

Digital printing makes an impression

Growing competition from electronic media is making it necessary for the printing industry to find new ways to improve and diversify its services. Digital printing, with its capability for viable short runs and personalised printing, is seen as part of the solution. A recent DTI Global Watch Mission visited New York State to find out how the US is making use of the technology.

It was the third Global Watch Mission to be co-ordinated by the British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF) and the first to focus solely on digital printing. The team visited leading organisations in the Rochester and Buffalo areas, including the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), one of the world's most renowned academic centres for digital printing technology, and the world HQs of Xerox and Kodak NexPress.

The team found much greater interaction with technology suppliers and academic institutions in the US. In particular the RIT has integrated itself into the region's print supplier network, for example by testing materials and inks. It is also a source of training in specific skills – both technology and sales-based – for companies and relies on them for around two-thirds of its training revenue.

Another highlight was the visit to Rochester-based ColorCentric Corp, which has enjoyed 300 percent growth year-on-year since launching in 2002. ColorCentric's business model is based on ultra short-run capability, using increased automation and lean manufacturing techniques to reduce run times and bring its clients closer to the process. Its model of printing books on demand enables books to be kept in print at no investment cost, with huge advantages for academic publishers in niche markets.

The US industry is responding to the growing market for data-driven variable colour printing for direct mail marketing, highlighting the need for improved understanding of data and databases among UK printers. The team also found digital and traditional litho printing co-existing successfully at several organisations. At Mercury Print Productions, for example, litho sales have increased as a result of digital because of its ability to offer a total solution of both short-run and volume printing.

'The message to UK printers is, 'Have no fear'. The ideas are out there. It's about understanding the customer and using the technology to deliver solutions that add value rather than just put ink on paper'

Mike Hopkins, Director of Membership at the BPIF

Further information

For a CD-ROM copy of the mission report, 'Digital printing: future technologies, current best practice', please contact

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Mission reports can also be downloaded from:

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