

ASAP UK looks to grow turnover by replacing eco-solvent and multiplying customer choice with HP Latex Printing Technologies



At a glance

Industry: Sign & Display

Business name: ASAP UK

Headquarters: Southampton, UK

Website: asapuk.net



Challenge

- Achieve greater capacity with faster print production to satisfy customer demand.
- Drastically reduce turnaround for durable output by eliminating outgassing processes.
- Explore new markets for premium applications such as printed decorations and furnishings.
- Reduce the impact of printing in the workplace and on the environment.

Solution

- HP Latex 360 Printer with water-based HP Latex Inks for vehicle wraps, high image-quality outdoor signage and indoor applications.
- Avery® MPI1900 vinyl with DOL1460 laminate for vehicle wraps.
- Avery® MPI2000™ Opaque Series and Avery® MPI2040™ Transparent for vehicle flat panels, shop fascia graphics and self-adhesive labels.
- Avery® MPI3000™ for promotional graphics, point of sale boards, window displays and hoarding panels.
- ImagePerfect™ IP2605 Backlit Film with HP Latex Inks for illuminated poster sites.
- ImagePerfect™ IP2113 Banner for banners.

Results

- 30 per cent faster print speed than eco-solvent printer for comparable image quality boosts business capacity and shortens turnaround to help meet tight deadlines.
- Saving days with lamination/finishing straight off the printer compared to minimum 36-hour eco-solvent print outgassing for vehicle wraps.
- HP Latex Printing Technologies environmental credentials and safety certifications^{1,2} offer opportunity to reduce hazards in the workplace and costs related to additional air-extraction equipment.³
- Superior scratch resistance of HP Latex Inks compared to eco-solvent prints offers greater peace of mind and can reduce reprints.⁴
- Range of substrates supported by HP Latex Inks with higher image quality offers superior quality products and flexibility to explore new premium applications.

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DESIGN SUPPLY supporting creativity

"We have significantly boosted our service level with HP Latex Printing Technologies, we can offer higher image quality when needed, and we can create a range of premium applications such as soft signage that customers increasingly value."

– Jason Terry, managing director at ASAP UK



ASAP UK started out 17 years ago as a high street sign shop with a staff of three employees. Today ASAP UK, based in Southampton, UK employs 25 staff and last year turnover grew by around 20 per cent and is targeting another 15 per cent growth for the current year in a backdrop of challenging economic conditions. "You need to keep up – you need to be innovative and your capabilities as a printing business need to match evolving customer demands," says Jason Terry, managing director at ASAP UK LTD, explaining why ASAP, after closely following the evolution of HP Latex Printing Technologies since its inception and now with third-generation HP Latex Inks, recently installed the HP Latex 360 Printer.

Since first adopting large-format digital printing 10 years ago, ASAP had used exclusively solvent and eco-solvent ink technology.

ASAP offers customers superior performance with HP Latex Printing Technologies

"We print like-for-like quality, 30 per cent faster on our HP Latex printer. For an application like vehicle wraps, we can print at 18 m² per hour compared to 12 m² an hour using eco-solvent," Terry says. "At comparable speed, HP Latex Inks offer much higher image quality than our eco-solvent printers. Turnaround is normally our greatest challenge. We often receive orders as late as 4 or 5pm for next day delivery. Up to now we have had to split jobs between our three eco-solvent printers to meet tight deadlines to satisfy the service that our customers demand. Add to that a minimum 24 hours for outgassing an eco-solvent print before lamination, compared to prints that are ready to finish straight off our HP Latex printer.

"We have significantly boosted our service level, with HP Latex Printing Technologies we can offer higher image quality when needed, and we can create a range of premium applications such as soft signage that customers increasingly value. Retail customers don't want the plastic look and feel you get with solvent ink on vinyl if they can have a far superior product. We regularly print updates to a store location map for a local shopping centre. Now we print it on ImagePerfect Backlit Film using HP Latex Inks and it is a far superior product," Terry explains.

"We can gain three whole days on the first print when producing vehicle wraps using HP Latex printers compared to our eco-solvent equipment. When laminating eco-solvent wraps we need to allow a full three days to outgas the print otherwise the solvents sealed within the laminate can compromise the adhesive. The outgassing process is eliminated with HP Latex prints as they dry straight off the printer," explains Terry. "In addition HP Latex prints 30 per cent faster."

Reducing overheads while saving precious time

"Our eco-solvent printers operate in a dedicated closed off area created for them. Each printer has its own extractor fan, with another one in the workspace, plus air conditioning.

It all adds up. Our HP Latex printer can operate anywhere.³ HP Latex Inks are water-based, aren't toxic and are dry off the printer. They don't require outgassing and can be finished and delivered earlier," says Terry, comparing the planning, organisation and investment in production facilities that is required when operating eco-solvent printers compared to HP Latex Printing Technologies. "We have dedicated storage areas on racks for eco-solvent prints that ensure the free flow of air so that they can outgas for at least 24 hours. They have to be handled carefully while they are sticky to avoid damaging prints."

Terry explains that water-based HP Latex Inks are easier to maintain and eliminate labour-intensive maintenance processes with strong cleaning products that are required for their eco-solvent ink technology. "Our HP Latex 360 Printer requires little or no maintenance and it's automatic. It's straight up and running in the morning. It saves that precious half hour that our eco-solvent printers require for a strong clean. We adhere to strict maintenance routines that are very much a manual process for our eco-solvent printers, and we also have service contracts for all our printing equipment. Thanks to its higher productivity, two HP Latex printers have the production capacity to match output from our three eco-solvent printers, and therefore we would save on a service contract," he says.

Making a difference with environmental credentials

"The health and safety of our staff comes first so the environmental credentials and safety certifications of HP Latex Printing Technologies^{1,2} are important to us in our working environment, and as a company in a broader social context. We are a 9001 quality management certified and ASAP is ISO 14000- certified for environmental management. We have a 20 kilowatt solar panel system that supplies part of our energy needs," Terry says, highlighting the importance ASAP places on the environmental impact of their business. "More and more customers do enquire about our processes and products and their impact on the environment, particularly in the public sector," Terry claims.

ASAP multiplies customer choices to expand market opportunities

"We are able to produce more from a single printer and that translates into an increase in our production capacity. That's the first major benefit to our business from our HP Latex 360 Printer. Secondly, we are able to achieve a much higher image quality than before, if and when the customer or application demands it, and we can't match that quality on our eco-solvent ink technology. And finally, the flexibility of HP Latex Inks is opening up new markets for us. HP Latex Inks can print on a massive range of materials such as wall covers, fabrics, wallpapers, self-adhesive vinyl, and the list goes on. It offers printed products with a higher quality look and feel. We are looking forward to exploring wall covering applications, soft signage, custom furnishings on fabric, and other new applications that we can sell or customers will demand," Terry concludes.

1) UL ECOLOGO Certification to UL 2801 demonstrates that an ink meets a range of stringent criteria related to human health and environmental considerations (see ul.com/EL).

2) HP Latex Inks are GREENGUARD Children and Schools Certified™ (see greenguard.org).

3) Special ventilation is not required to meet US OSHA requirements on occupational exposure to VOCs from HP Latex Inks. Special ventilation equipment installation is at the discretion of the customer – no specific HP recommendation is intended. Customers should consult state and local requirements and regulations.

4) Durability comparison based on testing of representative eco-solvent inks including eco-sol Max inks on Avery SA vinyl for display permanence and scratch, rub/abrasion, and chemical resistance. HP image permanence and scratch smudge, and water resistance estimates by HP Image Permanence Lab on a range of media including HP printing materials. See hp.com/go/supplies/printpermanence.

At press time (April 2014), ASAP UK served as a beta test site for the HP Latex 360 Printer.

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