

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Market Update for Month End

April 2026

Prepared for: Commercial Print & Graphic Arts Industry Leaders
Date: April 2026 | Source: Gimbel & Associates

Overview

This month's Gimbel & Associates Market Update covers fifteen articles drawn from leading industry publications including Printing Impressions, Packaging Impressions, Wide-format Impressions, and In-plant Impressions. Together they paint a picture of an industry in active transition — consolidating in mature markets, selectively investing in growth segments, grappling with technology adoption, and beginning to confront next-generation security challenges. The editor's notes throughout provide strategic context for print company owners and managers.

Strategy & Business Leadership

1.

The One Question Drucker Would Ask Your Printing Company Today

Mike Philie revisits Peter Drucker's foundational principle — *the purpose of a business is to create a customer* — and applies it to today's print landscape. His central argument: most print companies organize strategy around their capabilities (equipment, speed, quality) when they should organize it around the customer's desired outcome. When relationships are built around transactions rather than the customer's broader goals, clients quietly drift away without complaint. The fix is proactive engagement — bringing unsolicited ideas to existing accounts, understanding what success looks like for each of your top ten customers, and positioning your company as a trusted advisor rather than a vendor competing on price.

Great work is the price of admission — not the sole source of advantage.

Key Insight

When two companies do great work, the customer looks at price. That is a strategy problem, not a production problem. Knowing your customer's success metrics — not just their specs — is the differentiator.

Industry Financial Performance

2.

Quad Reports First Quarter 2026 Results

Quad/Graphics (NYSE: QUAD) reported Q1 2026 Net Sales of \$581 million, a 7.7% year-over-year decline — though half of that decline stems from the February 2025 divestiture of European operations. Adjusted EBITDA held essentially flat at \$45M vs. \$46M in Q1 2025, and Adjusted Diluted EPS improved 25% to \$0.25. The company reaffirmed full-year 2026 guidance. Management is investing in co-mailing optimization, AI-enabled productivity tools, and audience-strategy services. Macro headwinds remain — postage cost inflation, geopolitical tension, and cautious client spending — but disciplined cost control is preserving margins.

3.

December Printing Shipments Rallied to End the Year

December 2025 shipments came in at \$7.21 billion — a slight rebound from November's \$7.11 billion. While the month-end uptick was welcome, the full year remained poor by historical standards. The data reinforces the broader pattern of flat-to-declining volume in traditional commercial print.

4.

Commercial Printing Establishments — 2010–2023

County Business Patterns data (NAICS 323111) shows 15,140 commercial printing establishments in 2023 — a 31% decline from 2010. Small shops (1–9 employees) still represent 70% of establishments; mid-size shops account for 22%; and the largest operations just 8%. These proportions have remained remarkably stable for over a decade, suggesting the consolidation is happening within size tiers rather than dramatically reshaping the size distribution.

KEY INSIGHT: Industry Consolidation Reality:

Despite a 31% drop in establishment count since 2010, the size distribution of print shops is essentially unchanged. Small shops still dominate. Consolidation is squeezing out marginal players, not restructuring the industry's fundamental shape.

M&A Activity & Market Structure

5.

Target Report: Schutzschirmverfahren — The German Chapter 11

Manroland Sheetfed — one of the most respected names in offset press manufacturing — entered German insolvency proceedings (Schutzschirmverfahren), the equivalent of a debtor-in-possession Chapter 11. Three structural pathways are now distinctly visible across the industry: (1) closure when headwinds are insurmountable; (2) local consolidation as operators combine to absorb exiting volume; and (3) continued capital investment in packaging, labels, and digital print — the growth segments. The March 2026 deal log captured 16 M&A transactions, one Chapter 11 filing, six non-bankruptcy closures, and one German insolvency.

6.

Why the M&A Stage Is Set for an Uptick in Tuck-ins

James Russell argues that flat 2025 sales (average +0.7% per PRINTING United Alliance data) and limited organic growth options are driving conditions favorable for tuck-in acquisitions. Tuck-ins — where a buyer absorbs a seller's client list and often retains key staff — work best when sellers face plateaued growth, no succession plan, or too-limited local markets. The editor notes this trend specifically as relevant context for understanding smaller competitor strategies.

7.

RRD Expands Collectibles & Games — A Growth Segment Case Study

R.R. Donnelley has made multi-million-dollar investments to expand its global trading card and board game production infrastructure across seven countries. With a 37-year legacy in collectibles, RRD is now the only U.S.-based manufacturer with end-to-end global capabilities covering design, print, kitting, warehousing, and fulfillment. Key differentiators include proprietary randomization systems for chase card rarity integrity, anti-counterfeiting technology (holographic foils, unique serialization), and sustainable hourglass paper sleeves replacing plastic blister packs. Included as a general-interest example of how specialty print segments can command premium positioning.

Technology Adoption

8.

Should Printing Companies Use ChatGPT?

Alyssa Summers delivers a balanced guide for print shop owners. The answer is yes — with clear guardrails. Best uses include overcoming marketing writer's block, improving customer service tone, and organizing internal knowledge. The easy wins are front-end tasks that don't touch proprietary data. The danger zones are uploading client mailing lists (PII violations under GDPR/CCPA), sharing pricing formulas (competitive exposure), technical prepress math (hallucination risk), and legal or financial documents. The recommended framework is Human-in-the-Loop (HITL): every AI output gets human verification, employees are trained in data masking before submission, and every shop needs a written AI Usage Policy.

Use AI to handle the language. Let your experts handle the print.

9.

Why Quantum-Resistant Printing Is the New Gold Standard

Security threats have migrated from physical access (locked trays, badge readers) to the quantum realm. Quantum-Resistant Printing (QRP) integrates Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC) — specifically NIST FIPS 203/204 lattice-based algorithms — into the full print job lifecycle. The most urgent threat is 'Harvest Now, Decrypt Later' (HNDL): adversaries are already storing encrypted print streams today, betting on decrypting them with quantum computers within 5–10 years. Hardware bought today that lacks PQC in its silicon may become a legal liability before full depreciation. QRP is now a standard clause in high-value commercial RFPs, and insurers are beginning to deny breach coverage to non-compliant providers.

KEY INSIGHT: Action Required:

Hardware purchased today will be in service 5–7 years. Ensure new press and production hardware includes PQC-compliant silicon (e.g., HP LaserJet Enterprise 5000/6000 series). Non-compliant equipment may create insurance and liability exposure for healthcare, legal, and financial print clients.

Equipment & Vendor News

10.

Toshiba Expands High-Output Print Portfolio

Toshiba America Business Solutions is adding Xerox PrimeLink color and monochrome light-production printers to its portfolio, reinforcing its multi-vendor strategy. The PrimeLink C9200 Series (up to 81 ppm color, 2400×2400 dpi, media up to 400 gsm and 51" banners) targets marketing, creative, and in-plant operations. The B9100 Series (100–136 ppm monochrome, up to 3M pages/month) targets high-volume education, government, and healthcare environments. The move leverages Toshiba's existing Xerox relationship following Xerox's acquisition of Lexmark.

11.

EFI Ignite Event — Digital Printing Technology & Trends

EFI's Ignite event (March 11, Londonderry, NH) hosted 40+ companies showcasing digital solutions across wide-format graphics, packaging, and textiles. Sessions covered print industry trends, digital embellishments, advanced applications, and an update on Fiery's Display Graphics Software Suite.

12.

2026 International Sign Expo — New Solutions & Strategies

ISA's International Sign Expo in Orlando drew strong energy with multiple equipment launches: Roland (TrueVis XG-640, Dimense DA-640, VersaSTUDIO BN2-30), Canon (Arizona 2380 GTF, ip GP-4600S), Epson (G9070 DTF, SureColor V4000), Mimaki (UJV200-160/130 LED Printer, UJ330H0-160), and CGS-ORIS (KCXL+ UV LED Flatbed).

Wide-Format & Installation

13.

Graphics Installation: 10 Trends to Understand

Installation is no longer an afterthought — it is increasingly technical and often the most visible moment in a project. Ten key trends from wide-format professionals: (1) installation is far more than applying vinyl; (2) hybrid print-and-install business models are growing; (3) trust between producer and installer is essential; (4) controlling production improves installation outcomes; (5) in-house installers offer cost control; (6) independent installers provide flexibility; (7) skill sets are expanding rapidly; (8) economics are driving a rise in resurfacing work; (9) large event installations are high-risk, high-reward; and (10) complex fabrication projects offer substantially higher margins.

Employment & Workforce

14.

Graphic Arts Employment in March — Non-Production Up Substantially

March 2026 graphic arts employment rose 0.3% overall from February — but the mix is notable: production employment fell 0.8% while non-production employment jumped 2.9%. In related segments, signage employment was flat; paper products employment rose 0.2%; and creative services (graphic design +0.4%, ad agencies +0.3%, PR +0.7%) showed modest gains. The broader March BLS report showed +178,000 nonfarm payrolls (well above the 50,000 consensus), though the U-6 'real' unemployment rate rose from 7.9% to 8.0% and labor force participation slipped to 61.9%.

15.

In-plant Staffing Practices and Trends

An In-plant Impressions survey finds that 29% of in-plants have open positions to fill. Budget constraints — hiring freezes or lack of funding — are the barrier for 67% of short-staffed operations. Finding skilled labor is the top hiring challenge (77% of managers). Vacancies ripple into higher workloads, overtime, and reduced quality. Notably, 75%+ of in-plants are confident they will be fully staffed within 12 months. Successful retention strategies emphasize career growth, respect, and community — and increasingly, hiring for character rather than specific equipment experience.

Key Metrics at a Glance

Metric	Value	Significance
Quad Q1 2026 Net Sales	\$581M	-7.7% YoY; half from divested European ops
Quad Adjusted EBITDA	\$45M	Essentially flat vs. \$46M in Q1 2025
Quad Adjusted Diluted EPS	\$0.25	+25% improvement over Q1 2025
Dec 2025 Print Shipments	\$7.21B	Slight rebound from Nov \$7.11B; weak full year
Commercial Print Estab. (2023)	15,140	Down 31% from 2010 (NAICS 323111)
Small shops (1–9 employees)	70%	Share of all commercial print establishments

Metric	Value	Significance
Print industry avg. sales growth 2025	+0.7%	Per PRINTING United Alliance survey
In-plants with open positions	29%	Staffing shortages remain widespread
Top hiring barrier (in-plants)	67%	Budget constraints / hiring freezes
Graphic arts non-prod. employment	+2.9%	Month-over-month, Feb → Mar 2026
QRP adoption status	Standard RFP clause	Now required in most high-value commercial bids