

While full-time label or packaging converting is a separate business in its own right, there are entry-level options for commercial digital printers that might add a handy extension to the range of services that can be offered

## Get stuck in

Anyone who sells anything physical probably needs a label or a package for it, and often both. If you're a major international brand or retail chain, that easily runs into hundreds of thousands or even millions of units a year, and you're going to buy at the keenest prices from large, established and dedicated suppliers. But if you're at the boutique end of the business scale, perhaps selling via the internet, or a commercial printer doing other work for small business that do, you probably won't have the volume to interest the dedicated converters and may also be dealing with very short and mixed runs with quick turnaround times.

All of which makes it worth looking into the options for producing labels and stickers in-house, using equipment that won't break the bank, but which could lead to greater things if that side of the business takes off.

This was pretty much the case at BeanPrint, a personalised printing company based in Redditch, Worcestershire, that specialises in high quality short run printing. Founded in 2009, the company's portfolio today includes a wide range of customised products including labels, gifts, business cards, stationery, invitations and badges. BeanPrint has 11 employees and sells its products online via its website.

Some two years ago, BeanPrint made the decision to expand its portfolio with the addition of personalised labels that specially designed for school uniforms. At that time, the company was using a machine to print and cut the labels in small batches, but demand quickly grew and the existing printing method was extremely time-consuming. As a result, the company was struggling to keep up with the significant uptake of orders and its staff were working longer hours to meet the increased demand.

Alongside this, the business was also seeing growth in orders across its range of sheet labels. The company had relied upon the same printer for a number of years to produce these, but as demand continued to grow, it was clear that this printer was no longer up to the job. To ensure



▲ Sheet labels are a key part of BeanPrint's output

its customers could continue receiving their orders promptly, the company decided that to invest in a dedicated sheet label printer to help keep up with the volume of orders.

BeanPrint director Chris Chedgzoy realised that two separate solutions were needed. 'Firstly, we required a roll-fed label printer that could print onto the specialised labels we were using for school uniforms. Our requirements for this printer were that it needed to offer a more streamlined solution, along with increased efficiency and colour quality.

'Secondly, our existing sheet label printer wasn't up to scratch, and we often had problems when the machine was nearing a service. We therefore needed a solution that would ensure we could offer our customers consistent results that exceeded their expectations in terms of quality. With this model, it was also important that we could maintain it ourselves, to reduce our current service costs.'

Looking for guidance, Mr Chedgzoy found AM Labels, who after several meetings to understand the needs also carried out tests with various models. A demonstration of the five-colour Oki Pro1050 colour label printer confirmed that met all the requirements for the personalised school uniform labels. By also being able to print in white, the

Pro1050 exceeded BeanPrint's expectations, providing the opportunity to further expand its portfolio.

For sheet labels, AM Labels demonstrated the OKI Pro9542 A3 colour label and sheet printer. This had a much smaller footprint than the company's existing printer, while also offering solid white. All parts being user changeable also ticked the easy maintenance box.

Having bought both, Mr Chedgoy summarises, 'The Oki printers we purchased from AM Labels supported us in completely overhauling and streamlining our label production operations, meaning we could create labels of the highest quality, while fulfilling a much greater volume of orders. Thanks to both printers offering the unique option of printing in a full range of CMYK colours, plus solid white, we will be able to continue expanding our portfolio with more unique products, helping us to stand out from our competitors.'

### Here be dragons

In 2018 illustrator and graphic designer Mikael Andersson from Alvesta in Sweden founded MickeGFX, initially selling colouring books of Drakis, a baby dragon. Over time greeting cards, fabric bags and stickers were added, all of which are sold online shop.

Stickers play an important role in customer retention and acquisition. Every package that leaves the 'dragon's lair' has individual labels. 'When I send orders to customers they should directly see from the outside that this delivery is from me. I always put a sticker on it that says 'Don't forget to smile when you open this package.' I want my customers to think I am a good business who has put a lot of effort into the packaging,' explains Mr Andersson.

He had been ordering the stickers from various suppliers but this was expensive and minimum order quantities made it difficult to offer the different designs and illustrations in small quantities.

Via Swedish reseller UniPrint, Mr Andersson became aware of the LX610e Pro colour label printer from German supplier DTM Print. Covid restrictions made an on-site visit impossible at the time, so Uni Print's Daniel Pettersson explained the LX610e Pro via video call. A strong attraction was its automatic built-in die-cutting function, said to be a unique feature in the desktop printer market, which makes it possible to print and cut custom labels of any shape or size in one process without die costs and wastage. Easy switching between dye-based and pigmented ink and photo-realistic resolution at good print speeds, plus an affordable price also played in its favour.



▲ Mikael Andersson's whimsical illustrations make popular stickers, now produced on the DTM LX610e Pro

Mr Andersson bought the printer from UniPrint at the end of August 2020 and has used it almost every day since. For the production of his stickers and labels he uses DTM Paper High Gloss, DTM Paper Semi Gloss and DTM Poly White Matte Eco. The two supported ink types exploit the full production opportunity. Dye-based ink prints bright and vibrant colours that suit prime label applications, while the pigment ink prints labels that are slightly less bright but withstand sunlight and water for years. This flexibility has also won new customers, with an anti-Coronavirus masking variant of the dragon having been very popular.

Mr Andersson says, 'I can produce custom-made stickers with a few clicks. I can try new designs whenever I want, I don't have to order online and wait two weeks for them to arrive. And the best thing is that I can do only one sticker or label at a time if I want.' dp

▼ The Oki Pro 1050 prints five colours, including white, and met BeanPrint's needs for personalised school uniform labels

