Digital printing with HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Press drives across-the-board growth at Swanline Print

At a glance

Industry: Sign and Display, Packaging, POS/POP

Business name: Swanline Print Ltd.

Headquarters: Staffordshire, UK

Website: swanlineprint.co.uk

Challenge

- Expand large format printing capacity for high-quality displays and packaging.

- Meet trade customers' growing needs for faster time to market and cost-effective small orders.

- Acquire new capabilities to address market trends toward mass customisation, higher quality and speed, more design creativity.

Solution

- Two HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Presses, for fast-turnover of high-quality printed displays and packaging on corrugated board, plastics, paper and other substrates.

Results

- Direct-to-board HP digital printing has vastly simplified Swanline's operations, reducing inventory complexity, manufacturing time, wastage and stress.

- Digital printing has proved a profitable complement to screen and offset-litho, strengthening Swanline's business and helping drive growth across all three processes.

- The digital portion of annual turnaround grew from two per cent in 2013 to 14 per cent in 2014, and is projected to reach 20 per cent the following year.

- 85 per cent of ultra large-format offset-litho work (over 1620mm wide) is now produced digitally, far exceeding Swanline's expectations.

- The substrate versatility and high print quality of the HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Press have opened new trade markets to Swanline, bringing in new customers and new types of jobs.

If a new customer suddenly changes the deadline on an order for 15,000 litho-laminated boxes from three weeks away, to tomorrow, what can you do? If you're Swanline Print, and you've got an HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Press working alongside your analogue equipment, you can quickly shift gears and leverage your digital printing capabilities to save the job.

Faced with this challenge, Swanline switched the most urgent part of the order to digital, and delivered 2,500 boxes the next day – faster and with higher quality than the customer expected. Then, it followed up with the rest of the order according to the original litho-lam production plan.

That approach worked perfectly for Swanline, turning a new customer – a packaging distributor whose client was launching a new line of beer – into a loyal repeat customer. Nick Kirby, Swanline's general manager, recalls: "The customer was delighted that we were able to service the order in such a short period of time. But he was even more pleased with the quality. He actually preferred the appearance of the digital boxes. This is a good example of how digital and offset-litho work together and enable us to solve issues."

More flexibility, with less complexity

As a trade-only supplier of packaging and Point-of-Sale (POS) displays, Swanline's services span from design to printing, finishing and delivery, and are provided according to each customer's needs. The HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Press, is based on HP Scitex High Dynamic Range (HDR) Printing Technology, which provides smooth colour and tone transitions, sharp edges on text and graphics, and high image print quality, making HP Scitex FB10000 ideal for jobs with demanding print-quality requirements. This has allowed Swanline to move an increasing amount of traditionally analogue jobs to digital and take on new kinds of print jobs.

Kirby notes that HP Scitex digital printing has also massively simplified operations. It's just so much easier from a processing point of view. Printing directly on the corrugated board means we're only handling one type of material. Manufacturing time is lower. There's less stress and less wastage. Inventory is easier."

HP's digital innovation opens a new path for Swanline

The high media versatility, high industrial productivity and superb print quality of the HP Sctiex FB10000 Industrial Press, along with the built-in upgradeability of the HP Scitex HDR technology, were the decisive factors in Swanline's decision to move to digital.

"We were ready to sign an order for offset-litho," explains Kirby. "Then we saw the new HP Scitex press, and it was HP's HDR technology that made us do a u-turn. We recognised that the FB10000 was rising above everything else in digital. HP had taken digital to the point that it was relevant to us."

Higher profits from digital

In July 2013, Swanline became the first print service provider in the world to install an HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Press, and then it added another one in April 2014. Fast-forward to August 2014, Swanline's two digital presses are printing approximately 15,000m^2 (161,000ft^2) per week. Production on the newest press is still ramping up, but both presses are expected to be working two shifts at full productivity by the end of November, with projected total production of around 27,000m^2 (291,000ft^2) per week.

Kirby says he originally calculated that digital printing would take over about 10-15 per cent of Swanline's large-format offset-litho work. But it actually accounts for much more – about 85 per cent for the largest formats. Digital has grown from two per cent of turnover in 2013, to 14 per cent in 2014, projected to rise to 20 per cent in 2015.

Broader offering

With its HP Scitex FB10000 Industrial Presses, Swanline has expanded its offering, and now also produces double-sided hanging banners, posters and one-off promotional displays, complementing Swanline's core applications – displays and corrugating packaging.

"We can convert a lot of substrates using the FB10000 that we can't on offset-litho or screen, so now our constructional designers have the freedom to use a far wider range of substrates, and that gives us the opportunity to come up with innovative displays," says Kirby. For some displays, Swanline combines different materials and prints them all digitally, or uses digital with screen and/or offset, for different parts.

In general, jobs requiring up to 700 beds are printed digitally. And, if quality requirements or time constraints demand it, larger jobs are also sent to the HP presses. For POS jobs of up to 1,000 or even 2,000 large format sheets, Swanline usually chooses digital over offset. Kirby points out that for packaging jobs using smaller B1 sheets, the multi-loader makes it competitive to print up to 2,800 boxes on the digital press.

Digital and analogue thriving together

In addition to cutting turnaround times, as with the urgent beer boxes job, and allowing more media versatility, the HP Scitex presses enable Swanline to offer cost-effective short and medium runs.

Added together, this all means great business for Swanline. "There's no question, we've been winning more work and customers since adding our digital presses. Origination prices used to kill the small packaging jobs, but now we can service lower-quantity jobs. We've got the versatility to do one or 100 – and we'll make money on all of them," says Kirby.

"What's more, by investing in digital, we've strengthened the other parts of our business as well. All the processes – screen, offset-litho and digital – go together well and we are actually seeing growth as a result."