



KONICA MINOLTA



LABELS UK

UPGRADES TO ACCURIOLABEL 230



Giving Shape to Ideas



“RELIABILITY, QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY ARE KEY FOR COMPANIES OF ANY SIZE TO SUCCEED. FROM THE OUTSET, LABELS UK INVESTED IN A SOLID LABEL PRESS THAT PERFORMS DAY IN DAY OUT”

RESPONDS TO GROWTH IN DEMAND WITH FASTER KONICA MINOLTA PRESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Manchester-Based Labels UK Ltd first became a serious contender in industrial digital label printing when it installed a Konica Minolta bizhub PRESS C71cf in the summer of 2019. Complemented by faster finishing, the investment quickly accelerated the business. Just 15 months later, the growing company has upgraded its digital print capability to the latest model, the AccurioLabel 230 press, as it cements the relationship with Konica Minolta.

A small, family-run company headed up by father and son, managing director Steve Dobson and director David Dobson, Labels UK is a supplier of labels to customers in the food and drink, chemical, security and pharmaceutical markets. The past 18 months has seen a determined push from the Dobsons to expand the business and offer customers faster delivery, higher quality, more variable data options, and better service. Demand has also increased beyond expectations, in part fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainty ahead of Britain leaving the EU.

CHALLENGES

Moving from a tabletop digital inkjet device to the first-generation Konica Minolta toner-based label press, the bizhub PRESS C71cf, marked the start of a considerable investment programme at Labels UK.

Having searched for years for the right type of machine at the right price point, which would also deliver high-quality labels, the company was delighted to find that the C71cf delivered on all counts. “The transition to the first KM machine was smooth,” said David Dobson looking back. “It gave us the speed and the quality that we were looking for, so we could supply full colour labels at short notice to our clients. We could do much longer runs and multiple SKUs, and it enabled us to compete with much larger label printing companies.”

“The C71cf opened up new markets for us in terms of the type of jobs we could do, and it turned our focus to sectors that require shorter runs that only digital can satisfy,” he added. “Since then, we have moved a fair number of jobs over from flexo to digital and even taken on several

trade customers, who now come to us for their digital labels.”

However, within less than 12 months it became apparent that there was potential for more rapid growth and to speed proceedings up even further. The C71cf, complemented by a Digicon Lite converter from AB Graphic, was close to full capacity. There were also longer jobs that required variable data capability, so the Dobsons once again turned to Konica Minolta for advice.



SOLUTION

The AccurioLabel 230, or AL230 for short, was first introduced to the market at Labelexpo Europe in September 2019. As the third-generation label press from Konica Minolta, it brought significant improvements in productivity, flexibility and stability with higher speed, two web width options, new overprinting facility, no warm-up needed and more accurate media handling.

For Labels UK, investing in the AL230 was a natural progression and a decisive response to a demanding label market where those who can provide fast turnaround and just-in-time delivery of high-quality jobs succeed. "Our order book is full of jobs that can only be done on a digital press because customers want them printed yesterday," explained David. "These are small or medium run length jobs or jobs with many sorts, and we were working flat out, so we needed to add higher speed into the equation.

"We first started growing the digital side of the business because the demand was there," added Steve Dobson. "Customers were outright asking for it. Also, we were finding it difficult to get reliable trade supply, so we decided to go into digital ourselves. This venture has been a real success for us, and some 30% of our business is now in digital, but we don't want to stand still. Installing the AL230 was the next logical step."

With the new overprint kit with eye mark sensor, digital four-colour print can be accurately registered to pre-printed jobs coming off the flexo presses at Labels UK. The AccurioPro Label Impose software and RIP also allow for faster file preparation of variable data, another plus for Labels UK as they were keen to move more work from their thermal printers to the KM press. Now jobs that previously took three days to produce can be done in an afternoon.

In addition to the increase in speed, the reduced start of time of 30 seconds and the overprint facility, the AL230 features a host of other improvements that together makes the printing experience much easier. These include a splicing table with air clamps, stuck web detection, Easy

Thread© automatic web feeding and True Sense© low unwind sensor.

The press is also fitted with new internal LED lights to help illuminate manual web feeding should the need arise, "But," said Tom Clucas, who runs operations in the digital print room, "while it's a nice, useful feature, it's not really something I've had to make much use of, because we just don't seem to have those sorts of issues."

Talking generally about his experience of upgrading to the AL230, he said, "Once it was installed, it was very easy to jump onto the new press. At first it seemed a lot bigger than the C71cf, but it is so simple to run that I soon forgot all about that. It's a bit like upgrading your mobile phone. There is of course a load of new features to get to grips with, but it is all so intuitive and simple."

He also mentioned the new cutting knives on press as a great improvement and that the new unwinder and rewinder are easier to use. "And despite the fact that there are more rollers inside this machine, there is a lot less cleaning involved."

The challenges imposed on the industry by the COVID-19 restrictions have not stopped Labels UK from expanding their business. Throughout the pandemic, which has seen the label market grow overall, Konica Minolta has continued to support customers and successfully install new machines whilst following all guidelines for social distancing.

"The whole installation process was impressively quick," said Steve. "The Konica team simply swapped the presses and trained the operator. We were back up and running in just three days, which is great as we really couldn't have afforded any significant downtime."

"During the pandemic, we have seen new markets appear with the demand for cleaning products and hand sanitisers going through the roof, so it was important not to miss out or let any customers down," said David. "With KM's reliable digital technology in house backed up by their excellent support and service, we have been able to offer quick delivery and respond within a matter of

days." He added that in the busy run up to Christmas, many companies are also stockpiling labels ahead of Brexit.

All in all, the past year's impressive investment plan has seen Labels UK install a total of five new machines. "Our flexo presses are still running and we have added two new die-cutters and an inspection slitter rewinder to the mix," said Steve, explaining that the demand for more label embellishment is also being met with the investment in a Newfoil 3500 machine bought specifically for the digital output from the AL230. He concluded with a smile, "It has been a busy year!"

"Working with Labels UK and seeing first-hand the difference that Konica Minolta's digital technology can make is immensely satisfying, and we are proud to play a part in their continued success," said Steve Lakin, Label Press Sales Consultant, Konica Minolta Business Solutions UK. "Reliability, quality and consistency are key for companies of any size to succeed. From the outset, Labels UK invested in a solid label press that performs day in day out, and they are now reaping the rewards having built a reputation as a company that delivers."





KONICA MINOLTA

AccurioLabel 230



LET'S TALK

Contact us to find out how Konica Minolta can support, protect and optimise your business today and in the future:

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