

Me & my: Presstek 52DI-AC

By Richard Stuart-Turner, Monday 11 August 2014

When a print business only four years into its life has 20 staff, a rapidly growing turnover and a raft of machinery investments under its belt, you know it's doing well.

Sunderland-based trade printer Where The Trade Buys, which was launched as an online business in 2010 and is overseen by Martyn Young, managing director of the firm as well as its parent company First2Print, made an instant impression and won a local business award only a year after opening.

The firm grew by 40% last year and is looking for 30% growth this year. It secures most of its work via its website, with online sales for this year approaching £1m, although it does get some walk-in business at its print site in Sunderland.

“We’re a very different sort of online company. We’re web-driven, but the website is in effect our shop front. We still like to pick up the phone and ring people who place work online rather than email them,” explains Young.

Offering general digital and litho as well as exhibition and outdoor wide-format services, the firm’s continuous investment in new equipment, around £500,000 this year already, has been made possible by the number of satisfied customers that keep coming back.

The company installed its Presstek 52DI-AC at the beginning of 2014 to replace a previous model, and half a year later it has found this waterless and chemical-free digital offset press with coating to be a very worthy investment.

“We previously had a Presstek 34DI which we bought two years ago. It was a bit of a punt for us at the time but we liked the fact that it had no separate CTP and therefore quick makereadies,” says Young.

The firm decided to upgrade to the faster, larger B3 model because the SRA3 34DI was struggling under the weight of the volume of work coming in. “We hammered that machine to death. They’re not big volume machines and we did something like 20m impressions on it in 18 months. But it was a very reliable machine, we had very little downtime on it.”

The company was also still outsourcing a lot of its work and was keen to bring more of it in-house. It felt that the quicker 10-minute makereadies of the 52DI-AC would help it to achieve this goal. “We went and viewed the 52DI-AC, which was a big decision because of the expense compared with alternatives from Heidelberg and Ryobi,” says Young.

But the firm took the plunge and hasn’t looked back. “The press is running 24 hours a day and we do about 46 jobs a day on it on average. It has allowed us to do longer-run work and it’s much faster.”

Adding value

Speed was essential for Where The Trade Buys as it prides itself on quick turnaround times. “Most of our work is short-run, fast-turnaround. We’re not your typical trade printer selling jobs as cheaply as possible, but we guarantee next-day delivery within the UK. We’re more about offering a high level of service and adding a little bit of value back into the products.”

One of the key reasons the firm was attracted to the 52DI-AC was the press’s environmental credentials. An advocate of environmentally friendly printing from day one, the firm uses zero-carbon coated papers, vegetable inks and EA toner, and recycles all of its waste paper, chemicals and general waste.

“Our aim is to have as little impact on the environment as possible and the 52DI-AC helps us to achieve this. All of our plates get collected by the manufacturer and recycled and there’s little to no chemical waste from the machine,” explains Young.

And much like its predecessor, the 52DI-AC uses waterless printing, which eliminates the need to mix water and alcohol in the printing process, saving huge amounts of solvents, chemicals and water. Aside from the benefits of reduced wastage, waterless printing also produces sharper images with more definition than other processes, claims Presstek.

“The quality we get off it is absolutely superb; the colours are very vibrant. We’ve done some jobs for some major companies throughout the UK and they keep coming back time and time again due to the quality of the work that this press produces,” agrees Young.

Employing the right people to use the machinery has been crucial to the firm’s success, says Young. “To get the best out of a machine you need good operators, and that’s where people have struggled to excel in the areas that we have. We run quite light so our press operators sort their own stock between makereadies and it’s a very precise operation. The three guys that run the 52DI-AC have got a good 60 to 70 years print experience between them.”

The firm’s relationship with Presstek has continued to strengthen over the years and Young has nothing but praise for the company. “Presstek is a good hands-on manufacturer that’s supported us along the way, seen our growth and been part of our journey. So we saw no reason to look at any alternatives just to save a few pounds here or there.”

Installation of the 52DI-AC took around 10 days and was completed by Presstek over two weekends so that the firm’s day-to-day work wasn’t interrupted.

“Installation was pretty seamless really. We kept our previous press up and running while the new one was being installed and then we switched over. The Presstek guys worked late and brought a lot of engineers onsite to make sure that they hit the deadlines we had in place,” reports Young.

Trouble-free operation

No real problems have arisen with the machine. “Nothing major has happened that’s stopped us from running the press. We sometimes wear out serviceable parts a little bit quicker than normal because of the sheer volume of work that we do but we can always get any problems resolved quickly, often over the phone or by the next day at the latest.”

The ability to carry out certain tasks much more efficiently than the firm could on a conventional press has proved to be one of Young’s favourite things about the 52DI-AC. And the knowledge of the multi-skilled operators running the press combined with its high automation and digital workflow have meant

that jobs can be finished without interruption.

“If you took a traditional press, and the plates were made and the pre-press guy had gone home, the operators then running that machine couldn’t go over to the CTP and sort a set of plates out or change an image round,” says Young.

“But if there was a problem with this press and the plates hadn’t been made, the operator could preview the job before they released the plates, and they’ve got the ability to then change something round to see if it could be run better or set up in a slightly different way. Once they’ve made that change, our guys can then release the plates, print it and put it straight onto the pile for finishing.”

The press has brought a huge amount of confidence to Where The Trade Buys. Young feels happy that the firm can now turn around a job on a tight deadline without sacrificing quality. The extra capacity that it’s brought has also enabled the company to take on extra work.

“It’s 40% more efficient than our previous model so we’re saving on running costs and doing more jobs. And that’s all without extending any shifts,” he explains.

And with only good things to say about Presstek, Young would have no hesitation in upgrading to another of its machines in the future.

“We’d happily upgrade with Presstek again and would without a doubt recommend the company and its machines to other businesses. The 52DI-AC has exceeded our expectations and we can’t fault the machine at all. The quality we get from it is excellent and I’m personally amazed that more people don’t have them,” concludes Young.

SPECIFICATIONS

Max speed 10,000sph

Sheet thickness range 0.06-0.5mm

Max sheet size 520x375mm

Min sheet size 110x100mm

Max print/coating area 510x360mm

Resolution 2,540dpi

Automated makeready time 10 minutes

Inking process Waterless

Feeder pile capacity 500mm

Delivery pile capacity 490mm

Price £487,900 (includes 12 months warranty, installation, training and Presstek Momentum RIP)

Contact Presstek Europe 020 8745 8000 www.presstek.com

Company profile

Where The Trade Buys is an online trade printer established in 2010 and operated by holding company First2Print. The £1.6m-turnover, 20-staff business, which is overseen by managing director Martyn Young, produces items including business cards, leaflets, stationery, banners, posters and short-run packaging for other printers, graphic designers and marketing agencies. The company also runs Konica Minolta, Heidelberg, Duplo and Horizon equipment. It won Small Business of the Year at the 2011 Sun FM Business Awards and was shortlisted for Newcomer of the Year at the 2013 North East Business Awards.

Why it was bought...

The firm bought Presstek's 52DI-AC to replace a 34DI, which it had run for a couple of years before. Although the company was very happy with the previous model, the 34DI was being pushed to its limits as the company's workload continued to grow. The firm also required additional capacity to be able to bring more of its work in-house and speed up makereadies.

How it has performed...

According to Young, the 52DI-AC has done everything that it was bought for and exceeded the firm's expectations. "The quality we get from it is absolutely superb and the colours are very vibrant. It's also 40% more efficient than our previous model so we're saving on running costs and doing more jobs on a day-to-day basis," he says.

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