

Springfield Solutions refines the digital vision with HP Indigo presses



At a glance

Industry: Labels & Packaging

Business name: Springfield Solutions Ltd

Headquarters: Hull, United Kingdom

Website: springfieldsolutions.co.uk



Challenge

- Make the leap to wholly digital production while ensuring quality, productivity and profitability.
- Find creative digital alternatives to familiar analogue production methods.
- Refine the business model in terms of broad digital solutions for customers, not just print.

Solution

- Two HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Presses.
- Offline Digicon SabreXtreme laser label cutter.
- Inline Digicon converting unit from AB Graphic International for standard label line.
- Two HP SmartStream Labels and Packaging Print Servers, Powered by Esko.
- Esko A10 Automation Engine linking JDF compatible devices for efficient workflow and automating routine functions.

Results

- 87.3 per cent growth over five years ago.
- 28 per cent growth year on year 2012-2013.
- Consolidation as fully digital marketing solutions company.

“Part of our decision to become a fully digital solutions provider was based on the conviction that ways could be found to achieve digitally everything that we’d been doing conventionally, and that has proved to be the case.”

– Ian Lemon, managing director, Springfield Solutions Ltd



“We’re not printers because printing is dead. We’re a digital marketing solutions provider,” says Ian Lemon, managing director, Springfield Solutions.

These are bold statements, the truth of which can be found in Springfield’s recent history and in its commitment to the digital proposition. Each of these has played a role in transforming and growing the company while raising customer satisfaction levels.

Reinvention

Springfield began in 1977 as provider of metal decoration proofing services to local can makers. Over time, many of its original customers joined large businesses with international brands as their clients. Springfield extended its service to full repro work, but its course was changed when Albert Dass, now chairman of the company, installed one of the first digital prepress systems. Not long after, in 1996, the company began printing trade sample labels and ultra-short runs on the UK’s first Indigo Omnius press.

In the years that followed, the company went in and out of international corporate ownership, but it continued to invest in digital technologies. Over the years it installed five successive HP Indigo press ws4000 series machines, culminating with the installation of two HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Presses in 2010.

“When we established ourselves as an independent company, we thought long and hard about what we wanted to do,” explains Lemon. “Our name, ‘Springfield Solutions,’ isn’t based on some trendy marketing jargon, but on a conscious decision to find solutions for our customers’ problems.”

As its transformation continued, there was an ultimate vision to go fully digital.

“The vision sounds simple: lower volumes, high impact and high quality,” says Lemon. “But, reaching the decision to go fully digital took two years.”

“While I had faith in our HP Indigo digital technology, I was concerned that customers would ask for things that we couldn’t do digitally, but that we had been able to provide with conventional print.”

While the all-digital strategy was being debated, it became apparent that digital solutions could be found and that customers were happy with them.

“Finding new solutions for old problems is now an integral part of our business,” says Lemon. “For example, we used to print labels with metallic ink conventionally. In long enough runs, it was profitable, but the make-ready and waste meant it might not be viable for shorter runs.”

“To consumers, labels and packaging are the face of the brand and the more it can tell about the brand, the more engaged consumers become in the relationship.”

– Ian Lemon, managing director, Springfield Solutions Ltd



“The digital solution was not to use metallic ink, but metallic substrates – which the HP Indigo presses can handle easily. The substrate cost is higher, but the savings on make-readies, plates and start-up waste mean that digital is the cheaper option. It also means that the customer can have the other digital advantages of short-runs, fast-turnarounds and variable data printing.”

Balancing realities with the vision

For Springfield, the digital advantage is measured by the overall achievement of what the customer wants, not just the economics of the printing.

“We calculate our costs very carefully, like any print service provider (PSP),” says Lemon. “We’ve studied cut-offs (cross-over points)¹ and work to save time on jobs wherever possible: saving 30 seconds per job over tens of thousands of jobs is a lot of time.

“One of the keys of streamlining workflow and saving time and money is to automate the administrative tasks along the production line and to use your human resources where they can add value,” Lemon says.

To maximise efficiency, Springfield uses a combination of an end-to-end workflow management system that uses JDF format and an Esko A10 Automation Engine to link the JDF-compatible system to carry out labour-intensive jobs like stepping, and inputs to the presses’ digital front-ends.

Springfield has also physically separated its two HP Indigo WS6000 Digital Presses to give an efficient combination of specialised labels and flexible converting with the production of more “standard” self-adhesive labels. One is configured for the standard work using an inline Digicon converting unit from HP Finishing Partner AB Graphic International. The second press has a near-line Digicon SabreXtreme laser label cutter, also from AB Graphic.

Each press is driven by an HP SmartStream Labels and Packaging Print Server, Powered by Esko that can be viewed from a single interface.

“In this way, we can give extra attention to special jobs without interfering with our basic production,” says Lemon. “Self-adhesive label production accounts for the majority of our business, but we also offer in-house design, prototyping, alternative decoration options, such as Reel-fed Shrink-on, and work that takes us beyond printing.”

The result has been an 87.3 per cent increase in turnover in the past five years and a 28 per cent increase from 2012-2013 year-on-year.

Thinking beyond print

When Lemon talks about “offering more than print,” he means a lot more than most PSPs. One example relates to use of QR codes and hidden screen technologies. Springfield’s “SmartPicture” is a licensed solution that enables the use of an image or logo as a bridging device between a label and a web page.

“To consumers, labels and packaging are the face of the brand and the more it can tell about the brand, the more engaged consumers become in the relationship,” explains Lemon. “Codes that can be read by mobile devices are a bridge between the limited space of the label or package and the limitless world of the web. The trouble is that too often once you’ve crossed the bridge to the web, the destination is disappointing.

“To address this, we’ve formed an association with a digital media agency to develop better landing sites. We’re delivering the destination as well as the bridge – and that is what being a digital solutions company means!”

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Lemon cites the recent Coca-Cola campaign that used personalised labels on bottles to engage with consumers as a prime illustration of thinking beyond just the digital printing element of the project.

“That campaign illustrates how the power of digital printing goes way beyond discussions of cost-per-thousand and cut-offs,” Lemon says. “I wish we’d done it because it exemplifies the direction of marketing and what printers are going to have to be able to do in the near future. This is where we see the future, and we’ve only begun to scratch the surface.”

“The real questions to ask are, ‘How can digital printing add value and enhance the brand? What can it do for brands that they can’t do themselves or by any other means?’” he says.

Both Lemon and Dass have been strong advocates for digital printing and regularly talk to PSPs in groups and at exhibitions promoting the broader vision for digital.

“Even though we may be competitors, it’s not about cutting throats; it’s about new relationships, collaborative business and exploiting the power of digital to add value for the customer and enhance the end-user’s experience,” continues Lemon.

Lemon looks forward to the time when a collaboration of like-minded PSPs around the world can combine capabilities to carry out work for global brands via a collaborative local approach.

“We’ve had a long and very good relationship with HP,” he concludes. “We get inspiration from them, see case studies, learn what others are doing and benefit from shared best-practice. This all makes having HP Indigo presses a differentiator in the market.”

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1) The run-length below which digital is more cost-effective than conventional printing.

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