

Innovating in packaging pre-press

Six years ago, Contact Originators Ltd, part of the Contact Group of companies, created a long term objective to develop a transparent and automated workflow process by integrating a management information system with leading pre-press automation technology.

Part of this project was the vision to have complete transparency throughout the business and a real time digital feed of the relevant job information into each department. After several years of development, the team at Contact had acknowledged the benefits of such an ambition, however, in order to fully realise the project's potential, they recognised that success depended on identifying like-minded partners.

Four years on, and with the introduction of the new MIS solution, Aramis from The Quick Brown Fox GmbH, driving the Esko Automation engine, the plan is taking shape nicely. Commercial manager and project leader, Nick Mitchell, said, 'We are really pleased with our progress so far. We still have some way to go to reach our ambition, but the transparency the system currently provides us in terms of integrating all employees and departments is a huge step forward. With the use of the digital planning module in Aramis and the introduction of large format plasma screens in each department, we have vastly improved our workflow and efficiencies throughout the company. Within seconds of entering a customer order, every department in the process receives the relevant information enabling us to manage our workloads more efficiently. In conjunction with our automation, it has allowed us to expand our business whilst effectively controlling our costs and we really cannot imagine managing our process without these systems in place.'

Changing demands

For the flexo specialist from Stockport, Cheshire, the introduction of the new MIS solution was also a reaction to the changing demands of the market. 'In the UK, lead times on jobs have diminished dramatically over recent years,' explained Mr Mitchell. 'We used to enjoy four or five days turnaround for most work, but as market demands have changed, it is not unusual for our clients to require our help within less than 24 hours. In order to achieve this, we need to pro-

cess information quickly, efficiently and accurately. We recognised that our process had to evolve and we needed to innovate in order to service all our clients, we needed something new. We have always been innovative in our marketplace and are striving to maintain this momentum.'

In saying this, Mr Mitchell makes reference to the innovations within Contact Originators, specifically in the area of flexographic plate production. Here, in co-operation with Flint Group, the company has developed 'Ultra V', a solution for HD and flat-top dot plate production. Unlike other systems, this method requires no additional processes and provides exceptional levels of repeatability and consistency.

To complement its high end solid plate technology, the company has also developed a new liquid plate, named LiquiCorr. Embracing the latest in Jetsetter technology and special liquid resins, LiquiCorr is specifically designed for corrugated and is ideally suited to print on lower grade liners yielding excellent ink transfer properties.

Quick and simple

The sources of motivation for innovation are, in this case, customers, HD, flat-top dots and liquid plates are all solutions demanded by a market place ceaselessly driving for the next improvement in print quality. But it is not only the plate production that offers potential for process optimisation; especially in administration, many processes can be streamlined which, in the end, is beneficial for the customer. Mr Mitchell said, 'As we develop our customer base not only in

the UK, but also in the rest of Europe, USA and Canada, we need a solution like Aramis, in which all management information is permanently processed and kept up to date in a quick and simple way. This is also true for the reporting needed from ourselves in order to manage our own business and



Each department at Contact has been fitted with a large plasma screen for easy access to the new system

provide accurate KPIs and details to our customers.'

He continued, 'We were not only looking for a solution adapted to the industry, but also for a provider which has profound know-how of packaging pre-press and platemaking, and is well established in the market. The QBF team and its system impressed us a lot. We could adjust the workflow exactly to our processes and get the best support available.'

Asked about the company's future plans, Mr Mitchell said, 'We plan to maximise the possibilities of automation completely through further integration of Aramis, Esko and JDF. Our aim is to develop our philosophy of one point data entry, ultimately integrating seamlessly with our clients to share information. We believe we already have a solution in place to manage this development however such changes have to be introduced step by step.' ■