

Deal with the simple things and you will have more time to manage the complex issues out of the system. But then the complexities are nearly always a series of simple issues so if you deal with the simple issues management time can be spent on developing the business. Moving into flatbed digital printing is one of those development issues. Equally releasing the capabilities of those in your company who have difficulty with reading and writing is another key issue some of the following points are alarming

Before I move on to the simple issues there is one that is an insidious drain on the performance of industry that is illiteracy. There are seven million functionally illiterate (a reading age of less than that of an 11 year old) people in Britain that is 20% of the population. Even more have a problem with numeracy. I rabbit on about process control and standard operating procedures but it is almost certain that a large percentage of those who are supposed to follow them cannot read the information. I don't recall running a training course in company where everybody on the course could read satisfactorily. Writing is often phonetic even for those who can read. We assume people can read memos, warning notices, and safety data sheets. In my experience all the people who have been functionally illiterate are very bright. They have to be otherwise they wouldn't be in work. They have had to bluff their way through life, live on their wits, and develop extraordinarily retentive memories. To progress in their jobs they have to write reports and send memos, impossible! We end up with very capable people unable to reach their potential, who certainly become frustrated and sometimes even angry. What a terrible waste. Often very practical and innovative they are shackled by the inadequacies of their formal education. When Modern Apprenticeships insisted on Application of Number and Communication I got on my high horse about passing responsibility onto industry and employers to teach their employees to read and write, why should we that is the job of schools! The reality is we have to take up the challenge of this very delicate subject. Finding the right method of delivering the training in Basic Skills (Numeracy and Literacy) is apparently very simple you just ring your local LearnDirect hub and ask about "Skills for Life". Now that is something you have just learnt. It is not Numeracy and Literacy, Adult Literacy or Basic Skills it is Skills for Life.

I found what appears to be an excellent CD entitled A Way with Words Entry Level 1. On the LearnDirect website. The blurb says:

This is a lively course, with pictures, moving images and sound. A fun way of learning.

A Way With Words gives you exercises and examples. It shows you how to:

- Work out your level of word skills with an easy to use Word Skills Check
- Improve your speaking and listening skills as you learn
- Brush up on your reading and writing with practice and tips
- Etc etc.

So I want a copy, I am happy to pay for it, to see how it could be used to introduce employers and their employees to the topic that we recognise is delicate. "If you want a copy you will have to sign on to the course, which is free." States the very helpful person at LearnDirect (Notice the merging of two words into one) hub. "But I just want to have a

copy.” “No you have to sign on to the course and do the induction, Health and Safety etc. Then carry out the assessment.” was the reply. On Monday I sign up! But what happens if I pass the assessment, you may ask. I want to be sorted. Then I will be able to introduce what appears to be an excellent CD to clients. The sad thing is I will become just a statistic of achievement for some government department and it has taken me hours and hours to get to this stage. Is there any hope for us? If you have as much difficulty as I did trying to get the information make life easier for yourself and ring the FESPA UK Association on 01226 321202 or e-mail [peter@pdsinternational.com](mailto:peter@pdsinternational.com). Particularly reassuring is the fact that the training is FREE, when you can source it.

It is alright Mark (The Headhitter) I will get back on the subject you want me to talk about this month Flat Bed Digital versus Screen Printing. In last month's issue I stated that digital printing technology had reached a plateau and that certainly hasn't changed. Where the technology is moving forward is in the software. Printers who purchased certain equipment in the last year or so are having their software upgraded to increase performance. In addition mechanical feed systems are increasing machine utilisation for most machines. Did you know there are more flatbed digital printers in the UK than the whole of the USA. 65% of all machines are in Europe and the UK. Oh I can't say that. But then fog in the English Channel does mean Europe is isolated.

A big step forward in large format digital printing technology is the introduction of white ink. The Durst Rho 160 range is the first to offer this facility. The company claims that users can now create a white background on coloured (non-white) and clear media. There are print options for white ink to under print white areas, fill white areas or details, print white as spot colour, produce cleaner backgrounds, create more contrast in images, and make colours more vibrant. No longer are media selections for certain applications limited by the fact that a white overlay or white background were unavailable or not technically possible. This does remove the need for screen printers to print a white raft on a coloured substrate although printing a white background with the digital press has a significant effect on output. So it may still be better to screen print the white background on longer runs. Of course if the substrate is uneven you will have to digitally print the white.

A machine produced by Inca should be available in 2004 that will print at very high speeds of simple low-resolution images at 3000, yes, Three Thousand square feet per hour! At 300dpi this is for packaging applications. Will this output come to point of sale quality? The second point is, how much will it cost? If you have to ask sir, you can't afford it!

I put a question to an MD who has a very successful screen printing company within which he has an effective flatbed digital printing facility.

“If I were to give you several hundred thousand pounds, would you spend it on screen printing or digital printing equipment?” “Oh Gawd” was his first comment. “We are flat out with screen printing and production want me to buy a two or four colour machine and I have clients wanting more short run digital work.” A nice position to be in, but what it

shows is that screen printing is far from dead and digital printing is opening up new market opportunities.

A key point is that the digital press is treated as another production tool. Printers operate both screen and digital machines. It is the “eye for print” that takes years to develop that gives screen printers who adopt digital an edge over pure digital print houses. Screen printers also score on finishing as they already have the skills and equipment. We are back to the synergy of the processes and providing solutions to the market. Design, print, finish, assemble, collate, stock and distribute are all part of the solution.

There are issues that you must take into account. If you are a screen printer you probably have screen printing machines in your shop that are at least 10 years old and fully paid for. They are likely still to be providing you with a good income. Cost of maintenance is minimal, you are comfortable with the technology. Flatbed digital printers require a serious investment. They are sophisticated computers with complex software fitted with innovative print heads. New models with higher outputs are appearing regularly. Beware this is still a relatively immature technology and salesmen, God bless them, tend to believe all their own publicity. 120 m<sup>2</sup> is not necessarily the output you will achieve at the resolution that you require. Adhesion to any surface is not always the same level of adhesion you are used to with screen printing inks. Colour stability although very good and improving is having to catch up with screen printing. Make absolutely certain that you are given the Material Safety Data Sheets for the inks you will be using before they arrive on site.

When do you step on the escalator? Probably when you have a substantial chunk of work that will go a long way to giving the capital return over a 2 year period! It is a different market that needs careful consideration. Starting with sub-contracting work out and then investing in your own kit when the volume justifies it is probably the most sensible approach. Talk to people who have already taken the step, there are an increasing number about.