

# Changing face of print technology

Digital printing is revolutionising the way businesses buy and manage their print, says **Adam Noble**, managing director of Irongate Digital in Derby.

**The world** in which we live is constantly changing but what we've seen in the past five years is a significant speeding up of the pace of this change.

Whilst this has been largely driven by new technologies as well as the world economic crisis, this is not a new phenomenon.

It has happened before with the birth of the steam age and the industrial revolution, the electrical liberation of technology, the computer age and, of course, the birth of the internet. And it will no doubt happen again.

Printing is one industry that has seen massive changes in the last few years.

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## Economies of scale

This is due to the high initial set up charges of traditional litho printing being offset by the economies of scale effect of it being only fractionally more expensive to order 1,500 than 1,000.

capital outlay but also the cost of reprinting new up to date materials.

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The print industry has done a good job of educating the market to buy print in this way, but times have changed and a number of factors have created a large demand for a new way to both buy and use print.

Working with reduced budgets, faster moving products and markets and the need for better and more relevant communication with customers and end consumers are all influencing the modern day marketers.

## Doing it digital

The good news is that there is an alternative - digital printing. A digital print press is a bit like a huge industrial version of a copier or desktop laser printer.

It takes a print ready file straight from your computer and it allows businesses to order and pay for the exact amount of print they need and want to use at that time - whether it is 3, 33 or 333 units - it's called print on demand.

Digital printing offers a similar unit price for short runs to what you would be paying for much longer runs with litho, depending on volume and job specification. In addition, the quality of digital print has improved immensely and is no longer seen as the lesser quality alternative to litho.

And new digital web to print systems allow businesses to



Adam Noble

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manage their print in a more efficient and cost effective way via a web portal 24/7, so each transaction can be managed and tracked online allowing for fast turnaround and tight control of budgets.

Marketing resource centres, as they are now commonly referred to, can store all of a business's marketing materials and operational print documents in an online library from where you (or employees, agents, distributors, franchisees or any other permission-based user) can quickly and easily choose, customise, proof and order printed materials.

A simple example would be the ordering of business cards - which is made so much easier if the business card template is online and the user enters in the person's details and clicks order



Sweet success: bespoke print for Thornton's

- you can order as many or as few as you need and there's no need to wait until you have enough names to make the print run cost-effective.

## Personalised brochures

But this is just the tip of the iceberg because, with digital printing, each page of a brochure can be personalised or versioned for a particular market or product

or even down to an individual customer. We are all different, so why shouldn't you communicate with your customers in a more personal manner?

Imagine you are in the market for a car: you go on to the manufacturer's website for details and specifications including trim and colour; as you're doing this, in the background, the website is building your unique

and personalised brochure to be digitally printed that day and posted out to you.

The completed brochure will contain your name, the actual car you have specified, the trim and the colour you desire.

Whilst this may sound futuristic it's not - it is happening in the world today and by using this type of technology many marketers are improving their print communications.

One example of how Irongate Digital is utilising this latest technology for one of our clients, Thornton's, is with the creation of their personalised chocolate boxes. A Thornton's customer can go online and upload a photo and message to create a unique chocolate gift personalised to the recipient.

Electronic files containing the completed box artwork are sent daily to Irongate Digital who print the boxes and send back to Thornton's that same day to be despatched to the recipient.

The very latest application of digital print technology that Irongate Digital is using to

help customers improve their marketing campaign success is to integrate digital print with other communication channels such as email, personalised websites (purls) and SMS to create multimedia campaigns that drive response and increase that all important return on investment.

It's called cross-media marketing and is the next stage of the digital print revolution.

## FACTS AND FIGURES

▶ UK is the world's 5th largest producer of printed products

▶ UK estimated turnover in print £14.3 billion

▶ 10,500 UK companies employing 140,000 people

(Source: BPIF UK Printing, 2010)

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