

Short run, dynamic and strong: digital labels

The labels' market is one that is continuing to grow. However, it is one that is also changing dramatically – and to not change is to risk being left behind.

P rivate labels and own brands are becoming the biggest product ranges in the world, whilst others try to keep up by producing ever more exciting and dynamic packaging and labels to attract back custom. The amazing growth in artisan producers is also perfect stumping ground for short run digital labels.

So, the first thing that you need to decide along the sort run digital labels path is whether the technology is right for your business.

Whether it is something that can really enhance what you already do, and allow you to offer more to your customers in terms of service.

Whether it is something that can help you to make more money.

Obviously, every single business is different – in requirements, in abilities, in potential, in ideas and inspiration and in your business strategies. But there are some very general questions that will help to outline whether digital is a process you should seriously consider, or whether it is not.

Digital print also has some very specific benefits – some of which cannot be achieved with any other form of print technology. We will outline the general benefits here and allow you to see how those could work to aid your productivity, efficiency and cost effectiveness whilst raising levels of customer satisfaction.

So, why go digital?

Short run

In every sector of print, run lengths are coming down and you as a print provider, or a converter, must be able to cost effectively be able to handle this. If you are currently using flexo or offset, or even other processes, to produce labels, you may find that you are turning away jobs because, although you could happily produce the run, it is just not cost effective to go through the process of making plates, setting up the press, and taking time to produce these applications. This is where digital excels, but equally, it is also capable of handling longer run, higher volume jobs too.

Runs as low as one, single label, or multiple different individual labels, or runs of ten, 20, 33, 45, 67, 103 – or whatever you need, are easily achievable.

As more packaging owners look at specialist labels, own labels, and improved shelf stand out, digital can really help.

Faster make readies

With digital there are no plates to make. This not only does away with the time it takes to produce these, but also the expense, labour, and use of consumables.

This means that jobs onto a digital press can be instant. No waiting time – vastly reducing your make readies and vastly reducing your costs.

All you need is a digital file, a digital front end (RIP, colour management and workflow) and you can be up and running with a job in minutes.

This also makes it very quick and convenient to change over jobs, and jobs can run be run one after the other with very little stoppage time – dramatically less than for any other process, so downtime is much less.

Faster turnaround

Because make readies are so short, you can guarantee faster turnarounds. Productivity on most digital presses is very good too, and with on-demand printing you can output what the customer needs in very short timescales – certainly faster than a longer run on another process.

Proof and prototype

The ability to print one-offs, cost effectively, means that you can run exact proofs on the press that the final product will come from. This means the customer sees exactly what the final job will look like rather than a proof that might not be exact.

The ability to run one-offs also means that you can very easily produce prototypes, so you can even produce a product, say in several colours or designs, to take to the consultation with the prospective customer and have an eye catching print example ready to show them, rather than relaying on words!

Of course, you can do this with on other processes, but it is very costly and time consuming, whereas with digital it is quick, simple and inexpensive.

Variable data

This is 'the' benefit that you cannot achieve with any other printing process or technology in a sophisticated and cost efficient way.

Variable data allows you to do so much more, and offer so much more, than static print, but importantly, it will also offer greater return on investment for your customers.

Margin rich applications

If you add variable data to one off production you can produce truly margin rich jobs. Digital should not be sold on price, it is not a commodity, but rather on what it can do for the customer and how much reaction it will generate, so coming up with creative and inspirational ideas is easy and if you use it wisely, it will start to win you new customers who see the benefits. Unfortunately, there is much print that is produced today that is seen as a commodity, and labels can very easily fall into that trap. Digital will help you to add new revenue streams and to charge a good price for the products you produce.

Lower investment cost

The cost of investing in a new digital press or printer – even a high end, high volume one – is considerably less than buying flexo or offset machines. There is also no investment needed in platemaking equipment or the on-going cost of plates.

However, there are many smaller, compact models – even desk top versions – which are high quality and fast, and more than good enough for short run labelling needs.



Cost savings, waste savings

Digital as a whole can offer you cost savings, whilst giving you something to differentiate your business from competitors and to add margin. It will also help you to cut waste and streamline your production processes.

As you can see, digital has many benefits, and whilst there are applications that it will not be suitable for, it is quietly making its march into the mainstream of labels and packaging production.

It is unique in its benefits. It is an added value process. It can help you to solve problems for your customers. It is an essential part of the print world of tomorrow.

To not at least think about going digital is to get left behind, and in an already competitive market with over production rife, those who cannot offer more will not survive. Digital is one answer to this. **PS.**

Ask yourself...

- Am I seeing the need for shorter runs?
- Are my customers asking me for faster turnarounds?
- Do I need to cost effectively produce mock ups or prototypes of labels?
- Could I offer more in terms of creativity for special products?
- Do I want to make more money?
- Do I want to take cost out of my production process?
- Do I want more control over my production chain?
- Do I want to compete in the label market of the future?

If the answer is yes to any – or all – of the questions above, then digital is certainly worth investigating.

This article was reproduced from 'How to make the most of digital labels' published by Earth island Publishing. A new version of this handbook will be available later in the year. If you would like to be included, please let us know.