

08/08/2017 - A New Boost to Productivity for the Accidental Printers

With a rapidly expanding business, fabric and exhibition printers Harberson Ltd changed brand and supplier to find the most versatile solution for their needs. Now, a couple of months on from the installation of their new Mutoh ValueJet 1638UH UV hybrid printer, Print Manager Karl Richardson is delighted with the difference it's made to the company's productivity.

The accidental printers

Harberson Ltd wasn't always Harberson and it wasn't always a printing company. The business started life more than 20 years ago and in its initial incarnation it was called Chemi-Clean. Established by Eric Hargreaves, Karl's father-in-law, the company supplied bed linen to care homes and hospitals. When customers began asking for branded linen, investing in a printer seemed the obvious thing to do and gradually fabric printing became the mainstay of the business.

In 2010, when Eric retired, his two daughters, Caroline and Lisa, joined forces with Karl to take on the business, incorporating it and changing its name to Harberson Ltd. Since then, the operation has grown and evolved – now the lion's share of the work is in printing branded tablecloths for exhibitions and trade shows for clients across the UK and Europe. As well as these, Harberson supplies pop-up stands, roller banners, promotional work wear, pavement signs and bespoke large print and fabric printing.

Building capacity

As business built to over 3,000 customers, Harberson needed to expand its capacity. "We knew we wanted a hybrid printer that would allow us to print both rigid and roll media," explains Karl. "We needed something that could quickly take care of UV banners and pop-ups, freeing up our dye sublimation printers for fabric orders." However, the first hybrid they invested in didn't quite give them what they needed.

"When we started to look for an alternative, Colourgen put us in touch with SEDO, who supplied us with a Mutoh VJ-1638UH," says Karl. "That was a couple of months ago, and it's already made a difference to our production turnaround times." The advantage of using UV inks is that the print comes out of the printer already dry. "This fact alone saves a lot of time. We used to have to wait 24 hours for prints to dry before we could laminate them. Now, we can laminate them immediately and get things back to our clients far quicker. It's enabled us to keep production in-house, freeing up our dye sublimation printers for more fabric work as it takes on all the banner and pop-up orders."

A world of new opportunities

The Mutoh is nothing if not versatile, which is important to a small business such as Harberson. It's given them the capability to print on board and a range of other media. Prior to having it, if a client wanted a rigid print, they would have to print a vinyl sticker and apply it to a board before laminating it. Now, with the ability to print directly on board, the company has expanded their capacity for taking signage orders.

Karl sees the new printer as an integral element in the forward development of the business. "In effect, having the Mutoh is allowing us to add new product ranges onto our website – and the more diverse our product range, the less need our clients have to look elsewhere. It's giving us the ability to handle all of their printing needs in-house."

The new ValueJet VJ-1638UH is 64" wide and is Mutoh's first release of a dual head LED UV printer. It has been designed exactly for this type of circumstance – offering a versatile workhorse to an expanding business with a variety of needs. It can accommodate 1625 mm roll media as well as rigid boards up to 15mm thick. As well as CMYK LED UV inks, it can also take white ink and varnish,

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allowing for transparent or non-white substrates. This means it can handle practically anything you might throw at it – from trade show graphics to POP and retail signage, from wallpaper to backlit banners, and from small lot packaging to posters.

For Harberson, the Mutoh's flexibility is giving rise to new opportunities in all sorts of areas. "We're now able to print customised flooring, which could be a good area to expand into," says Karl. "It involves printing onto the back of clear lino – and would complement the other exhibition and promotional printing we offer."

SEDO made it easy

With the expansion in productivity a hybrid offered, Harberson definitely wanted to get the best printer for the job. "SEDO and Mutoh distributor, Colourgen couldn't have been more helpful," says Karl. "They loaded the machine with the specific print profile that we'd want to use, and then sent us sample printouts to compare with our own. They were also excellent when it came to the installation. Steve Evans, Colourgen's Senior Installation Engineer came and gave us a couple of days training on the features and the software and we were able to start using it straight away."

The Mutoh came bundled with Caldera RIP software and a PC. "We hadn't used Caldera before but we quickly discovered it has a great range of additional features, which might be useful for some of our other machines."

For Karl, it's been a wholly positive experience. "I would certainly recommend SEDO to other printers," he says. "They've been quick to answer any questions and we were very happy with the price. Having the Mutoh means we can respond more quickly to our clients and meet tighter deadlines."

So, what will be the next expansion for the accidental printers? "Well, the Mutoh covers all of our UV needs for now," says Karl. "Our next stop would probably be a wider dye sublimation machine – it would enable us to expand our display fabrics offering."

Flexible success

Harberson's is a success story that every business could learn from. Their expansion has come in an area that they originally hadn't considered part of their business. However, by responding to customer needs, they've built a thriving company in a niche market. They branched out, found success and weren't scared to leave their original roots behind. It absolutely goes to show the importance of being flexible in a changing market, and it will certainly be interesting to see which paths they follow in the future.