



HAVING THE VINYL SAY...

Innotech Digital sets out UK
strategy for US Vinyl manufacturer
General Formulations

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MAKING THE WORK FLOW

It's all about the workflow, right? Whatever size your operation you're no doubt on an efficiency drive - whether the focus is to reign in costs or to grow business - and having a streamlined workflow is key to that. Well, get turning pages then, because according to this year's Widthwise Survey of UK/Ireland large-format PSPs, only 3.31% - that's five of the poll's 151 responding operations - have invested in Industry 4.0 technology. To give you some stats on more specific areas of investment, 8.61% said they would be investing specifically in workflow software in the next two years, the figure dropping to 3.31% for MIS investment, and to 1.99% for Web-to-print. Perhaps that indicates that many large-format operations have already made their big investments in these areas - but that's not what the solutions providers are necessarily telling me!

For instance, according to Clarity MD Richard Gamlin - see What They Say on p24 - "there's still a lot of gold to mine in the UK print sector" where he reckons there are "5,000 - 600 live potential buyers" for software packages bridging/integrating production workflow, MIS, CRM and ERP functions.

Then we have the likes of Robert Farfort, MD of Data Image, telling us that when hosting open days to highlight how businesses can profit from workflow efficiencies based on software tools - and in this case on using them as part of a lean processing programme - that "the biggest reaction we get is 'wow, that's a lot of money. They'd rather buy a new printer.'" See why he thinks that's a mistake by reading the piece on p31.

Still need to be convinced that scrutiny of your workflow and investment in that area is worth a detailed look-see? Read on - the What To Watch feature on finishing starting on p16 flags up the issue, as does the Zeitgeist piece on MIS on p38.

Talk is cheap - just wondering if the real money is going where we're being told it should be for PSPs to become more competitive?

Editor
LESLEY SIMPSON
LESLEY.SIMPSON@IMAGEREPORTSMAG.CO.UK
TEL: 01932 707173



From Top:
Lesley Simpson
Alex Gold
Tania King
Wayne Darroch
Carl Archer



Editor: Lesley Simpson
lesley.simpson@imagereportsmag.co.uk

Production Manager: Alex Gold

Design: Tania King

Publisher: Wayne Darroch
wayned@sjpbusinessmedia.com

Advertising Manager: Carl Archer
carl.archer@imagereportsmag.co.uk
Tel: 07723 079928

www.imagereportsmag.co.uk

SJP Business Media,
2nd Floor, 123 Cannon Street,
London, EC4N 5AU

For circulation enquiries contact:

SJP Business Media
Unit K, Venture House
one Lane, Newbury, R14 5SH

Tel: 01635 879361

Fax: 01635 868594

Email: imagereports@circdata.com

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CONTENTS

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2018

REGULARS:

6 News

Keeping you abreast of all the latest news in relation to digital wide-format print.

8 Cover Story Advertorial

Innotech talks strategy following its UK distribution deal with US-based General Formulations.

34 Think Bigger

Gallery showing off the creativity and complexity of large-format inkjet print.

36 Forum

Vital stats to help you run your business; Digging below the surface with Industry Mole; Out and About - events diary; Over to You with Graham Wood, MD, All Signs Visual Communications.

38 Zeitgeist

Do you use your MIS to get the best ROI?



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SECTIONS:

Technical

10 What to Watch I

Inks: developments that can help you make money.

16 What to Watch II

Finishing: new kit, and how to get more from your investment.

23 Special Report

PDF: on the road to standardisation for large-format print

24 What they Say

Why Clarity chief Richard Gamlin thinks there's "gold to mine in the UK print sector"

Business

26 Talking Point

... with Richard Leach on selling up to a French company ahead of Brexit

28 Top Tips

The FSB tells you how to win at the late payment game

31 Special Report

One year on - an update on the lean programme at Image Data

Environment

33 Hi Society

Why you should be greening up your act and shouting about it.

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Colourgen starts selling the Dimense

Colourgen has become the exclusive UK distributor of Veika's new 3D wallpaper printing solution Dimense. Dean Keenan, formerly of Landor UK and Sihl Direct, has been appointed by Colourgen to head business development and sales for the Dimense range, which starts shipping to the UK in September.

Dimense adds custom height up to 1mm to prints by embossing and digitally printing simultaneously, without the need for a print cylinder. This enables users to print non-repetitive and unique wallpaper. The system is based on latex eco-friendly inks and PVC-free structure-forming Ecodeco media to deliver output with high light-fastness, scrub resistance and that is C1 fire rated. Speeds of up to 20m²/hr can be achieved in CMYK with a print width of 1.6m on the Dimensor Model S. It will be followed by the Dimensor Model M next year, which will print at up to 100m²/hr. Dimensor Model L, which will print in one pass, will then be launched in 2020. This device will be capable of achieving 1000m²/hr, which Veika says will enable it to meet the productivity needs of wallpaper companies.

Colourgen will exhibit Dimense at the 100% Design exhibition at Olympia, 19-22 September.

Flyeralarm installs Europe's first EFI Vutek HS125 F4

German-based online print company Flyeralarm has installed Europe's first EFI Vutek HS125 F4 hybrid flatbed/roll-to-roll inkjet printer.

Founded in 2002, Flyeralarm is active in 15 countries in Europe and has more than 2,000 employees. For ten years it has been providing LFP products, sending out around 3,000 packages per day. With the new Vutek machine on board the company plans to offer more bespoke products to customers, 90% of which are B2B.

"Thanks to the great flexibility of the [new Vutek] machine with regard to the range of materials, we will now be able to offer our customers additional and even more personalised products," said Igor Zanolvskiy, managing director of the company's large-format printing department. "Our bespoke department already deals with our customers' special requests. With the new EFI machine, we now have the opportunity to gradually expand this service."

StackaWraps seeks PSP involvement on back of new product launch

StackaWraps is looking to partner large-format PSPs following the introduction into the retail market of a 3D Shelfies product - free-standing display/stocking units that range from 4ft to 8ft in height and combine a printed stretch fabric cover over a lightweight frame to replicate merchandise.

Using its patented software, StackaWraps takes a 2D photo and can turn it into a fire-resistant wrap that is zipped up over a bespoke made skeleton framework. The result is a 3D display unit, with multiple shelving options. The Shelfies are designed as bespoke assembly kits and are supplied flat-packed.

Richard Mark Peter, co-founder of StackaWraps,



said: "We are very keen to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with POS suppliers on the basis that we manage the specialist process of converting a 2D image to a 3D printed stretch fabric vinyl cover. We would also provide the necessary CAD files, which will allow our partners to produce the internal structure using their existing cutting equipment. If required, we can also supply fully finished units, but we see that there is a real opportunity for our partners to have much greater control over lead-times and pricing if they produce the internal frames themselves."

Peter added: "We recognise the need to help companies promote Shelfies to their clients, so we have put considerable investment into being able to supply 'mini-samples' and computer-generated visualisations to our partners. We can even help them experience producing their own 6ft champagne bottle with internal shelving units to act as the ultimate sales presentation tool. To show how straightforward the construction process is we have also produced a short video showing a Shelfies champagne bottle being put together."

VGL takes Durst P5 250 HS printer with white ink option

VGL has become the first company in the UK and Ireland to order a specialised version of Durst's P5 250 HS printer - it is configured with white as a printing colour.

VGL already has seven Durst systems - two Rhotex fabric printers and five roll-to-roll digital inkjet machines. The P5 - the first Durst flatbed machine at its Smallmead production facility in Reading - will bring a print volume capability (in two-pass mode) of up to 240m²/hr and is expected to quadruple the

output of the machine it is replacing.

MD David Gray said: "Our flatbed capacity needed upgrading because one of our machines had come to the end of its useful life. The P5 will quadruple output in comparison to its predecessor and at a higher resolution. This will open a lot of doors for VGL and is a huge step forward. We're seeing a significant increase in demand in flatbed sales, which drives this investment."

Sun releases Corporate Sustainability Report

Sun Chemical has released its 2017 Corporate Sustainability Report.

Highlights from the report include how solvent-based liquid inks use resins responsibly sourced from certified forests and how water-based liquid inks use bio-derived resins that do not impact ink performance. It also looks at how its MirrorTech inks reduce waste by replacing metalised board with printable metallic ink.

"Sun Chemical is committed to doing its part to be a sustainable organisation," said Michael Simoni, global product stewardship leader, Sun Chemical. "We want to show our customers that we are continuously working with suppliers and challenging ourselves to improve the eco-efficiency of our processes and products."

Global Graphics product eliminates 'inkjet smile'

Global Graphics has released a new version of ScreenPro, the screening engine tuned to smooth out imperfections in inkjet printing. It introduces a technology that reduces non-uniformity across the web - commonly known as the inkjet smile.

ScreenPro Version 2.0 introduces PrintFlat technology that mitigates the artifacts caused by variation within a head, between heads or wear on the head itself. It does this by being able to address every nozzle separately on any combination of head and electronics, to achieve very fine granularity.

The latest ScreenPro can be applied to any inkjet technology and print industry workflow and can be added to printers already on the market, or incorporated into an inkjet press that's still on the drawing board.

New board appointed to Leach

New Leach owner Chargeurs has appointed James Lavin as MD and Adrian Ray as sales and marketing director of the UK operation. Former MD Richard Leach and director Jim Parkin are contracted to remain at Huddersfield-based business for 12 months from its acquisition in April this year, but will gradually hand over to the new team, which is supported by the French-based parent's Sampiero Lanfranchi, director of international development, and Patrick Bonnefond, chief executive of technical substrates.

In other key moves, operations manager Russell Wilson has become head of operations, overseeing everything from new product development through to installations; company secretary Paul Wadsworth is now head of finance; and senior project manager Tom Foster has taken on the role



of head of Leach Inspire - the group's heritage sector brand.

With the new structure put in place by Chargeurs, £11m turnover Leach has a goal to reach £25m within five years. (See feature p26)

Investment at Northern Flags sister FaberExposize UK

Northern Flags sister company FaberExposize UK has spent another £500,000 expanding its print facility on the back of a £1m investment into the relocation of its wide-format print hub last Christmas.

Now operating within a two-unit site, FaberExposize UK and Northern Flags have installed a second Agfa Avinci DX3200 dye-sub printer alongside an Anapurna M3200i roll-to-roll UV machine in the hope of expanding their presence in the POS, exhibition and interiors markets offering



tension fabric, free standing display units, custom vinyls and display graphics.

Iain Clasper-Cotte, UK MD, said: "Our focus on Agfa [printers] is different than at other bases across FaberExposize's European presence, which tends to lean heavily on Durst machines instead. However, we feel Agfa is a better fit for both brands in Leeds. Having two Avincis now allows us to properly explore a variety of specialised fabrics and increase our expertise in a variety of substrates while maintaining a consistency of print."

Having last year become the first UK wide-format printer to operate a DX3200 printer, the decision to buy a twin machine was to meet demand during the busy summer period. Historically, the Northern Flags brand has focused on sports and event branding. While this is still a key market, over the past three years the company has expanded exponentially delivering full POS campaigns to retailers and automotive clients.

Tharstern introduces Layout Library feature to MIS solution

Tharstern has introduced a Layout Library tool developed to allow printers to teach their MIS how to lay down impositions in the correct way for their equipment and processes.

"MIS-to-prepress connectivity is pivotal to automation and while there have been great strides made in this area, it has still always felt like all of the knowledge was held in prepress and the MIS was only sending a rough idea of the imposition layout for prepress to interpret and make good. On the whole, that did work, but one of the challenges that has remained unconquerable in our opinion is change control," said Keith, Tharstern's MD.

"When prepress make changes to an imposition, the integrity of the workflow is broken and feedback about job status and costing is nearly impossible. Some

prepress systems have gone a long way in trying to communicate this information back to the MIS but honestly, it's typically too late or too difficult to flush that information into the relevant areas for each job. There are just too many implications," added McMurtrie.

"What people seem to want in an automatic production route is for the MIS to come up with the layout that they would have selected manually."

Tharstern claims this is fundamentally what has been achieved with the new Layout Library. While the MIS will still create dynamic impositions automatically, there is now the added functionality to 'teach' the software about any exceptions to the rules.

Perfect Colours becomes NS Multi reseller

Perfect Colours is now selling the NS Multi LG wide-format flatbed digital printer in the UK and Ireland. The first orders of the machine - made by Portuguese New Solution Engineering - have just started to ship.

Designed for the short-run printing of folding cartons and corrugated boxes and sheets, the five-colour (CMYKK) NS Multi LG has a 47in (1200mm) media width, a 42in (1066mm) print area, print speeds of up to 300mm per second, and a resolution of up to 1600 x 1600dpi. A demonstration printer is sited at the Perfect Colours Innovation Centre in Sheffield.

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- Digital Factory v10 Apparel software released
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- William Smith adds to film range
- New look for Wrights Plastics
- Felix Schoeller's SLP papers certified for whole HP Latex series
- Onlineprinters reaches 250,000 climate neutral order milestone
- Semaphore sold to The Print Centre Cardiff
- UYR starts running new Agfa Anapurna H2500i
- Antalis now selling whole Stadur range
- HP certifies Onyx Rip for Latex R Series
- Spec announced of Context HD Ultra X 6000 scanner



INNOTECH DIGITAL'S UK STRATEGY FOR GENERAL FORMULATIONS VINYL

Earlier this month, East Midlands-based wide format media giant, Innotech Digital, announced their appointment as authorised UK distributor for General Formulations wide format digital print media, self-adhesive vinyls, overlaminates and mounting films. General Formulations is one of the best-selling vinyl brands in the US and their medias are renowned for their durability, quality and niche applications.

Founded in 1953, General Formulations (GF) is a family owned company located in Sparta, Michigan, US and produce a huge range of quality medias for Solvent, Eco-Solvent, Latex and UV Curable printers. Their specialist medias can be used on carpets, floors, walls, motorbikes, cars and commercial vehicles and installed in restaurants, classrooms, offices, warehouses, homes and retail outlets, amongst others, meaning that users will have a much wider variety of quality proven vinyls to choose from than ever before.

Marcus Norman, regional sales manager at Innotech Digital commented, "General Formulations medias are extremely well established in the US and we were thrilled to be appointed as their authorised distributor in the UK earlier this month. We now hold stock of all their most popular ranges, in the region of 30 plus variations. This allows our printing and sign-making customers to create brilliant new products for a huge variety of markets, which enables them to grow their businesses and make more margin, using their existing print and finishing equipment."

Murat Zekeriya Kurdu, managing director at General Formulations said, "We're delighted to have Innotech as our authorised UK distributor for our range of wide format medias and vinyls. They are a reputable

supplier to the industry with a strong and knowledgeable sales team, a great reputation for customer service and the capacity to stock the largest choice of our materials in the UK. We're looking forward to growing our brand with them in the UK and seeing some of the wonderfully creative projects that their customers will produce in the future with our products."

Once such customer is Norfolk based printer Repro Arts. Clive Hill, managing director, comments, "We've been around since the 1950's and are well known for our vehicle wrapping service. We tried the GF 230 Series Automark™ product and were very impressed with the results – it goes on easy and the print finish is outstanding. We will definitely be back for more."

The 230 Series Automark™ is a Premium 60mic calendared Gloss white vinyl digital media with a grey permanent acrylic adhesive on an air-egress liner. This film is designed to accept a variety of solvent, latex and UV curable inks common to wide format digital printing systems. The grey permanent adhesive offers excellent opacity and exceptional repositionable qualities.

Three other specialist products are particularly aimed at signmakers and print service providers to help open up new markets by producing durable graphics for floors, carpets and walls.

The first is 212 Series Traffic Graffix™ matte carpet

vinyl which creates vibrant, durable and eye-catching floor signage for carpets that really stick and won't damage, peel or curl. Ideal for both temporary or more long term graphic displays, 212 Series Traffic Graffix™ gives vibrant, eye-catching signage with potential uses such as directing traffic, welcoming visitors, cautioning pedestrians or creating an imaginative floor space.

The second is 285 Series Roughmark™ which is a conformable, calendared, hi-tack vinyl that can be applied to any rough surface such as bricks and rough walls but it can be removed without leaving any residue up to six months after installation. Ideal for either temporary or more permanent displays, Roughmark™ can be used in spaces where the walls are un-plastered or uneven which would make painting or displaying signage any other way almost impossible; this enables print service providers and graphic display companies to offer a graphic for virtually any wall surface.

The third product that wide format print service providers will find particularly interesting is 229 Series Wallmark™ Embossed Canvas Wall Vinyl. Wallmark™ Canvas is designed for wall murals, decals and graphics to suit most types of smooth painted interior walls. This includes most flat, semi-gloss and gloss paint finishes. The surface should be smooth and clean prior to application but if applying to brand new paint, the surface must be fully dry according to the paint manufacturers' specification before application. Not designed for metal surfaces, Wallmark™ Canvas is, however, suitable also for glass and is printed using solvent or UV curable digital ink printers.

Kieran Dallow, marketing manager at Innotech Digital comments, "Part of our strategy in the UK for General

THE FULL RANGE STOCKED BY INNOTECH DIGITAL INCLUDES:

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- Matte White Semi-Rigid Vinyl
- WallMark™ Canvas
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- Dry Erase Laminates
- AutoMark™
- Gloss Clear Vinyl
- Polymeric Gloss
- Polymeric Matt
- Traffic Graffix™
- Rough Mark™

Partial van wrap by ReproArts using
AutoMark Vinyl and Laminate

Formulations is to ensure that sign makers and print service providers have access to the full range and have all the support they need to make it a success. Anyone who has ever used the GF range knows that it is reliable, durable and delivers consistent colour output across different ink types so it's a great choice if your print fleet consists of different makes of printer and with differing ink types."

Profiles are available for just about every wide format printer on the market and there is a Selection Guide that users can download and use to select the right media for the job. Once customers have decided on the right media, they can request a particular sample from Innotech directly and this can be followed up by face to face visit with one of their media specialists, who are based all over the country. <http://marketing.innotechdigital.com/general-formulations-selection-guide>

For more information on the range, call Innotech on 01530 512 731, visit the website at <https://innotechdigital.com/product-category/digital-print-media/generalformulations> or email sales@innotechdigital.com.

SPOTLIGHT ON INNOTECH DIGITAL

Combining more than 80 years' experience with exceptional expertise and a network of global partners, Innotech Digital supplies the global wide format print market with the largest single range of display hardware and wide format print media under one roof. They have over 8,000 pallet spaces in their purpose-built facility as well as over 1.4 million square meters of grand and wide format media stock and more than 75,000 roller banner systems available for same-day despatch. Innotech is the sole distributor for Vistaflex Banner Materials, Envirotech PVC-Free Medias, Kinetix Magnetic Media, and the Vertex Textile range as well as premier UK reseller for DGC self-adhesive vinyls and now General Formulations Vinyl.

Offering maximum choice to signmakers, print service providers and display graphics companies, Innotech also supplies arguably the largest range of display graphics hardware such as pop up displays, tension framing systems, roller banners, outdoor displays and totems, lightboxes, snapframes and point of sale accessories as well as a comprehensive range of presentation media such as whiteboards, LCD mounts, tablet displays and more.

This unique business model, allows wide format print service businesses to save admin and delivery costs by purchasing the bulk of their print materials and display systems from a single supplier.

A family-run business, Innotech prides itself with establishing and maintaining strong and lasting relationships with their customers and are continually striving to improve every part of their business, in order to be the best at what they do. Whether this is improving internal systems, increasing services such as marketing help to customers or by answering the phone within 20 seconds, Innotech is a forward thinking, dynamic and modern company, committed to the industry to the betterment of all their stakeholders – customers and staff alike. Hence their tagline – The Industry's Trusted Partner.



INK: BLOTS AND BLAGGING RIGHTS

TALKING ABOUT PRINTING INKS? THEN YOU'RE PROBABLY COMPLAINING ABOUT THEIR RISING PRICE. BUT, AS SIMON CREASY EXPLAINS, IT'S NOT ALL BAD - THERE ARE PLENTY OF DEVELOPMENTS THAT SHOULD ACTUALLY HELP YOU MAKE MONEY.

For the majority of print service providers ink isn't something that they are ever going to get overly excited about. It's normally viewed as a necessary evil and an expensive one at that. And it's getting worryingly expensive at the moment, as the recent Widthwise Survey 2018 underlined. The survey found that hikes in the price of supplies like ink is a major concern for nearly 55% of PSPs.

But while ink might not be considered as 'sexy' as a brand new all-singing-and-dancing wide-format printer, it's rapidly becoming an area where ink and hardware manufacturers are focusing their R&D efforts because it has become clear that the right ink can elevate a bog-standard print job to a whole new level. Anyone looking for evidence of this push need only to have taken a quick spin around the exhibition halls of Fespa 2018 where the latest ink technology was one of the show's hottest talking points.

The innovations on display at the show are being driven by a plethora of end user demands, according to John Mills, CEO of Inca Digital. "We're finding the most important thing with inks in wide-format [at the moment] is flexibility," he says.

To this end the company recently launched the B1 UV printer OnsetM. The OnsetM is a B1 UV printer that uses new Fujifilm Dimatix small-drop, 7pl binary piezo heads and has eight ink channels, allowing the operator to choose either dual-CMYK for higher speeds, or CMYK plus light cyan, magenta and opaque white.

"We wanted printers to be able to print anything on anything, so giving them flexibility in substrate, in colour,

THERE IS A
GROUNDWELL
OF PUBLIC
OPINION AND
NO-ONE CAN
AFFORD TO
IGNORE THE
SUSTAINABILITY
FACTOR

in quality was really important. UV-cured inks give that flexibility," stresses Mills.

Flexibility is also a big area of focus for Mimaki, which has recently added updated dye-sublimation inks and new colours to its solvent range. "Naturally, our customers are also enjoying creative and performance benefits from these and a good example is how Mimaki's punchy orange SS21 solvent ink is proving to be a useful addition, allowing designers to hit even the most challenging of corporate palettes, brand identities and logos," explains Brett Newman, chief operations manager at Hybrid Services, Mimaki's exclusive distributor for the UK and Ireland.

Another interesting creative option is the latest clear varnish developed for Mimaki's UV printers. "This can be used in a number of ways and is a great technique for finishing prints. It adds a tactile element and most importantly, a value-adding proposition to the final job," says Newman.

Sticking with the 'clear' theme, EFI also recently launched clear inks in addition to thermoforming inks and reactive inks that have been developed with the textile market in mind.

"Our clear ink is a unique EFI hybrid launched feature that addresses high gloss/high emphasis, bringing to the forefront an area of the print," says Ken Hanulec, vice president, Inkjet marketing at EFI. "The customer response has been very positive to our launches as they have enabled printing companies to respond to new requirements and generate new revenue streams. Those inks have also given our customers a strong point of differentiation in the marketplace."



Epson has been looking to differentiate its own product offer by focusing on eco-solvent inks - in particular the UltraChrome GS3 and GS3 with red inks used on the company's SureColor SC-S series for signage, posters, wallpaper and car wraps.

"In the last six to 12 months we have seen a surge in interest and some printers moving away from latex machines to eco-solvent having found that the heat needed to cure latex deforms or damages some substrates," says Phil McMullin, sales manager for pro graphics at Epson UK. "With the eco-solvent SureColor SC-80600 there is a ten-colour ink set and the inks are fast drying. This means users can achieve close to 98% of the Pantone colour gamut. With GS3 inks it is possible to get exception quality on clear film, vinyl, canvas and photographic paper. Results are great even on low cost monomonic plastics."

It will hardly come as a surprise to PSPs to discover that the one area where the majority of ink and press manufacturers are also focusing a lot of energy and effort at the moment is the environment.

"Green remains a key issue because the printers' customers demand it," says McMullin. "There is a groundswell of public opinion and no-one can afford to ignore the sustainability factor. The GS3 eco solvent inks hold the Greenguard Gold certification meaning they are safe to handle and use in the printing process."

One company that has led the way in this area is HP through its ground-breaking range of latex printers. At Fespa HP unveiled the latex R-series featuring a newly formulated for rigid latex ink.

"Before the launch of the R-series the only thing you could print on rigid was solvent or UV [inks]," says Phil Oakley, HP's UK and Ireland country manager for large-format printing solutions. "When it comes to the global debate around environmental change there are leaders and followers and we have stuck with a technology that has led the way for ten years. We continue to re-innovate again with this new formulation of inks for the R-series."

Oakley says that the environment will continue to be a key driver for the company in terms of future new product development. "HP is one of the most sustainable companies on the planet and we are focused on how do we reduce our carbon footprint and how do we make our supplies ecosystem completely sustainable and renewable," he adds.

These considerations are also guiding development activity at Fujifilm, but it's not the sole area of focus for the business, according to Tudor Morgan, sign and display segment manager at Fujifilm Graphic Systems Europe.

Epson SC-80600 uses UltraChrome GS3 and GS3 with red inks

Uvijet ink maker Fujifilm is "constantly looking at stability and quality issues".



THERE HAS BEEN A RISE IN RAW MATERIAL COSTS - WE'VE SEEN UP TO A 50% INCREASE IN RECENT YEARS, WHICH IS PREDICTABLY GOING TO CONTINUE

"A lot of the work we do isn't just about developing inks specifically for applications, but to make our ink products more robust for all applications," says Morgan. "It is to do with our chemistry and ensuring our products have the right physical attributes, such as stability and jetting ability, so we can sell and ship the products globally. There's a huge amount of work which is done looking at the chemistry itself to make the inks more robust and of the best quality for all applications."

In terms of the future direction of travel for ink R&D, industry experts identify a number of different areas that are ripe for innovation. Epson is "constantly" working on the development of a wide number of different ink sets including UV, cured resin, dye sublimation, DTG, aqueous and eco solvent, according to McMullin.

"Bear in mind that Epson spends about €150m a day on R&D and its key USP in this market is that it develops and manufactures the chassis, printheads and inks of the printers because each must work perfectly in tandem for the best results," McMullin explains. "What customers are looking for are lower running costs and higher productivity with no sacrifice of quality. Everything must be quick, easy to use and flexible in the substrates used and applications that can be addressed."

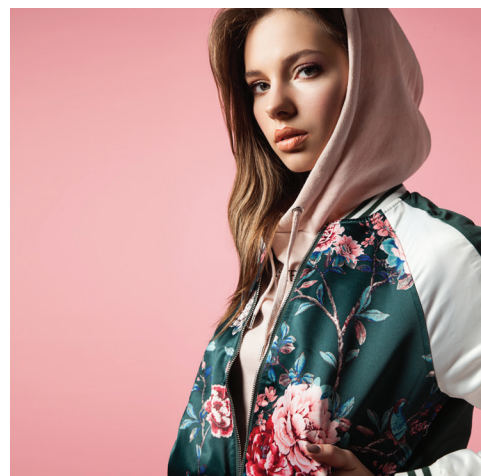
For Inca there is a big future opportunity - and indeed challenge - surrounding the demands presented by single pass technology. "We are increasingly seeing that despite the increased productivity the reduced flexibility of single pass is proving a challenge for most people as they are unable to print more challenging substrates," says Mills. "Single pass presents some different challenges in terms of inks. Our 1.6m machine for the corrugated market, the Jetliner, will use aqueous inks, while the Speedset will be available with UV or aqueous inks. The Jetliner prints up to 28,000m²/hr, so curing time is a really important thing to consider. If print speed is faster than cure speed, then you're creating a bottleneck, so curing time has to be faster than the print speed, and this means choosing the right inks, and using the right curing process, is essential."

It's a balance that ink manufacturer Sun Chemical knows all too well. At Fespa this year the company showcased its latest Streamline UML eco-solvent ink series, fully colour matched and mixable with Mutoh UMS inks.



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“WE ARE IN THE FINAL STAGES OF R&D TO REFINE ONE OF OUR AQUEOUS INK CHEMISTRY PLATFORMS TO ENABLE US TO OFFER AN INKJET INK SERIES FOR THE HIGH VOLUME PRINTED PAPER POSTER MARKET”

JAMES GOULD, SUN CHEMICAL

“In the past 20 years, across the entire print market, there have been initiatives to introduce aqueous inks which have the same print performance and quality as the current generation of inks, but with a reduced environmental footprint,” says James Gould, product manager - digital aftermarket at Sun Chemical. “The graphics market is no different - Sun Chemical has invested significantly in innovation to ensure we remain the leader in technological development. We are in the final stages of R&D to refine one of our aqueous ink chemistry platforms to enable us to offer an inkjet ink series for the high volume printed paper poster market.”

While this raft of innovative new ink products will no doubt be music to the ears of PSPs, issues around the rising price of supplies like ink are unlikely to go away any time soon.

Indeed, the situation may get worse before it gets better, according to Fujifilm's Morgan. “There has been a rise in raw material costs - we've seen up to a 50% increase in recent years, which is predictably going to continue. At the moment, a lot of the increase in these costs is absorbed through Fujifilm becoming more efficient. For the UV ink manufacturing plant in the UK, we don't send anything to landfill, we are already taking steps to generate energy for the plant, and 99% of raw materials are recycled or reused. However, ultimately, at some point these increases will have to be absorbed within the supply chain,” he warns.

That's not to say that ink suppliers aren't looking at ways of getting around this issue. “The print market faces challenges, such as the cost for solvents used with printing inks have increased for everyone in the market,” says Gould. “In these situations, we utilise our R&D expertise to adapt formulations, as well as leveraging our position as the number one ink manufacturer in the world to minimise the impact of these issues for our customers, as much as we can.”

Mimaki is looking to address price issues by selling more cost-effective larger pack sizes



As for Mimaki, it's looking to address the rising price of ink by offering what Newman describes as “more cost effective” larger pack sizes.

“UV inks are now available in one litre bottles that offer savings by volume over the 440cc cartridges and similar choices, but even larger - 2l packs - are available for Mimaki's solvent and sublimation inks as well,” says Newman. “Original bulk ink systems are an option even on Mimaki's smallest solvent printer/cutter - the CJV150-75 - meaning at every level, savings can be made for customers using higher volumes of ink.”

Reducing the cost of supplies like ink - wherever physically possible - will remain a significant area of focus for ink and hardware manufacturers going forward, as will the continued emphasis on the total cost of ownership, with PSPs generally making less frequent new kit investment.

“Customers are looking more and more at the economics of their investments,” says Morgan. “The cost of energy is going to inevitably keep going up, so if printers can keep their machine longer, reduce the amount of energy they use to run it, combine it with an ink system that lasts longer, then printers can move from a two to three year return on investment to five to six years.”

So although it's unlikely that ink will ever become the most exciting topic of conversation for PSPs, it's highly probable that it will start to crop up in their conversations with their supply partners with greater frequency in the future.

FUTUREPROOFING YOUR PRINT SHOP



What's the key to success in the world of print? How can you make sure your business rises above your competitors'? How do you make enough profit to ensure your business grows? These are big questions and they don't have simple answers. Your business isn't the same as everyone else's and what works for your customers won't necessarily work for all customers.

There are, however, certain trends that apply to the print world as a whole, to a greater or lesser degree. Consumer behaviour is changing, their needs and expectations are evolving, and you can't afford to ignore these culture shifts. If you look at the trends in the marketplace today, you can arm yourself with the knowledge you need to get that competitive edge.

COLOUR VIBRANCY

A wide and vibrant colour gamut is at the top of the want-list for a lot of your potential customers. In some cases, you may even be dealing with several brands at the same time. Take motorsport for example: During the 2018 FIA Formula One World Championship®, the races attract an audience of more than 400 million viewers around the world.

This is a huge brand-exposure opportunity for the many sponsors appearing on the livery of the vehicles. Since these sponsors are willing to invest significantly, they expect perfection from the racing teams' livery squads.

"The team always carries 30 versions of every sticker, so they can be replaced if needed," says Joe McNamara, Head of Graphics for Renault Sport Formula One™ Team. "Eighty per cent of the stickers are sponsor-related so they have to be replaced with absolute precision."

Naturally, the sponsors expect precision for their brand colours too, but it's not just large global companies who want their brand colours to be spot-on. Today's consumers are a lot more informed than they used to be. These days, they know what to ask for and they have higher expectations when it comes to print, and even local businesses will demand that you hit 'our green' perfectly.

BREADTH OF APPLICATIONS

One of the most powerful things you can do for your business is to diversify your offering. Let's say a customer comes to you for a window vinyl to promote their plumbing business. They might not know that the same print-and-cut technology can be used to create a wall-vinyl for their reception, or vinyl stickers for their vans. If you can upsell some leaflets or service reminder labels, you've got yourself a little repeat business.

The impact of expanding your offering can have impressive effects. Merrick Fuller opened Mr. Cricket to create personalised sportswear. "We mainly use our Roland machine for printing names, numbers, club badges and logos to personalise sports and school wear and we've seen a big uptake on that part of the business. However, we've also recently created a cricket scoreboard-style wedding table plan, and printed sponsor-branded wrap-arounds for cricket stumps!"

These additional applications are only possible with the right tech that lets you quickly flex and scale your business at a moment's notice. "With our Roland printer, we've more opportunity for growth as we are able to offer more services; everything is now under our control and we can confidently meet customers' needs quickly, whilst guaranteeing the quality of the end-product."

SAYING YES

There used to be a time when a sign-maker just made signs, or a print shop made leaflets and posters. Now, things aren't so simple. Now, we're all used to getting what we want quickly and easily, and we don't mind spending a little more for the convenience of a one-stop-shop. If you

can't offer the kind of versatility your customers expect, there's a good chance they'll go elsewhere.

Once you've secured that market, however, your next challenge will be to meet the demand. A can-do attitude is a great way to give your customers confidence, but nothing can damage your reputation quite as much as broken promises. You'll need to provide great quality output, but you can't afford to wait all day for the printer to complete the job.

Matthew Anderson of BOW Design in Cardiff noticed the effects of increased productivity immediately. "The week before the TrueVIS was installed I printed 100 stickers on our older machine in 39 minutes. A week later, on the new TrueVIS, I printed 100 stickers in nine minutes. We now have two operational Roland machines, running all day every day, and I've calculated production has increased by 72 per cent."

THE WIDER, THE BETTER

If you're just starting down the road of digital printing, you might not have a lot of orders for wide format work. It's for this reason that many print professionals approach the industry with the intention of starting small and scaling up. This might work very well for some, but in our experience, a large segment of printer owners look back wishing they'd just bought a wider printer in the first place.

It's natural to be put off by the additional cost of a wider printer, but it's a mistake to focus on the initial investment. You should instead focus on the speed that you'll earn a return from the additional business gained from a more comprehensive offering.

"We were blown away by the quality of the prints; the depth of colour running six colours is phenomenal," says Anthony Roberts, Managing Director of The Colour House. "We can now print 10' x 5' signs in one go, with no unprofessional-looking joins, which is perfect for our clients in the house-building sector."

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

If you've succeeded in building a business that offers a wide range of products to a variety of businesses, you'll likely have a lot of work on your hands. Your printer/cutter is the hub of this business and it's easy to take it for granted and assume it'll always be there. But a printer is just a machine, and no matter how good it is, it'll suffer from wear and tear.

If something goes wrong, and your printer is taken out of action, your business will grind to a halt. You need to know that help is just a phone call away and that you can find an engineer to get you back on your feet. Be warned though – the cost of once-off calls can add up pretty quickly. Do some research into the warranties offered by your printer manufacturer. In some cases, the cost of a warranty works out cheaper than just two engineer call-outs. And after all, you can't put a price on peace of mind.

IN CONCLUSION

Like every other industry, the key to a successful print business is giving the customers what they want. It's vital to pay attention to their changing appetites if you are to keep your business relevant and profitable. By following the advice in this article, you can stay a step ahead and gain the assurance you need to keep your customers satisfied, today and tomorrow.



TrueVIS VG Series printer /cutter



Imagine.  Roland

AT THE CUTTING EDGE

IF YOU'RE NOT AUTOMATING YOUR FINISHING YOU'RE ONE OF A SWIFTLY DECREASING NUMBER - AT LEAST ACCORDING TO THE MANUFACTURERS/SUPPLIERS OF THE KIT AND 'SOLUTIONS' THEY WANT TO SELL YOU. HERE'S AN UPDATE ON THEIR LATEST OFFERINGS TO THE LARGE-FORMAT PSP.

Looking ahead, where do you think the biggest technological developments are taking place - or need to - in terms of finishing within large-format digital print, and when do you expect the market to see the fruits of R&D in those areas? That was the question put to manufacturers and suppliers of finishing kit for this feature. To précis the response: 'automation' and 'now'.



Lars Bendixen, segment manager graphics at Zund provides a more detailed overview, saying: "In general, the ability to print on an ever increasing number of materials, and the creativity that allows print companies in terms of the applications they can deliver, means that everyone wants more flexible, faster, more efficient finishing solutions. Having more automated tooling for instance, is an area of focus. As is making sure to have not just print ready, but cut ready files.

"You know that when someone looks at a new printer the first thing they ask is how fast does it go? It's the same with finishing kit, but they need to think about efficiencies not just speed. We have very close relationships with Rip vendors to ensure we can make our finishing solutions as efficient overall as possible.

"In terms of robotics, it's fair comment that many PSPs in LF graphics don't see the ROI making sense at the moment, but that will change. People want to reduce manual labour so it will happen. Robotics have traditionally been good for repeat jobs, but they have developed and there are robotic solutions for 'bespoke' types of short-run environments. It's now more of a mindset than technical issue, and in three-four years I think we'll see a change in how the market accepts it."

Bendixen continues: "There isn't one specific 'gap' when it comes to technological development requirements for finishing in the large-format print space - all areas can be improved. However, there

are some focus points. Developing better finishing solutions for fabric applications is one. Fabric print is a big trend and we are having to continually adapt handling tools to meet requirements."



Geert De Proost, director solutions marketing at Esko, picks up automation theme: "Full automation is where all industries are heading. Esko continues to support the sign and display and corrugated sectors with integrated hardware and software solutions that are designed to help wide-format print shops implement automation software quickly and efficiently."

"As many print businesses now look to automate previously manual aspects of print finishing or need to have much greater throughput to cope with the output of print from new print workflows means we expect to see more features built in as standard [on finishing kit] and to have greater productive growth within a single device to ensure the hardware investment keeps pace with a printer's business," adds John Draycott of Summa UK distributor ArtSystems.

"I have noticed that year on year it is becoming more important for companies to automate and reduce labour wherever possible. This is basically what the machines I sell offer, with many having robotic features replacing human hands," says Neil Thayer of Finishline Machinery, UK sales agent for Bickers and Lamina.

The message overall for finishing solution development is exactly what we've come to expect - that though there'll always be something of a focus on actual machine speed and kit offering more flexible tooling and handling capabilities, there's also real R&D focus on better network connectivity, workflow integration, remote diagnostics and job analytics.

THINK SMART

As a large-format PSP you have probably read much about the gains to be made from having an automated shape nesting application, but it's possible you haven't considered how a dedicated, integrated solution can deliver benefits throughout the production chain right through to finishing and distribution. Well, Sagen de Jonge, CEO of Tilia Labs, outlines why it would be a good idea to do so.

"OK, so you're not going to buy new kit without first ensuring it will integrate into your overall production reasonably easily. And most large-format printers come bundled with their own automated nesting software that should interface with common production protocols without too many headaches. If good enough is all you want, then job done. But if you are wanting to minimise costs to maximise return, you might want to ask yourself a few questions. For instance, is your nesting totally automated? Are you fully utilising all your equipment? Are you creating overly complex workflows to get around software limitations? Are you using multiple imposition solutions to handle different work? Do you know what your material waste is?

"The software included with equipment is going to be optimised for that one device but by adopting a dedicated system that automates imposition and nesting throughout the entire production process you can make startling gains.

"Just think about your cutting operation. Does someone have to physically move boards to the table, load the cutting data onto the device, and perform a registration step? What about sorting, gathering and packing? Once pieces are cut out, where do they go? Are different pieces of an order spread out across the layout or on a separate layout? Do you use a different programme to help the cutter or router work out how to stack pieces?

"A dynamic workflow with a dedicated imposition system can help identify and organise the final cut product. Using integrated imposition - such as tilia Phoenix - orders can be grouped by due date, delivery region, or any number of different parameters so that they end up on the same layout to cut down on collection time. Dynamic barcodes or text marks can be added to orientate pieces ideally and to sort pieces for stacking. Auto-generated PDF-based reports can help operators visually identify pieces, while auto-generated XML-based reports feed back into MIS system to help track which layouts featured each individual piece or order.

"Last-minute artwork amendments, changes to specifications and equipment malfunctions are, unfortunately, a daily occurrence. When they happen, do you need a prepress specialist to re-configure your layouts or re-direct the jobs to an alternative printer or finishing device? Wouldn't it be great if any member of staff could just log onto your MIS or workflow management system to make the order changes, safe in the knowledge that the print job has been automatically updated, re-imposed and optimised to suit the substitution?

"Some of these scenarios might seem a long way from your current production needs, but If you're looking to grow your business without investing in complex workflow integration, solution like tilia Griffin are great way to start.

"Repetitive and difficult tasks such as nesting, tiling, registration and grommet marks can be accomplished quickly and with little training - not only cutting down on material costs but enabling you to increase your throughput without increasing headcount. All that and you have a solution optimised for further automation whatever you decide for your set-up in years to come."

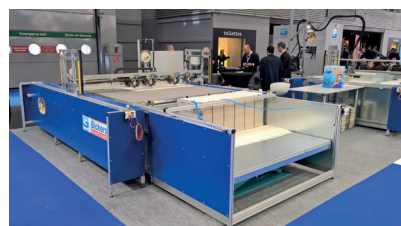
A LOOK AT THE LATEST OFFERINGS

Here's a quick reference guide to the newest finishing solutions - all introduced into the UK since last summer.



XYZ International Trident router/cutter

A number of upgrades have recently been incorporated into the hybrid Trident router/cutter. These include a redesigned processing head that is said to be much simpler to operate and easier to service, and improvements to the oscillating and tangential knife-cutting units that provide higher routing/cutting speeds and the ability to handle a much wider range of materials.



Bickers XY Tapejet

Launched at Fespa 2018, this German-made machine is available in the UK from Finishline Machinery. It automatically picks and places sheets with camera controlled precise positioning. Tape is applied automatically in any angle direction. The largest standard size is 2100 x 1600mm - other sizes are available on request.



Col-Tec Smart Poster Collator

This machine, introduced into UK last year, can deliver collated sets on demand, meaning that no two sets need necessarily be the same - they can be store or client specific. It can handle a maximum format of 62 x 42in at a top speed of 1,500 sets per hour. Prices start at £100,000.

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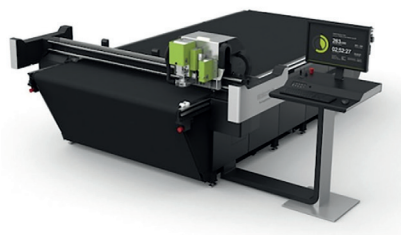
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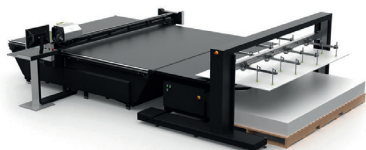


Esko

Flip-Side Camera for Kongsberg

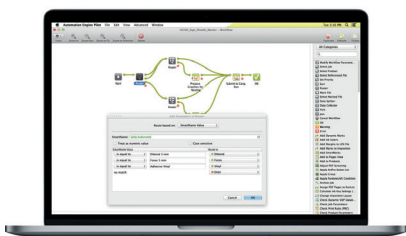
You should be able to get your hands on the new Flip-Side Camera for Kongsberg cutting tables equipped with a feeder and from Q4 2018, but you need to look at forking out £18,000 for it. The solution promises to save the 20 to 30 minutes of manual set-up time typically required to ensure accurate cutting of corrugated board for in-store displays etc.

When using the Kongsberg Feeder and Stacker, the camera scans the underside of the sheet to locate registration marks, barcodes containing set-up instructions, and the corner of the sheet. It is then able to cut and crease accurately by calculating where the registration marks are in reference to the corner, with limited or no operator intervention.



Feeder and Stacker for C64 Kongsberg

This is a modular solution, with the i-BF60 (feeder) costing from £55,000, and the i-MS60 (stacker) from £68,000.



Automation Engine QuickStart for Sign

Released in March, this package - which directly links to Kongsberg cutting tables - comes preloaded with workflows for sign and large-format production, with Esko promising that in five days you will be up and running with an automated system that handles tasks like preflighting, PDF optimisation, cut path and bleed creation, tiling and nesting - as well as producing reports. It costs £29,000 implemented.



Robotic System for C66 Kongsberg

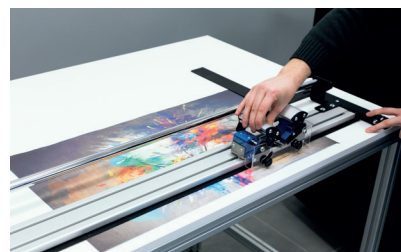
Released April 2018, with a price tag of around £500,000 depending on configuration, this feeder/stacker robotic system does what you'd expect - automates the task at hand!



Neolt

XY Matic Plus Trimmer/Cutter

This is Neolt's latest offering for the large-format market, having been introduced in June 2018 by UK distributor Atlantic Tech. The system - which provides up to ten vertical cutting units - can cut four ways, is self-aligning on a cut run, and has adjustable speed and pneumatic pinch rollers. There's a LCD touchscreen with built-in operator training video. Prices range from £9,685 to £18,250.



Easy Cut Manual Table-top Cutter

Again available in the UK via Atlantic, this is a robust manual cutter available in 100/130/150/200/250 widths. The cutter, which was introduced in May this year, has two blades in 110, 165, 210 and 310 sizes and cuts media up to 10mm. Prices start at £400.



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Electro Vertical Cutter

The Electro Vertical Cutter, which has been around since July 2017, has three blade options, cutting 1 - 30mm for materials including cardboard, foam, expanded polyurethane, forex, leather, Dibond, glass etc. It is available in 2,100, 2,500 and 3,100mm heights, costing from £6,576 to £10,857.



Summa

Summa F Series F1832

Launched at Fespa 2018 and now available in the UK and Ireland via distributor ArtSystems and its authorised resellers, this is a heavyweight piece of kit with a cutting area of 185cm (72in) wide x 320cm (126 in) long - up to 50m (164ft) long in multi panel. It handles media up to 190cm (75in) wide and runs at speeds up to 1,000mm/sec (39.4in/sec).

Key points of note/add-ons include: a tangential module; F Series and HF routing systems; electronic and pneumatic oscillating tools; kiss-cutting, single edge cutout, double edge cutout and heavy duty cutout tools; creasing and V-Cut tools; production software; and automated depth control left (an upgrade kit).

The UK RRP for the base model is around £100,000 excluding delivery and install.

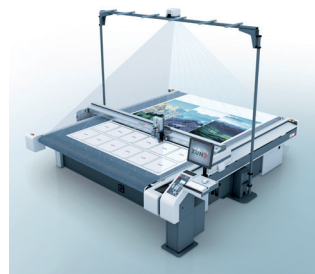


Trotec

SP4000 C

At Fespa 2018 Trotec previewed this large-format laser cutting solution for soft signage and though not yet available on the UK market it's worth flagging up.

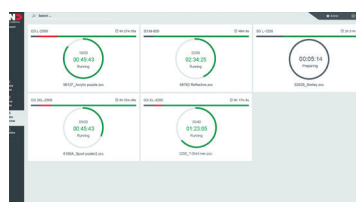
With a working area of 3,210 x 3,210mm and a maximum roll width of 3,210mm, the SP4000 C is a fully automated laser system for applications such as banners, flags, or lightboxes. The laser - available in 100, 200, and 400 watts - can be configured around a conveyor belt with feeder unit and unloading table, depending on the desired workflow.



Zund

Over Cutter Camera (OCC)

In March 2018 Zund introduced this intelligent optics system for automated digital capture of registration marks. The camera is mounted above the centre of the cutter - either on a support frame or suspended from the ceiling. One-shot capture technology means the number of register marks along with their position on the cutting surface become irrelevant. Data processing functions are integrated in the ZCC software so that in seconds, algorithms analyse the data captured by the camera and simultaneously compensate for any distortions.



Cut Center ZCC 3.0

Cut Center ZCC 3.0 came out in December last year, bringing with it new functions. It includes refined algorithms for capturing only those register marks essential for accurately determining position, skew and distortion, thus improving productivity.

Dashboard is another highlight of v.3. The browser-based function digests performance and productivity data of Zund cutters operating on the production floor and gives staff 24/7 remote access to that data, with real-time job status.



Cradle Feeder

This handling solution for rolled textiles has been on the market since summer 2017. Basically, it prevents tension and distortions when advancing stretch fabrics.

At the core of the feeder is a cradle equipped with an array of conveyor belts. For ergonomic loading, the back of the cradle tilts down. A dancer bar continually registers fluctuations in web tension and if necessary, the system automatically regulates the feed rate - which is also in synch with the cutter and further minimises tension and resulting distortions.

Intelligent edge control continually governs the positioning of the web on the cutting surface. If the sensor detects any irregularities, the cradle feeder adjusts automatically by correcting the alignment of the cradle.

The cradle feeder is suitable for both unwinding and rewinding rolls and comes in widths of 1800mm (71in), 2270mm (89in) and 3210mm (126 in).

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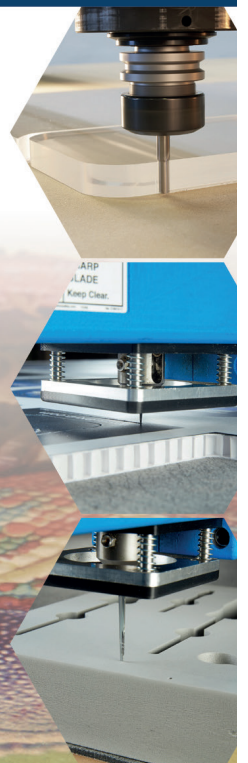
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PDF: ON THE ROAD TO STANDARDISATION FOR LARGE-FORMAT PRINT

THE GHENT WORKGROUP (GWG) HAS WRITTEN WHAT IT BELIEVES TO BE THE FINAL DRAFT OF THE LARGE-FORMAT SPECIFICATION. AHEAD OF ITS EXPECTED PUBLICATION, DAVID VAN DRIESCHE OF FOUR PEES - WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN FOUNDING THE GHENT PDF WORKGROUP - BRINGS YOU UP TO DATE ON DEVELOPMENTS FOR THIS SECTOR IN WHAT IS PDF'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR.

June this year marked the 25th anniversary of the PDF. Originally invented by Adobe Systems, the PDF file format became an international standard in 2008 (receiving the name 'ISO 32000' from the International Standards Organisation) and it was adopted very quickly - in some market segments, such as advertisement delivery and commercial print. Other sectors, such as large-format print, dragged their feet for much longer.

This was closely followed by the standardisation efforts from the Ghent Workgroup (or GWG - an international organisation comprising printers, software and hardware vendors, consultants and educational institutions alike). The first GWG specifications were released from 2001 onwards, targeting magazine and newspaper ads and various commercial print markets. Today these standards are well known and broadly adopted. Why so much slower in large-format print?

A number of factors led to the GWG not creating specifications for large-format print as quickly as for other market segments. First of all, the large-format print market back then was a lot less ready for standardisation and automation than it is today. Because of economic pressures, the commercial print market went with PDF and standardized PDF much quicker.

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the complexities in the large-format print market are simply much greater. If all you have to worry about is the difference between magazine ads and newspaper ads, creating specifications for ad delivery isn't very challenging. Any large large-format printer knows that the products they print, the materials they print on and the finishing processes they have to support are simply much more diverse than that and for someone trying to create a standard, that presents a lot of extra challenges.

CHANGING CONDITIONS

In 2015, the GWG - for the first time - released specifications built on top of the ISO PDF/X-4 standard. These allow transparency, layers, and the use of non-CMYK colours. These 2015 specifications provided the GWG with a technology platform that for the first time would be able to deal with the more complex products in different markets such as large-format print, labels or packaging.



David van Driesche provides a heads-up

A LAST CHALLENGE THE GWG IS FACING IS REPRESENTATION OF THE LARGE-FORMAT PRINT COMMUNITY IN THE GROUP

Another evolution around the same time, was that a number of digital print software and hardware vendors joined the GWG and that a number of existing vendor members grew their interest in the market segment. Now the GWG had a platform it could build on plus members interested in pushing the initiative.

TACKLING PRODUCT DIVERSITY

Mid 2016, a first draft was developed of what was then called 'digital print' specifications. These were later divided into a specification for small-format, digital print workflows and a specification for large-format print workflows. The specification for small-format digital print is expected to be released in the very near future - from an implementation point of view it is not especially challenging.

The large-format specification has turned out to be much more challenging, mostly because of the wide range of diverse products all termed 'large-format'. The GWG has even had to implement a completely new concept - a specification that includes variables. This concept allows one specification to mould itself towards the requirements of vastly different print products in a flexible way.

The variables included in the specification are viewing distance and scaling factor. Scaling factor determines how the file is delivered to the printer - full size, half size... Average viewing distance says how far from the printed piece an average viewer will be. Once these two variables are known for a particular product, the specification derives from that knowledge specific limits for text size, image resolution and more.

SO WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The GWG has written what it believes to be the final draft of this large format specification. A number of preflight vendors such as Callas Software and Enfocus have created test preflight profiles. The final phase for the LFP specification is production testing. The expected publication date in all likelihood will be end of 2018 or beginning of 2019.

A last challenge the GWG is facing is representation of the large-format print community in the group. While we do have a number of software and hardware vendors working in large-format print, we currently do not have a lot of printer members who are really active in this market segment, so if you want to participate in any way please get in contact (admin@gwg.org) and we'll let you know how you can help!



CLARITY HAS BECOME A WELL KNOWN SOFTWARE BRAND WITHIN SIGN AND DISPLAY PRINT MARKETS, SO WHAT PLANS DOES ITS PARENT COMPANY HAVE FOR THIS DIVISION AND ITS OTHER BUSINESS SECTORS - AND HOW WILL THAT IMPACT THE MARKET?

"We're trying to understand the psyche of why companies buy or do not buy our type of software. Why do some people buy on the day when they see it and others take six months to think about it. We need to fully understand that reasoning," says Clarity MD Richard Gamlin, who reckons there are "5,000-6,000 'live potential buyers' in the UK print sector" for a Clarity type product - one developed to simplify quoting, order processing, manufacturing and invoicing for sign and display companies by combining MIS, CRM and ERP functions.

Having sold Clarity software to over 2,000 companies since it was launched in 2001 and with 815 currently live installs of Clarity Pro - over half of which are in the large-format print space - Gamlin reckons it has something like 16-20 % of "the buying market" and that "there's still a lot of gold to mine in the UK print sector". This year he expects another 100 companies to start using Clarity and that within three years it will double turnover - currently around 60% of parent group Touch Systems' total. Last year that total turnover was £3.5m, and for the year to April 2019 it's expected to rise to £4.2m.

But Gamlin, who with Nick Elkin founded Touch Systems back in 1989, is aware that there are obstacles to overcome if Clarity is to reach its goals - the main one being educating the marketplace.

"We have become experts in 'change control'. We've had to because Clarity can help deliver amazing insight into a business and make it much more efficient, but it requires a change and people are resistant to that. We can help people configure their systems better but people don't always want to listen to us!" says Gamlin, adding: "I love watching people start using the system for which it was created - not just as a quote tool - because you see the penny drop."

To this end Clarity is reducing the number of clients each account manager looks after from 400 to 200, "so we can get people on site to improve

the education process and show what the system can actually do," says Gamlin, pointing out that "providing a high level of support is ingrained in Touch Systems".

That is not your average marketing waffle - having a company like Jaguar Land Rover as the first customer for a brand new product probably says it all. OK, so that was not for Clarity, but for its sister company's 'Flags' offering, a bespoke quality management system for lean manufacturing or assembly processes. As the first pen-based touchscreen application to be commercially available in the UK it enabled Jaguar Land Rover to take quality readings at its production line, implement statistical process control (SPC) and capture visual attribute data. Such was the significance of the tool that it was featured on 'Tomorrow's World' back in 1991, just two years after Gamlin and Elkin had set-up Touch Systems - the pen-based touchscreen system giving rise to the company name, and the visual 'flags' on the screen providing the name for the product, which has ended up in automotive plants across the UK including Bentley and Aston Martin.

Impressive, but in 1998 Gamlin and Elkin realised that they needed to diversify, a decision that led directly to the formation of Clarity and release of the product by the same name. "There were lots of acquisitions happening in the automotive industry back then and we could see UK car manufacturing going pear shaped. The market was effectively shrinking for the Flags product so we started to research new markets and came across sign and graphics," says Gamlin, who practically stumbled upon a piece of software that he explains "was with about 30 printers that were in trouble because the software company had gone bust."

THERE'S STILL A LOT OF GOLD
TO MINE IN THE UK PRINT SECTOR

Richard Gamlin

Co-founder

TOUCH SYSTEMS



"We'd been thinking about developing a complex quoting system when someone I knew mentioned this to me so we did a bit of investigation. It was an awful piece of software for quoting and had no real development potential as it stood because of the architecture on which it was written, but it gave us a base on which to build our own product." The rest ladies and gentlemen is history - Touch bought the intellectual property in 2000, and "stabilised the software while we rewrote it so that the printers already using it were OK," says Gamlin.

In 2001 Clarity was born. "Some of those old system users used a 'bridge' we built so they could shift across to the new Clarity system," Gamlin explains, pointing out that some chose not to do that and stick with what they knew, bringing the conversation back to the difficulty in adapting mindsets and working patterns/systems.

This September's scheduled launch of Clarity Pro v.6 should provide a platform to make some noise and get people thinking. "We've made the system much more powerful and ensured it can handle the supply chain as well as the sales chain," says Gamlin, pointing out that "the major benefit to existing users will be in terms of how it handles variants on stock/materials, and how they search for them etc., it will be much easier than before." Of course new users are anticipated too, and Clarity has a clear roadmap of who it wants on board.

"Over the last two years we've been finding that bigger and bigger print companies are coming to us - many of which are still using spreadsheets! They are realising that they can't expand any more like that - that they need proper, measured, business intelligence.

"But also, we realise that we need to provide the right install support on-site, put on more free training days so clients can use more of the software capability etc, and we need to scale up our operation to do that."

Currently Touch Systems - which is based in Solihull - has 55 staff across its two divisions, Clarity and Flags, the former led by Gamlin on a

day-to-day basis, and Flags by Elkin, a pair that have known each other since student days and having jobs in the same software firm. Indeed it was out of their purchase of the intellectual property of that Midlands-based firm that Touch was founded. With Gamlin as MD and Elkin as CTO on the Touch board is Janet Redman as FD - a trio that is driving business expansion plans with much focus on the Clarity side of things where, at the time of writing, five extra positions were open across account management, development and digital marketing.

Of the 55 staff Touch staff, eight are tied to the parent company, 11 to Flags and the rest are Clarity - other than the two in the innovation team that work across the divisions. "They have given a lot of time to Flags where we've been creating an augmented reality solution," says Gamlin, "but that is now at development stage so the focus will be back on Clarity."

Having talked about the imminent launch of Clarity Pro v.6 Gamlin is also keen to highlight Clarity Go, first released five years ago, but as he says "being rewritten because at the time we wrote it we did not have the tools available that we have now." He's also eager to point to Clarity's ongoing development partnerships with Sage, QuickBooks and Xero - and with Esko where Clarity integrates with WebCenter. "Working on finishing integration workflow is a key focus for us and we have loads more planned with Esko," says Gamlin, who understandably is tight lipped on the specifics.

He laughs when asked about what shape he expects Touch Systems to be in five years down the line, saying he expects Flags turnover to have climbed 50% within the next three years and reconfirming expectation that Clarity sales will have doubled in that timeframe, and pointing out that somewhere along the line it's likely that the two will become more autonomous from Touch. Short-term? "We are actually chasing people to get them to use the systems better!"



Richard Leach...

Earlier this year Huddersfield-based Leach was acquired by French-owned Chargeurs, a materials manufacturing and services group based in 34 countries across five continents and operating in four segments - temporary surface protection, garment interlinings, technical substrates and combed wool. So how's that going to impact Leach as the Brexit deadline looms? I asked Richard Leach who, as head of what was a family firm, was responsible for finding the new owner.

By Lesley Simpson

At the time of Leach's takeover in April 2018 you said you were proud of its 127 year heritage but that its structure as family-run business didn't support its growth plans, so you started looking for the 'right' buyer. What made Chargeurs that - assuming it was about more than the money it paid for the business?

I believed the company was at a stage in its development where it had a services portfolio and customer-base that was ripe for international expansion - and indeed needed to do that to reduce its dependency on the UK retail market. But I judged that the Leach family ownership was not the right structure with which to make a success of the company's international expansion opportunities. There was precious little experience of international sales and marketing, the foreign language skills within the business were negligible - and also, when we looked at developing sales offices in other countries ourselves we thought the risk, cost and speed with which we could do that did not make sense for a business of our resource.

I very strongly felt we needed to expand internationally right now - not somewhere down the line. As a family business that wasn't going to happen - there were too many gaps in our knowledge, understanding and financial firepower.

The company has, almost by accident, developed more overseas sales over the years, and we believe that is not because we are good at international sales and marketing, but because we have a really good product range and really high quality levels and consistency - the things that attract the brands.

My philosophy has always been that continuous growth is essential for the long-term wellbeing of the company. That's because market prices in large-format graphic display have eroded each year, so the only way to keep moving forward is to increase the volume of work, and we've done that for the last ten consecutive years. To keep profit going forward you have to keep sales going forward while becoming more efficient. You need to invest to keep abreast of technological development and you need to make sure that the kit is well loaded so that it doesn't just recover its cost but contributes to the profit of the company. So it's a treadmill - one we've navigated quite successfully. However, we came to the conclusion that

with the UK retail market relatively flat, and with us having almost accidentally grown international sales - about 15% of turnover is now overseas work - that we should look to increase our geographical spread.

So you specifically looked for a foreign buyer?

Most definitely. We specifically did not want to sell to a UK entity. We wanted to make sure that Leach was the key strategic operation within the UK for the new buyer. We wanted to minimise the risk of this operation - which has been strong for so many years - being merged and potentially being weakened by a company with multiple UK sites.

Leach is Chargeurs' only presence in the UK, yet they are active within this display market, especially on the fabric side of things, across many other countries.

Also, we have always targeted the upper middle market brands and we have an aspiration to move up to the luxury brands - because they can and will pay a better price, and value the type of product and service we can provide.

Those brands are increasingly looking for international suppliers, and a huge number of them have roots in France! Chargeurs made a strong case to us about the exposure they had to some of these luxury brands, and there's already some very early stage discussion going on with some extremely well-known French names. The hope is that those discussions will lead to quite transformative business. There's no way a relatively small family-owned Yorkshire business could have even got access to these companies.

Do these brands not seek print providers who can print locally for them across the globe?

I don't think there's a hard and fast rule to that. And I think there is a feeling within these brands that a European site is local - so a UK operation would be deemed local for the whole European market. What is important to them is consistency across continental borders.

That has to lead us on to Brexit. It must have been a consideration when you signed the deal with Chargeurs, and I assume it still is. What are your concerns/thoughts on how the changing political and economic landscape is going to impact Leach now it has a foreign-based parent?



...Director and former MD, Leach

My view is that before the Brexit vote the UK was one of the top performing global economies and that since the vote it has slipped down to become one of the poorest performing global economies. There is still growth, but that growth is quite anaemic, and it's clear that the UK retail scene is not performing massively well, particularly at the mid-market level. So, wanting to internationalise and move up to the luxury good end of the market seems to be a sensible strategy to be pursuing - but one that was so much harder to pursue as a Yorkshire-based independent than as part of a large, internationally connected, financially powerful group.

Our thoughts on wanting to become more of an international player became much more focused post the Brexit vote, and it was probably about a year after that was taken that we decided we needed to look for a buyer that could support the kind of growth strategy we envisaged.

That all sounds positive, but have there been/do you foresee any negatives with Leach having a French owner?

Well, number one, our customers have received the acquisition very positively. For a start, Chargeurs has not bought a broken company that requires short term fixes. The short-term plan is business as usual.

The acquisition is about the long-term. It's about driving Leach's growth rate by making more investment capital available and by leveraging Chargeurs' international sales and marketing expertise.

Our UK customer-base has been reassured by that, and true to its word, Chargeurs is not rushing in but taking time to fully understand the business and how their R&D expertise too - mainly over in France - can help take Leach forward.

Another thing to be said, is that Chargeurs is respectful of the need for senior management teams to have nationals on board, so it is not swamping the Leach with massively heavy levels of head-office personnel.

So can you take us through the structure at Leach now?

Obviously there's a lot to be done in terms of integration with the new parent in terms of things like financial reporting, global health and safety policy alignment etc. But when it comes to driving the business, Chargeurs quickly assessed the management

team below myself and Jim Parkin to be very capable.

Jim and I are contracted to continue for at least a year, but the idea is that we do eventually fade away from the business [Leach Impact and Leach Inspire - now owned by Chargeurs. Richard Leach continues to own/run Leach Studio as a separate entity]. The new management structure now in place - with James Lavin as MD and Adrian Ray as sales and marketing director - will come to the fore and run the UK operation with support from head office. There are two Chargeurs people on the board - Sampiero Lanfranchi, director of international development, and Patrick Bonnefond, chief executive of technical substrates.

The Chargeurs group has publically said it plans to double its turnover to 1bn Euro in the next five years. How strategically important do you think the Leach acquisition is to growth-hungry Chargeurs - and do you think we'll see it make more print company acquisitions?

I can't comment on that. What I can say, is that when it comes to Leach it has shown that it puts a real onus on upskilling people and on putting decent budget behind things like training and development.

Your great-grandfather started the Leach in 1891 and it's now an £11m turnover business. You've already said that the financial backing of Chargeurs means you can move from 16-hour per day operation to 24-hours, and that you'll look to increase the £250,000 per year spent on new product development as it becomes an 'experience maker'. Finally, can you tell us more on those fronts?

In the two months following the takeover Chargeurs authorised the largest piece of equipment the company has ever bought - a Durst dye-sublimation system - that will be commissioned in August. Other investment is on the cards as part of factory expansion this year, and we'll see head count rise.

But the strategic logic of this deal is made up not just of financial muscle and the international sales and marketing expertise we've discussed - it's also about R&D integration across Leach and Chargeurs for new product development so the offering is always cutting edge. I think the market will see some interesting developments as a product of this acquisition.

WE SPECIFICALLY DID NOT WANT TO SELL TO A UK ENTITY. WE WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT LEACH WAS THE KEY STRATEGIC OPERATION WITHIN THE UK FOR THE NEW BUYER

Winning the late

Too many big businesses don't play fair. Adopting the right tactics, however, can ensure you aren't left waiting for the cash you're rightfully owed.

THE UK IS CURRENTLY GRIPPED BY A LATE PAYMENTS CRISIS WITH £14BN BEING WITHHELD FROM SMALL FIRMS BY BUSINESSES THAT DON'T PAY ON TIME. MIKE CHERRY, FORUM OF SMALL BUSINESS NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, PROVIDES SOME INSIGHTS ON HOW TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF LATE PAYMENTS.

1.

SPEAK UP

We can't hope to change our endemic poor payment culture unless we're prepared to call out bad practice. Appointed towards the end of last year, the Small Business Commissioner has been tasked with bringing our late payment crisis to an end. As part of his efforts, he's established a dispute handling service which provides assistance to small firms that are not being paid on time.

If your company is affected by late payments, don't hesitate to reach out to the Commissioner. The late payment crisis will not climb up the national agenda unless small businesses are vocal on the issue. And if you want to speak anonymously to someone who understands, do contact FSB too.

2.

DO THE RESEARCH

Before signing on the dotted line, properly research potential clients to see if they have a track record of poor payment. The Government now requires the biggest businesses to report on their payment practices. These reports are available to search online. 1,000 large companies have so far started to report on how they pay, and thousands more will follow suit over the coming months.

3.

SIGN UP TO CREDITSAFE

Creditsafe collects information on how quickly companies pay their invoices. Creditsafe's customers share information and insights about payment times, highlighting poor payers and promoting best practice. There are more than one million companies on the database, providing a unique window into corporate financial behaviour. Armed with the data that Creditsafe can provide, SMEs can take better-informed decisions on whether to accept work or commissions from certain companies.

Remember too that reference agencies like Experian conduct credit ratings for a small fee.

4.

BE CLEAR

Ambiguity around payment terms has to be avoided at all costs. If you expect to be paid within 30 days, make that crystal clear when drawing up agreements. Equally, leave your buyer in no doubt that practices like retrospective discounting, where big firms decide to pay less than agreed simply because they've paid on time, won't be tolerated.

It's also a good idea to send payment instructions and deadlines alongside invoices when they're issued. Ultimately, you're looking to pre-empt any excuses your clients might try and muster for paying late.

A DISPUTE HANDLING SERVICE PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO SMALL FIRMS THAT ARE NOT BEING PAID ON TIME

payments game

8 IN 10 SMALL FIRMS DON'T CHARGE INTEREST ON LATE PAYMENTS. THAT NEEDS TO CHANGE

5.

BE BENDY

Minimise the risk of delayed payments by providing flexibility around credit terms. For example, set up a facility for payment by credit card and think about offering discounts, such as 1% for early payments. Remember to balance the extent of any discount with the benefits of having an improved cashflow.

6.

INVOICE DISCOUNT?

Invoice finance solutions can be ideal for small businesses in need of an immediate cashflow injection. 'Invoice discounting' is essentially a cash advance against the value of your invoices. So when you raise an invoice you'll receive 85% of its value from a financier within 24 hours. You'll retain full control over credit management. The financier simply gives you cash up front and you pay them back, plus a small admin fee, when you receive payment.

7.

BE PROACTIVE

Setting up automated emails to clients to remind them when payments are due can nudge them into settling invoices more promptly.

Be proactive and chase your suppliers for payment. Make it clear that you'd prefer to be paid electronically by digital transfer or Direct Debit, rather than by cheque. Also, if you're waiting on a particularly large payment, don't be afraid to make a courtesy call or write an email to the supplier to check they've received your invoice and that there are no queries about it.

8.

KNOW WHAT'S WHAT

It's important to be aware of legislation in the space, such as the payment terms set out in the Public Contract Regulations. Cost effective legal support is also out there to help tackle repeat offenders. In a lot of cases, a letter from a solicitor is enough to make late payers change their ways.

9.

MAKE LATE PAYERS PAY

You have the right to charge interest on invoices the moment they become overdue. Use it. Our research shows that 8 in 10 small firms don't charge interest on late payments. That needs to change.

It can be a daunting prospect to take this kind of action against important clients. However, you need to remember that, if payment terms have been made clear, you're only taking the kind of fair, commercially savvy action that would be returned if the boot were on the other foot. If clients expect work to be done on time, payment should be made on time.

10.

GET HELP

A safe and secure debt management service can be a good avenue to take if you are really struggling to recover debts owed due to late payments. These services can take on the stress for you so that you can stay focused on running and growing your business.

FSB has a debt recovery product available to members which uses the most simple and effective way possible to recover the money you are owed. Users of the tool simply need to register online, load the debtor information and amount owed. A solicitor's letter will then be sent on their behalf, giving a seven day deadline for receipt of payment.

In the vast majority of cases like these, a solicitor's letter is all it takes to receive payment. In the unusual event that this doesn't happen there are further steps that can be taken on your behalf.



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ON MANOEUVRES

LAST SUMMER WE BROUGHT YOU A STORY ENTITLED 'WAR ON WASTE', LOOKING AT THE VALUE STREAM MAPPING LEAN JOURNEY DATA IMAGE HAD EMBARKED ON WITH ESKO TO MAKE ITS BUSINESS MORE EFFICIENT. SO WHAT HAVE ITS ACTIONS ACHIEVED A YEAR DOWN THE LINE, AND WHAT'S ITS TARGET NOW?

Data Image is on a heck of a mission - to grow turnover by 50% between April 2018 and April 2019. Think that's a tough call? Then what about aiming to grow net profit by 200% in that same time period? Robert Farfort, MD of Data Image thinks both are achievable via a two prong manoeuvre that will see the Leicestershire-based PSP target new business and jettison some of the old. It's all part of a master plan that's really come out of a Value Stream Mapping (VSM) business analysis programme that started three years ago.

"The thing is to be brave - and to understand where the money is," says Farfort, speaking on a day earlier this summer when he was co-hosting an open day with VSM partner and hardware supplier Esko to show off new robotic capability at what is currently a £6m turnover operation, and to flag up the ROI potential of investing in software as integration and strategic business tools.

"Building business is not about grabbing every opportunity," Farfort expounds. "It's knowing what counts. A good proportion of what we're doing with VSM is understanding the numbers within the business and what the data tells us is real rather than mere gut feel. It's about being strategic and understanding who our ideal customer is, then asking whether existing ones fit that profile, and which new ones to go after. We have jettisoned a substantial amount of customers so far!"

That might be scary stuff but as Farfort points out: "It's all about making money. We don't want to grow just turnover, but net profit. A lot of that comes down to efficiency, really what VSM is all about." (A VSM outline is in the 2017 article: <http://bit.ly/2l93mBY>).

In the 12 months since Image Reports first spoke with Farfort and Esko on the VSM programme being undertaken by Data Image - at which time an action plan was being drawn up by a small team of key management to deal with key inefficiencies data gathering had highlighted - there has been "constant improvement" across the company, where there's now also much wider staff involvement.

"One person from every department of the business is now on the VSM team, which reviews the action plan every 30 days, though some points are looked at daily," says Farfort, adding: "We constantly tweak the action plan as required. From the VSM dashboard we can see what the biggest issues and frustrations are of the business. The action plan is to investigate what the problems are, how frequent they occur and put

THE BIGGEST
REACTION WE
GET FROM
COMPETITORS
IS 'WOW, THAT'S
A LOT OF
MONEY'. THEY'D
RATHER BUY A
NEW PRINTER



that on a 'frequency frustration map'. From that we know where to concentrate our efforts."

So what's proved the biggest frustration over the last year? Farfort says it's most definitely the quality of information supplied - or rather not - into the business by customers. "They all want jobs delivered tomorrow but don't supply enough detail. So our focus has been on utilising Esko WebCenter to better effect.

"We already had it, but hadn't really implemented it fully. Buying a solution like that can actually be the smaller cost to a business - a lot of time and effort goes into implementing it. It takes real effort to educate customers to use it and that can be a hard sell so you need to devote time and energy to get any real payback. Still only a small percentage of customers are using it, but that number will grow. We think that of all the actions we've undertaken since the VSM meeting in summer 2017, that this will give us the biggest result by improving the level of good information we get coming in.

"Also, as we grow new business we'll have the conversation about using WebCenter up front, so having it will become a USP - after all, customers can track their jobs etc. and they like that."

But Farfort understands why many a PSP baulks at the idea of doing what he's doing: "Through VSM we are refining factory layouts and consolidating processes to make us a more efficient and focused business. It's all about integration and having as few touchpoints as possible and that will pay dividends - the ROI is huge, but it's not a tangible asset. It's true that implementing a lean process/structure costs serious money and time. Our software spend over the last five years has been £100,000 - £150,000 [covers Rips, workflow, colour management, accounting etc.] We're constantly doing demo's to show off integrated systems but the biggest reaction we get from competitors is 'wow, that's a lot of money'. They'd rather buy a new printer.

"I think lots of those running SME's in this industry start out with a passion for print and haven't been 'business trained'. They have no clear strategy of where they want to be or how to get there. There's this idea that print is lovely, tactile stuff, but we've got to become more hard-nosed and become data driven. We are in print, but we're not printers - we're business people. VSM has focused our minds on that."

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- * 2014 OCE ARIZONA 480XT 3 X 2.5M BED WHITE / ROLL OPTION
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- * 2010 OCE ARIZONA 550GT 2.5X 1.25M BED WHITE / ROLL OPTION
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HI SOCIETY

IF YOU'RE GREENING UP YOUR ACT, SHOUT ABOUT IT. PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW THAT YOU'RE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE. REALLY. WALTER HALE EXPANDS.



“What have you done for society lately?” That is the question consumers are asking businesses of all kinds, according to Peter Freedman, managing director of the Consumer Goods Forum, a powerful global body representing retailers and manufacturers, writing in a new state of the industry report ‘No Normal is the New Normal’ published by KPMG’s consumer markets practice.

As Freedman notes: “The forthright question consumers - and investors - are asking CEOs is: ‘What are you good for?’ And that good is no longer defined in purely financial terms.” For many consumers, especially those in the Millennial generation, good means being good for the environment, communities and societies by, to take one topical example, making sure there is no forced labour in the supply chain. It also means - as the furore over plastic bags, straws and cups suggests - not damaging the environment.

Freedman’s sentiments, and the media campaign over plastics in our oceans, chime with the revival of a movement called ‘radical environmentalism’. In practical terms, radical environmentalism is often associated with direct action such as Greenpeace sending a ship in pursuit of a fleet of Japanese whalers. Yet some of them argue that to be truly green, we need to look beyond the plight of an endangered species - often photogenic ones - and think of the planet as a single eco-sphere affected by every aspect of human life - government, business and individual behaviour.

Many people and organisations that don’t agree with such protests as setting fire to SUVs to highlight the evils of consumerism have some sympathy for the idea of the eco-sphere and recognise that the fight against climate change will require more a commitment not to use plastic straws. Yet the KPMG report suggests that many consumer-facing businesses are yet to get the message.

Sustainability is not one of the seven most significant challenges identified by the 530 respondents from 28 countries. They were more worried about their markets

PRINT SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL FIND THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES AND POLICIES UNDER SCRUTINY

being disrupted by new competitors, reducing their speed to market and competition from e-commerce. Only 18.9% of the sample identified resource scarcity and the environment as a serious concern. They were, though, interested in a buzzword associated with sustainability - transparency, particularly in terms of giving consumers more information about how a product was produced. Such ideas as a QR code on a jumper that links you to a video of the sheep in New Zealand the wool was sheared from may be gimmicky but they reflect business’s understanding that we live in age of distrust and few consumers are going to take a company’s word for anything.

To answer Freedman’s question “What have you done for society?” companies have to do good and be seen to do good. Although it has often been said that corporate commitment to the environment is wavering, Freedman is convinced that it is actually deepening.

He has a point. In 2018 alone, such business behemoths as Starbucks, Ikea, TetraPak, Wrangler, Apple, Waitrose, Lego, Eurostar, Dunkin Donuts, Virgin Atlantic and JD Wetherspoons have all either taken action, or made public pledges to do so, on a variety of issues from plastic straws to eliminating CO2 emissions and palm oil linked to deforestation.

Such commitments also emphasise that the US government’s war on environmental regulation is not changing the mindset of CEOs, consumers or, critically, regulators in other parts of the world. If anything, the demand for transparency is only going to grow which means that, at some point in the not too distant future, print service providers - especially the larger businesses that supply publicly quoted companies - will find their environmental practices and policies under scrutiny.

Given that only four out of ten UK printers - according to the 2018 Widthwise survey - actually have any environmental accreditation, this is not a reality that the industry can afford to ignore. PSPs - and their suppliers - also need to reflect on the broader definition of being ‘good’ for society. The good news is that wide-format printers have some time to get their act together. The bad news is that no one really knows how long.



a. Pipe dream comes true

Reproart in Newton Abbot, Devon, recently handled the printed and finishing on this novel job for a local arts centre exhibition in Ashburton - changing the pipes of its organ into pencils!

b. AllSigns delivers holy order

AllSigns Visual Communications printed and installed this glass manifestation across the inside of the entire entrance to the newly-built atrium of St Patrick's Catholic Church in Bristol. It created a stained-glass mosaic effect using multiple UV ink layering, printed directly onto a clear self-adhesive film on its EFI Vutek QS2 Pro.

c. Leach times Raymond Weil job to perfection

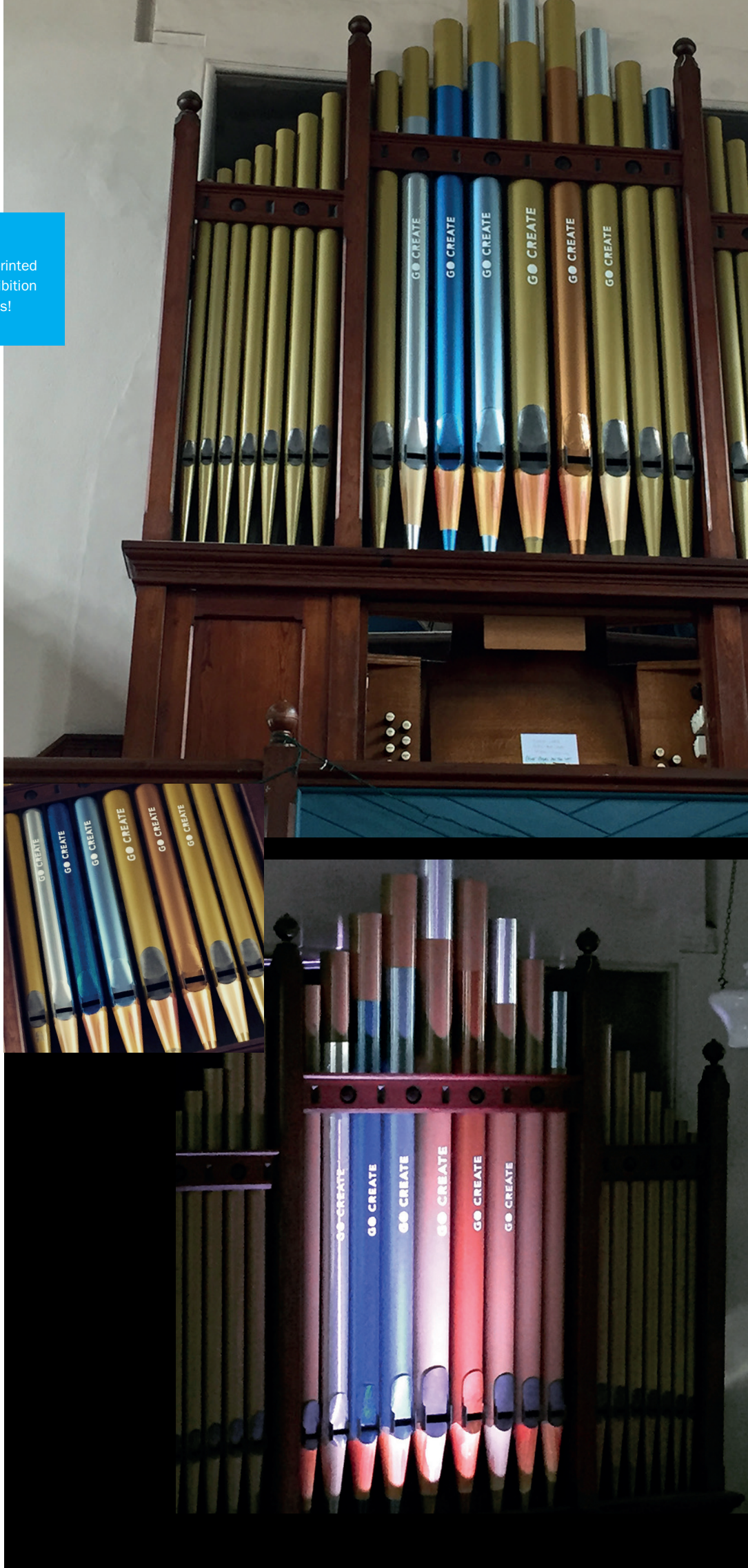
Leach Impact handled this interior rebrand project within the Manchester Arena for watchmaker Raymond Weil - the arena's 'official time partner' and headline sponsor of its VIP Icons Bar.

d. Poppy Signs takes two

Chorley-based Poppy Signs completed a problem glass manifestation job at the offices of theidol.com, a web-based insurance provider based in Penrith, Cumbria. The job was not straightforward as Dave McDonald, MD of Poppy Signs, explained: "We carried out a job on an internal glass partition that was finished with a regular clear laminate. Unfortunately, the surface scuff marks left by the squeegees looked really obvious. We stripped the glass partition and reapplied the whole graphic, this time finishing it with Drytac Protac Anti-Scratch laminate."

e. FLS shows pride in AA job

Fleet Livery Solutions (FLS) wrapped a fleet of 10 AA vehicles in rainbow colours for this year's Pride in London Parade. The AA vans sported wraps printed on 3M's Scotchlite Print Wrap Film 780mc-10R.





a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



OVER TO YOU...

GRAHAM WOOD,
MD, ALLSIGNS VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS
WWW.ALLSIGNS.UK.COM

What's having the greatest impact on your business at the moment?

We have employed a marketing executive focused on getting our name in front of agencies, architects and building contractors and are seeing more work coming in from them.

Where do you see the greatest wide-format opportunities?

For us, in the interior design and fit-out sector, along with retail POS.

What would make your day-to-day operations easier?

We are constantly evolving - our management team meet regularly to evaluate processes and procedures to ensure we work efficiently and ethically across all departments.

Your favourite bit of kit is..?

Our Zund G3 cutting table - it complements our Vutek QS2 Pro by allowing our production team to meet tight deadlines.

What's the best bit of business advice you've been given?

My father ran a large print department before he retired

from British Gas, and has always advised in investing in the best kit to give clients all that's new and improved.

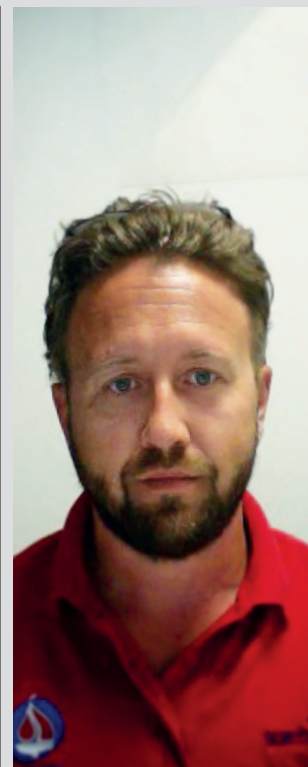
In an industry that is quite unpredictable one month to the next it takes nerves of steel to commit to long finance deals on large pieces of equipment when the order books is rarely more than three to four weeks in advance. I have learned from my experience in the industry over the years that commitment to quality and service keeps clients returning.

What are you most proud of achieving?

To be the youngest business owner in the UK to take delivery of a Vutek printer and Zund cutting table, both purchased through CMYUK. It was daunting and exciting at the same time.

What lesson does the wide-format sector need to learn?

I can't say what the wide-format sector needs to learn as a whole but for me it's avoiding the 'pile them high, sell them cheap' mentality. We very much rely on innovation through technology to maintain steady organic growth.



VITAL STATISTICS

THE NEW 'ANNUAL SME BENCHMARKING REPORT 2017/18' FROM FINANCE AND BUSINESS ADVISOR MENZIES IS SUBTITLED 'REWRITING THE RULES: A GUIDE FOR BUSINESS OWNERS BY BUSINESS OWNERS' AND IS INTENDED TO HELP PRIVATE COMPANIES WITH FEWER THAN 250 EMPLOYEES MANAGE CHANGE.

FOR THE REPORT MENZIES CONDUCTED RESEARCH WITH MORE THAN 1,000 UK-BASED SMES. HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY FINDINGS.

39%

say business decisions have become more data driven

43%

say competitor activity has intensified

64%

lack business support

96%

of business owners are aware of facing significant risk in the year ahead

37%

believe it is now more important to act quickly when it comes to investment or altering pricing strategies

DIGGING BELOW THE SURFACE WITH **INDUSTRY MOLE**

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What is the optimum number of slides you can put in a presentation? The question occurred to me the other day when our sales director Brian gave a pitch to a potentially massive new client. He used 85 slides and ignored all my not so subtle hints that he delete a few.

There is a famous Dilbert comic strip in which he suggests that fewer slides would be more persuasive, prompting his outraged workmate to ask: "So you're saying that having zero slides would be the most persuasive of all?" In fact, according to the 10/20/30 rule, the best PowerPoint presentations should only contain 10 slides, last for 20 minutes and never feature any type smaller than 30 points.

In the meeting, the sales director pressed on remorselessly with his exhaustive - and exhausting - presentation. Some of the client's staff were unsure whether to listen or read. After about 30 minutes of doing their utmost to pay attention, a few of them began doodling, checking their phones, and staring at a particularly attractive colleague. (They were represented by five men and two women). Fortunately, the air conditioning was in full flow, so none of them actually nodded off.

To be fair to Brian, he didn't commit the cardinal sins of bad presentations: reading each slide aloud word for word and talking to the slides, rather than the audience. Nor did he block off the view for anyone in the room - or use too much jargon. Even so, you could almost hear the sighs of relief when it was over. The client's team needed to reinvigorate themselves with coffee and water before formulating their questions.

Reading the mood of such meetings is never easy. As we came out, Brian asked me what I thought. I said it reminded me of the finale of the film Cool Hand Luke. When he looked nonplussed, I reminded him of the bit where Paul Newman says: "What we have here is a failure to communicate". He gave me his stare for a few seconds but then shrugged it off. He gets worse from his clients on a daily basis.

Three days later, they rang to tell me we were one of three companies invited to the next round. Brian looked suitably smug. He's probably planning a 100-slide extravaganza for the next meeting.

STREET
EVENTS

THE PRINT SHOW	PRINT UV 19	SIGN AND DIGITAL UK 2019	FESPA 2019
When? 18 - 20 September, 2018	When? 27 - 19 March, 2019	When? 2 - 4 April, 2019	When? 14 - 17 May, 2019
Where? NEC, Birmingham	Where? Encore by Wynn Resort, Las Vegas	Where? NEC, Birmingham	Where? Messe Munich
Cost? TBA	Cost? \$1,545pp. Early-bird fee is \$1,445pp before 31 December 2018.	Cost? Free for trade visitors	Cost? TBA
Who will be there? A mixture from across the print spectrum.	Who will be there? This will be the 12th Print UV conference, with dive deep info on core UV processes with experts from multiple fields and case studies from successful UV printers.	Who will be there? A bit early to say but no doubt there'll be a decent number of large-format digital print orientated suppliers.	Who will be there? Most of the key players in the digital inkjet space plus those in the non-print orientated European Sign Expo running alongside.
Should you go? This is a growing show and promises to include more wide-format this year so worth a look-see.	Should you go? A good shout if you want to better understand trends driving the growth of UV printing, hear how industry leaders have developed proprietary offerings, learn about advances in inks, coatings and equipment, oh, and network - but bear in mind it will be mostly with those in North American UV printing market. The rating below reflects the distance of the show - not its content!	Should you go? As a UK-based show it's worth attending, though exhibitors tend to keep major launches for the following Fespa event.	Should you go? Again, yes as I remains the main European show for the large-format digital print community.
Rating 7/10	Rating 6/10	Rating 8/10	Rating 10/10

MIS managed

DO YOU USE YOUR MIS SYSTEM PROPERLY? THARSTERN'S BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER ROSS EDWARDS, AND PRE-SALES CONSULTANT PHILIP DODGE, ARGUE THAT PSPS IN THE WIDE-FORMAT SECTOR AREN'T USING THEM TO BEST ADVANTAGE. BUT IS THAT ABOUT TO CHANGE?



Can you believe that there are still printers who don't use their MIS to its full capability, or even use it for its main purpose - managing information. They use it for estimating and booking in jobs, but that's it. No analysis! This is something that the Pira MIS best practice study identified back in 2006. Things have moved on a since then, but not necessarily when it comes to MIS use in large-format. Ross Edwards, business development manager, and Philip Dodge, pre-sales consultant at Tharstern - a MIS supplier with many customers in the wide-format sector - believe product development and changing business requirements mean that's about to change.

"To get a good ROI on your MIS it's crucial to use it to your full advantage. There are so many features in an MIS nowadays that it would be really advantageous to use more of its capabilities.

"We've targeted some of our customers' issues by introducing our Business Intelligence module. Modules like this are a way for power users to consume MIS information and create actionable analytics. It allows you to view key information on a dashboard that you set up yourself - a simple drag and drop system - so you can easily see a performance overview and ensure sales and operating activity are in line with your business strategy. Decision makers can see which elements of the business they need to improve - whether it's speeding up production or identifying areas where profit margins can be increased or pricing needs to be more competitive - invaluable data."

Data capture has often been identified as a sticking point when it comes to MIS, but developments should mean this is less of a problem than it has been in the past argue Edwards and Dodge.

"Almost every element of an MIS now includes data collection and analysis. Data can be so powerful - we've seen customers using sales analysis to determine which of their customers, market sectors, product types and orders are worth keeping and which are worth surrendering because they are of no value to the business. And then there are customers who look at timings at each stage of a job and where they can be improved, to try and become more efficient.

DATA CAPTURE HAS OFTEN BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A STICKING POINT WHEN IT COMES TO MIS, BUT DEVELOPMENTS MEAN THIS IS LESS OF A PROBLEM THAN IN THE PAST

"Data capture in an MIS is becoming a very popular feature, especially with barcode tracking. Printers can use real-time data capture to scan the jobs and track how long each job is taking to provide your team with a real-time flow of information including up-to-date work in progress and production tracking information. It's tools like those that have been developed to help address the data collection issue, so they can easily address targets and KPIs.

"You may think it's time consuming to collect the required data for proper analytics to begin with but it will prove extremely useful in the long run. Now we can even automate the capture of data using JDF integrations.

"Using your MIS for business intelligence can make a huge difference to a company's performance, so when selecting which to buy you are obviously going to want to make sure you select the system right for your sector/type of business."

Tharstern says it works closely with customers in the large-format space to ways in which MIS can improve their workflows. "Some of the modules particularly useful for wide-format are: advanced imposition, for nesting irregular and regular shapes of the same or different sizes together to optimise material utilisation and production; the milestones functionality, that can help users track and manage every aspect of the job - from artwork approvals through to installation; and job tracking, which can also be used both on- and off-site, which is really useful for tracking not only design and production costs but also site surveys and installation activity - this in turn can be used to compare against estimated versus actuals to make sure quotes are more accurate.

"Integration capabilities are a huge benefit in an MIS. Make sure the system you're buying has an API, then you can integrate with different products and open up more opportunities for streamlining your workflow.

"Tharstern developed its latest estimating module to provide extensive support for wide-format, but also, so that it could work without needing a fully qualified estimating team - users can quickly create an estimate using a description of the item, that is production ready. This means it can also submit into production workflows electronically for workflow automation.



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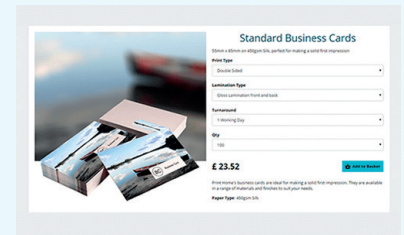
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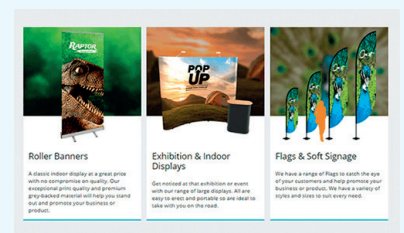
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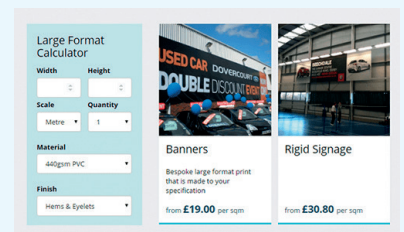
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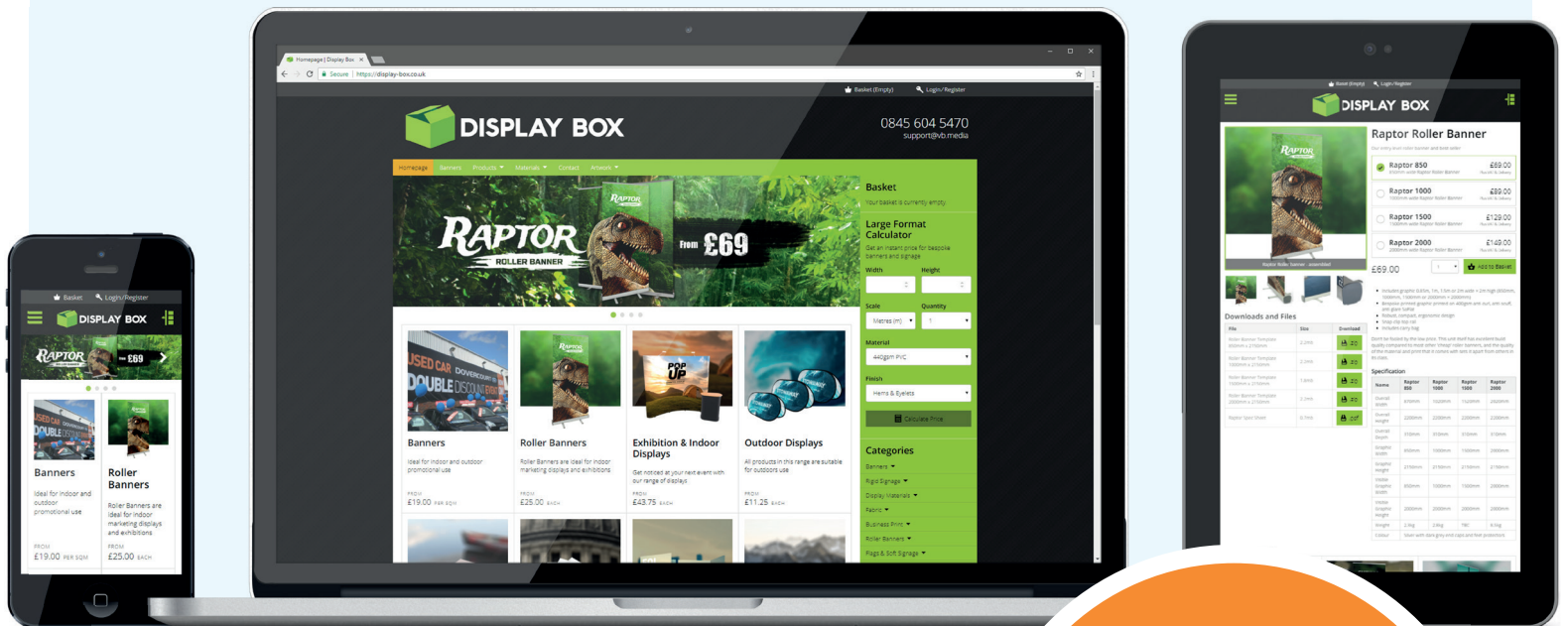
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Illuminated print carriage and maintenance area.

New Powerful VersaWorks Dual RIP Software

Supports PostScript and PDF natively for improved file reproduction.

3 Ink Configurations

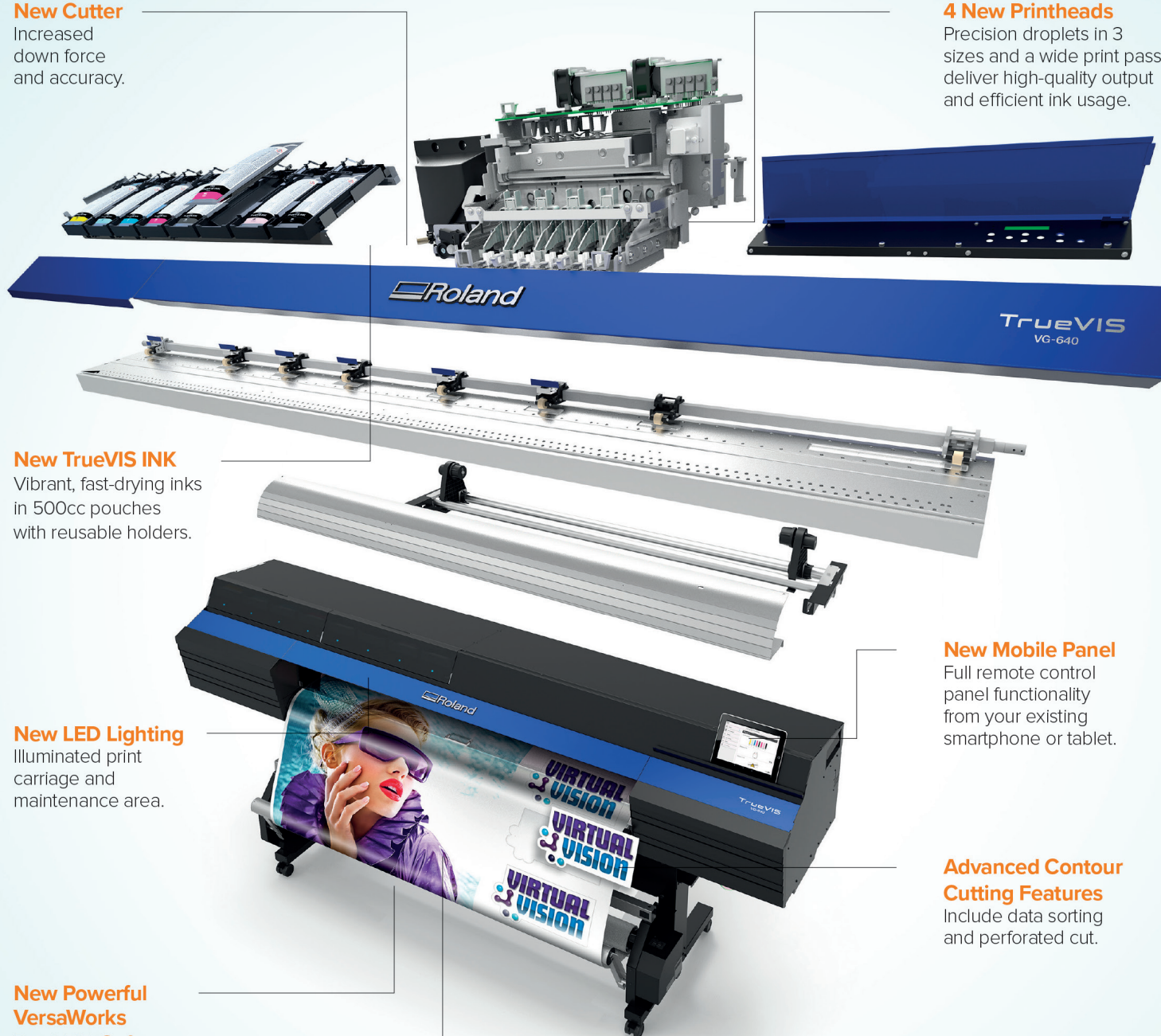
Dual CMYK, 7 colour (CMYKLcLmLk), 8 colour (CMYKLcLmLkWh).

New Mobile Panel

Full remote control panel functionality from your existing smartphone or tablet.

Advanced Contour Cutting Features

Include data sorting and perforated cut.



Discover the new TrueVIS VG Series, available in 64" and 54" models at rolanddg.co.uk or call 01275 335 540

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