



Globally there is a year on year reduction in screen printing ink sales of 10% in the UK it is higher than that. These figures were gathered from major ink manufacturers and they were unanimous in their opinion. That is not to say that their overall ink sales are reducing, because Litho and Digital ink sales are replacing screen printing inks sales. What was once a rock solid market for ink suppliers is in decline. Mesh sales demonstrate a similar downturn. This is no hiccup in the market it is a continuing trend.

The biggest hits are in the Point of Sale sector where every company in the premier league of printers has large format litho printing press, sometimes more than one. These sit alongside their multicolour screen lines and are taking more and more of the work that used to flow down these screen printing lines. Often these four and five-colour screen printing lines are being used for multiple spot colours. The UK has the highest concentration of multi-colour lines in the world with an estimated 75 in all.

Eroding the lower volume end of production is digital printing and as speeds increase so this erosion will expand.

There is an issue that has often been ignored with regard to litho and much of the digital output and that is outdoor light fastness. Screen printing inks have an outdoor life of 2 years plus, litho and many digital inks rate in months rather than years. This is because of the pigments that can be used and the ink film thickness. On plastic substrates it is often the substrate itself and the chemical reaction with the ink that puts a limit on the outdoor life. There is a lot of chemistry involved and clear advice is needed from ink and substrate suppliers. Of course a poster in the Shetlands is likely to have lower levels of sunlight that one in the Scillies, which is another factor.

What has been interesting are my work in Europe this year has enabled me to see printing facilities in countries where screen printing is holding its own. In virtually every visit I have made the print shop and stencil departments are clean and well organised and environmental management is a priority. At Serimaster AS in Drammen Norway in their spotless print shop they have potted plants on the shop floor and the waste water from their stencil reclamation is drinkable!! Egil Linberg the Managing Director and His wife Berte-Marie run a very efficient organisation that produces high quality overlays and labels screen printing and digital printing run in parallel. Key to their success is that they are both qualified screen printers and proudly display their certificates for all to see.

CERTIFICATES AT SERIMASTER



SERIMASTER AS IN NORWAY



An example of best practice in Point of Sale printing can be found at Point Seven BV in the Netherlands, another family business where Wim Herbold is the Managing Partner. Attention to detail and the aim to control and manage the screen printing process to extract every Cent of profit from the work are exemplified in the facility.

POINT SEVEN BV IN THE NETHERLANDS



Wim is a disciple of precise process control and is one of the few screen printers who have adopted the ISO standard for process printing. What is also interesting about these European facilities is that many have been competing successfully with litho for many years and have met the challenge of matching screen with litho in terms of colour standards. The application of best practice in all aspects of their business has enabled both these companies who are in different market sectors to be very successful. Another similarity is that they are family businesses.

So why have I featured these two companies, simply because it does not have to be all doom and gloom for the screen printer. There is still a lot of mileage in the process. Even the large format POS printers would be silly to walk away from screen printing. The special effects that now are achievable would add value to any promotional campaign and next year the Effects Printing Book will be available for DSPA members courtesy of FESPA.



FESPA has been one of the highlights of the year. It is a unique organisation as organiser of the most successful exhibitions serving Screen, Digital and Pad Printing. They have brought together an extremely effective team at their head office in Reigate. The result is that they are running very successful exhibitions the profits from which are being ploughed back into the industry through special projects. These projects are instigated by National Associations throughout Europe. The projects include: Technical Seminars, E-learning, Special Effects Screen Printing, Standards Development, Translation of Technical Documents, Process Development etc.



Already the UK industry through Digital and Screen Printing Association has benefited from their support on several occasions. This past year has seen a step change in the DSPA. You will see a different DSPA emerging in the next few months, far more proactive and able to provide a range of additional benefits to its members including a central resource offering what you need to know to enable you to prosper in this challenging and exciting industry.

A key element of the FESPA effect is to bring suppliers and printers together to share ideas and take the industry forward. Suppliers to the industry are customers for the exhibition and their relationship with FESPA has been enhanced by the removal of unnecessary barriers in the past year. The FESPA effect in terms of facilitation is invaluable to the industry. There are going to be some very interesting projects introduced in the next twelve months that could have a significant impact on the industry, watch this space.

Sadly the demise of Trumax Ltd a stalwart in our industry is one of the low points. Even this has given a boost to the resurgent Natgraph Limited in Nottingham who has acquired the dryer business to great effect and is steaming ahead with an export order book that would be the envy of many UK companies. Drying technology is crucial to any printing process particularly screen printing whose thick ink films need specialist dryers to dry and cure effectively. Let us hope that continued success would enable them to extend their investment in developing drying and curing technologies.

A BUSY PRODUCTION AT NATGRAPH LIMITED



So here we are at the end of 2006 the screen printing process is undoubtedly under pressure in the Point of Sale sector. Having said that often displays consisting of solid line colours can be far more effectively and profitably printed on screen printing presses than digital presses. A hand bed can be an invaluable tool for solid colours. It would be foolish for POS printers to throw out all screen printing equipment. Many special effects can only be achieved with screen printing. In a world of plug and play digital presses the printer who can screen print has that Unique Selling Point that will secure the work from the pure digital printers.

There are no better examples of this than four printer members of the DSPA who have won categories at the prestigious Print Week Awards.

The premier accolade for Printing Company of the Year went to Multigraphics plc of Bradford the large format banner producers whose thoroughly professional approach to the market has made them pre-eminent in their field. Well done Gary, Fred and the rest of the team.

Augustus Martin won the award for the Innovative Printer of The Year and you only have to see one of their campaigns to recognise how the best use of the various printing technologies has taken them to the top. Not bad for the boys from Bow.

SMP Group plc. Like the other companies SMP have embraced all the printing processes and their poster demonstrated their excellence in print to win the first prize in Poster of the Year. Well done the Woolwich Warriors!



PDS International Limited

A YEAR IN SCREEN PRINTING

Finally not to be outdone by those southerners it was Simpson Group from Washington Tyne and Wear who put the final jewel in the crown with their award for Point of Purchase Printer of the Year. Mark Simpson couldn't stop smiling, why should he. All he needs now is for Newcastle United to win the premiership!

What do all these companies have in common (other than being DSPA members)? They have been in the business for many years, they have moved with and embraced the new technology, they are all highly innovative and most important of all they are managed by professionals. These companies are an object lesson for all those who aspire for the top in this very challenging industry. Well done fellas we are proud of you!