COVID-19 AND THE FUTURE OF PRINT

Late last year FM Future in partnership with Ricoh Europe conducted a survey to ascertain the tone and opinion of the FuturePrint community in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. Graham Kennedy examines some of the key findings

In October 2020, 139 respondents from 20 countries completed a survey conducted by FM Future in partnership with Ricoh. Respondents come from the FuturePrint Eco-system of print technology, print production and manufacturing sectors. The objective was to gauge the sense of the market, expectations of the impact of change and how the crisis is altering demand and revealing opportunity for digital printing technology

A SENSE OF NORMALITY
2020 was clearly a year of great uncertainty, however by October when the survey was conducted, the majority of respondents had moved into a more resourceful state.

"Only 12% of respondents indicated they have closed their business"

While uncertainty remains, acceptance of this is a new fact of life. Results demonstrate that the majority of respondents agree a sense of normality has returned to business life with 53% answering 'somewhat' and a further 16% saying they have now become accustomed to it.

TACKLING THE CRISIS
Respondents highlight the innovative spirit of the inkjet community with 57% saying that they have adapted to create new demand and solve problems; 38% have added new digital solutions to help to deliver against changing demand.

Only 12% indicated they have closed their business, underlining the community of respondents' innovative DNA, with a natural inclination towards solving new problems.

IMPACT ON INNOVATION
Reassuringly, 51% of respondents report that they are innovating more now than prior to the Covid-19 crisis. Only 6% stated they have suspended their innovation plans, while the remaining 43% state it has impacted on but not halted innovation plans.

These results underline that respondents are more inclined to work outside of their comfort zone, to continue to drive business forward, solving problems and innovating in the process.
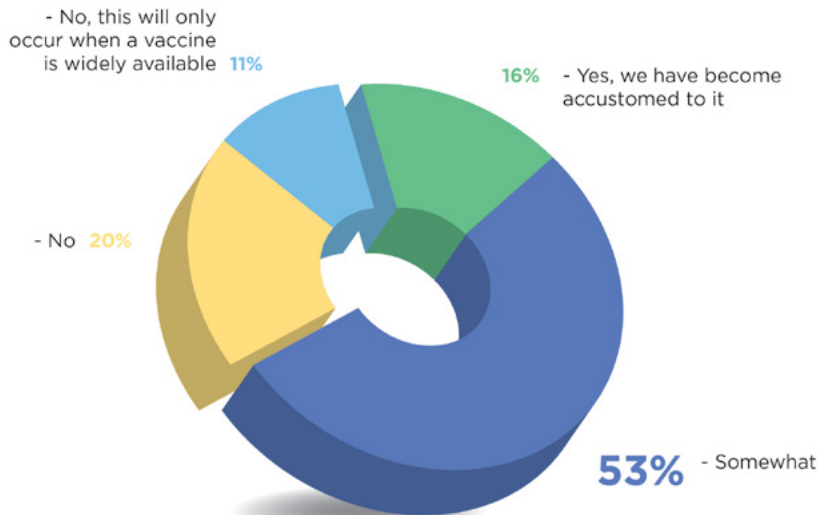
INVESTMENT CHANGES
51% of respondents stated that investment plans have changed with a focus on solving new problems while 31% said that the crisis has not forced them to change their investment plans.
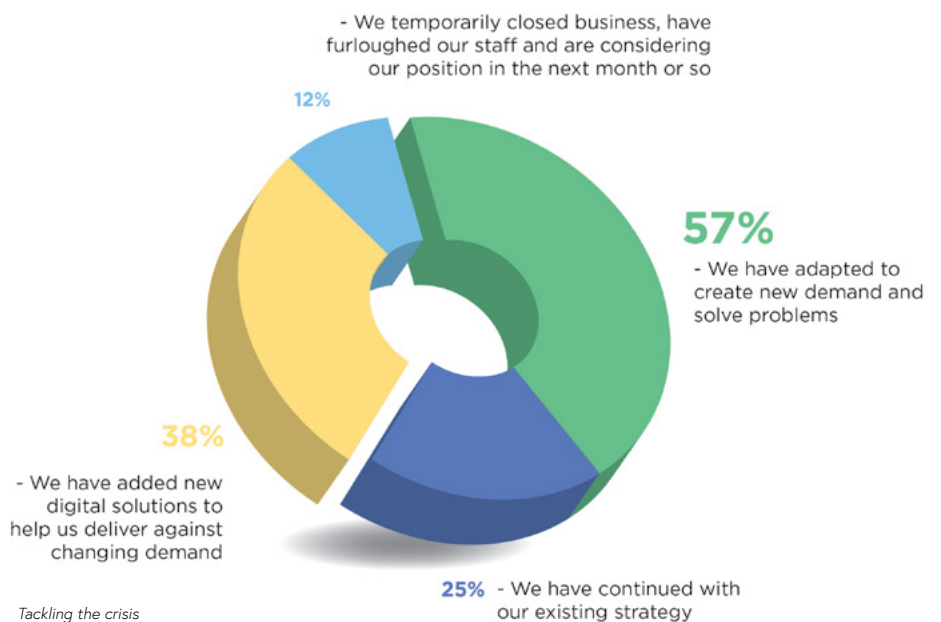
Only 18% believe that investment is now on hold – again demonstrating there is still opportunity to create value despite uncertainty and rapidly changing demand.

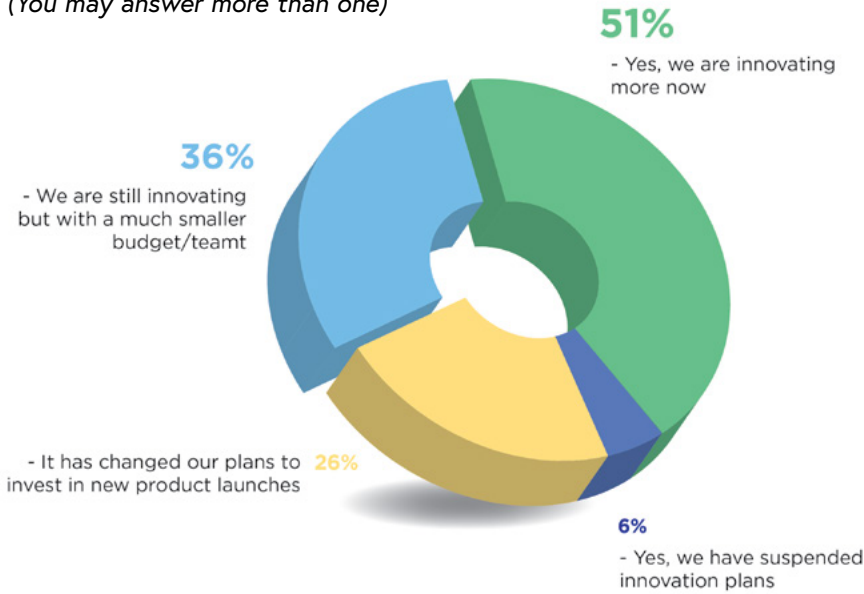*In your experience, has some sense of normality returned to business life when compared to April?*

- No, this will only occur when a vaccine is widely available 11%

16% - Yes, we have become accustomed to it

- No 20%

53% - Somewhat

A sense of normality

How have you tackled the crisis? (You may answer more than one)

- We temporarily closed business, have furloughed our staff and are considering our position in the next month or so

12%

57% - We have adapted to create new demand and solve problems

38% - We have added new digital solutions to help us deliver against changing demand
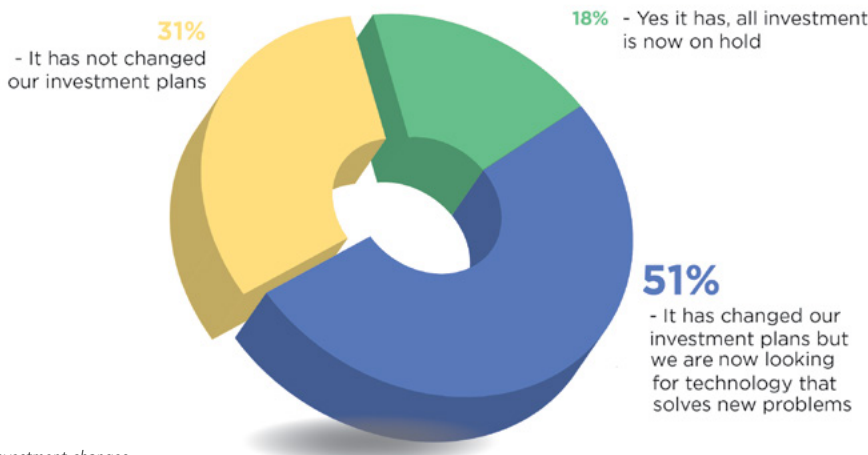
25% - We have continued with our existing strategy

Tackling the crisis

Has the crisis in the past few months affected your innovation plans?
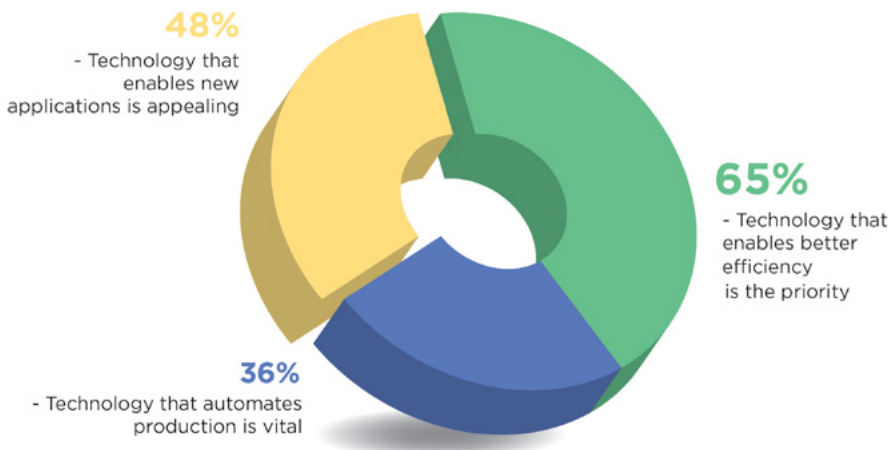*(You may answer more than one)*

51%
- Yes, we are innovating more now

36%
- We are still innovating but with a much smaller budget/teamt

- It has changed our plans to invest in new product launches **26%**

6%
- Yes, we have suspended innovation plans

Impact on Innovation

Has COVID-19 affected your plans to invest in new technology?

18% - Yes it has, all investment is now on hold

31%
- It has not changed our investment plans

51%
- It has changed our investment plans but we are now looking for technology that solves new problems

Investment changes

What is your priority with technology now?
(You may answer more than one)

48%
- Technology that enables new applications is appealing

65%
- Technology that enables better efficiency is the priority

36%
- Technology that automates production is vital

Technology priorities

TECHNOLOGY PRIORITIES

Efficiency is always high on the list of driving factors when acquiring new technology in any market and unsurprisingly the crisis has compounded this, with 65% stating efficiency as their priority.

"Respondents are more inclined to work outside of their comfort zone"

Not far behind, 48%, stated that technology that enables new applications is a key priority underlining that new application potential in new markets has gathered more interest as traditional print sectors struggle in line with reduced demand and shifting priorities.

COLLABORATION AND DIGITAL MANUFACTURING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

In response to critical issues in supply chain delivery of manufacturing goods into retail stores, according to respondents, collaboration (57%) has been forced to increase to solve these supply problems.

Secondly, respondents expect to see an increase in digital manufacturing investment to help solve future supply problems.

This aligns with a commonly held expectation that manufacturing models will start to decouple from a traditional centralised model with a more decentralised approach where manufacturing is located closer to customers, enabling supply regardless of uncertainty and with product that is best aligned with local demand.

ACCELERATED DEMAND FOR DIGITAL

Growth in digital printing in new industrial sectors has arguably been slow over the past five years pre-Covid. However, the crisis has revealed the traditional supply chains to be inflexible and unable to deliver

"Change has accelerated by 10 years in just 12 months"

against a fast-changing scenario. This has piqued interest in digital inkjet that can empower localised production and solve the problems of today.
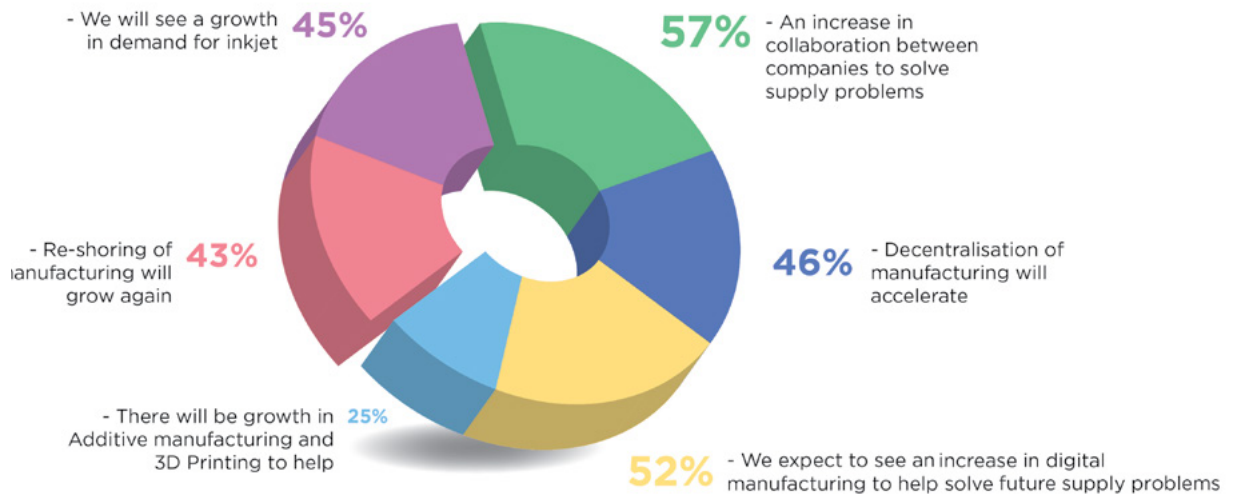
These results also chime with growth in interest for digital manufacturing technologies. Many believe change has accelerated by 10 years in just 12 months. Therefore, the added agility and flexibility along with late-stage customisation inkjet can deliver has greater appeal than ever.

CONCLUSION

While 2020 was a significant challenge, the results indicate a resilient sector with a commitment to innovation by solving new

Do you think that challenges with the general manufacturing and retail supply chain will lead to any of the following? (You may answer more than one)

45% - We will see a growth in demand for inkjet

57% - An increase in collaboration between companies to solve supply problems

43% - Re-shoring of manufacturing will grow again

46% - Decentralisation of manufacturing will accelerate

25% - There will be growth in Additive manufacturing and 3D Printing to help

52% - We expect to see an increase in digital manufacturing to help solve future supply problems

Collaboration and digital manufacturing

Do you think this is a watershed moment where digital print technology truly grows into new markets?

40% - It is a moment of change but not a moment of growth

50% - Yes

9% - No
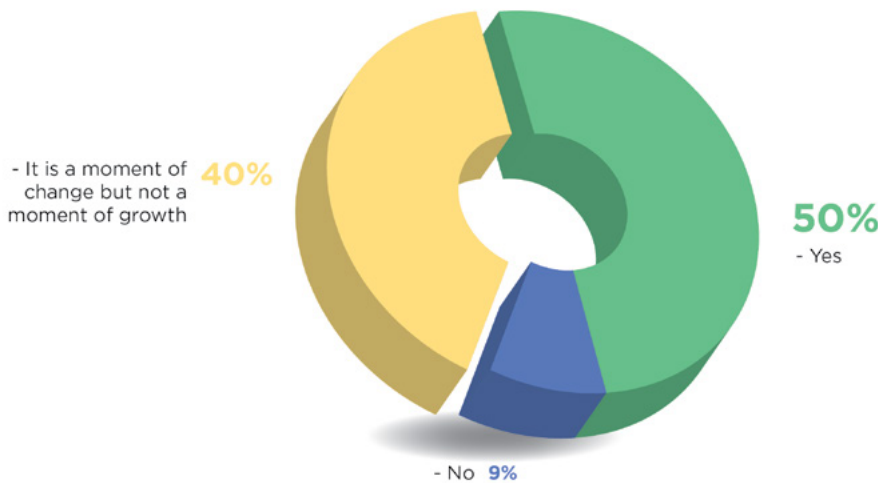
Accelerated demand for digital

problems that digital technology is best suited to solve. We expect the first half of 2021 will continue to provide challenges but despite continued uncertainty there is also a significant opportunity for inkjet as interest accelerates. We expect to see a more positive year overall with the second half of the year benefiting from the coverage of vaccines and a relative return to stable trading conditions. ∎

For all results of the 'Covid-19 and the Future of Print 21' survey, please visit www.futureprint.tech or email marcus.timson@fmfuturenow.com for a copy.

Further information:
Ricoh Europe, London, UK
email: graham.kennedy@ricoh-europe.com
web: www.ricoh-europe.com