

Platemaking Area Features Automation

The new Observer Newspapers building features perhaps the most automated platemaking department of any Michigan newspaper. (Illustration 1) This provides both speed and quality, as the number of variables formerly determined by inaccurate equipment has been sharply reduced.

The picture of the camera-ready page is automatically processed and emerges as a page negative in the platemaking department, where it is checked for flaws and then placed on a flat (Illustration 2). Small holes have already been drilled automatically in the film, and these "registration holes" are carried right through onto the plates, to make sure the ink prints exactly in the right place when the plate is put on the press.

THE NEGATIVE is placed on top of a sensitized aluminum plate (Illustration 3) and held in place by a vacuum. The top of the plate maker then is flipped over, exposing the plate to strong light from an arc lamp, which shines through the transparent parts of the page negative to expose or "burn" the plate underneath. Those places that are exposed will eventually print when the plate is put on the press.

The exposed plate is then run through an automatic plate developer (Illustrations 4 and 5), which scrubs chemicals into the plate at a constant and precise rate. The finished and developed plate is then ready to be put on the press.

Back up equipment enables platemakers to process plates by hand, should the automatic plate processor break down.

The main advantage of the new Observer platemaking department is high speed and constant quality control. Around 45 plates per hour can be put through the department, with uniform quality control, with the savings in time translated into later deadline news for the reader.



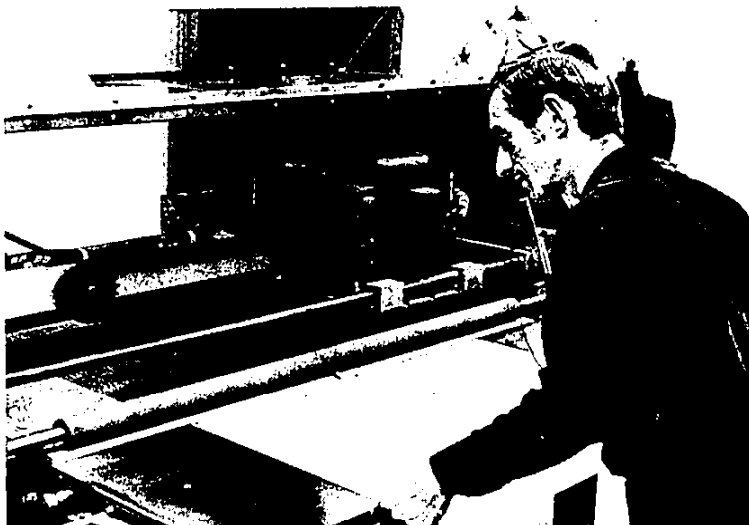
1 The Observer Newspapers plate-making department is perhaps the most automated in Michigan.



2 Negatives are checked for flaws and placed on flats.



3 Page negatives are placed on top of sensitized aluminum plates before burning.



4 Exposed plates are fed into the Western Litho automated plate developer.



5 Developed plates are produced at a rate of about 45 per hour.