KONICA MINOLTA

LABEL PRINTING
CUSTOMER SHOWCASE

Over 500 AccurioLabel Presses installed worldwide

Featuring:

Superfast Labels Ltd Digital Print | Cotswold Labels | Labels UK Limited | soabar | Premier Labels | Label Tec Scotland Ltd Quality Label Specialists

Giving Shape to Ideas

SOABAR CUSTOMER SHOWCASE

"The reliability of our two AccurioLabel presses has certainly been tested to the max in the past two months. We have seen demand for digital labels go through the roof, and if it wasn't for the Konica Minolta machines, we would have struggled to support our customers during this difficult time.

Although we had already been ramping up in our digital department over the past year, the crisis has accelerated that process and we have very quickly gone from digital accounting for 16–17% of turnover to nearer 50% of current sales.

Our Konica Minolta presses are really saving the day for us and for our customers, we are now producing in excess of 70,000 linear metres per month, which is a three-fold increase of where we were at the beginning of the year. And there are still new inquiries coming in, so the opportunities are out there."

Phil Achurch,
Managing Director Soabar

soabar

Castello
di Valpecca
CHIANTI CLASSICO
RISERVA
2012

pomona
love your
daily vitamins
sweet cherries, wild blueberries
& a kiss of cardamom
Nutrition Facts
Serving Size 1 bottle (354 ML)
Serving Per Container 1
Amount Per Serving
% Daily Value*
Calories 190 0%
Total Fat 0g 0%
Saturated Fat 0g 0%
Cholesterol 0mg 0%
Sodium 0mg 15%
Total Carbohydrate 44g 8%
Dietary Fiber 2g
Sugars 36g 0%
Protein 1g 42%
Vitamin A 4%
Vitamin C 5%
Calcium
Iron
* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet
Ingredients: sweet cherries, purified water, organic blueberry puree, cardamom
12 FL OZ
354 ML
PET
Printed on Konica Minolta bizhub PRESS C71cf
Lecta Adestor Gloss 80

PREMIER LABELS CUSTOMER SHOWCASE

"We had been looking for several years for the ideal solution to allow us to expand our offering. We wanted a digital press that would service our discerning clients but also came at the right price point. When we became aware of the AccurioLabel from Konica Minolta about a year ago, we soon realised that we had found the right machine.

This press will help us respond quicker to customer demand. We are also looking at some very exciting new technology that will combine our expertise in hotfoiling with digital print and more specifically with the capabilities of the AccurioLabel 230 press."

Gary Kerr, Managing Director, Premier Labels

PREMIER® LABELS

SUPERFAST LABELS

"We had to find a machine that could take on the overflow and power through some of the mid and longer length jobs."

Andrew Miller, Managing Director, Superfast Labels

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When Superfast Labels encountered a serious capacity issue in its established digital label production due to continued growth, the company turned to Konica Minolta to find a solution that would slot in seamlessly and increase efficiencies. Superfast had reached full capacity on its three inkjet presses and was looking to replace one of them with a faster machine with equal reliability, ease of use and robustness that would also fit into the existing factory space. The solution came in the form of the AccurioLabel 230, which has now been installed at the company's Sittingbourne facility.

Originally serving its customers with labels printed on a raft of flexo presses, Superfast Labels bought its first digital press in 2012, and today its £2 million turnover comes mainly from digital. The company truly lives up to its name by delivering printed labels in just 24–48 hours from receipt of artwork, sent out to a very wide variety of customers, large and small, in many different industries and as far away as South America.

CHALLENGES

Superfast Labels was founded in the early 1990s by the Miller family and today employs 18 staff. The company fully embraced digital technology early on, investing in its first inkjet label press eight years ago, and then over the following years gradually replacing two more of its four flexo presses with digital machines. In the process, Superfast has become a 'victim' of its own success and is known for its highly agile operation and ultra-fast delivery of labels.

Andrew Miller, son of the founder, is the managing director of the family-owned company. He explains, "We usually receive artwork by email and aim to send out proofs within a few hours. If these are approved quickly, the job can be on the press that day and shipped out by the end of the afternoon."

This unique approach means that the order book only fills up two or three days in advance at most, but this doesn't worry Andrew, who understands how to profit from the immediacy of digital print. "If we look at next week today Thursday – we have no idea what we will be producing then, but by Tuesday there will be 70 orders waiting to be printed," he says. "The orders come in at extremely short notice, but we have a robust system in place to deal with that – it's how we like to operate – and our customers know they can rely on us to deliver what they need when they need it."

However, towards the end of 2019, Superfast Labels had reached maximum capacity on the three inkjet presses and it was becoming increasingly difficult to deliver on that promise. "We had to find a machine that could take on the overflow and power through some of the mid and longer length jobs," explains Andrew. "And we needed a reliable workhorse that could replace the oldest of our inkjet presses and literally fit into the same slot. We also wanted a machine that could be up and running almost from day one and give us more speed and flexibility."

"Once the AccurioLabel was in place, we did a few tests then went on our holidays safe in the knowledge that we had found the right fit."

Andrew Miller,
Managing Director, Superfast Labels

SOLUTION

With such specific needs, the Superfast team didn't take long to realise that the Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230 ticked all the boxes and furthermore came at the right investment level. Successful print trials at Konica Minolta's UK showroom in Sutton-in-Ashfield and a visit to an existing customer confirmed the decision.

Andrew continues, "The digital jobs we print are so varied and can be quite tricky at times, so we presented the team at Konica Minolta with some highly challenging test files. I was very happy to see that the press passed with flying colours, so it was an easy choice to make."

Within weeks the press was installed almost as an early Christmas present to the whole team. "Once the AccurioLabel was in place, we did a few tests then went on our holidays safe in the knowledge that we had found the right fit. In early January, the operator had a couple of days training and that was it. We were ready to roll."

The AccurioLabel 230 offers Superfast Labels full-colour print at a speed of up to 23.4m/min with an addressable print quality resolution of 1200 x 1200 dpi. The transport system, unwind and rewind are built by finishing specialist GM, a feature that did not go unnoticed by Superfast when considering the investment. Andrew says, "We already run a fleet of GM finishing equipment – two GM DC330MINIs and two GM DC330NANOs – so it's a technology that we know and trust. It reassured us that the construction of the machine was sound."

The toner-based press comes with AccurioPro Label Impose software, which automates impositioning to save on waste and time. The PDF-based workflow features a simple and intuitive interface that automatically imposes and prepares jobs. Superfast had previously been carrying out the step&repeat process manually. Now artwork PDFs are simply dragged into Label Impose from the management information system, making life a lot easier for the pre-press department, explains Scott Obermuller, who is Superfast's reprographics and digital print manager. He adds, "We simply had to increase our productivity and fill the gap with something faster but keep the high print quality. The AccurioLabel was exactly what we needed when it came to replace our oldest inkjet press."

"We have already printed 40,000 metres, or 2.3 million labels, on the new KM press with no issues. The average job length is 130 metres and that takes only a few minutes on press."

Andrew Miller, Managing Director, Superfast Labels

After just five weeks of operation, the AccurioLabel 230 has printed over 300 jobs and Andrew estimates that the machine is only running at 25–30% capacity. Looking at the MIS, which quickly gives him a complete overview, he says, "We have already printed 40,000 metres, or 2.3 million labels, on the new KM press with no issues. The average job length is 130 metres and that takes only a few minutes on press."

Production manager Tracy Pollock is also singing the praises of the AccurioLabel. "The KM is going to change our lives," she says. "It has already speeded up production and everything runs so much smoother now. And it has opened us up to more challenges." Andrew agrees, "Yes it has. Back in November last year we were literally cracking under the pressure. Now with the AccurioLabel installed we have truly cracked it."

The new partnership with Konica Minolta is set for success. "The team at Superfast are already experts in industrial digital label printing, so they knew exactly what they wanted and the AccurioLabel fits perfectly with their existing workflow," comments Steve Lakin, Label Press Sales Consultant at Konica Minolta Business Solutions (UK). "This proves that it isn't just a label press for new entrants into digital, it's a robust and reliable machine that holds its own against any of the high-end presses."

"We are very pleased to have found a partner like Konica Minolta, a company with a proven technology, the perfect machine and the support that we need to continue serving our customers in the years ahead," Andrew concludes. "We now have three digital presses on site allowing continual production across the widest range of substrates. Combined with our fleet of GM finishing equipment and our digital expertise, we are ready to take on any challenges and continue to deliver super-fast!"

Superfast Labels Ltd Digital Print

COTSWOLD LABELS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Situated on the edge of a designated Area of Outstanding Beauty, in Cirencester, Cotswold Labels shares its premises with sister company, South Western Tapes. The company prints labels for a variety of artisan food and drinks producers, as well as for the industrial and retail sectors. Having first entered digital production in 2011, it has now partnered with Konica Minolta to bring in an AccurioLabel 190 toner press to power up performance and increase productivity.

"The quality of the print was one of the main drivers for the purchase, along with the ability to print onto standard facestocks, without treatment or special finishes. Image quality is outstanding for a machine at this price point,"

Howard Burr, Managing Director, Cotswold Labels

Cotswold Labels is on a path of expansion and digital transformation. The company supplies self-adhesive labels, mainly to local customers, printed on its narrow web flexo presses and hot foiling machines. Wanting to respond to current market trends and take on more customers, it is now expanding its capabilities and accelerating production with the investment in an AccurioLabel 190 toner press from Konica Minolta, complemented by a DC330 converting unit from GM.

CHALLENGES

For managing director Howard Burr, the interest in digital printing goes back to 2009 when he first started at looking to expand the label side of his business.

He had joined South Western Tapes in 1995, and the company acquired what was then Malmesbury Labels in 2008 when realising the high risk of relying on just one avenue of income in the tough economic climate that existed at the time.

After rebranding the label business to reflect the move to Cirencester, Cotswold Labels invested in a table-top water-based inkjet printer, but soon found that issues with quality and finishing were eating into profits, and therefore shelved the idea for the time being. But the desire to implement digital did not go away, and in 2011, a small four-colour digital print and finishing combo was brought in from a US supplier, with the aim of printing those shorter run jobs that the company's flexo presses couldn't produce profitably.

Those first stepping stones into digital provided the company with some very valuable lessons, but as demand continued to grow, the need for more capacity and consistent, high print quality became more urgent.

"We cut our teeth on those first digital investments," explains Howard, "but we want to grow the label side of the business quite significantly over the next few years and take on more work from small brands and local producers, so we needed to invest in a reliable, industrial print solution that could truly deliver for us."

SOLUTION

The Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 190 toner press was chosen after Cotswold Labels had surveyed the market for some time looking for that perfect combination of high quality and affordable investment. "The quality of the print was one of the main drivers for the purchase, along with the ability to print onto standard facestocks, without treatment or special finishes. Image quality is outstanding for a machine at this price point," says Howard.

- Ease of operation
- Low maintenance
- Reliability

The four-colour toner press prints at speeds up to 18.9m/min in a resolution of 1200dpi, on uncoated media 330mm wide. It comes with KM Label Impose software, which automates jobs, such as impositioning and step-and-repeat, and also offers support for variable data printing. Job pricing is equally straightforward as this is based on a simple click model that uses price per linear metre to calculate the final cost, which includes consumables and service.

"The impositioning software makes it very simple and efficient to run the press," says Howard, "so we are looking to train several of our staff, because it is quite easy to learn. You don't need a trained flexo or litho press operator. Basically, if you can use a

smartphone, you can run this press. Of course, it also gives us a greater degree of flexibility having more people who can operate it."

To ensure a sound return on investment, understanding just how digital print fits into the mix is key. "Upping our digital capability gives us a great opportunity in the marketplace," states Howard. "Buyers and brand owners have seen how they can be more flexible with their product packaging. They want to be able to offer seasonal variations, promotional campaigns and the opportunity to test variants on shelf at low cost, and they know that digital can give them that.

"We understand the value proposition for brand owners, who are looking to buy smaller volumes so they can react to the market quickly, and as a print supplier, we have to back up their flexibility and deliver labels just in time and in the right amount. We need to deliver a high-quality product at the right time and to specifications – the AccurioLabel press enables us to do just that.

He adds, "We are also looking to engage with other label printers of our size that have not invested in digital and help them with their requirements."

As well as putting in a new mez zanine to make room for the new press and finisher, Cotswold Labels has also taken on new staff. Stephen Bates has joined as Print Pre-Production and Liaison Manager to head up the pre-press and digital print department, adding his long experience gained at a major digital toner press manufacturer over the past 15 years. He says, "The AccurioLabel press is a big step forward for Cotswold Labels as we now offer a complete in-house service to our customers. It allows us to tap into a market where in the past we could not compete, and combined with our hot foil machines, we can now deliver high-quality digitally printed and foiled labels."

Partnering with the right press supplier to ensure ongoing support and future-proof its investment have been some of the main criteria for Cotswold Labels in choosing to work with Konica Minolta. Howard explains, "Konica Minolta's long heritage in the printing industry was key to making the decision to invest in the AccurioLabel 190. Their technology has been well proven in the sheetfed market over many years."

He adds, "From my initial contact with Konica, they have been extremely helpful throughout the whole process of ordering and installing the press. And the service engineers are practically on our doorstep. Having that whole support network of trained engineers is also essential for me to make sure that downtime is kept to a minimum, and speaking to the maintenance guys and hearing their views has further reassured me that we have made the right choice.

"Although Konica is a new entrant to the label market, they are developing rapidly and are looking to improve their presses in line with market requirements; something we wanted to benefit from going forward. Backed up by our existing flexo, foiling and embossing expertise, the AccurioLabel gives us a footing in a lot of camps and will be instrumental to our growth," concludes Howard.

"It's great to work with a company like Cotswold Labels that understands the need to get serious about digital and is looking for an experienced partner to help expand its horizons," commented Steve Lakin, Label Press Sales Consultant for Konica Minolta Business Solutions UK. "The AccurioLabel is the ideal machine to help the Cotswold team achieve their goals and move them into new profitable areas of business."

"Konica Minolta's long heritage in the printing industry was key to making the decision to invest in the AccurioLabel 190. Their technology has been well proven in the sheetfed market over many years."

Howard Burr, Managing Director, Cotswold Labels

Cotswold Labels

LABELS UK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sat in the shadow of Old Trafford football stadium, Manchester-based Labels UK Ltd is a family-run label printer, managed by father and son duo, Steve and David Dobson. Established over 30 years ago, the company has recently invested in a digital toner label press from Konica Minolta in response to increased demand from its customers for faster delivery of high-quality, full colour labels.

As a supplier of self-adhesive labels to customers in the UK and in Europe, Labels UK Ltd is well aware of the advantages of digital printing, which allows faster time to market, just-in-time delivery and no minimum orders quantities. The company, which employs 12 staff, has now decided to take the next step in digital by investing in a Konica Minolta bizhub PRESS C71cf label printing system to include all these benefits in its business model and offer cost-effective, high quality print to its clients.

CHALLENGES

Labels UK Ltd had been searching for the right industrial label production press for over a year.

With customers in a wide variety of sectors, including chemical, security, and food and drink, the need to supply labels with very short lead times had been growing for some time. Customers were also actively asking for digitally printed labels. The company had been meeting that demand by producing labels on a small desktop inkjet printer, installed a few years previously, but the running cost combined with the limited capacity were proving to be barriers to taking on more work and increasing profitability.

SOLUTION

Labels UK Ltd has successfully been running a suite of flexo presses and hot foil machines for many years, but the time had come to put a bigger emphasis on digital. The search for the right combination of high-quality print, production-level capacity and a suitable capital cost point led the team to visit the Packaging Innovations show in Birmingham, where Konica Minolta was demonstrating its label printing expertise.

When Steve saw the high-quality labels produced on the Konica Minolta press running on stand, he knew that he had found the solution to his problem and didn't hesitate in starting negotiations to acquire one of his own.

- Ease of operation
- Low maintenance
- Reliability

The bizhub PRESS C71cf can print on most standard label substrates without the need to prime. It comes with Konica Minolta's own Label Impose software, which optimises the use of media by automating jobs, such as impositioning and step-and-repeat, and also offers support for variable data printing. It works on a simple drag-and-drop principle where the one-up, print-ready PDF file is simply placed into the software, which then performs the necessary functions. This is complemented by a Konica Minolta FD-9 Auto Scan Spectrophotometer gives Labels UK Ltd the ability to profile and calibrate the colours in around four minutes. All technology that adds up to significant savings in time and waste.

The cost model of the press is based on a straightforward click price per linear metre, which includes consumables and service. This means that the company can quote for a job without seeing the artwork, as there is no issue with estimating ink coverage.

'We know exactly how much each job is going to cost,' said Steve. 'It is very simple to calculate, and we can adjust a quote as needed in a matter of minutes. And as the set-up is so quick; we save a lot on substrates compared to our flexo presses.'

The new Konica Minolta bizhub PRESS C71cf stands in a separate, dedicated room, built specifically to house the digital department. The company has also added to its finishing operation by installing a Digicon Lite converter from AB Graphic International to cope with the output.

Digital Print Manager Tom Clucas, at Labels UK Ltd, sings the praises of the new press, "I can 100% vouch for the ease of use. We had two days of training on the machine, but to be honest, one would have been enough – it's that simple to run and the functions are pretty much self-explanatory. The press is ready to print within a couple of minutes and we can just line up the jobs then run them back to back without stopping." He adds, "This machine is much more efficient, and the turnaround is so quick; plus, the print quality is fantastic." Tom had no printing experience prior to joining Labels UK Ltd two years ago, and now confidently manages the digital print operation, preparing files and sending them to the press.

Having efficient service support is key for smaller printing companies venturing into higher volume digital production. "We've only had one issue with the press so far," says Steve Dobson, "and an engineer was on site within two hours to sort it out. Knowing that we can rely on Konica Minolta to be at the end of the phone and on site so quickly when needed, was a big selling point for us."

Labels UK Ltd may be a small business, but with the new Konica Minolta press, it now has the potential to take on a much bigger part of the market. It has definitely hit the ground running with the first commercial job going on the new press the very next day after installation, and they haven't stopped since. And the 1200 x 1200dpi print resolution is not going unnoticed.

"Our customers are amazed by the print and they love the fast turnaround. And to be fair, the registration is excellent, and the quality is stunning. The Konica Minolta bizhub PRESS C71cf covers all the needs of our existing customers and we can now deal with any new enquiries for digital that come in. We are only two months in and turnover in digital has already doubled!" concludes Steve.

"Although this is an entry-level machine, it can make a huge difference to companies like Labels UK Ltd by enabling them to compete with digital presses that cost three times as much. It is the perfect match," commented Steve Lakin, Label Press Sales Consultant for Konica Minolta.

"it was clear to us that there was so much more work for digital out there that we just couldn't tap into, as we simply didn't have the necessary capacity."

Steve Dobson,
Managing Director, Labels UK Ltd

Labels UK
LIMITED

SOABAR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Established in the 1970s, Leicester-based Soabar is a leading labelling solutions specialist, servicing a wide variety of industries including retail, food, chemical, automotive and logistics. In addition to supplying thermal transfer printers, consumables and service, the company also produces high quality digital and flexographic labels on behalf of its customers nationwide.

With a goal to boost its digital print capability, Soabar has added two new Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 190 label printers and an AccurioPress C3070 colour sheet-fed press, equipped with Accurio PRO Color Care software suite, to its armoury.

- Additional digital print capability
- Best-in-class colour management
- Platform for future growth

CHALLENGES

When Soabar first decided to enter the digital age in 2017, it opted to invest in a Konica Minolta bizhub PRESS C71cf digital label printer and finishing equipment, a move that enabled it to bring all digital label printing business in-house rather than outsource to a third-party. This investment paid off, opened doors to new markets and new opportunities, and brought in a lot of new work for the firm.

As the volume of digitally printed labels continued to grow rapidly, the company decided to invest in a second press to deliver additional capacity. Another key driver for the expansion was to build resilience; in the event that one device was being serviced, with a second press, there would be no interruption to throughput, or delay in delivery to customers.

"Having more capacity means we are not reliant on just one machine. That's provided us with a level of flexibility as well as the capacity to keep on growing."

Phil Achurch
Managing Director
Soabar

The decision to invest was dependent on several criteria being met; cost-effectiveness and a strong return on investment was key; ensuring absolute colour consistency across all output devices was essential; as were the ability to produce labels with reverse-side printing.

SOLUTION

Instead of purchasing one new label printer, Soabar opted for a complete fleet refresh, replacing the legacy C71cf with two AccurioLabel 190 digital label presses, which offer best-in-class graphic output, easy colour management and operator friendly interaction.

The company also invested in the AccurioPress C3070 colour press, marking its entry into the commercial sheet-fed digital printing market. This digital colour on-demand system boasts fast print speeds, comprehensive media handling and sophisticated finishing versatility.

All three systems were installed with the Accurio PRO Color Care software suite which comprises five modules. Color Care Catch - measures and controls colour output and verifies that the quality conforms to the standard defined; Color Care Profiler - creates high quality ICC printer profiles on the colour device; Color Care MatchPatch - further refines and optimises ICC printer profiles; Color Care Linker - allows the creation of DeviceLink profiles from easy-to-use presets to expert-level free linking; and Color Care Display - calibrates computer monitors and creates ICC monitor profiles.

BENEFITS, RESULTS, RETURN ON INVESTMENT AND FUTURE PLANS

Managing Director Phil Achurch said: "We knew that we wanted to continue utilising Konica Minolta systems. We are committed to delivering first class customer service at all times and we know we can depend on the devices' quality of output, speed and reliability. The click charge model suits us well and importantly, we have built a strong partnership and feel very confident about the support that we get from Konica Minolta."

He added: "Our initial plan was to add a second label printer to the line-up, however future-proofing our investment and further boosting our capability made sense, which is why we ended up with a brand new three-strong fleet."

Soabar completed major renovations to its factory to accommodate the new investment. It has installed air conditioning, built a new mezzanine floor adding 100 square metres of space, and opened up the office space. The refurbishment has also served to join up the two sides of the business, enabling them to more effectively optimise the space.

Adding the AccurioPress C3070 press to the line-up has enabled Soabar to streamline the label proofing process. The company now utilises the system for customer proofing, this has removed the requirement to stop long runs on the label presses, and now allows for sheet-fed labels to be printed for shorter runs, proofing and in the longer-term for printing swing tickets.

Phil said: "One of the key advantages of the new solution is that we have been able to move work away from our flexo presses and output it on the Konica Minolta 190s. The new way of working is simpler, better and more cost-effective."

A key component of the investment strategy was to elevate Soabar's label printing services, expand its customer base and meet customers' requirements for short run, high quality, fast turnaround jobs.

"The ability to reinsert media to print on both sides of the label has been a huge value-add," Phil noted.

Soabar is also seeing a boost in productivity. The company typically runs different media stock on each press, meaning jobs can be throughput without having to stop to change the substrate. The two devices are located side by side meaning one operator can easily run both.

"The fact that the two label printers and the sheet-fed press are able to communicate with each other and that colour consistency is a given is also a key benefit," Phil explained.

In conclusion he said: "Having more capacity means we are not reliant on just one machine. That's provided us with a level of flexibility as well as the capacity to keep on growing. Our first investment enabled us to deliver a lot of profitable work and we are confident that we will soon see a strong return on this investment."

"One of the key advantages of the new solution is that we have been able to move work away from our flexo presses and output it on the Konica Minolta 190s. The new way of working is simpler, better and more cost-effective."

Phil Achurch
Managing Director
Soabar

soabar

LABEL TEC

"We've been working with Konica Minolta for many, many years, printing great labels on their machines. It just works for us"

Paul Dunne
Managing Director
Label Tec

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Label Tec Scotland started using Konica Minolta printing technology back in 2004 when digital was still very new in label production. The company had invested in the first VP8020 laser printer in the UK – a four-colour, roll-to-roll machine, powered by a Konica engine and originally developed for continuous stationery and forms. Label Tec saw the opportunity to run the sprocket-fed printer in-line with a Newfoil machine for cutting and foiling to produce embellished labels in shorter runs.

"You could say that we helped pioneer Konica's label printing technology," said managing director and founder Paul Dunne, thinking back. "We eventually had two VP8020s and kept them running until they became obsolete. They stood us in good stead for the digital market and produced some great labels for our customers. They also set us on our path with Konica Minolta, and it was the start of a long fruitful partnership."

This partnership has seen Label Tec work closely with Konica Minolta over the years to maximise the potential of its label printing technology. In 2015, the Scottish label printer installed the first bizhub PRESS C71cf label printer in the UK, at its facility in Airdrie, North Lanarkshire. This was upgraded in 2019 to an AccurioLabel 230 press, also the first in the UK and a machine developed with significant input from Label Tec.

CHALLENGES

Label Tec Scotland started out as a partnership in 1996, working out of a garage with an old-fashioned foil printing machine, which according to Paul: "could hardly register two colours together." After about 18 months, the company invested in a reconditioned foiling machine and moved into a small production unit. This was also the time when the first press operator joined the company.

The founders both came from the world of long run label production but had discovered that there was good business to be had in producing high-quality, short-run labels and wanted to exploit this niche market. "We thought it would be better to focus on short run work with a wider spread of customers, as it was less risky and there was more margin to be had," explains Paul. The next step was to invest in a flexo press to complement the more sophisticated foiling machines that were now on the factory floor. "We improved our skills in flexo printing and continued to invest in more presses and more foil printing machines," says Paul.

The main customers at the time were UK manufacturers of televisions, white goods and other electronics, but that demand started to fall away as many companies moved production abroad. Label Tec therefore started to diversify into new markets, such as the premium drinks sector, where its expertise in foiling could be used to full advantage.

The interest in digital printing had always been a factor and soon the VP8020 laser printers made their debut. Paul continues, "When they became obsolete, we diversified into digital desktop printers, and although they were a bit limited, it did start to open up markets for us. We found that as soon as customers heard the word 'digital', they got very excited about it. But it was very much in its infancy when we moved into it."

As demand started to outgrow capacity, Label Tec Scotland continued to pioneer

digital label printing through investment in new technology, including an aqueous inkjet press. However, Paul was keen to find a replacement for the 8020 printers with the Konica engine that had given his company a great reputation for high-quality labels very early on.

Having heard about the first dedicated toner label press from Konica Minolta, he started to investigate this newly developed digital machine. However, at the time it was not on the market in the UK, so Paul took matters into his own hands and contacted Litho Formas in Portugal, which was the beta test site of the Konica Minolta four-colour bizhub PRESS C71cf.

"When I approached Konica UK, the salespeople weren't aware of the new press, but they quickly became very excited about its potential. After having test files printed successfully in Portugal, we managed to get the first UK C71cf installed in 2015, and we worked with Konica to get the best out of the machine," says Paul. "It was perfect as it had a stable web path, which was so important to us. Re-registering digitally-printed stock offline had until then been a constant problem."

For several years, Label Tec enjoyed great success with this unique complement of toner, inkjet, flexo, silk screen and foiling capabilities, but there were aspects of the digital machines, such as printing speed, that could be improved.

SOLUTION

As the latest iteration of Konica Minolta's digital label print technology, the AccurioLabel 230 digital toner press can run at a speed of 23.4m/min, which in real terms represents a 73% increase, as most self-adhesive papers and films (including PP, PET and YUPO) can be printed at full speed.

"The team at Konica Minolta has always listened to us and taken onboard our feedback," says Paul. "We have had the opportunity to give them a lot of input on the first label press, with the result that this new model has everything we wanted: web guides, the higher speed and even the ability to slit."

The press tackles textured and uncoated materials with ease, printing four colours in a resolution of 1200 x 1200 dpi at 8bits. The 3D hybrid structure of the toner contains functional polymers to ensure a high level of compatibility with various types of media, along with low-temperature fusing technology.

"The toner works extremely well on textured materials without the need to varnish, because it is encapsulated in a resin, and that was important for us, because you can so easily ruin that texture by saturating the paper with varnish," says Paul. "And we get a very good blend between the toner and foil. The way the foil almost melts into the toner is beautiful, and that was a pleasant surprise."

Another new feature is web guides on the unwinder and rewinder for accurate feeding of the substrate. Paul says, "We've got more stability with the print to web registration now, so there is no need for cameras on the machine, because it is normally very consistent print. To be honest, there are more opportunities for colour variance on a conventional press, so there's more consistency, more confidence."

Paul adds that the small footprint of the press and the ease of operation are other big plusses. "It doesn't take up a lot of space and this is important as people are struggling for space," he explains. "It's also very user friendly, so you're not in trouble if you lose a highly-skilled operator like you might be with some of the bigger, more expensive digital presses."

The many years of cooperation with Konica Minolta is underpinned by an extensive service and support network. "We knew from the start that we could rely on an already established network of engineers who were already on the road on the sheetfed side, so it was an easy transition for them. Also, all the consumable parts of the machine are included in the contract and can be replaced," says Paul before concluding: "I know sometimes people buy into a brand, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it is the right machine for them. It is about having the confidence to follow your instinct. We've been working with Konica Minolta for many, many years, printing great labels on their machines. It just works for us."

"Our long relationship with Label Tec is a testament to the reliability and consistency of the Konica Minolta machines, and the commitment we have to our customers," comments Steve Lakin, Label Press Sales Consultant at Konica Minolta Business Solutions (UK). "Paul has been a pioneer in digital label printing since the early days, and his feedback has helped us bring this completely redesigned label press to market."

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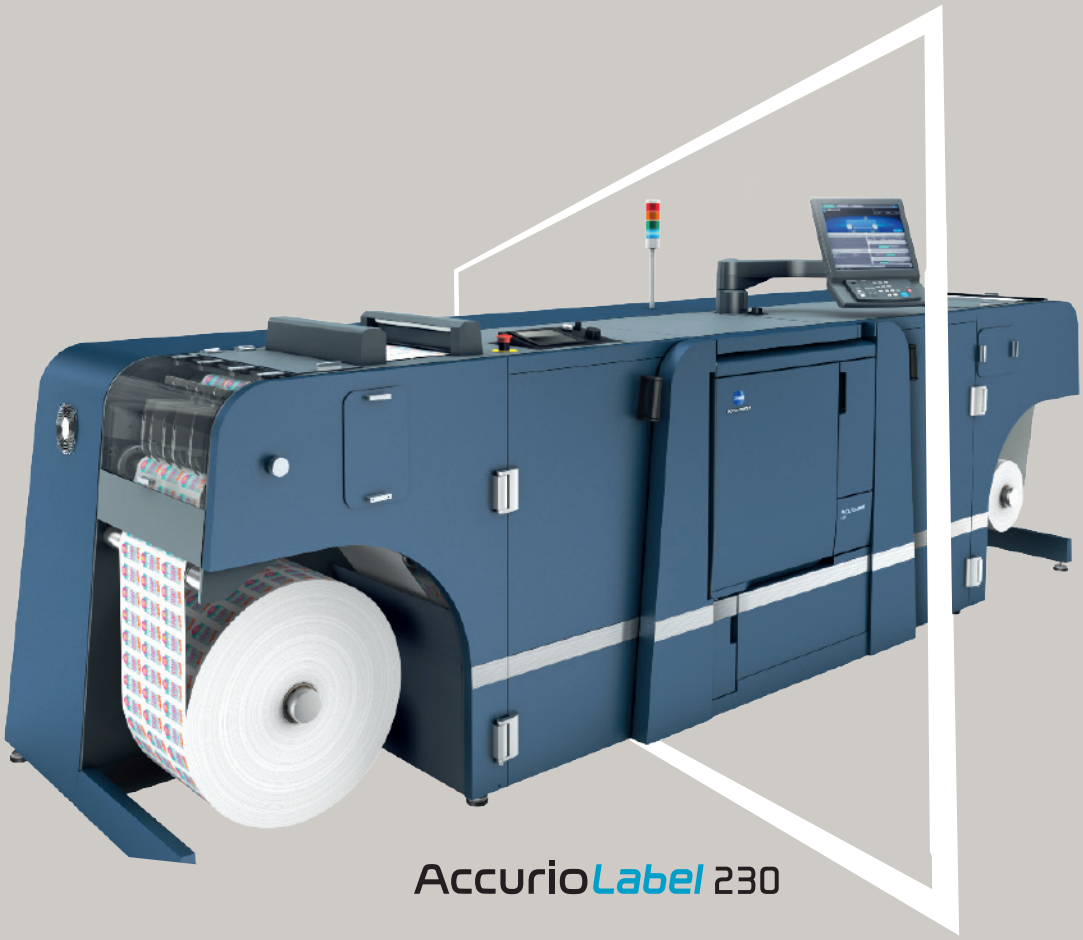

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LET'S TALK

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