Category 5 Imaging was established in 2005 with one goal: to be the first fully digital full-service large format printer in Canada. The company opened its doors with a staff of six and an EFI™ VUTEk® QS2000 superwide format UV printer, serving high-end retail needs.

Greg Priede joined the company in 2009 as Production Manager, and, in 2010, took over managing the day-to-day business as General Manager. Category 5 produces, installs and removes display graphics for retail and other industries, including in-store point-of-purchase (P-O-P) materials, new store development signage, building and parking garage wraps, and more.

Category 5: A Force to be Reckoned With

All-Digital Large Format Firm Partners with EFI for End-to-End Workflow Integration

Challenge:

“Our goal is to provide high quality at a fair price with reliable service. ...We knew we had a first-mover advantage in being the first all-digital display graphics company in Canada, and our VUTEk QS2000 was an exceptional choice for launching us down that path. Its versatility in the ability to produce roll-to-roll or direct-to-rigid literally gave us two printers in one. Before long, we were running that printer 24/7.”

—Greg Priede, general manager

After taking over as General Manager in 2010, Priede began looking to increase production capacity to accommodate growth. He says, “I was tasked with finding efficiencies and maximizing production. I knew I could accomplish part of this task by simply adding another printer. But to do it right, I needed to examine our end-to-end workflow and find a partner who could bring us world-class solutions, not only for printing, but also for optimizing our business and production workflow as well. We determined that EFI was that partner.”
In 2010, Category 5 added an EFI VUTEk GS3200 to its production platform. In addition, the firm upgraded its two VUTEk printers with EFI Fiery® XF RIPs -- both for faster processing and for access to the many production-oriented tools Fiery XF provides, including color management, imposition, variable data, the ability to manage spot colors and more. The Fiery XF RIP also ensures that color matching among Category 5’s VUTEk printers is spot on.

Category 5 invested in a VUTEk GS5000r 5-meter roll-to-roll printer in 2011 for even more capacity and to prepare itself to compete in the billboard market. Priede says, “We began to see that in the United States, billboards were being printed on polyethylene for its recyclability and durability rather than paper, and we expect to see that trend filter into Canada. Meanwhile, it gives us the ability to run three 54-inch rolls across the span of the printer to triple our output for banner work. Since banner work tends to carry lower margins, this, combined with lower ink costs on the GS5000r, allows us to improve our profit picture on banners while using the QS2000 and GS3200 for premium-priced applications, including clear cling vinyl prints using white ink. When we are able to add white ink to the GS5000r, we will be able to compete on all levels with screen printing for vinyl clings.”

Finally, Priede decided to acquire Pace, EFI’s browser-based print MIS solution that has specifically engineered to better serve the needs of large format printers. “When I joined the company,” Priede admits, “it was all guesswork as to whether we were making money with these printers. Everything was done on Microsoft® Excel spreadsheets and accounting software. Customer service would input job data into Excel; the system required that the data be entered twice. Data was again entered by scheduling and shipping, requiring that much of the same data be entered four times, and allowing plenty of room for human error, as well as the inherent inefficiency of such a system. When changes were made to the job, it was almost like a scavenger hunt tracking down the job history as recorded in different locations by different employees.” EFI’s Pace, he hoped, would take some of the guesswork out of job management and tracking.

Not only was Category 5 the first all-digital display graphics company in Canada, but it was rapidly becoming the most efficient. “Prior to acquiring the VUTEk GS3200,” comments Priede, “we had been doing some agency work, such as a run of 2,500 bus kings (display signage wrapped on the sides of buses) for a mobile phone company. We were chosen because the client preferred to pay a premium over screen print to ensure color consistency, but it took us three shifts to run this type of project.” With the GS2000’s print width of 126.5 inches compared to the 80-inch print width of the GS2000, Category 5 could run two sheets at a time, doubling the amount of throughput. “We were able to increase throughput even more,” adds Priede, “by switching to Fast-5 (CMYK+W) on the eight-color plus white GS3200, bringing the unit run down from eight minutes to three minutes. That gave us a huge increase in capacity.”

The GS3200 also delivered increased opacity on window clings as compared to screen printing, which placed Category 5 as the preferred provider for a large client that was seeking greater opacity for this application.

EFI Pace offered a new level of automation and control. Priede states, “Its bi-directional JDF-based communication with our Fiery XF RIPs made sure we could keep a real-time handle on what was happening in production. In addition, the Fiery XF RIP communicates directly with our cutters, enabling automatic set-up and eliminating another manual step in the process. It goes without saying that having all of this data at our fingertips removed all the guesswork about where we were in the job process and gave us the ability to assess real-time the profitability for a given job or customer. We can now isolate products we were selling at a loss so that we can buy smarter and market the more profitable applications to our clients; this has had a positive impact on our profitability.”

“We are excited about the future,” Priede concludes. “With EFI as our partner, our industrial-strength VUTEk printing capability, our end-to-end integration with Pace and Fiery XF, and the excellent service we receive from EFI, we see few limitations to our ability to deliver continued growth.”

Solution:
“As terrific as our large format presses are,” Priede states, “the real boon in working with EFI was the ability to automate our workflow. Pace allowed a single point of entry for all job data, which was then accessible to everyone who needed the information.”

— Greg Priede

Results:
“Anyone can buy a wide format printer and the same materials we use...to stay competitive, we have to avoid redundancy and be smart about our purchases. Our partnership with EFI has given us a first-mover advantage in Canada that will ensure that we remain not only one of the leading suppliers of display graphics in the Canadian market, but the company that can also deliver the ultimate in customer service. The end-to-end automation and communication has revolutionized our business and placed us well ahead of the competition in our ability to deliver quality, reliability and the utmost in customer service. The broad range of capability offered by our VUTEk printers opens the door to even more innovation from our talented staff as we work with clients to exceed their expectations.”

— Greg Priede
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