



BARRY LEWIS, MD Reel Appeal, with Domino N600i

Reel Appeal installs UK's first Domino N600i

THIS FAMILY RUN UK CONVERTER is looking to transform its conventional print business with the installation of the latest UV inkjet technology. Andy Thomas reports

Trade printer Reel Appeal, based in Oldham near Manchester, has installed the UK's first Domino N600i UV inkjet press, which it hopes will be the platform to triple the company's turnover over the next three years.

Managing director Barry Lewis has been involved with labels since the age of 11, working school holidays at his father's label company, learning how to operate the company's Edale-supplied Sanjo letterpress. Lewis learned his craft at two local label converters in nearby Todmorden and Burnley before setting up Reel Appeal with financial help from his family and three other shareholders Xten years ago.

Reel Appeal started out with a Sanjo letterpress and Arpeco slitter, before adding a 5-color stack flexo press from Chinese company Zonten, plus a flatbed hot foil press. Recently they added a rotary die-cutting unit from Wenzhou Rhyguan. They are now the UK agent for both Chinese manufacturers.

Reel Appeal quickly developed a specialty in booklet and leaflet labels for the agro chemicals and chemical markets after modifying the Sanjo press into a dedicated booklet converting line. Most final end users are UK-based multinationals who send their products all over Europe. Because this is a seasonal market, Reel Appeal soon diversified into prime label work.

Seven years ago the company moved to its current premises, and with its continued expansion took an option on the neighboring business unit – which now houses the Domino digital press in a temperature-controlled clean room.

'When it came to the next investment decision, we decided

not to go flexo, but, looking at our customer base, decided on UV inkjet as the best step,' recalls Lewis. 'The Domino N600i, we felt, was the best machine and with the best support in the UK market. It's a comfort that in three hours I can be face to face with Domino technicians.'

In fact Reel Appeal had already ventured into digital printing with a desktop Memjet press supplied by Magnum Materials. But without lamination this did not offer the print fastness required for the harsh outdoor environment typical of the agricultural and chemical sectors.

'We did look at the toner technologies, and in fact we did farm some work out to printers with Xeikon and HP presses,' says Barry Lewis. 'But there were always caveats for our market – particularly with color fastness and robustness for outdoor labels.'

PRINT TRIALS

After meeting Domino's UK sales manager Stephen Hancock at a trade show, things moved quickly, with job trials taking place on Domino's N600i press at its Cambridge HQ. 'I felt I could have confidence in the Domino UV inkjet press, which was the most robust machine I had seen,' says Lewis. 'When I open up the covers I can see things I can relate to. I was also confident that I would receive from Domino the technical backup and training I needed for this big step for our company. There will be a steep learning curve from prepress to post press and all steps in between.'



CONVENTIONAL operation at Reel Appeal

The Domino N600i installed at Reel Appeal is the same specification as the press demonstrated at Labelexpo Europe – but without the new white capability. ‘White was a step too far for our sort of work,’ says Lewis. ‘There was a cost implication and we haven’t put white in our flexo press for two years, CMYK fits my current customer base.’

Nor does Lewis see a future requirement for the extended gamut ink systems now being developed by Domino. ‘Our work is a lot of four color process and varnish. We are quite happy with the wider CMYK gamut of the Domino press.’

In terms of the digital crossover point, Lewis does not want to treat the Domino press as a short run machine. ‘The Domino runs fast, so we do not wish to take on “traditional” short run digital work with 10-20 jobs an hour. Ideally I’m looking for 7-8 jobs a day with a reasonable run length with variants, which we can cope with in terms of quotes and enquiries.’

TALKING IT UP

When L&L visited Reel Appeal, the company’s staffs were undergoing training on the recently installed press – but already Barry Lewis has been out selling its capabilities.

‘This will open up new markets for my trade customers and allow them to offer more variety to their end users,’ said Lewis.

‘The cost of additional printing plates meant that for smaller jobs we advised only making minor changes so there would only be one extra plate, and we shied away from suggesting variants. This prohibited our customers from marketing their products as much as they wanted to. With digital it is the opposite. Now the final customer can change whichever elements of the design they choose, and at no additional cost, so can up-sell their products. If I didn’t offer this, another supplier could have done. Now they are loving it and we have their marketing people fully on board. They won’t go back.’

OPERATIONS

The new digital printing operation will be run by Barry Lewis’ brother Martin, who left a well-paid IT post to take up this new opportunity. A young press operator from the flexo department is being trained to run the press itself, and an employee who worked up through the design side of the business – and

already handles artwork for the Memjet – will handle the front end. New positions are being created for dedicated marketing and digital pre-press roles.

Finishing will be carried out on the company’s existing converting units, where the Memjet finishing is already done. The 13in width of the Domino press is fully compatible with existing tool sets. ‘There’s no advantage to us in in-line finishing,’ says Barry Lewis. ‘When you’re printing at 50 m/min you don’t want to slow down to set up slitting knives.’

CONCLUSION

The installation of the Domino N600i at Reel Appeal is an example of the transformative effect of digital printing – and the smaller the company the more powerful the effect. ‘People already think I’m in a totally different league,’ says Barry Lewis. ‘Now there’s no reason that I can’t get to the top level. While printers with HPs and Xeikons are competing on price and turnaround, I’m now leading the pack instead of following.’

Looking to the future, Lewis aims to more than triple the turnover of Reel Appeal from just under GBP £1m to £3m in 2-3 years, and this will be achieved by further investment in supporting and improving the digital offering. ‘At the moment I can only see myself investing in digital.’

But there are dangers in pushing the ‘digital’ message, says Lewis. ‘You need to be careful about using the word digital in case it tells everybody that it’s cheaper, and that is not the message I want to get out. We want to say it gives you the ability and quality to help you promote your products. We are using the press to add value and not to save costs. It’s not just about saving plate costs but up-selling products.’

PRESS SPECS

The Domino N600i digital color inkjet press installed at Reel Appeal is the 4-color version of the new N610i machine launched by Domino at Labelexpo Europe 2013, (minus the new White print station). The press prints at up to 75m/min (246ft/min) with a native resolution of 600 dpi using Kyocera KJ4 jetting assemblies. Domino’s unique i-Tech technology features include CleanCap automated print head cleaning and capping station, and the ActiFlow ink circulation system which maintains ink temperature and degasses the ink for improved print quality and reliability. Domino’s StitchLink micro-motor controller technology maintains enables precise head alignment to eliminate stitch lines across the 333mm (13in) print width. The press is driven by an Esko DFE.