The Xerox Daytona

Gentlemen, start your engines, the race is about to begin. Where better than Daytona Beach as a take-off point for what may be a race for the future of print? Peter Coleman waves the start flag.

(right) Philip Chambers and Bryan Bloch of DME, with the iGen3 behind.

(below) Bryan Bloch of DME: "Australia can take advantage of seeing what's going to come".

As part of its push to establish the long-awaited Xerox iGen3 colour production system in Australia, Bryan Bloch, from Florida-based direct marketing specialist DME, is in town to provide a glimpse of what's to come.

And it's not a pretty sight. Mass media — which Block observes, "still seems to be working here" — is almost dead in America's prosperous south and every legal trick (and a few that are at least borderline) is being used by motor dealers, real estate agents and financial institutions wanting to be noticed in a crowded market.

Or at least that's the way Bloch tells it. The company uses email and a range of telephone-based techniques, including voice broadcasting, "live interactive voice response" and its own call centre to spruik the wares of its clients, which include one of the country's biggest Toyota distributorships.

And there's print. In fact, with three iGen3s already in use — "more than you've got in Australia," Bloch quipped — and a fourth on order, DME is producing five million direct marketing pieces a month.

Established two decades ago by a guy by the name of Mike Panaggio, who couldn't get the print services he wanted for his travel incentive company, DME has grown into a showplace 120,000ft² "campus" with 24-hour music and where everything is inhouse "except growing the trees".

In ten years of personalised print, it's moved from inkjet, to preprinted colour shells personalised by a single-colour laser, to full-colour variable laser printing on the iGen3. And the average response rate has climbed from less than one per cent, to2.6 per cent, to 5.6 per cent ... "and we can do things which weren't possible before," Bloch said.

All of the pieces are printed in a single run, and are part of an integrated approach designed to create the greatest response at the lowest cost. "Being integrated separates us from the bunch," said Bloch.

Apart from boosting sales for its clients, the new Xerox gear has helped cut waste at DME, which was having a problem cutting back the volume of unused preprinted forms it had to scrap when the message became outdated. By last year, they'd got this down to 374,000 pieces (from two million in 2002).

Privacy laws — something Fuji Xerox's launch guests wanted to know about — are rather different from those here, and focus around issues such as a "do not call" list to protect telephone subscribers. In the USA, direct mail can be used to "revive" a former client who has lapsed to the "do not call" because there has been no business in the past 18 months.

The company takes pride in its database management facilities, with a staff of 40 working in this area. But while larger companies trust DME with its databases, smaller ones are frequently reluctant to do so.

Bloch says with multi-channel TV and a range of other media, it's become difficult to get people's attention in today's USA, but one-to-one marketing using digital print is helping ... and it's a great opportunity.

"Australia can take advantage of seeing what's going to come," Bloch said. "Mike's philosophy is not to wait until you have to do something, but to be 'ahead of the bandwagon'."

So the race is on. And it seems, five years after Xerox announced the FutureColor (later iGen3) at drupa 2000, and a couple of years after it was launched in Europe and the USA, a few printers in Australia still have that opportunity. ■