The strength of JMC Signmakers from Bruinisse in the Netherlands can be put down to supplying and installing small runs of signs, often only one item, of top quality at an affordable price. Automation is an important component of this strategy, as can be gauged from the growth registered in recent years.

**CHALLENGE:**

“We were looking for a printer we could use to print rapidly and directly on all possible materials. The drying and bonding of printed film took far too much time for processing the number of orders in good time.”

To continue to manage such growth, the company recently went in search of a solution that would enable them to avoid a number of sub-processes such as drying and bonding printed film. The answer came with the installation of a VUTEk QS220. No need to dry and affix on a plate anymore, because the two-metre wide material is printed directly and, thanks to the UV technology, comes out of the printer dry and ready for finishing.

Cees Bolijn manages JMC Signmakers together with his wife Miranda and his brother Martijn. When the company was started in 1991, its activities consisted chiefly of printing, business gifts, stickers, screen printing and lettering. As there
were few if any lettering firms in the region, they invested in a cutting plotter themselves – “a pretty affordable option compared with other investments such as a printing press,” Cees Bolijn explains. “We found technology and IT far more interesting than purchasing printed matter, and in 1996 we opted fully for signage.” That worked fine, but there was still no clear strategy for standing head and shoulders above the other providers. That sudden change came in 2004. As Cees explains, “since then we have been supplying total packages, including logistics and customer care. For instance, we not only print panels, we also install them.” They hit the bull’s eye, it would seem, because a year later, turnover was up no less than 60% and there has been no stop ever since.

Working more efficiently

With the number of orders, pressure on man and machine increased also to have everything ready on schedule as agreed. The average lead time is between three to four days. Rush orders are often delivered the same day. Streamlining the many orders has become a colossal challenge. Cees Bolijn has developed a proprietary system with which orders are divided into suborders. “The order system determines itself which materials and minimum quality specifications are necessary and then combines the orders into common production orders. Enormous time saved in this way and the risk of errors is reduced to a minimum thanks to automation,” explains Anouk van Tiggeleen, marketing and communication manager. Machinists can see very easily in the system where an order is in the production process and where and when this will be placed. Geographically convergent orders are then grouped so that they can be carried out at one go. “People are deployed far more efficiently and we drive far fewer miles, which is good for the environment too,” according to Anouk.

A second bottleneck was more difficult to remove however. Up to the installation of the VUTEk QS220, the material was printed on film and then bonded onto the final background. Cees Bolijn: “Drying and bonding are sub-processes you can
scarcely if at all accelerate. And then you have to deal with the logistics so as to attune all these sub-processes as well as possible to each other. Installing an extra printer was no solution, and would have actually made the problem even worse.” It became clear all too soon that a flatbed printer that printed directly on the material, was the only good option for being able to continue to manage the increasing production.

**Take down in a matter of seconds**

The installation of a Kongsberg cutting and milling table got things really moving. JMC Signmakers got in touch with VUTEk through the supplier of the cutting table, and that got the ball rolling. As Cees Bolijn explains: “We at first thought of another printer, but after a number of tests, this printer did not seem suitable for our applications. 95% of what we produce are unit orders – for one item, in other words – and then taking down the printer is crucial to process the many orders smoothly and cost-effectively. With the VUTEk QS 220 this can be done in seconds, whereas the other printer took several minutes. The specifications of the two printers look pretty close to each other on paper, but in practice, we manage to process about twice as many orders during the same time. When the purchasing price turned out not to be too far removed, then the decision was taken quickly.”

**Gooseflesh moments**

Three months later, the VUTEk QS220 was there. “We were operational within a week. The following weekend we simply continued working… so delighted were we with our new investment. We were like children that had just got a new toy;” says Cees Bolijn enthusiastically. “I still get goose pimples when I see those large panels come out of the printer ready to use. You can print on nearly all materials with the VUTEk: you name it, you got it, and it is precisely this technical challenge that we like. Where others give up, we try to make the difference. Sometimes it does not work out, and then it proves costly. But we do not really mind, because we learn something from it every time. From this point of view, the VUTEk has become an indispensable tool. Certainly on transparent or dark materials, the colours come out far more intense, thanks to the white underlayer.”

The fact that JMC Signmakers has just now dared to make this investment, attests to vision and pluck. The mix of automation with the right machine for the right order seems in particular to be a fine strategy. “We really needed such a printer, but up until very recently, a machine with these qualities and specifications was too expensive for our budget. The attractive price of the VUTEk QS220, at no expense for quality and reliability, enabled us to achieve this;” Cees concludes. “A subsequent bottleneck was already there, because we are urgently seeking new employees to deliver the many orders in time.”

**RESULTS:**

“The speed and versatility of this VUTEk printer has opened up new markets for us. Thanks to the extra production capacity of the VUTEk QS220 we can make optimal use of our existing machinery.”
Beat the competition and profit with EFI’s integrated Fiery, VUTEk, Print MIS, Web-to-Print and Proofing, Jetrion and Rastek solutions. Visit www.efi.com to learn more.

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