."

BUSINESS BENEFITS

- Incorporating DISCOVERY Multiscan with high resolution linescan camera technology, has enabled Runbeck to achieve the high levels of mail integrity required to satisfy compliance requirements.
- Close integration on the W&D BB700 enabled high integrity whilst maintaining non-stop production.
- Runbeck has strengthened its position as a leading election printing service provider and is well positioned to capture more business.



IMPACT

Since 1972, Runbeck Election Services has preserved the integrity of the American democratic process, by ensuring that voters receive the correct ballot documentation to enable them to cast their votes, in a timely and efficient manner.

Printing and mailing VBM documentation involve some unique risks and challenges that Runbeck has worked hard to mitigate. "We are under enormous pressures to ensure our production facility performs faultlessly during every election cycle," said Kevin Runbeck, CEO of Runbeck Election Services. "It is through the dedication of our staff and the optimum operation of our technology that we are able to deliver this hugely important service for our country. The verification and reporting system from Lake Image plays an integral part in helping us deliver this service, by enabling us to achieve the highest levels of mail integrity we require."

The addition of the DISCOVERY Multiscan system to the existing W&D inserting lines has not only enabled Runbeck to satisfy growing operational requirements but, it has also positioned them to secure more election ballot printing business. As Ellington points out: "State and election officials demand assurances that we have excellent processes in place to catch and rectify errors as soon as they occur. When we demonstrate our end-to-end print and mail processes, they are 'blown away' with the levels of accuracy, integrity, and audit-tracking we can offer."

Following the success of the Lake Image camera verification system in enhancing the integrity of VBM production, Ellington is now investigating how the technology can be used to enhance their Sentio Ballot-on-Demand Printing System®. "Our Sentio® product can be used to print daily supplemental or emergency ballots. We are actively investigating how we can enhance the existing cameras on this product with technology from Lake Image Systems, to deliver even more value to ourselves and to our clients," added Ellington.

"WE ARE UNDER ENORMOUS PRESSURES TO ENSURE OUR PRODUCTION FACILITY PERFORMS FAULTLESSLY DURING EVERY ELECTION CYCLE. IT IS THROUGH THE DEDICATION OF OUR STAFF AND THE OPTIMUM OPERATION OF OUR TECHNOLOGY THAT WE ARE ABLE TO DELIVER THIS HUGE IMPORTANT SERVICE FOR OUR COUNTRY. THE CAMERA VERIFICATION SYSTEM FROM LAKE IMAGE PLAYS AN INTEGRAL PART IN HELPING US TO DELIVER THIS SERVICE, BY ENABLING US TO ACHIEVE THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF INTEGRITY WE REQUIRE."

Kevin Runbeck, CEO of Runbeck Election Services



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