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20
FESPA
GLOBAL
PRINT EXPO

Madrid
24-27 March 2020

Round Table

State of the nation discussion
among print chiefs

Angel Awards

The most innovative products
of 2019 are...

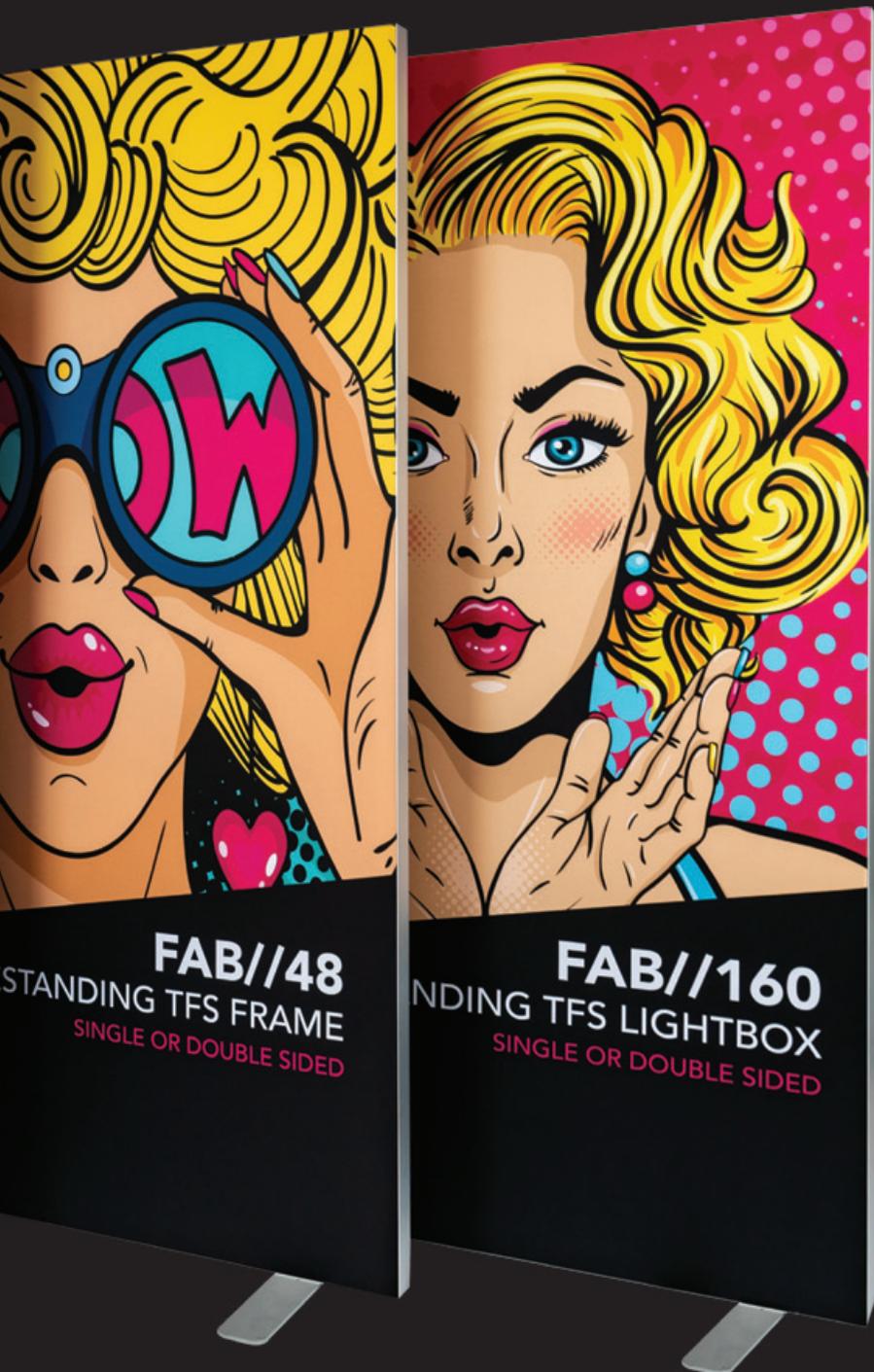
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...AND THE WORLD TURNS

Hey, a new decade is about to dawn. Does that awaken a sense of optimism - or despair? Let's hope it's the former. At the start of 2019 that was certainly the case, as our annual Widthwise survey of large-format PSPs highlighted - the reasoning for that being fully explored in the subsequent Widthwise Report published in the summer (if you still haven't scrutinised it you can download it for free at: <https://www.imagereportsmag.co.uk/widthwise>).

Want to know what your colleagues/competitors think now? Turn to p26 and you'll find out - well, what five of them think anyway. Yes, it's the write-up from the annual Widthwise Round Table where this time around Tony Barnett, MD of John E Wright; Richard Courtney, director at Gardners; Damian Quarmby, owner of Quarmby Colour; Nicole Spencer, operations director, at RMC Digital Print, and new Fespa UK Association president; and Will Tyler, CEO of Octink came together for a state-of-the-nation type discussion. The group declared a moratorium on Brexit given we only had an afternoon together! Other than that everything else was up for discussion, so see who you agree with - and don't.

We'll kick off the 2020 Widthwise poll at the start of January, so I'd just like to take this opportunity to urge you to get involved. 247 large-format PSPs contributed in 2019, so a massive thank you to those who took part - and do so year on year. If you're a newbie we'll welcome you like an old friend. Keep your eyes open for the poll link going live on our homepage in the New Year.

Meanwhile, get a glass of something festive and enjoy this issue, where we look back at some of the best things to have come out of 2019 and delve into expectations for 2020 and beyond.

Wishing you a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

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Image Reports is available free to printers based in the UK. Register at www.imagereportsmag.co.uk/register.

To purchase a subscription please visit www.imagereportsmag.co.uk/subscribe - UK £54, overseas £84

Printed in Great Britain.

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CMYUK introduces eco printable textiles

New from CMYUK is a range of printable wallcoverings made from yarn created from recycled plastic (rPET) bottles.

The Ufabrik Wallcover Canvas Eco - part of CMYUK's growing own-brand media portfolio - is a premium woven canvas that can be used for single piece wallcoverings, display graphics and tension frame systems etc. It has B1 flame retardancy (making it suitable for use in public areas), is compatible with latex, solvent or UV inks, and is available in various roll widths up to 3100mm.

This material is suitable for waste-to-energy incineration at one of several Energy Recovery Facilities (ERF) in the UK, where it is transformed through clean and safe processes into renewable power for the National Grid.

"As we continue into Q4, we will be launching other products that fulfil the same criteria performance, quality and planetary care," said Michael Crook, CMYUK commercial business director.

Swanline in 'green' joint venture with CorrBoard

CorrBoard Bioenergy (CB Bio) - a joint venture between packaging and display trade specialist Swanline Group and paper-based packaging producer McLaren Packaging - has invested £5.5m in the creation of the world's first sustainable energy generation facility fuelled by organic waste, to provide heat and power for the manufacture of corrugated sheet board.

The investment will facilitate the manufacture of carbon neutral corrugated material for use at Swanline and McLaren's respective manufacturing plants in Staffordshire and Port Glasgow.

Some of the waste needed for the 6,400megawatt/annum energy plant will be sourced from Swanline and McLaren's packaging users who require compliant food waste disposal; thus providing a robust circular economy. Remarkably, the by-product from the plant is a quality fertiliser, pasteurised and certified to PAS 110, suitable for spreading on local farmland to aid crop growing.

CB Bio is located adjacent to CorrBoard UK, the consortium-owned independent corrugated producer based in Scunthorpe of which Swanline and McLaren are part owners. Although autonomous neighbouring businesses, this facility effectively makes CorrBoard UK's production carbon neutral.

The plant has the capacity to divert 25,000 tonnes of biological waste from landfill to provide more than twice CorrBoard UK's energy consumption, or enough electricity and heat to sustain 1,500 homes. The plant is modular in construction and therefore output capacity can be increased in future.

Fespa UK Association appoints its first female president



RMC Digital Print operations director Nicole Spencer has become president of the Fespa UK Association - the first female to take on the role.

"One of my key areas of focus as president will be diversifying and expanding the range of insight and support we offer to our members, as well as embracing technology and innovation to ensure that we are working together towards a more sustainable future," said Spencer, previously vice president of the association and now replaced in that role by Nick Kirby from Swanline Print.

Spencer is keen to raise awareness around sustainable printing methods and encouraging printers to consider initiatives to support them in minimising wastage.

Tony Moscrop, MD at Dufaylite and outgoing president at Fespa UK Association said: "Sustainability is undoubtedly high on the agenda. Swanline Print and RMC are industry leading companies on this important issue so I am sure their planned combined efforts and initiatives will provide significant benefits for association members, their customers and the environment. During Nicole's term as vice president, she supported me during a period of significant change and growth for the association and the sector at large. I am delighted about her appointment as president of Fespa UK Association and it was a great pleasure to hand over the chain of office at the recent board meeting."

"Both Tony and Nick have pioneered products that are made from recyclable materials, so with their support, I feel we can help our members to replace some of their current products with more sustainable resources," said Spencer, who also pointed out that association members have access to a network of contacts, technical information and tailored events which include sustainability as a key theme.

Spencer was one of the participants at this year's Image Reports Widthwise Round Table discussion on the state of the UK's large-format print sector - see p26.

New Epson printers unveiled

December 2019 sees the commercial availability of two new 12-colour printers from Epson - the 24in-wide SC-P7500 and 44in-wide SC-P9500.

Their introduction continues the company's run of SureColor printer launches - the new 64in-wide dye-sublimation SC-F9400 and SC-F9400H having only recently been announced - the latter providing yellow and pink fluorescent ink options.

At the unveiling of the SCP newcomers Epson UK sales manager, prographics, Phil McMullin, said: "For large-format PSPs the real interest here is the productivity gains they offer. The SC-P7500 is up to four

times faster than the existing SC-P7000 for instance."

He said that for now the SC-P7000 will continue in production, as will the SC-P9000, though the SC-P10000 will be disappear from the product portfolio, "which will be streamlined in 2020".

At the time of going to press, UK pricing on the new SC-P printers had not been formalised, though McMullin said they would be "price competitive."

The printers - said to offer 99% Pantone coverage - use TFP12 printheads with 300dpi resolution and Epson's newly-developed UltraChrome Pro12 inkset, with K3 technology.

Q3 BPIF poll flags up depressed outlook

The third quarter of 2019 was a disappointing one for the UK printing industry according to the latest Printing Outlook survey from the BPIF. 37% of printers polled increased output levels in the third quarter of 2019 - 31% held output steady and 32% saw a decline.

Orders and output had been expected to remain subdued in Q4, so an election surge will be well received said the BPIF.

In a statement the BPIF said this is the worst Q3 report for three years, since the aftermath of the shock EU referendum result, and particularly disappointing in comparison to the positive Q3 and Q4 performance levels last year.

Color-Logic introduces Touch7 Photo ECG

Color-Logic used Printing United in the US to introduce Touch7 Photo ECG, a tool that simplifies the use of extended colour gamut (ECG) in wide-format and digital presses.

Touch7 Photo ECG is a Photoshop plugin that enables a designer or prepress operator to add one, two, or three ECG separations into an image in a few seconds by eliminating the need to create manual masks.

The software does not require ICC profiles to create the ECG separations, enabling designers to create, at the design stage, five-, six-, or seven-colour separations and then send the file to prepress for production, where ICC colour management is used to map the image to the ink set of the printer or press.

Global Graphics names new CEO

Hybrid Software founder, president and CEO Mike Rottenborn is to head up Global Graphics. He will take over from Gary Fry as CEO on 1 January 2020. The announcement follows fast of the heels of Global's \$4.5m acquisition of workflow solutions developer Xitron as it seeks to strengthen its offering for the industrial inkjet market.

Rottenborn founded Hybrid Software in 2007 to provide a software solution that bridges the gap between e-commerce portals, prepress workflows, and MIS/ERP systems. He has spent 30 years working in the graphic arts industry.

Fry, who will step down at the end of 2019 to pursue other avenues in the printing and publishing software industry, has been Global's CEO since 2008 and has steered it through a significant growth period during which several acquisitions were made, including Meteor Inkjet, the industrial printhead driver solutions specialist.

He said of the latest acquisition: "Xitron is the lead player in pre-press Rips with some 35,000 Harlequin Rip-based installations around the world and an impressive network of dealers and distributors. This acquisition allows us to further develop our digital print strategy with a more complete offering for industrial inkjet, such as textiles and décor, and with a broader range of pre-press components for digital applications.

One of Global Graphics Software's longest standing partners, US-based Xitron has been building solutions around the Harlequin Rip since 1991 to drive various models of inkjet printers, digital presses, proofers, imagesetters and platesetters and its Harlequin-based Xitron Navigator Rip is well known in the industry. In recent years Xitron has been increasing its footprint in production inkjet with its Navigator driven digital front end (DFE), which supports drive electronics from Meteor Inkjet and Global Inkjet Systems and drive all Memjet and Canon Finetech heads directly.

For the year ended 31 December 2018 Xitron recorded revenue of \$4.77m and for the six months to 30 June 2019 revenue of \$2.43m.

Impress Print Services wins national environmental award

Walton-on-Thames based Impress Print Services has won one of 2019's Planet Mark Awards categories and been highly commended in another.

The company clinched the 'Sustainability Transparency' award and was highly commended in the 'Best Company' category where it was shortlisted alongside Bywaters and Prologis.

The Planet Mark is a certification programme that recognises commitment to continuous improvement in sustainability. The programme helps companies measure and reduce their carbon emissions, energy and water consumption, travel, and the amount of waste created. The organisation also helps firms engage their own people in the process.

Roland extends its printer portfolio

Roland DG used the recent Viscom show to unveil its IU-1000F UV LED flatbed printer - available in Europe from the first quarter of 2020. Able to print on materials/objects up to 2510mm x 1310mm, 110mm in height and 45kg/m² in weight, the newcomer has a top running speed of 116m²/hr.

Equipped with 12 printheads in a staggered three-row arrangement, the IU-1000F can print up to 635 x 1800dpi with variable droplet technology that can simultaneously fire three sizes of droplets at high speed. Printing time for a typical 1220 x 2440mm rigid board averages about 15 boards per hour (48.5m²/hr) in the 'standard' print mode. About 10 sheets (32m²/

hr) can be printed in the 'quality' mode. In addition to high-adhesion, high-density CMYK UV inks, printer supports white, gloss and primers.

For optimal efficiency the IU-1000F features has an ionizer that removes static electricity, and print bed media alignment pins.

Roland DG has also added 64in, 54in and 30in-wide SG2 Series eco-solvent printer/cutters to its TrueVis range. A new ink delivery system is said to reduce ink consumption by up to 54% due to automated maintenance sequences.

The four-colour SG2 machines use new TR2 ink, and a newly developed True Rich Color preset. There is also an automatic pinch roller system and an optional take-up unit.

HP ploughs \$200m into water-based ink technologies

HP has committed \$200m over five or more years to develop water-based ink technologies for printing digitally on corrugated packaging and textiles.

Santi Morera, general manager and global head of graphics solutions, HP, said: "Investing in water-based solutions that meet market needs and the increasing sustainability requirements of graphics customers is expected to propel business growth for HP. We

will be dedicating resources toward continued innovation and industry disruption to accelerate safer, simpler and more sustainable water-based printing technologies that meet the quality, performance and economics needed by these markets."

This new tranche of investment builds on HP's existing innovation in water-based ink technology - such as for the sign and display market using its water-based HP Latex inks.

Manchester Print Services takes first UK HP Stitch S1000

Manchester Print Services is forecasting that its total output will be digital textile print in 12 months' time, following the recent installation of the UK's first HP Stitch S1000 dye-sub printer.

The company, formed in 2010 by Lee Egan and Andy Lambert, only became involved in dye-sub output 16 months ago when it installed its first large-format dye-sub machine - a Mimaki JV5 320-DS dye sublimation printer - to test the market. A subsequent tranche of retail work wins, including a large European account, prompted the recent HP Stitch purchase.

Apart from servicing the traditional sign and graphics market, the move into dye-sub print has taken MPS into upholstery, using its JV-300 160 machine. In the next year Egan believes the company will move further into non-traditional textile markets.

"We can expand by 15 to 20% in these new areas without needing any more new dye-sublimation equipment or any additional staff. The margins are less but it's a definite growth area, and one we didn't anticipate," he said.

Central to the company's dye-sub print ambitions are printable textiles from Pongs, supplied in the UK and Ireland by CMYUK (which also delivered the printers). The German manufacturer has produced a number of profiles for the HP Stitch for its best selling materials.

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- Major shake-up and shake-out at Xaar
- Caldera releases TextilePro driver for HP Stitch printers
- tilia Cloud officially unveiled at Print 19
- EFI releases Fiery FS400 Pro
- Fespa to kick off Print Census at Fespa Global 2020
- New HP Latex certification programme for rigid media
- IPIA offers new 'Lite' membership
- German PSP starts running first Karibu
- Canon adds to imagePrograf range
- Roland and Ricoh scoop BLI wide-format printer awards
- SME's missing out on R&D tax relief says expert
- InPrint Milan 2020 to run alongside Viscom Italia
- HP confirms Xerox takeover talks
- Gardners sings praises of its new EFI Vutek HS125 F4
- Xaar introduces Ultra High Viscosity ink jetting capability
- Perspex Distribution awarded gold status for fleet efficiency
- YPS adds DGI Poseidon dye-sub printer to its offering
- Avery Dennison officially opens expanded production facility
- Spandex adds Proseries wrapping tools to its portfolio
- Roland TrueVis VG upgrade programme available in EMEA
- Colorado reaches milestone
- One Q Technologies brings out app for HP Workpath Ecosystem
- Government offers new machinery money
- Mutoh MS41 inks gain Greenguard Gold certification
- Imaginators scoops another prize



FESPA GLOBAL PRINT EXPO 2020: WHERE COLOUR COMES ALIVE

By-lined to Neil Felton, CEO of FESPA

I've travelled to many print industry events in my time as FESPA CEO, but there's one thing that sets FESPA Global Print Expo apart the minute you walk through the entrance – colour. The colourful range of applications, processes and materials that are powering growth in screen, digital wide format and textile print is what makes this exhibition unique.

'Colour' expresses the boundless opportunities in our vibrant industry, whether we're talking about media, inks, finishing techniques or even colour management. For me it also summarises the energy, personality and entrepreneurial spirit of the global print community that congregates at FESPA Global Print Expo.

Add in the exciting Mediterranean location – in 2020 we're returning to Spain for the first time since our FESPA Digital event in 2012 – and 'Where Colour Comes Alive' makes the perfect strapline for FESPA Global Print Expo 2020. Colour is a dominant theme across our content programme for Madrid too, with a great line-up of free visitor features designed to make your trip to FESPA Global Print Expo the most rewarding experience.

COLOUR L*A*B*

Let's start with Colour L*A*B*, our colour management showcase. Making its return after a successful debut in Munich this year, Colour L*A*B* will provide a wide-ranging overview of all individual elements that

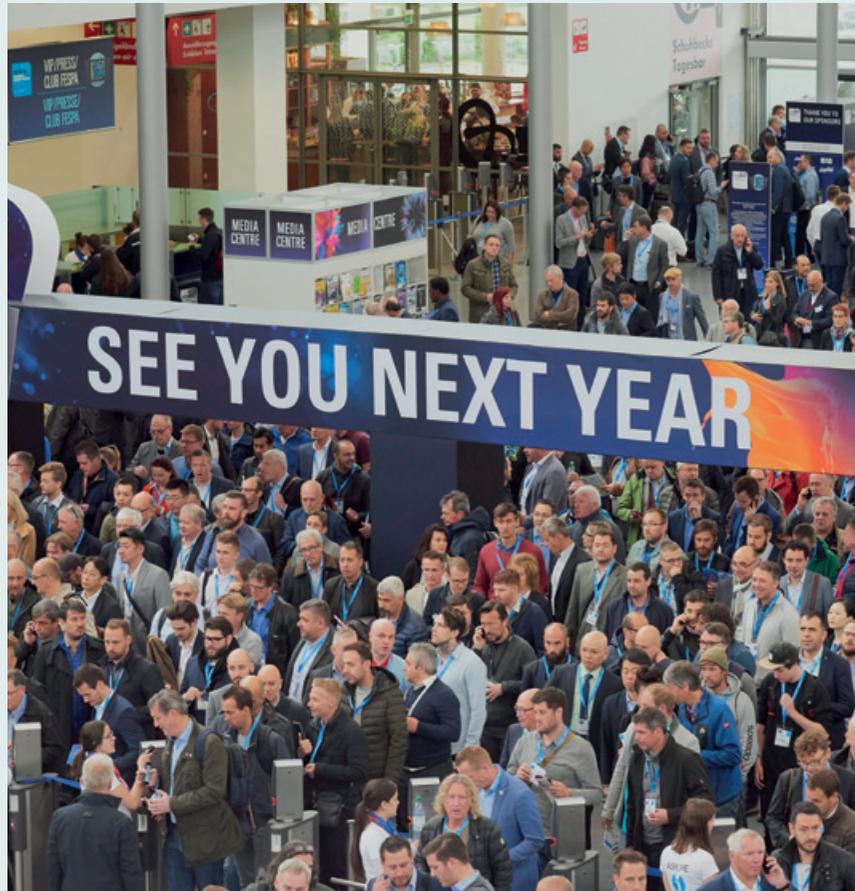
contribute towards professional colour management, with a focus on device profiling, process control, as well as proofing and standardised viewing conditions. Run by subject matter experts, Colour L*A*B* will give you valuable insights on how to improve your colour management practices and achieve accurate, high quality print, all of which are key to reducing the chance of errors and avoiding unnecessary reprints and ink consumption.

TREND THEATRE

The Trend Theatre is a programme of over 40 seminars, compiled with the needs of printers like you at heart. With a speaker line-up that comprises business owners and organisations like the Fogra Research Institute, the sessions will cover industry hot topics of interest, such as workflow automation and sustainable practices, while also giving you an overview of the latest market trends in all areas of speciality print.

PRINTERIORS

While the focus of Colour L*A*B* and the Trend Theatre is on education, the emphasis of Printeriors is on visual inspiration, using high quality print samples to highlight the creative and colourful possibilities for interior and exterior décor. One of the stand-out findings of the FESPA Print Census in 2018 was the increasing popularity of



décor applications, with 74% of respondents identifying wallpaper and interior décor as areas of growth. Printeriors will bring together a mix of sustainable fabrics and materials, providing an immersive visitor experience that combines video and photographic imagery of the Madrid Royal Botanical Garden.

PRINT MAKE WEAR

To mark the launch of our new co-located Sportswear Pro event, the Print Make Wear fast fashion factory feature at FESPA Global Print Expo 2020 will focus on sportswear manufacturing. Bridging the gap between the two exhibition areas, Print Make Wear will recreate the live end-to-end production process for sports and athleisure garments, starting with planning, design and prepress, progressing to printing, drying, cutting, sewing, welding and embellishment and finishing with packing and retail display. You'll even have the opportunity to print your own personalised sportswear garment at the on-site kiosk, demonstrating the speed and effectiveness of digital print on-demand for garment decoration.

WORLD WRAP MASTERS

One of our most popular and energetic visitor features, World Wrap Masters brings out the competitive streak in the world's leading wrappers. This year you'll see reinvigorated displays and a new scoring system, as well as some stunning graffiti artwork for good measure. Expect a thrilling, high-octane competition!

FESPA AWARDS 2020

Nothing says 'colour' like a glamorous awards ceremony and our FESPA Awards returns in 2020 with two new categories for 'Wrapping' and 'Printeriors', recognising

the dynamic growth and development of both applications. Taking place on 25 March at Real Fabrica de Tapices, the Awards event will entertain and inspire, with a great range of world-class print projects being celebrated on the night and showcased in the exhibition for all visitors to see.

EUROPEAN SIGN EXPO 2020

Of course, visual communication is not all about print. European Sign Expo gives brand owners, print service providers and signmakers a space to discover the latest developments in non-printed signage, ranging from channel lettering, engraving and etching to LED, neon and digital signage. It's a great place to gather inspiration for how print and other viscom options can be combined to deliver maximum visual impact.

Seeing the latest technology innovations is always an important reason for visiting an industry event, but the true value comes from what you can learn and absorb by coming with an open mind, awake to new ideas and inspiration.

Our markets are moving faster than ever and the clients we serve are adapting to consumer expectations that are changing by the minute. Technology investment is one important part of the equation – but we also need to see trends, spot opportunities, and be ready to adapt and collaborate.

With three market-leading exhibitions bringing together the cream of our industry's technology, media and ink suppliers, plus a rich content programme all in one place at IFEMA exhibition centre in Madrid, FESPA Global Print Expo 2020 is where colour – and your business potential – comes alive.

COLOUR' EXPRESSES THE BOUNDLESS OPPORTUNITIES IN OUR VIBRANT INDUSTRY, WHETHER WE'RE TALKING ABOUT MEDIA, INKS, FINISHING TECHNIQUES OR EVEN COLOUR MANAGEMENT.... IT SUMMARISES THE ENERGY, PERSONALITY AND ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT OF THE GLOBAL PRINT COMMUNITY.

Neil Felton

Register now at www.fespa2020.com using code FESM204 for your free visitor ticket to FESPA Global Print Expo, which also gives you access to European Sign Expo and Sportswear Pro.



READY, STEADY...

THE MANUFACTURERS ARE IN THE STARTING BLOCKS AS WE GO INTO A BUMPER TRADE SHOW YEAR. AS THEY JOSTLE FOR POSITION SIMON CREASY ASKS 'WHAT LARGE-FORMAT R+D IS GOING TO CREATE THE BIGGEST IMPACT IN 2020?'

Manufacturers and developers of large-format hardware and software have been anything but idle in 2019. That high level of commitment and innovation looks set to continue going into 2020.

One company gearing up to deliver a flurry of new products in the next 12 months is Epson. According to Phil McMullin, sales manager prographics, the company spends around 1.4m Euro per day on R&D to ensure it delivers a continuous road map of new products, and in the wide-format sector it currently has big growth plans for the photo, signage, decor and textile sectors.

"This year has already seen the launch of major new products in photo so 2020 will be mostly about the latter three sectors," says McMullin. "Epson already

has a well-established presence in these areas and we will be looking to expand our product portfolio to further gain significant market share. Currently we are the only major printer manufacturer to have our own ink chemistry covering aqueous, eco-solvent, UV, resin, DTG and DTF. So expect to see developments in all these areas."

He adds that all of the new products planned for 2020 remain under an NDA, but the company will be sharing full details as the launch dates approach, so it's a case of 'watch this space'.

EFI is equally as shy about the specifics surrounding future equipment launches, although product manager Dani Alkalay stresses that it's the company's customers that are the main R&D driver.

“Any new R&D project at EFI has to have a direct link to one of the three key customer metrics we access,” explains Alkalay. “One, will this new printer or technology enable the customer to grow their business into new applications; two, will this new printer or technology reduce costs enabling the customer to be more competitive in the marketplace; and three, will this new printer or technology mitigate business risks to meet end customer commitments?”

She says that EFI is currently assessing new ink characteristics and software enhancements that it intends to apply to equipment in 2020 and all of that “will benefit our customers per the criteria above”.

The financial benefit of bringing new products to market for the manufacturing groups is underlined by the experience of Fujifilm Graphic Systems. According to Nils Gottfried, wide-format inkjet product manager, in 2018 Fujifilm invested 6.8% of its total global revenue back into research and development.

“R&D is, by default, a key focus for Fujifilm and has been for years,” says Gottfried. “We invest significantly in bringing new and better products to market across all areas of the business, including wide-format inkjet.”



He highlights the company's ever expanding armoury of presses as an example of this. “The latest additions are the Onset X HS, which features a revolutionary 30 second set-up and an impressive single cycle print mode, and the Acuity Ultra 5044 - a dual CMYK roll-roll printer with an exceptional print quality and a maximum print speed of 400m²/hr,” says Gottfried. “With two major shows in 2020 - Interpack and Drupa - customers can expect Fujifilm to continue to provide impressive products and updates.”

As for Hybrid Services, exclusive distributor for Mimaki devices in the UK and Ireland, it's a case of 'carry on as you were' over the coming 12 months. “With 10 hardware and ink product launches alone in 2019, it's fair to say

that Mimaki has innovation and R&D at its heart and there's no reason to suggest this drive will slow down in 2020,” says Brett Newman, chief operations manager at Hybrid Services.

“It was the breadth of technology that Mimaki chose to release that was most noteworthy - recent additions such as core solvent printer and printer/cutter solutions in the form of the new JV300/CJV300Plus range, a highly competitively priced grand format solvent machine [the SWJ-320EA] and a state-of-the-art flatbed LED UV printer, the JFX200-2513EX all enjoyed debuts at September's Print Show.”

Newman claims that R&D for Mimaki carries on long after the product actually hits the market. He says a good example of this is Mimaki's UCJV Series LED UV printer/cutters. “Launched in two 1.6m versions - the UCJV150 and its faster and higher spec'd sibling, the UCJV300 - additional sizes were then added to the UCJV300 Series, MCS development announced with ink and media manufacturers 3M and Avery, the launch of a unique clear ink and then revised firmware to maximise print output have all been added in during the course of the year,” says Newman.

In 2020, the company will be focusing a lot of its efforts on promoting the new SWJ-320EA, which Newman says will offer a “new level of pricing both for the hardware and the inks, offering print providers a low cost, yet high quality option for expanding their business into new and wider areas”.

Also waiting in the wings is a hybrid textile printer that was announced in principal at ITMA in 2019. It is “tabled to deliver flexibility and choice to businesses in the ink type and media available - key values to look out for from us over the coming months,” adds Newman.

For Canon, the emphasis going forward is based around what Derek Joys, marketing excellence product business development, describes as “the evolving needs of both the demand and supply sides” of the market.

“With the escalation of targeted marketing and mass personalisation, as well as the exponential growth of the interior decor market, customers are looking for increased



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media versatility, demanding original applications on new media,” says Joys. “On the supply side, print service providers want solutions that deliver cost-efficiency and increasingly professional production against a backdrop of shorter runs and tighter turnaround times, with 60% of jobs requiring 24-hour delivery. PSPs are calling for tech that is futureproof in terms of both media compatibility and environmental impact.”

In response to these market trends, Canon’s large-format R&D efforts are going to be focused on maximising the advantages of its proprietary UVgel ink technology.

“This rapid ink technology produces high-quality, odourless, indoor compliant prints without using heat, ensuring a wide and unique application range,” explains Joys. “UVgel separates the curing and inkjet processes, allowing all ink necessary for the print to be laid down and the complete image to be built up without having to cure intermediately. With ink in gel form enabling precise positioning and controlled dot gain, as well as best-in-class colour consistency, dimensional stability and continuity, UVgel combines speed of production with exceptional quality.”

He adds that the potential of printing with gel is still being explored and the company has a ten-year roadmap of new releases planned.

“Starting with the 2017 launch of the Colorado 1640, UVgel was always going to be the platform for an extended product family,” says Joys. “In 2020, Canon will delve deeper into the physical advantages of UVgel technology, while also expanding its product portfolio to handle true industrial capacities and reach a wider customer base.”

Much of the aforementioned hardware innovation is focused around allowing printers to do their jobs more quickly and efficiently, yet still maintain high print standards. This is also an area that software developer Tilia Labs is focusing on. It intends to leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to enable printers to produce jobs more cost effectively.

“In the past printers and converters were used to very long runs and because runs were so long they were able to deal with one job at a time,” says Tyler Thompson, solutions director at Tilia Labs. “In order to keep or grow revenue they now have to take on a lot of short run jobs and because of that we are finding that working in this old school way of dealing with one job at a time is not practical. Phoenix can look at not just one order at a time like a human - it can look at thousands of orders at the same time and in a couple of milliseconds it can run through all of the possible permutations and say this is the most cost effective way to do it.”

In Q1 2020, the company intends to release an ink costing module that looks at the price of printing and finishing a job and establishes the most efficient way of handing this work. To this end, Tilia is also working in partnership with equipment manufacturers like Zund to leverage the internet of things and digital finishing devices.

“With digital finishing the variable cost is always the cutting time,” says Thompson. “The same amount of material that gets printed on a digital press could drastically change price based on ink applied and the finishing time. We’re running through and generating



“THE APPETITE FOR INDUSTRY 4.0 WILL INCREASE, BUT SO TOO WILL THE THIRST FOR PRODUCTION BENEFITS ON AN ‘EVERYDAY’ SHOPFLOOR.”

different permutations and different ways of doing work in real time talking to the Zund digital cutting table to find out how long the job is going to take to cut. We can then use that information and tie it back to the costs to run the cutting machine.”

Going forward he thinks that leveraging the internet of things will become increasingly commonplace as getting that real time information and feedback from devices will allow printers to make smarter business decisions.

“For the printing industry this is a completely new way of manufacturing,” says Thompson. “You can’t use the old ways with digital printing anymore, so the companies that are going to adapt to software and technology and embrace it instead of resisting it are going to be the future suppliers for brands.”

The PrintFactory also thinks technology could have a huge role to play in the large-format textiles and décor market in the short to medium term.

“There’s been a low uptake on automation there to date, which is not surprising considering the complexities of the workflows involved,” says Toby Burnett, director EMEA and Americas at PrintFactory. “But of all the large-format sectors seeking improvements in overall productivity, textiles has the most potential.”

He believes that profit margins can change due to a greater use of technology in the sector. “The financial gains from reducing fraud - via digital asset management - are tremendous, and the focus on environmental ‘fast fashion’ impact will inevitably shift back up the supply chain, to wasted fabric and ink used in the production process,” says Burnett.

“More broadly speaking, we think the general economic landscape will focus people’s attention on simple gains: the appetite for Industry 4.0 will increase, but so too will the thirst for production benefits on an ‘everyday’ shopfloor.”

Although the economic outlook in the next 12 months may remain uncertain, the good news for all you that run large-format PSPs is that there is a slew of innovative new products and solutions poised to hit the market in 2020 that should make your lives much easier.

2020 VISION

YOUR CAT IS SMARTER THAN AI. TRUE. SO SHOULD YOU IGNORE IT? AI THAT IS, NOT THE CAT!

WALTER HALE BRINGS THE SUBJECT INTO FOCUS AS WE ENTER A NEW DECADE WHERE IT PROMISES TO DOMINATE.

Here are three statements about artificial intelligence (AI). Only one of them is true. Kind of.

- 1. With AI, autonomous vehicles will be able to drive in all kinds of weather without human intervention.**
- 2. AI-powered robots can read as well as human beings.**
- 3. Your cat is smarter than AI.**

You guessed it - the statement that is closest to the truth, as French neuroscientist Nicolas P Rougier has suggested recently, is that your feline friend probably is more intelligent than a robot. Before we pit cat against machine, let's explore the other two statements that are both fake news.

You may be puzzled by the claim about the limits of autonomous vehicles, especially given that some of these groundbreaking machines are already being tested on British roads. Yet when pressed by the American business magazine 'Fortune', John Krafcik, the CEO of Waymo - which is pioneering this technology on behalf of Alphabet and Google - admitted that he could not foresee a time when these vehicles would be able to drive themselves in any kind of weather without human intervention.

The second item of fake news was perpetrated recently by Microsoft and parroted by a credulous or complacent media. As two American scientists Gary Marcus and Ernest Davis noted on the news site Quartz, in response to a Microsoft press release suggesting that robots can read a document - and answer questions about it - as well as we can: "This sounded much more revolutionary than it really was. Dig deeper and you would discover that the AI in question was given one of the easiest reading tests you can imagine - one in which all of the answers were directly spelled out in the text. The test was about highlighting relevant words not comprehending text."

They argue that if we gave AI this statement to read: "Two children, Chloe and Alexander, went for a walk. They both saw a dog and a tree. Alexander also saw a cat and pointed it out to Chloe. She went to pet the cat." and we asked AI who went out for a walk, it could tell us. If we asked it whether Chloe liked cats - which we would assume because she went to stroke one - AI would be nonplussed. As Marcus and Davis conclude: "Inferring what isn't said is at the heart of reading and it simply wasn't tested." This narrative isn't, they suggest, that unusual: "Practically every time one of the tech titans puts out a press release, we get a reprise of this same phenomenon: minor progress portrayed as revolution."

This kind of hype makes it hard for businesses to know where they stand. It's hard to assess how close AI is to changing the ways companies operate or how people work if we are continually being fed disinformation, Panglossian optimism and spurious claims. That has to be a concern for many print service providers have been caught on the bleeding edge of technology when they thought they were

HYPE MAKES IT HARD FOR BUSINESSES TO KNOW WHERE THEY STAND. IT'S HARD TO ASSESS HOW CLOSE AI IS TO CHANGING THE WAYS COMPANIES OPERATE OR HOW PEOPLE WORK

on the leading edge. All of which brings us back to the cat.

If a cat played a computer at chess, there could only ever be one winner. Yet if you judged your cat and a robot on their ability to walk properly, the cat would win every time. Indeed, the difficulty of getting robots to move in sync was one of the reasons Boeing decided to abandon full automation at the plant north of Seattle where it is producing its 777X jetliner and give the robots some human help. That is not a one-off. Even a visionary like Elon Musk, who wanted to automate as much of the car manufacturing process as possible, had to scale down his ambitions to meet his production targets.

This is one reason why, even though the totally automated print factory was being talked about in Japan in the mid-1980s, so few of them have materialised. The variety of jobs, specifications and substrates wide-format printers use have left many of them sceptical about the possibility of complete automation. At the recent Widthwise Round Table, there was a general consensus that AI-driven automation might be an option if you had machines that were effectively running the same kind of job all the time but, in reality, the participants wondered, how often was that likely to happen? As runs get shorter, and orders more varied, the bar for AI and automation keeps getting raised and none of the printers around the table expected themselves - or their competitors - to be running a fully automated print plant within the next decade.

There is an argument that these are the kind of challenges that face every emerging technology. After all, it took the humble lightbulb 120 years to become commercially viable. It was invented by British chemist Humphry Davy in the early 1800s, passed from one researcher to another until, in 1879, Thomas Edison figured out how to make an incandescent light bulb people would actually buy. Even then, it took another 40 years for electrical utilities to become stable, profitable businesses and they did that by looking beyond the light bulb and wooing consumers with electric toasters, electric irons and electric trams. Though the resources being devoted to AI are exponentially greater than those dedicated the lightbulb, the tasks being asked of machine learning, robots and all other kinds of AI are also exponentially more complex. If we recognise that problem, the argument goes, we should be wary of writing off AI too soon.

And we shouldn't write off AI at all. It is already clear that it can prove immensely useful in gathering, vetting and analysing vast amounts of data, which, if managers are smart enough to use it, should make it easier to make better decisions. Imagine the impact on productivity - and morale - if all of that data that is being painstakingly entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets could be pulled in automatically and presented in an easy to digest form that required no greater technical expertise



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 PRINTERS AROUND

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 FULLY AUTOMATED

 PRINT PLANT WITHIN

 THE NEXT DECADE.





of the employee than the ability to read and deduce. The potential that comes from allying AI and the Internet of Things to improve production processes - from managing web-to-print more effectively to diagnosing faults before they occur - could also be transformational.

Yet let's not get carried away by the hype. Marcus and Davis say that when another breakthrough is proclaimed, we should ask - stripping away the rhetoric - what AI actually did, how general the result is (for example, a robot could may be able to read a paragraph of Lord Of The Rings but could it also understand the news?), whether we can duplicate the result, and whether performing that task is an academic exercise or something that could be useful in the real world. And when a press release proclaims that robots can do something better than humans, it seems pertinent to ask which humans and how much better.

Their last suggestion, which takes us right back to driverless vehicles, is: how robust is the system? "Could it work as well with other data sets, without massive amounts of retraining?" they ask. How well, for example,

could the system driving an autonomous vehicle cope with a detour that is not on its map?

French neuroscientist Rougier says that there is a fundamental flaw in AI that, despite the rapid development of machine learning, has still to be overcome. The ability to recognise an object, he argues, is not the same as understanding it. So if you fed a million images of a cat into the system, the algorithm could identify the species but it would still not be able to tell you what your pet was trying to communicate if it purred or rubbed itself against your legs. In contrast, show one kitten to a young child and they would instantly be able to recognise any other cat (even if they didn't know the word yet). Rougier argues that for AI to be truly intelligent it needs to be able to ground digital symbols in the real world. It's not enough to have sense, it needs somehow to acquire the senses we rely on to make sense of the world.

Not everyone agrees with Rougier but you can see his point. The bottom line, as Marcus and Davis conclude, is that: "AI really is coming eventually but it is a lot further away than most people think."

What technological developments will be the most crucial going into the new decade?



Jan De Roeck

Marketing director, industry relations and strategy, Esko



Dan Tyler

Founder, Vism

Which technical developments do you think will have the biggest impact on large-format print companies over the next decade?

The digitalisation of large-format converters, especially in those areas that are lagging at the moment, is likely to have the most impact, particularly with regard to customer communications, internal communications, job planning and estimating. The entire upstream part of the production workflow, which I refer to as job onboarding, needs to become more efficient. Once the data and its metadata (data about the job) are available, processing and production is fast and efficient already, but can be subject to further robotisation and automation.

Automation. Automation. Automation. With large-format well on its way to being the commodity that commercial litho became long ago, the printers that will thrive for years to come will be those that automate where they can and retrain team members in to client facing, creative or project led roles.

There's lots of talk about artificial intelligence. By 2030, how significant will this be for large-format businesses?

AI is a means to drive and increase automation throughout the entire door-to-door process of a large-format business, not just in the press room or in the prepress department. Based on aggregated and curated data from various disparate but connected systems, smart workflows and connected devices, AI will assess how jobs are acquired and processed and will then make decisions based on that historical data. Human roles will be focussed on tasks that add value to the process, while artificial intelligence will take tasks that can be automated away from people. Large-format businesses are in no way different in being susceptible to such changes and will reap the benefits of this technological evolution in the years ahead.

I suspect a lot will look to understand how machine learning could help them become more efficient, but it will be interesting to see how quick the industry is to adopt it. Whilst it will play a big part in some businesses, I'm not sure it will be all that widely used by then.

In 2030, do you think robots will be in commonplace in wide-format printing?

Observing the speed of innovation and realising what robots can already do today, I believe that our current definition of the term 'robot' will have changed by 2030. I don't think today we have a term available in our vocabulary to adequately describe how robots will be used in our industry. The analogy is that in the 1930s, we were referring to an automobile or car with the term 'horseless carriage'. I believe that robots will start to take up more complex and diverse tasks and when connected, the factory of the future may well be a complete robot-cell - you input raw materials and data and what comes out at the other end will be the finished product - the large-format printshop as one large robot."

Absolutely. With a number of manufacturers already showing off some seriously impressive robots at the last few big shows it's easy to see a lot of the higher volume, repeat work type businesses benefitting from these. And in another 10 years the speed of these machines will no doubt have increased significantly.

If you could give owners of large-format print companies one piece of advice about how to prepare for technological advances in the next 10 years, what would it be?

The keywords are 'digital transformation' of the business. In order for a large-format printer to define where they will be/want to be in the years ahead, it is important to define where one is on the journey of digital transformation today. Digital transformation is a continuous improvement game, not a journey with a well-defined and finite goal. Digital maturity models can be used to assess the current status of digital transformation of the entire business, not just the production floor. And your business may well be at different maturity stages for distinct parts of the business, but only a documented insight into the current status will provide insight to the next steps to be undertaken. If this doesn't happen, it will at least provide a solid basis for the management to develop a digital transformation strategy that is not built on assumptions of the future, but on assessments of reality today."

Be careful of taking a 'well, the way we do it works' approach. Too many have done so and fallen by the wayside. If you want to grow, stay relevant, and ultimately thrive, you'll only be able to do this if you embrace the opportunities that these advances will bring.

Wondering what your company will look like by 2030, and how technology will have changed it?

Here's some current thinking on how things are likely to shape-up over the next ten years.



David van Driessche

CTO, Four Pees and executive director,
Ghent Workgroup

It's tempting to point to this or that technical advancement for printing or finishing equipment as to what will have the most impact, but I don't believe that would be correct. Yes, machines are going to get faster, more ecological, and more flexible. That is a given. But I believe the biggest impact for companies will come from software.

If you want to make a profit, you have to be able to focus on printing jobs quickly and with high quality. Standardisation and automation are the concepts you need to accomplish this. This is a trend we've seen in the commercial print sector during the last 15 - 20 years, and one that large-format print is overdue for. Companies focusing on how they manage the complete job cycle, from attracting the order in the first place, to delivering it to the customer, are going to win. Yes, good printing devices are important. But the real key to better margins and efficiency comes from software, not hardware.

There is a huge difference between 'clever' software and software that contains real artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence implies that the software gets smarter over time and learns from, for example, the input from operators. What we see so far is that software gets cleverer all the time, but there are very few examples of software that really learns after being installed. Such software could solve interesting problems in our industry.

Think about quality control of incoming jobs or job planning taking all constraints in a company into account. But given the challenges on developing artificial intelligence software and the relatively small areas where they could make a difference, I think ten years' time is not enough to make a significant impact, but I firmly believe artificial intelligence will hugely impact the way we drive to our printing companies in the next ten years!

No. Large-format printers tend to deal with widely varied jobs, and to be able to use the type of robots we have today, you need painstaking standardisation, together with high enough volume to justify the investment and get good ROI.

Very large companies or companies who manage to specialise highly could be an exception, but I don't see robots becoming a significant part of most large-format print workflows any time soon.

Educate yourself and the people who work for you! Read about what's happening, talk to colleagues and competitors, go to conferences, listen to podcasts - where you find the information isn't important, but make sure you educate yourself.

Even better, don't just learn about your industry or the part of it you're focusing on. We humans are excellent problem solvers and incredibly good at making connections between disparate pieces of information. But that only works if you feed your mind with enough information to begin with.

A (Belgian) VIGC study showed a direct correlation between those companies thriving in their market and those spending time and money on education. So don't get caught up in day-to-day operations. Broaden your mind!



Bryan Manwaring

Director of product marketing,
Onyx Graphics

A trend we have seen grow tremendously in recent years for digital inkjet large-format printing is the need for automation. With the increasingly diverse print applications for this market, the types of technical developments are likely to be equally diverse. PSPs of all sizes are striving to meet evolving customer needs as well as to stay competitive and profitable. PSPs look to and will continue to look to automation to help achieve that.

For large-format printing, the term 'artificial intelligence' is being used to describe automation and optimisation algorithms to improve production efficiency so that PSPs can remain competitive in an already competitive market. Speaking just about ONYX software, artificial intelligence already exists in the form of ONYX Hub aggregated print production data tools to alert print companies about ink usage and media waste. In addition, ONYX software algorithms assist in nesting layouts to conserve media and reduce waste and produce barcodes to automate print and cut workflows. Our latest version can now automate colour management workflows and make ink reduction calculations without manual iterative ICC profiling. While at present, these small steps into intelligence are emerging in large-format digital inkjet printing, we expect this to grow and continue in the coming years.

As a software provider in the wide-format digital inkjet space, we aren't in a position to comment fully on this question.

It may be advisable to first assess what is most important to the business and where you want that business to be in 10 years before making a software purchasing decision. For example, does the developer regularly release updates to meet the changing technological needs of their print shop? Is the company's solutions ahead of the technology curve for industry standards that meet evolving user needs? Do they offer end-to-end workflows for automation throughout print production? Can they offer solutions that scale and grow with the business? More specifically, is their solution a full 64-bit product across all applications not just a Rip? Do they offer a network license solution to meet changing daily production needs? Can they support all their devices both now and in the future? Do they offer fully automated workflow capabilities? What colour management options do they have? Can they automate that colour management across devices without having to re-profile? What about other tools, such as those providing efficiency business data or further print production automation can they provide? All these questions and more are just some of the things print companies might want to consider.

Angel AWARDS 2019

ALLELUIA! 2019 HAS SEEN SOME REAL INNOVATION IN LARGE-FORMAT PRODUCTS AND SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT. ONCE AGAIN WE HIGHLIGHT THOSE THAT THE EDITORIAL TEAM CONSIDER WORTHY OF PARTICULAR PRAISE. THEY ARE...

INCA ONSET X HS

FUJIFILM

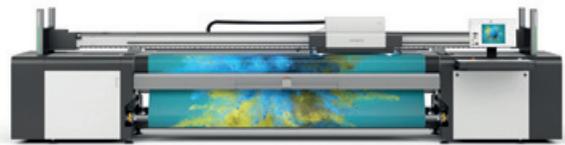
This high-speed range comprises two models, the Onset X2 HS and the Onset X3 HS, and uses a single cycle mode that optimises print jetting profiles and jetting frequencies to deliver up to 1450m²/hr. There's automated on- and off-loading systems, UV shutter alignment and table skin adjustments to take average job set-up time down to around 30 seconds. The machine uses Fujifilm's Uvijet OX ink for adhesion to media like corrugated board, packaging and non-PVC rigid plastics.



KARIBU

SWISSPRINT

swissQPrint's unveiled what is its first ever roll-to-roll printer at Fespa Global in May and worldwide deliveries started in September. The 3.4m wide UV inkjet printer, earmarked for the soft-signage market, uses NVC-free and Greenguard Gold certified inkset, and through tests specified by the ISO 20690 standard, Fogra has confirmed the printer is highly energy efficient.



STITCH S

HP

The 3.2m Stitch S1000 textile printer made its debut at Fespa Global, alongside the 1.62m (64in) Stitch S300 and S500, and marks HP's entry into the dye-sub market. Since the introduction Caldera has announced Rip certification and support for the series, having developed TextilePro printer drivers specifically for the range. The workflow suite has been designed to give HP Stitch users the ability to control, colour, ink and substrates. Onyx too has had its Rip software certified for the HP Stitch textile printer line.



JFX200-2513 EX

MIMAKI

This UV flatbed printer is successor to the JFX200-2513 and is substantially faster than previous JFX models. The new machine, which has a 250cm x 130cm print size, is said to be 280% quicker in new draft mode when printing in four colours plus white, and 100% faster for all other print modes than previous JFX printers. The entry-level printer also has Mimaki's 2.5D Texture Maker for textured effect print without lengthy file preparation.



TRUEVIS VG2 SERIES

ROLAND DG

Introduced early in 2019, Roland has won a number of awards for these 64in and 54in wide-format eco-solvent inkjet printer/cutters that incorporate FlexFire printheads, have a new colour management preset called True Rich Color, and use a new generation TR2 inkset that now includes orange and is certified Greenguard Gold. Also new are middle pinch rollers that raise automatically prior to starting the cutting process, allowing media to be cut without the rollers travelling over the printed area. An optional take-up unit supports two modes according to the type of media chosen. The included VersaWorks 6 Rip software supports the latest Harlequin Rip dual core engine with PDF 2.0 and native 64-bit processing.



VELO BLADE

VIVID

This system combines cutting, creasing and perforating in a single pass, and has auto-feed, conveyor belt and collection tray for unattended production. It handles stocks and sizes of between 210mm x 297mm to 600mm x 400mm, and cuts at up to 1000mm/s. Gantry mounted vacuum clamps operate alongside air separation jets, feeding stock into production - loads from 100mm up to 1.5mm or 1200gsm can be handled. A CCD camera picks out registration marks to align the cutting head then a tungsten steel blade carries out the cutting process, whilst the vacuum-grip conveyor belt holds stock in place. It is then automatically stacked in the collection tray.



ROSETTA RIP**SHIRAZ SOFTWARE**

The Shiraz Rosetta Rip is an end-to-end Web-to-print solution for the large-format market. It includes new image streaming technology that business development director Ramin Shahbaz

likens to Spotify and that allows users of the software to “securely and transparently” stream images for printing. The product was launched on Shiraz’s new dedicated website at the start of July and can be tested for 15 days in fully working mode. Lease pricing is from £30/month.

**SPECTRO LFP QB TEXTILE EDITION****BARBIERI**

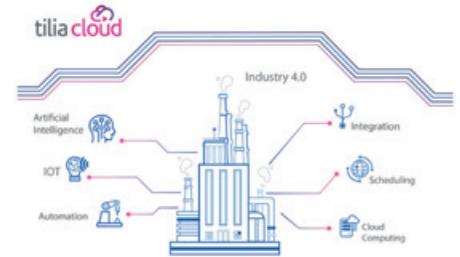
With Spectro LFP qb Textile Edition, first shown at Fespa Global 2019, Barbieri has delivered a colour measuring device that can handle automatic and spot measurements in dye-sub print environments. The spectrophotometer has a large measurement aperture, special holders and an air blowing system to prevent textile fibres contaminating the optics and the camera-based patch recognition.

**WALLSHARK****KERNOW**

WallShark is a self-adhesive, PVC-free, and scratch resistant film developed from the floor graphics film FloorShark, using the same shark-skin ink-receptive technology. It has been developed to look like a high-end quality traditional wallcovering and can be printed with all types of wide-format inks.

**TILIA CLOUD****TILIA LABS**

At Printing United 19 Tilia Labs showed Industry 4.0 platform tilia Cloud - coinciding with the announcement of its first formal IoT integration with Zund Cut Center. Designed to support and facilitate the opportunities of Industry 4.0, tilia Cloud is a secure but open framework that “aims to revolutionise the way print companies connect, access and manage data”. It gathers and stores data in real-time from connected equipment and moulding that data into meaningful information that allows actions to be automated and decisions made instantaneously.

**UFABRIK ECO****CMYUK**

Launched this autumn as part of CMYUK’s own-brand media portfolio, this is a woven canvas made from recycled plastic bottles and suitable for wallcoverings, display graphics and tension frame systems. It has B1 flame retardancy and is compatible with latex, solvent or UV inks. The media is available in various roll widths up to 310cm. Other products are expected to be added to the range in 2020.

**SPECIAL MENTION - SOYANG/BLUE CASTLE FOR THEIR PVC BANNER RECYCLE SCHEME**

Soyang Europe partnered with waste management specialist Blue Castle earlier this year to create a PVC Recycling Membership Scheme. Test sites, such as Gardners, have been impressed by what is the first step towards a very real recycling solution to the use of PVC banner material, so widely used within the printing industry but not recyclable.





Jenny Matthew

Organisers of Sign and Digital UK (SDUK) are promising “an all new show in a new hall” when it takes place on 28 - 30 April, 2020. A new team has been put in place to deliver what they promise will be “a fresh show with a new website, new layout, new features and new stand options”. But is so much change code for “panic, we’re in trouble”? I met up with new event director Jenny Matthew to get her strategic take on developments.

By Lesley Simpson

To be blunt Jenny, questions are being asked over the event’s ongoing viability. You have replaced long-term event director Rudi Blackett in the role, there’s a new marketing team, and everything has seemingly been thrown up in the air with the aim of delivering a show that will have an “appeal beyond its core audience”. What does the big shake-up signify?

The show is evolving. First let me say we’re not panicking. The show has a 30-year heritage. I previously worked on it between 2002 and 2007, and it’s changed phenomenally since then. There have been some natural staff changes at [SDUK organiser] Faversham House. Rudi has been the show director for nearly 18 years and the thought was ‘let’s just get some new thinking’.

I was working on another portfolio for Faversham, and because I knew the show, I was asked to visit the 2018 and 2019 shows just to talk to some of the exhibitors and get a feel for how the event had changed since I had worked on it. One thing led to another and timings were right for me and for Faversham so the decision was made that I’d come in and work alongside Rudi, who has decades of experience in this industry and is now account director with a core focus on strategic sales. When we last worked together the show he was group sales manager and I was group marketing manager so we have a good relationship and work really well together.

We have also had other staff changes - somebody has retired, there have been some internal promotions and two team members have moved across to another show portfolio, and we have a brand new marketing team as you say, which is really exciting because of course that brings fresh ideas and a fresh approach.

So everyone has been replaced on the marketing team?

Well Jane was with us for seven years and she’s moved on to new challenges. So yes, we have Zoe who’s head of brand portfolio, we’ve got Helena who is our marketing exec, and we’re looking to fill another

senior marketing role. So everything hasn’t been thrown up in the air - we’re just looking at every single aspect of the show, and we’ve been doing that with a new team, with fresh eyes.

We do an awful lot of research each year too. I’ve personally been out visiting some of our visitor audience and what we’re delivering is what the industry is telling us they want. So it might look like there’s a lot of change - and there is - but we’re keeping the core appeal of the show the same, we’re just expanding it.

How much are you swayed by existing - and potential - exhibitors wanting to reach new client bases when it comes to reshaping the show?

We always listen to our customers, who are our visitors and our exhibitors. We take on board their focus, where their businesses are going and who they want to reach.

Sign UK is a much loved show, and it’s stood the test of time, and that’s because Faversham has always consulted the industry.

So are the exhibitors pushing for an expanded visitor base to the show?

Not aggressively, but we are working with them on finding out who they strategically want to get to.

We have huge investment happening in our data, and encourage exhibitors to say ‘we particularly want to get this type of person’ or ‘this level of person’ and then build that into our show development strategy.

A good example in relation to the 2020 show, is that a lot of exhibitors are providing products and services around textile printing - wallcovering, décor etc - a huge area that is growing for many reasons. So this year we’re introducing ‘TextileTech’, which is a dedicated area within SDUK.

The exhibitors want to sell to existing customers and typical Sign UK visitor, such as wide-format printers - who want to expand their business and open new revenue streams, and perhaps get into embroidery for example.



event organiser, SDUK

How important is it to the show's continuation that it attracts a new visitor audience - such as those you've earmarked from textile production through to end users in creative, retail, lifestyle, education and local government?

It's not a make or break situation that we attract new visitors, but we do have to evolve the show, and yes, exhibitors want to reach new potential buyers too. That is why we're investing so heavily in the features around the show - such as the applications galleries. We do need to shout about what's at the show to attract those new people.

Sign and Digital has always been a buying show, and always will be. So it's important to keep the visitor audience fresh. Our stats show that 43% of visitors in 2019 were new visitors - so they hadn't attended the show in 2018, 2017 or 2016. And 86% of those visitors are involved in buying decisions, incredibly important when it comes to delivering the right people for exhibitors.

So do you see SDUK becoming a more generalised print show? We've seen what happened to Ipex!

Yeah, that's not a great model to emulate! But we have no plans to pigeonhole Sign and Digital. I think the beauty of the show is that it has such a breadth of products and services and gets such a breadth of visitors coming through the door. But we're not going to become just another print show. It is called Sign and Digital, and those people are still our core visitors, but like all shows we need to attract newcomers with features and attractions that are perhaps a bit more focussed on their types of business.

I would say our 'core' visitors are getting a more structured event in 2020. One of the things that came through from our visitor research this year, was that print companies wanted so to see certain things. Those things were at the show, it was just that they hadn't found them. So what we're trying to do with the next event is be a bit more organised and better signpost things.

For instance, apart from Textile Tech, we'll have a textile trail, whereby we badge those companies that have

something of interest to those visitors who have a specific interest in textile printing. A lot of our exhibitors have a preferred position and don't want to move so we can't put them all together, but we can make it more obvious for visitors as to who's doing what.

Also, we'll have some technical tours in 2020 - one of which will be wide-format, which will help those wanting to get into wide-format, or expand what they're doing with the technology.

SDUK is a stalwart on many of my readers' calendars, but what would you say to those who fear that the new-look event may make it less of a 'must attend' national large-format print orientated affair in 2020 - especially given it's just a month after Fespa Global.

We always have this show cycle and we always do fine. Also, our last lot of stats showed that 52% of visitors to our event hadn't been to a competitive show in the last two years.

Mentioning Fespa, 2020 sees Drupa too - and manufacturers are telling me they are doing fewer shows anyway - so how is that impacting SDUK?

Again, we've been through this show cycle before and at the moment all indications are that all the main manufacturers will have a presence at Sign and Digital UK 2020 - whether that's exhibiting on their own or through resellers. They'll find a way to do they show - they always have done. We are aware that the cost of everything is going up and we have some bespoke marketing packages this year to help support their presence at the show. And we stress that exhibiting isn't just about the three show days - the promotion begins the minute they sign up and continues post show.

What needs to happen at SDUK 2020 for us to see another show in 2021?

We need to maintain the quality of visitors we've been getting year in, year out - which we will do. And we need to make sure that we are listening to the industry and delivering what they want.

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LOOKING AT
EVERY SINGLE
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A MINDFUL MOVE

AS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES MOUNT, THE PRINTING CHARITY IS ROLLING-OUT A 24-HOUR HELPLINE. CHIEF EXECUTIVE NEIL LOVELL EXPLAINS.

While ‘innovation’ in the print sector is usually associated with technology, it can also positively influence staff wellbeing and productivity by creating a culture that breaks down the barriers to tackling mental health challenges in the workplace.

Mental ill health is the leading cause of sickness absence in the UK, costing an average of £1,035 per employee per year. Life has its ups and downs and according to the mental health charity, Mind, every year one in four of us will experience a mental health problem, the most common being anxiety and depression. Its research shows that work is the biggest cause of stress in people’s lives, more so than debt or financial problems.

Figures from Mind show that one in five people take a day off work due to stress and 42% have considered resigning due to workplace stress. The fact that 95% of employees calling in sick with stress gave a different reason shows mental health is still a taboo subject in many workplaces.

“WE HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY BY EXTENDING ACCESS TO A DIRECT, 24-HOUR, BROADER RANGE OF PRACTICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AS A NATURAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CURRENT NINE-TO-FIVE HELPLINE”

Employers have a clear responsibility to look after their staff, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because research shows that supporting positive mental health at work is good for business and productivity. It is also true that it can be difficult for employers to know how to respond when someone is in crisis or recognise the signs of an impending crisis. According to Mind, 56% of employers would like to do more to improve staff wellbeing but do not feel they have the right training and guidance.

In a print sector made up predominately of SMEs, some companies are supporting staff well, while others lack the time, confidence, and resources to focus on issues other than day-to-day operations. Moreover, in a male-dominated workforce, men are less likely than women to talk openly about their problems.

As the sector’s occupational charity, The Printing Charity is here to help people of all ages in the sector in genuine need and make a positive difference to their lives. We have long thought our support should not be restricted to financial help, so we carried out research about the impact our grants have for our beneficiaries to help inform our future activities. Through an engagement programme of interviewee-led, semi-structured interviews, the value of being able to talk to someone was the very powerful message we received from our beneficiaries.

Our takeaway was to look at how other benevolent charities are responding to changing needs, including addressing the growing awareness of the impact of mental health problems. It confirmed to us that we have a role to play by extending access to a direct, 24-hour, broader range of practical and emotional support as a natural development of our current nine-to-five helpline offer.

Against the backdrop of an ever-changing sector, a growing awareness that employees can struggle to get the support they need with mental health challenges, and our own insights from the people we help, we have been looking at the best way to develop our helpline. This has involved identifying the right partner with British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) trained counsellors and Citizens Advice style information specialists to run our dedicated helpline.

There are no silver bullets to the challenge of dealing with mental health but having someone to talk to is a good first step. The type of support you can access through our free, confidential helpline offers that 24/7. It is not intended to be a panacea for all problems but it does provide vital, in the moment support with the potential for counselling where it is felt that approach will help. The service will also help with more practical life challenges from dealing with a family breakdown, caring for an elderly relative, and childcare to debt, bereavement, and finding out about your consumer rights.

We are now in our first phase of the roll-out with large and small companies in the sector to gain an insight into the best way to introduce it to their employees. We will be looking at the second phase of companies to talk to about this service in 2020 and long-term we see this as being sector wide.

If you would like to find out more about how your company can get involved in the helpline email: sophie@theprintingcharity.org.uk

FIVE GO ON AN ADVENTURE



WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR LARGE-FORMAT PRINT COMPANIES IN 2020? WE BROUGHT TOGETHER FIVE COMPANY CHIEFS TO DISCUSS DOING BUSINESS TODAY AND IN THE COMING DECADE.

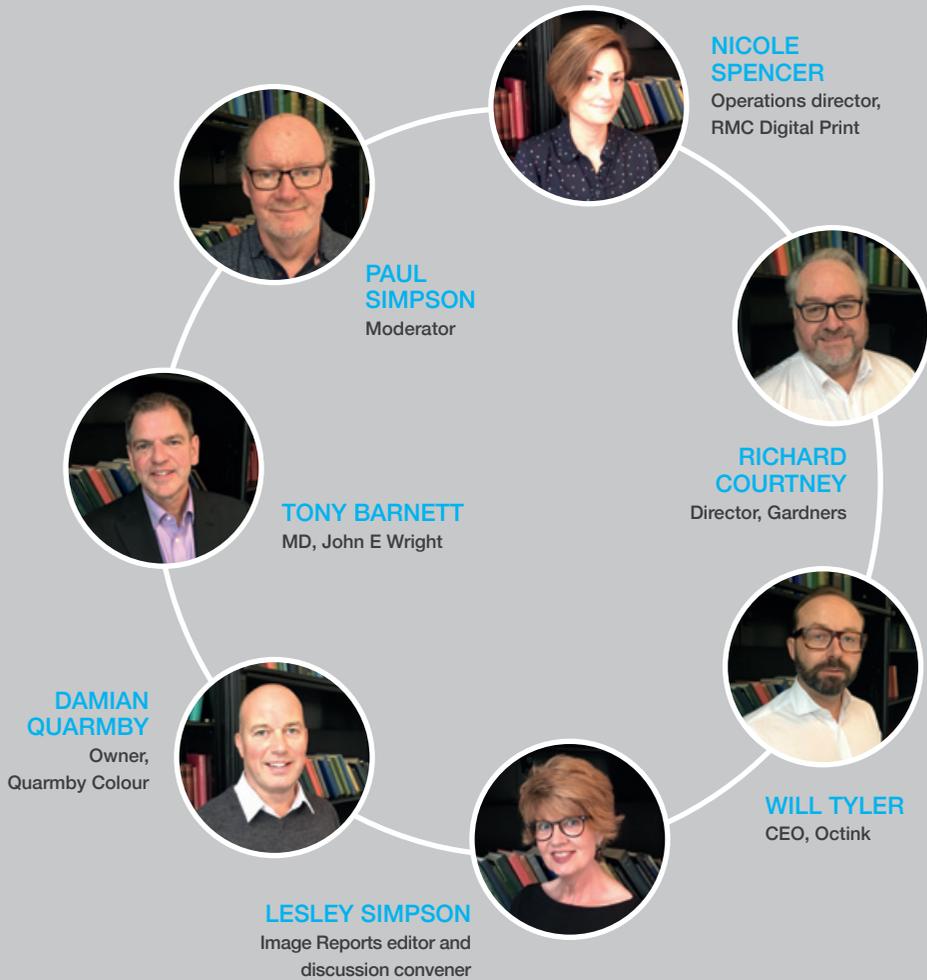
Never has it been more apparent that there's no "one size fits all" when it comes to running a successful large-format print business than at this year's Widthwise Round Table discussion on the state of the sector.

Having brought together five print chiefs from companies of different sizes and focus (£1.5m turnover, 15 staff Quarmby; 3m turnover, 20 staff RMC; £6m turnover, 80 staff John E Wright; 16m turnover, 95 staff Octink; 30.5m, 120 staff Gardners) the mood was set by the key findings of the Image Reports annual Widthwise poll, undertaken at the start of 2019. As you will know if you've read the subsequent Widthwise Report (free download at: <https://www.imagereportsmag.co.uk/widthwise>) - or from the key data panel on the right if not - the upshot of that survey was a pervading sense of optimism, and that was reflected in the opening comment around the table some nine months later. As you might expect, not all the participants agreed all the time on where the opportunities and pitfalls lie, but they agreed with Gardners director Richard Courtney's early remark that "in general the outlook is positive".

"Our margin has been under pressure this year, but then we're in transition [the company was acquired by Elagmore in the Spring and is in the process of forming part of the new Hexcite group of operations]," Courtney

KEY WIDTHWISE 2019 DATA

- 247** PSPs responded to the 2019 survey
- 37.65%** turnover under £250,000 and almost half (48.48%) have 5 staff or fewer
- 29.56%** turnover £1m+ (inc. 12.96% £5m+) and 7.29% employ 100+
- 42.51%** said they were feeling very buoyant about their business over that period - another 39.27% mildly optimistic, 14.57% neutral
- 57.89%** said they were confident of growth (33.20% said anxious but less so than in 2018)
For 61.94% the biggest concern was the impact of Brexit, followed by the price of supplies
- 50.61%** said their margins in WF increased in 2018, 36.03% steady, 13.36% down
- 86.64%** expected turnover to grow in 2019, with almost 30% of those saying it would be by more than 10%
- 39.68%** said WF print would not be their main focus by 2029
Asked about areas of which areas PSPs expected to add new services in 2019/20, 64.78% said design and 44.13% said installation services
- 64.37%** said that in total they would spend under £20K on WF tech in 19/20
- 94.74%** said they haven't invested in I4.0 yet. None of them expected to do so in 2019 either



really be made. I actually need one person who can live and breath certain accounts that require our input from design through to installation," agreed Tony Barnett, MD at John E Wright.

"Though print is were we get our turnover we have noticed that, even as a trade printer, we are increasingly being asked if we'll install," said Spencer. "We can organise that, and do, but we don't have our own installation team. We made a lot of investment in print kit in 2019 and doubled the size of our factory so our focus has to be on making that pay."

"Our margins were up around 5% in 2019. The luxury 'projects' are nice but the longer run work offsets that profit, but we need to take that on to keep the machines full," said Quarmby, confident that he'll see increased turnover in 2020.

"For us it's a balancing act," says Barnett. "We have a new Vutek H5 and we know there's £600,000 worth of council work out there in the Nottingham area that we are targeting. We're also targeting universities - we're in at a couple and once you're in one others come to you for work, so they are keeping margins up because we'll do more and more project work for that type of operation. But we couldn't take that on without doing the type of work where the print machines churn out stuff where its more about shipping the right output in the right boxes. We've employed an operations manager to get the best work through the business."

Then Tyler stepped in with: "We are a wide-format printer but we don't seem to have much commonality with the rest of you around the table. We are totally focused on specialist projects. We are project managers really. We can have 30 installation teams out every day - there's hardly any print we produce that we don't install. A lot of what we do is for the property sector and there's a huge amount to take into consideration - road closures for access etc - and we take all that on board. One day I'm sure we ourselves will become an attractive buy for a bigger company, because we can cross sell for them!"

"The reality is that we have to chisel profit out of things," added Courtney. "Continued investment is needed... and an eye to growth markets obviously." So what are they?

"Well we are developing the Hexcite retail proposition because we think here is real opportunity there," continued Courtney. "And there's lots of scope in spaces/venues where we weren't a player a few years ago but where they now appreciate our fire-power."

"I'd say retail has been re-energising too," said Spencer, "but we're also seeing a lot of growth in set and exhibition work." Both Quarmby and Bartlett agreed, again pointing out the demand for more project-orientated PSPs. "The recreation market is a big opportunity too, and we're getting a lot of fleet vehicle wrap calls," added Quarmby.

So what of the oft quoted 'new' vertical markets that kit and consumables manufacturers make so much noise about? "I think large-format has come of age, and the marketing a lot of the suppliers have done has pushed home the message that you can print onto many things," said Courtney. "But a lot of that potential new work is in the B2C market, not B2B. It's a whole different business model. It's like changing our business from what its currently doing to selling cheese!"

It was with general nods of agreement to that last comment and with comment that online storefronts for the B2C marketplace were little more than a headache, that Tyler bucked the trend and said he "wouldn't be in business

continued. "The retail market was our main customer-base some time back, then we got a reputation for being a volume supplier for OOH and now we're moving back into the retail supply space as digital has hit the billboard market - and because the shape of the market has changed. Ten years ago a couple of companies controlled most of the work and that's not the case now. So there's more up for grabs."

"Digital is expensive so we're seeing a lot of print spend," added Will Tyler, CEO of Octink, while pointing out that he believes the sector is nevertheless in for a time of consolidation. "I think we'll see a lot of PSPs fall over. We have had people knocking on our door asking if we're interested in buying them. It's at the point where they're two a penny."

"Yes, I'd rather be a £1m turnover company or a £100m company," replied Courtney, highlighting that was one of the reasons behind the new growth strategy.

"I'm hearing a few middling size companies saying they wish they were small again," added Nicole Spencer, operations director at trade printer RMC Digital Print, and now president of Fespa UK Association. "Many have invested in kit that eats work and they're filling them with work of little margin."

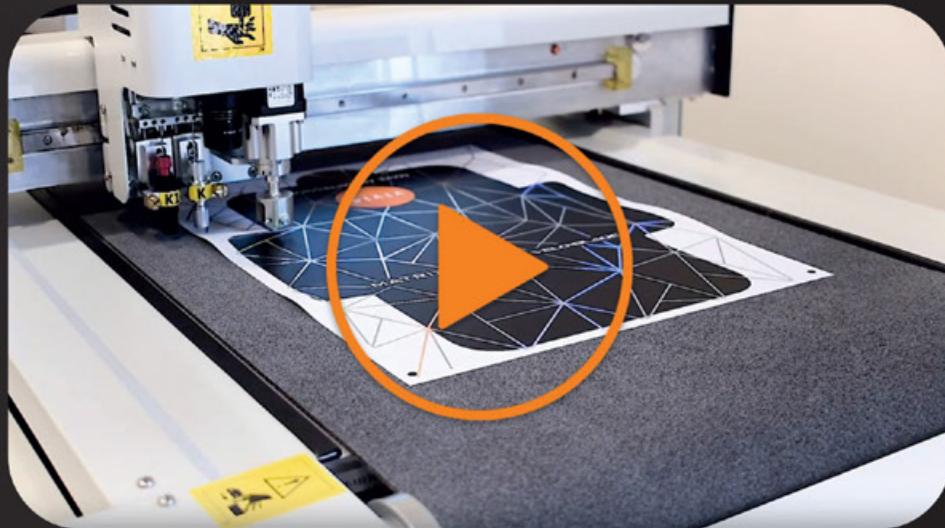
"We might be on the acquisition trail ourselves," piped up Damian Quarmby, owner of family business Quarmby Colour. "But not for another print business - for someone that can help us expand our services into design, fitting, video etc."

"The thing is, straightforward print margins are not fab. - Full project management jobs is where the money can

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if it weren't for emerging new vertical markets". Like digitally printed textiles perchance?

It was a reflection of the 2019 Widthwise research that Round Table participants flagged up their involvement in soft signage, lightboxes and non-illuminated display graphics, wallpaper, and as Spencer pointed out, "any kind of textile print for things like show homes", but there was a deafening silence on the chance of them getting involved in fashion or bedding, curtains etc. "I do think PSPs will get involved in more bespoke interiors textile print, but again, fashion and the high volume stuff is a whole different world," reiterated Courtney.

So where are large-format PSPs focussing? Well, perhaps more than ever on internal efficiencies and management issues. "The thing is, peaks and troughs are really marked now - clients are leaving the decision making process until a minute to midnight. If you get really busy you don't make the money you should because margin flies out of the window due to inefficiencies," said Tyler.

"We actually sell ourselves as a tech company rather than as a print one. We built our front/back end system ourselves because we couldn't find something that fully suited us - and to fulfil our requirement for customer intimacy. In 2020 we want to extend the success of our digital campaign. We have a team of coders who work on online portals. It changes the way work feeds in to us and it's proving a game changer."

"We need to upgrade our MIS," said Spencer. "We have invested a significant amount on print kit and now we need to concentrate on getting the most out that investment. We use Clarity at the moment but we think there must be something that's better. We've been looking and have seen a couple of options similar to what we have, but we're not impressed with anything we've seen to be honest."

"We need MIS too. At the moment it's all done visually and by feel of how things are going. We've got away with it but it's going to catch up with us. We have a small physical set-up and not much room to expand, so we need to figure out how to get more profitable work through the factory," added Quarmby.

"People dismiss the usefulness of a good MIS, but I get a 15 page report at the end of each month and I live my life by it," said Courtney, who at this point also raised the issue of automation requirements. "We need more automation right across the board, from file delivery to job delivery."

So will Industry 4.0 developments help there? "I still don't know what that means," admitted Quarmby, prompting Tyler's explanation that is it "manufacturing excellence using the Internet of Things".

"Using i4.0 technology to find where your bottlenecks are would be very useful," pointed out Barnett, though there was general agreement with Tyler that it won't bring "full lights out automation in our businesses in our lifetimes". "There's too much that can go wrong," summed up Spencer.

Speaking of things going wrong, when it came to asking respondents to the Widthwise poll what their top concerns were for 2019 and beyond, the impact of

A LOT OF POTENTIAL NEW WORK IS IN THE B2C MARKET, NOT B2B. IT'S A WHOLE DIFFERENT BUSINESS MODEL. IT'S LIKE CHANGING OUR BUSINESS FROM WHAT IT'S CURRENTLY DOING TO SELLING CHEESE!

Courtney



Brexit topped the list. A moratorium on that discussion was declared, but had some interesting things to say on what was listed as the next concern - the cost of supplies. Might things finally be moving in the PSPs' favour?

"Substrate prices nearly all went up at one point, but we can now see a lot of willingness to try and help us," said Courtney.

"Yes, we can definitely knock down fabric prices now," added Quarmby. "For us, more of an issue is training. We need to multi-skill so that we have cover for holidays and for the peaks and troughs."

The lack of relevant apprenticeships and training was an issue that got the whole group worked up - an issue that will be explored in detail in future issues of the magazine.

"For us, pay increases are an issue," said Barnett. "If the minimum wage goes up, everyone expects pay rises too."

Keeping to the staff theme, Courtney then brought up an issue highlighted at last year's Round Table too - that of foreign staff exiting Britain. "We've lost a lot of good people because they've gone back to Poland," he said. At which point Spencer made the obvious, but perhaps sometimes overlooked point: "You have to remember to nurture your staff as well as your clients. We've always tried not to have an office vs factory mentality by getting everyone to understand the timelines and requirements of jobs and have a cohesive workforce that understands the pressures across the business. There's a lot going right in this sector, but everyone involved needs to understand what could go wrong and not jeopardise the hard work required to make companies successful."



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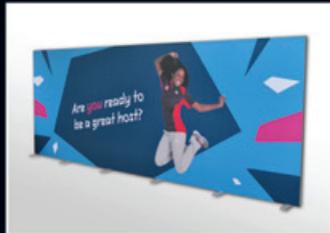


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TAKING THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

SUSTAINABILITY AND BEING ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE IS ABOUT MORE THAN OFFERING PVC ALTERNATIVES AND BEING WASTE WISE - AND IT SEEMS PSPS ARE TAKING THAT ON BOARD.

How many environmental accreditations have you got? There was a time when companies used to collect them like badges in the Scouts or Guides. Ecolabel estimates that there are now 88 accreditations available in the UK, with different schemes covering such specific aspects of sustainability as energy, fuel efficiency, water, recycling and CO2 emissions. They all serve a purpose but an increasing number of British wide-format print companies are looking beyond such schemes not because they necessarily believe it will be good for their business but because they believe it will be good for the planet.

“When we used to talk about environmental accreditations, it was a box-ticking exercise - we did it because we felt our customers wanted, or expected, us to. Now I think people genuinely want to do their best for the planet,” said Richard Courtney, director of Gardners, at the Image Reports Round Table convened to discuss the state of the industry in the light of the 2019 Widthwise Report. “There has definitely been a change of attitude. It seems intrinsic now to us to be greener, to want to save the planet for future generations. We have all become morally more responsible.”

For many printers, the sense of moral responsibility was driven not by their customers’ expectations, but by their children’s expectations. One managing director recently admitted to feeling a sense of shame on behalf of his sons and daughters when he walks through his factory and sees how much PVC they are using. Finding a greener substrate, which has the same visual impact as PVC, is at the top of his agenda for 2020. At the same time, there is a focus on the need to increase the amount of the material that is recycled. As Nicole Spencer, operations director of RMC Digital Print, pointed out at the Round Table, significant progress has been made on this topic: “Companies like Blue Castle are doing things in terms of PVC recycling that couldn’t be done even a couple of years ago.” Her company, a trade printer, also donates print waste to Scrapstore where it is re-used in various activities, from creative and educational, to social and therapeutic.

IT SEEMS
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There was a consensus around the table that investing in electric vehicles was an obvious win-win-win - good for the planet, good for the print service provider’s brand and, with lower running costs per mile compared to petrol and diesel, good for the bottom line. The financial incentive will be more alluring from April 2020 onwards when the government introduces bigger tax breaks for electric vehicles.

There is conflicting evidence about how ready the nation’s wide-format buyers are to take their share of moral responsibility. The 2019 Widthwise survey showed that almost four out of ten print service providers in the UK said their clients never asked them about environmental issues.

Some sectors showed greater concern than others. Being in the media spotlight when it comes to sustainability, supermarkets are especially likely to seek clarity on the environmental impact of the print they buy. Local governments also need to be seen to be doing the right thing. Out of home advertising has also been transformed by not entirely convincing claims made on behalf of ‘eco-friendly’ digital billboards, a shift that has prompted some printers to switch from vinyl banners, which usually end up in landfill, to paper alternatives and to explore the feasibility of using low-carbon concrete for billboard bases.

Yet even in such markets as architecture, where you would assume that the pressure to be as green as possible is immense, printers say their advice on how to reduce the environmental impact of a particular job is often politely welcomed and then ignored. If the wide-format print industry is going to do its bit to save the planet, it’s going to have to change customer mindsets.

At the same time, digital printers probably need to take a broader view of sustainability. As Will Tyler, CEO of Octlink, pointed out: “Sustainability is more than just about the environment, it’s about being corporately responsible, about how you embrace your local community, how closely you work with local charities, social enterprises and schools and what you are doing that makes a real difference to the lives of your staff and the neighbourhoods your company works in.”



a. Creating a virtual view

Stunning curved large-format tension fabric faced LED light boxes were designed, manufactured and installed at the marketing suite of the Canaletto building in central London to create this illuminated display showing virtual window views from the upper level apartments.

The curved fronted backlit panorama graphic was created to a width of 16.5m by using two lightboxes manufactured in multiple sections which were joined together on site on the ground level showroom apartment. Daytime and nighttime photos were taken from up high and then supplied to W&Co to enlarge and print onto the continuous backlit fabric graphic at true-to-life size.



b. Tiger feat

This 'Striped Express' tiger-themed metro train was launched in Moscow this summer to raise awareness of the endangered Amur tiger. Creative Team Print used its HP Latex 570 for the job, which involved wrapping the front of the train with a tiger head image and the sides of the eight carriages with tiger images.

c. Helping the heroes

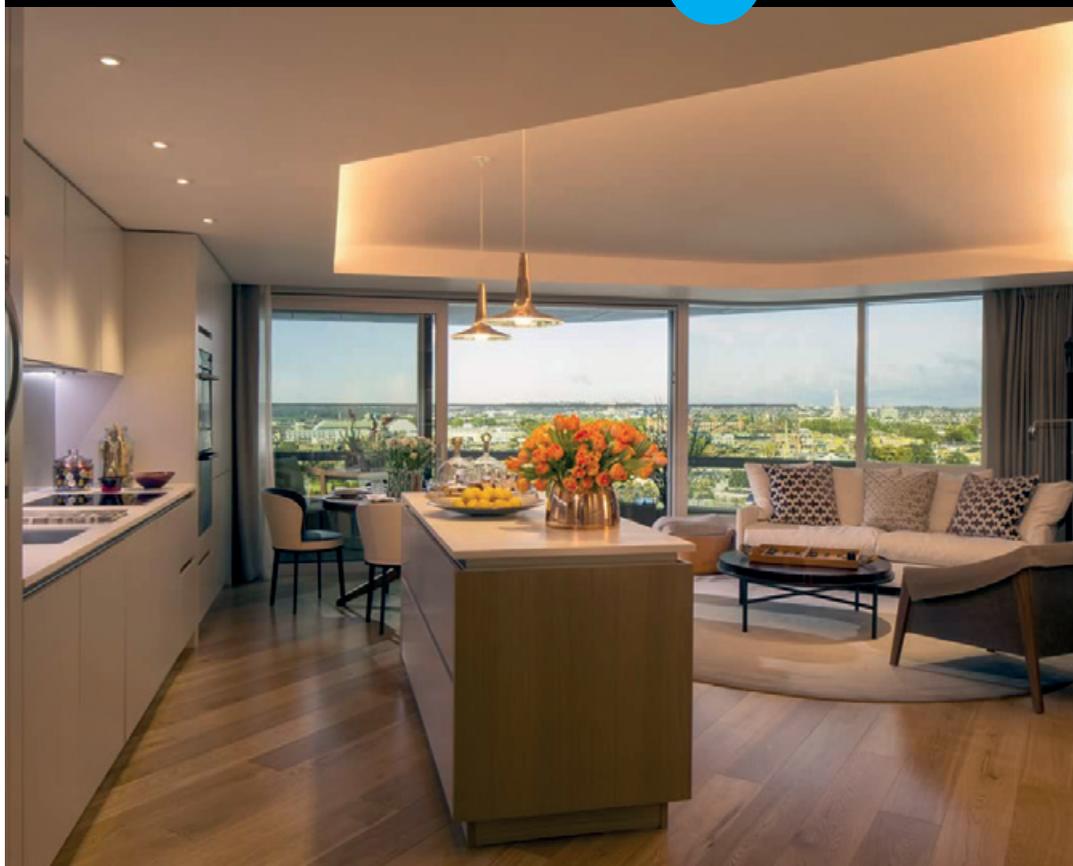
Sabur has helped raise funds for the charity Help for Heroes by wrapping its vans. The media was printed at Sabur HQ using Drytac Polar Premium Media. Each van was then wrapped by a team of experts from five local print companies, who each supplied their services free of charge. Media and inks suppliers also provided free consumables.

d. All buckled up

Wide-format PSP Colorzenith Milan used a Massivit 3D printer to produce two oversized eagle buckles - exact replicas of those found on Armani belts in its latest collection - for use on two Emporio Armani billboards.

e. A manifestly good job

Lintec's E-2200ZC optically clear film played a key role in the realisation of this interior décor project by Signbox at the London office of management consultant and professional services firm. The Egham-based PSP produced 120 linear metres of graphics for 20 meeting rooms.





b.

c.



d.



e.



DIGGING BELOW THE SURFACE WITH **INDUSTRY MOLE**

Comments please to industrymole@imagereportsmag.co.uk



Once a year, I catch up with a former colleague and current competitors to talk about life, work and the universe. We normally meet for a couple of drinks at some nondescript railway hotel that is equidistant between his company and Mole Graphics. This year we talked about many things: the ignorance of print buyers the simmering resentment of employees who smoke (by those who don't) and an old school salesman whose annual mileage must have single-handedly increased the UK's carbon emissions by a percentage point or two.

And then he said something that I'd never thought of before: "Even if your company is prospering, running a wide-format print business is a working-class lifestyle," he said, nursing his cooking lager. "It's not a banker's lifestyle is it? Even if you're doing really well you have to be on it, 24/7, go into the factory, see what's going right - and wrong - and do something. That's not the way a banker works, is it? My brother-in-law, who made his money in the City, still fondly recalls the years when they had so little to do that the weekend began at four o'clock on a Thursday afternoon."

I wondered if he was exaggerating the last bit, although I've since had it confirmed by others. He had

a point about wide-format though. The margins are small. The sums required for essential investments in the latest technology are not. Customers quibble when you charge them something for the time it took you to fiddle with their artwork to make it look how they originally intended to look. And there's always some busy fool out there who's willing to take on a job for next to nothing.

A combination of these factors had lead my old colleague to wonder whether he should encourage his children to enter the business. His son had just gone off to America to study the great works of Western civilisation. His daughter, who was taking a year out, was torn between advertising and acting as possible careers. They weren't particularly keen and nor, surprisingly, was my old friend. "It's just so pressured now," he explained, as he checked his phone for emails.

When I accused him of indulging in Private Fraser-style doom and gloom, he laughed and said: "You can still get rich in wide-format, I know that. It's just that you can't become a member of the idle rich." If wealthy indolence was the goal, we agreed, someone might want to pursue a less strenuous career. Like politics.

EVENTS

HEIMTEXTIL	FESPA GLOBAL 2020	SIGN AND DIGITAL 2020	DRUPA 2020
When? 7 - 10 January, 2020	When? 24 - 27 March, 2020	When? 28 - 30 April, 2020	When? 16 - 26 June, 2020
Where? Frankfurt am Main, Germany	Where? IFEMA Exhibition Centre, Madrid, Spain	Where? NEC, Birmingham	Where? Dusseldorf Messe, Germany
Cost? TBA	Cost? TBA	Cost? Free for trade visitors.	Cost? TBA
Who will be there? The focus is quite broad - exhibitors and conference topics cover everything from decorative and furniture fabrics to textiles for the bedroom, bathroom and table to wallpaper to sun protection systems - don't expect too much on soft signage and/or exhibition graphics type textile print.	Who will be there? This is the biggie for large-format, so expect most of the manufacturers/suppliers to be there.	Who will be there? Too early to talk about the exhibitor line-up, and as it is sandwiched between Fespa Global and Drupa you may not see the same amount of large-format exhibitors as in other years	Who will be there? Good question! We need to wait until closer to the event to see which companies of relevance to large-format will be exhibiting. It's likely that those who do so will have already launched any new products at the preceding Fespa Global 2020
Should you go? If textile printing is climbing up your agenda and you want to immerse yourself in that world you should go, otherwise forget it.	Should you go? Oh yes!	Should you go? Given this is the UK show most orientated towards this sector - though the plans are to broaden its appeal - it's probably still worth a look-see	Should you go? Depends what you want from attending. If you want to see new large-format kit and you've attended Fespa Global 2020, you'll probably not see many more introductions. If you want to see how the industry as a whole is progressing, then it's a big tick
Rating 7/10	Rating 10/10	Rating 7/10	Rating 9/10

OVER TO YOU...

KRIT PATEL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, PRINTVISION

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

Being able to supply what many print companies cannot - mainly fabric, bespoke print and hardware solutions. Printvision now offers bespoke POS to customers by sourcing and manufacturing individual custom products. If our customers give us a vision of what they want, we will deliver it.

Where do you see the greatest wide-format opportunities?

Our market is changing all the time - there are numerous companies in the wide-format market, but it's now about offering something different with attractive turnaround times and excellent quality.

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

System automation is vital alongside gathering detailed sales data which helps us understand our client base better, enabling us to react quicker to our customers' needs.

Your favourite bit of kit is...?

All the EFI products are amazing - fast, high-quality and very reliable.

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

Look after your team and they will look after your business. Without my colleagues, Printvision wouldn't be where it is today. And move with the times, as technology and trends are constantly changing.

What are you most proud of achieving?

Having an excellent reputation within the industry and having a purpose-built production facility

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

Keep investing, but not in every available piece of machinery. Be selective, stick to what your good at and find supportive business partners to help you source other products



VITAL STATISTICS

SMALL BUSINESSES ARE BEING HELD BACK BY POOR BROADBAND AND MOBILE CONNECTIONS, ACCORDING TO NEW RESEARCH BY THE FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES (FSB).

THE FINDINGS ARE REVEALED IN FSB'S DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT 'LOST CONNECTION', WHICH SHOWS THAT 33% ARE STRUGGLING WITH BROADBAND SPEEDS THAT ARE INSUFFICIENT FOR THEIR CURRENT BUSINESS NEEDS. 40% BELIEVE THEIR BROADBAND IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR THEIR FUTURE NEEDS.

OTHER KEY STATS ARE...

45%

of small firms cannot get a good connection on their mobile phones. The figure rises to 57% in rural areas of the UK

47%

say their internet speeds are lower than what was promised by their provider

30%

of small businesses - 39% in rural areas - receive download speeds of less than 10 Mbps

32%

report that poor mobile and broadband connection has prevented them from contacting or being contacted by existing customers - or even potential new clients.

31%

say poor broadband/mobile coverage is a barrier to the growth of their business



A sense of purpose

THE YOUTH WANT TO BUY FROM, AND/OR WORK FOR, A COMPANY THAT STANDS FOR SOMETHING MORE THAN MAKING MONEY. SO SHOULD YOU STILL PUT PROFIT FIRST? WALTER HALE INVESTIGATES

“The long-term health of free enterprise will depend on delivering profit with purpose.” That is how ‘Financial Times’ editor Lionel Barber kicked off the august newspaper’s new agenda for capitalism. Maximising profits and shareholder value, the focus for so many companies over the past decade, were, Barber said, “necessary but not sufficient”.

The ‘Financial Times’ is not the first pro-free enterprise organisation to issue such a clarion call. In March 2017, the management consultancy McKinsey proposed something it called “long-term capitalism”, arguing that a focus on long-term value would be good for companies, good for the environment and good for us. Although McKinsey has its finger on the pulse of corporate America, the campaign never really broke through the clutter. Yet now, purpose with a capital P is back on the agenda.

Let’s be clear. If there is no profit, there can be no purpose, even with a small p. Yet there are many reasons why this is a significant trend. If even the ‘Financial Times’ recognises that something is rotten in the state of capitalism, we must surely be at an inflection point. The populism that has swept many countries in the past three years was sparked by a deeply held, widespread conviction that the spoils of success are being distributed unfairly and unevenly. Generation Z and Millennials, the demographic groups

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that will drive the consumer economy and the workplace over the next three decades, repeatedly indicate, in survey after survey, that they want to buy from, and/or work for, a company that stands for something more than making money.

Does Amazon stand for something other than making money? The company mission statement says it aims to be “the world’s most customer-centric company, to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want online”. Although this statement positions Amazon as the pioneer of freedom of choice, the company isn’t doing this for the public good (although we, as consumers, will benefit) but because it believes this will ultimately deliver a bigger profit. To be fair to Amazon, there is a similar ambiguity about IKEA’s mission statement: “To create a better everyday life for the many people.”

The outdoor clothing brand Patagonia was much more direct about its purpose in its mission statement: “Build the best product, cause no unnecessary harm, use business to inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis”. It has since shortened this to: “We’re in business to save our home planet.” Words - even well chosen ones - are cheap but Patagonia has acted too. The company has donated 1% of its profits to grassroots environmental organisations since the 1980s, began making recycled polyester from plastic bottles in the 1990s and, in 2017, launched a Worn Wear programme to show customers how to repair Patagonia purchases and recycle them when they become unwearable.

That is what purpose with a capital P looks like. For an egregious example of fake purpose you need look no further than BP’s “We see possibilities” advertising campaign, an egregious exercise in misdirection from an oil and gas giant that invests just 3% of its capital expenditure in clean energy.

It can be hard for the owners of smaller, privately owned businesses who want to show purpose to know where to focus their efforts. If you’re struggling, Patagonia’s longer statement is a good place to start. Where can you improve quality? Are there are aspects of your business that are harmful to the environment or the community? If so, how can you minimise or eliminate that harm? What are you doing to make the world a better place?

You can start small - focusing on recycling, water use, greener materials, support for good local causes - and, as employees become more engaged, build on that, becoming more ambitious. It’s true that to do any of this, you need to make a profit. Yet it is also true that you, your staff and your customers will probably feel a lot better about your business if it makes money in an ethical, socially responsible way. In the internet age, companies have nowhere to hide, and, in the words of the classic gospel number ‘Run On’, “As sure as god made the day and the night/What do you do in the dark will be brought to the light.”

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