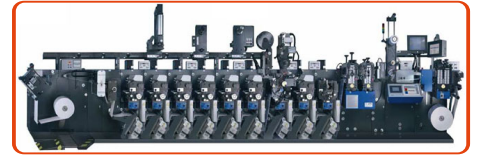
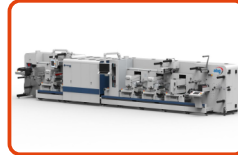


Resolving the Mystery of Going Digital or Hybrid or staying with an old friend Flexo



Flexo and Digital have long been thought of as competing technologies, but in reality, they can be viewed as "complimentary" technologies or integrated together as "Hybrid"! It does not have to be this or that, it can be this AND that!

It's an exciting time for our industry, and make sure that you are not left behind waiting too long- 'Change is the only Constant'; Evolution & Progress is all about moving forward and Technology is that ship which will sail us across the sea of advancements. In the world of Label printing, it is no different, to grow your business you have to look at the market place drivers, trends & technology to select what is best for your business. The question which leaves Flexo-based label-printers and convertors thinking-is it the right time to go Digital? If yes, then when to use Flexo and when to use digital, and if you are already using digital, then you may be thinking, do I have the right digital technology to compete and be successful in my business? What about hybrid then?

Historically analog printing such as Flexo has dominated package printing, during the era of 90's, most label convertors were Generalists and the growth was in double digits. Today, the scenario has changed. Demands of the brand owners in the label printing landscape have changed. The need for Specialists have come up, though the industry is still predominately categorized by generalists as specializing is a larger company's ball-game.

Manufacturers are continuously generating new flavors, colors, sense, varieties and sizes and to differentiate their product they shift the responsibility to the packaging & label (Adding SKU's in larger numbers while reducing print per SKU's). Due to number of choices thrown across to today's consumer, grabbing and retaining their attention has become crucial to the success of any brand. The first thing a consumer notices about any brand while strolling across the aisles of the supermarket is the packaging, more specifically, the Labels.

In this scenario, brand and packaging buyers are adopting lean manufacturing and Just in time (JIT) processes. They want quicker turnaround, reduced inventory and reduced waste. All this has led to two very important questions which need to be addressed; do we have right tools to make it happen? Do they have right printing technology for their business to succeed and grow? In the midst of all this, the dilemma which a label printer & convertor faces everyday is, whether to run Flexo or Digital? One thing is very clearly evident here-Flexo is not going to go anywhere soon in coming time, this technology has not been invented with the obsolete button, but what we are going to witness/ are witnessing is more and more work is being delegated to digital, which if we look closely, is opening up many facets for the conventional presses.

Flexographic label printing is the ideal choice for longer runs with a minimum number of SKU's where as Digital Printing is ideal for the short run jobs that require multiple queues, multiple versions, frequent graphic changes and where variable data is required. With Flexo, it is best to have press running continuously as long as possible. When one SKU or version of label is printed and completed it takes additional time and labor to complete the setup to make it ready for the next job to be printed and during this time when the press is not running, the label printer & convertor is losing money.

In Digital, make-readytime, cost, inventory, waste and material are minimized. Digital printing provides consistency in production with computerized color management which results in color consistency from label to label, job to job and we can get any number of repetitions with no variations even with different operators. A digital press provides an efficient way to handle shorter to moderate run lengths, provides the flexibility to finish in-line or near in-line. From the efficiency standpoint, label printers & convertors should look at the idea of having digital in their pocket as a technology which will not only compliment their Flexo but definitely opens up avenues in terms of flexibility in their capacity. Larger volume accounts with many queues need more efficiency and faster results. Digital printing will takes away lot of extra steps involved and will give an opportunity to venture into new markets and to attract new customers making you more competitive.

You may need stop here for a second and need to think about, why your presses are down? The answer which may resonate across will be 'EXCESSIVE SHORT RUN WORK'. Regardless of the print technology, when the press is not running you are not making any money. DOWN TIME is the enemy. The point which is worth noticing here is, Press Utilization Rate and Average Downtime. Conventional presses are down on an average 30% of the time. This is a huge loss. You as a business owner need to decide, what is the right and best technology for your business? The market around you is moving at a fast phase. Your customer demands digital, no matter what is the quantity. They want quality, they want consistency. In addition to all this, digital printing and finishing technology manufacturers have greatly improved performance of their equipment in terms of speed, reliability, quality and the capability to print on various substrates which enables this technology to be suitable for even wider range of production jobs and offers a much improved job-linked break-even point which is a plus.

To quickly understand Hybrid label printing, it combines Flexo and Digital by bridging the gap between two technologies, offering unlimited options for in-line printing and converting. It is a platform for producing longer runs and higher label counts. It also provides the option of adding embellishments, spot colors, varnishes and more while maintaining the consistency, repeatability and efficiency benefits that digital brings to the table. It maximizes your profitability by assisting you with faster copy changes, faster turnovers, faster jobs changeovers which at the end of the day results in higher production. Hybrid integrates the best attributes of Flexo and Digital.

When you think about sustaining and growing your business you need to think about the demands of your customers, your own internal tools and efficiency goals. This will help you to decide what will be best fit label printing technology in accordance to your business need.

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