SPOTLIGHTING SUSTAINABILITY IN SPECIALITY PRINTING

Graeme Richardson-Locke of FESPA, discusses the increased pressure on speciality-print providers for more environmental credentials as the demand for sustainable practice grows

Graeme Richardson-Locke, Head of Associations and Technical Lead at FESPA

At FESPA Global Print Expo 2022, many exhibitors displayed their innovative sustainable solutions

The main driver for this demand is consumer and brand behaviour as we all become more aware of sustainability concerns. How can we each take responsibility for minimising our environmental impact? Consumers are becoming hyper-aware of how the products they purchase damage the environment and want to know if they can be reused or recycled.

PRINT BUYERS QUESTION...

Print buyers are asking their providers to produce eco-friendly products that can be marketed at a comparable price to conventional alternatives. What technologies are you printing with? Will it be durable for the entire lifecycle of the product and maximise its shelf-life? How will the printing techniques and inks used impact the recyclability of the product at the end of its life? There is also an increased emphasis being placed on transparency and the need to eliminate greenwashing.

FUTURE SUCCESS

Printers are up against further economic challenges and consumers are still very price sensitive. As a result, it is essential that printers demonstrate the full value of eco-friendly products and that brands pass that same message on to consumers. As Christophe Aussenac, FESPA's President highlighted in his opening speech at FESPA Global Print Expo 2022, "We have all come through a period of crisis that most of us never imagined, let alone planned for.

"How can we each take responsibility for minimising our environmental impact?"

With our minds on the future, we must also think of future generations and focus on how to run our businesses with increased respect for the planet. From my own experience, I believe very strongly that sustainability and profitability are closely connected."

We have now reached a pivotal point for our industry where we can no longer overlook sustainability. Printers have to take action. To future-proof their businesses, print-service providers need to rethink their production practices and explore a switch to more eco-friendly technologies and consumables. Reduction of waste and the use of reusable/recyclable materials are key. Ultimately, companies that fail to take action will see a decline in business. Print buyers will turn to other providers who can prove their environmental credentials.

At FESPA Global Print Expo 2022, visitors could see a range of sustainable materials with a descriptor about the eco-friendly attributes of each

PLANNING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Every speciality-print business has unique and varying requirements, so it is hard to define a single road map or 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Instead, it is best to take a holistic approach to optimise production, as well as constantly reviewing the latest trends in the market. Print-service providers need to be cautious about taking environmental claims at face value. As well as focusing on production efficiency and waste reduction, quality, performance and longevity must be scrutinised. Print applications have to be fit for purpose and environmental responsibility is more than just reducing production waste. It is about maximising the life cycle of a product.

To support this, life-cycle analysis can help print providers to better understand and manage the impact of a product or service throughout its lifetime. From acquiring raw materials, designing, producing and delivering the product, right through to how it is used and what happens at the end of its life.

SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

Not only will undertaking this analysis enable printers to recognise areas for improvement, but it will help them to do so early in the production process. This, in turn, will ensure they can deliver better, more sustainable products from the get-go. There will be a need to gather data and produce a detailed inventory of inputs and outputs which may be complex. However, several software solutions are available, such as the Circulytics tools from The Ellen MacArthur Foundation. This can make the process simpler and is a great place to start.

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Another available avenue is to seek external, independent certification of environmental processes, such as ISO and EcoVadis. In this way, printers can demonstrate to their customers that they are moving towards a more environmental business model. B-Corp and Future-Fit Business also provide assessment tools to understand environmental progress.

URGENCY

The shift to more environmentally-conscious practices is also aided by new innovative, automated software solutions and eco-friendly substrates. These allow printers to reduce waste and cut carbon emissions. Technology and consumable suppliers are increasingly aware of the urgent demand for environmental progress in the market. This has brought about rapid developments in many aspects of digital printing, enabling print-service providers to improve their processes and make production greener.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that moving to a more sustainable business model is not always straightforward. However, it is safe to say that 'going green' will remain a focus in our industry for the long term. The environmental challenges we face are not an easy fix and are not solvable by one individual or one business. If we all play our part and work together the printing industry can do what it can to support the future of our planet. ◼

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