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MGI: it's back in Britain

French developer MGI's ingenious digital spot varnishing, printing and finishing systems return to the UK thanks to a new distributor. *Simon Eccles* paid a visit.



The B2+ JetVarnish as shown at Ipex last year. Some 65 have been sold worldwide.

French digital printer and finishing systems developer MGI Digital Graphic Technology hasn't achieved a very high profile in the UK. That's a pity, for it has a track record of innovation dating back to 1982, first in plastic card printing and then general commercial colour printers and compact finishing systems. It's currently doing very well in France with its unique B2 digital spot UV varnisher as well as its Meteor DP60 full colour digital toner press (the subject of a *Digital Printer* centrefold in September 2008).

We're likely to start hearing a lot more about MGI now that it is being handled here by a dedicated distributor. MGI Technology in Hemel Hempstead is the trading name of Printbyte, a start-up company created by David Evans, who has a lot of experience of digital print sales and support in the UK.

Mr Evans has worked in the print industry for 25 years, starting at Crosfield Electronics and including the past 15 at Indigo and then HP Indigo as key account manager. He has been primarily responsible for setting up and financing the new company.

The new company will be selling the complete range of MGI equipment, including the

B2 JetVarnish, the Meteor DP60 full colour SRA3+ digital press, Digital Finisher SRA3+ 360 modular finisher, UVarnish B3 flood UV varnisher, and a couple of plastic card production and finishing machines.

It will also take over support for existing UK installations of the MGI kit. This includes three Meteor DP60 presses plus five of the predecessor DP40 models.

Hemel headquarters

MGI Technology has taken offices and a showroom in a modern serviced building in Hemel Hempstead. 'Our market strategy is to be a distributor and to appoint resellers,' said Mr Evans. 'We will sell directly too, outside the reseller coverage. I believe that people buy from people. We have good long standing relationships, so people know we can support the products.'

MGI has hired four engineers already and sent them to France to be trained across the range of equipment. They include Tony Wheeler, who worked with MGI and Horizon systems at MGI's former UK distributor, GAE.

The first four or five resellers appointed will be in the south of England, Mr Evans says, mainly for ease of access in the early phase.

'By next year we hope to have ten resellers across all geographical regions,' he added.

From 2004 until the end of 2009 the MGI range was distributed in the UK by GAE in Perivale, best known for its distribution of Horizon and other finishing equipment, though it also handled small offset presses. Although it installed a range of MGI machines in its showroom and trained a sales and engineering team, it's fair to say that sales were modest.

When GAE went into liquidation early in 2010 as a result of the failure of its owner Litho Supplies, the business was acquired by

DF360 modular finisher

MGI's card finishing expertise has helped it to develop a general purpose modular finishing device for commercial print. The DF360 announced at Ipex combines up to five functions in one pass: duplex lamination (matt, satin or gloss), simultaneous cutting (vertical and horizontal), slitting, creasing (vertical and horizontal) and vertical perforation. The functions are selected on the touch screen panel and multiple combinations can be saved as templates for repeat jobs.

It takes sheets up to 360 x 740 mm. MGI says it's suited to applications such as book covers, brochures, menus, folders tri-and-quad-fold documents, tickets, business cards, photo books, invitations, greeting cards, post cards (with tear-off response cards) and menus.

Mr Evans says the UK price is likely to be around £48,000 all-in. Its most obvious competitor is the very successful modular Duplo DC645, though this doesn't include a lamination module.



New at Ipex was the five-in-one DF360 finisher.

Meteor DP60 press

There are two models of the Meteor DP60 digital toner press, the DP60 Paper, which has copier style feed trays, and DP60 Pro, which has an offset press style rising pneumatic feeder and sidelay guides for paper, envelopes or plastics, with a 3000 sheet capacity, in addition to three 500 sheet trays under the print unit for paper up to 250 g/m². Options include an envelope feeder and a 6000 sheet output stacker.

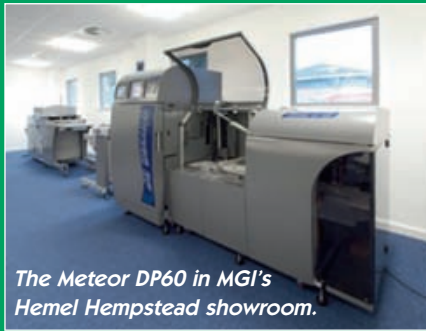
The DP60 Pro is able to print on standard offset papers if needed. It is FOGRA certified for ISO 12647-7 working. Standard formats range from 100 x 150 mm to 330 x 650 mm, but a new feature at Ipex was the option to take long sheets up to 330 x 1020 mm. This is enough for the A4 or larger landscape folded brochures that property companies love, or alternatively tri- and quad-fold brochures.

The engine is bought in and modified, with synthetic toners and MGI tweaks in the fusing and other controls to handle plastics and synthetics. The press runs on single-phase electricity. There are four colours and the resolution is given as 2400 dpi, sufficient for 200 lpi screens.

Both models have standard auto-duplexing and can print on paper, envelopes and synthetics as well as sheets destined for laminated card production. Speeds are up to 1600 A3 sheets per hour, or 3900 A4 sheets.

The DP60 Pro can additionally feed and print on plastics, which are pre-treated by a drop-down infrared heater and corona unit just before the infeed to the engine. Unusually, the DP60 can produce laser-safe stationery and envelopes. Intriguingly, the feeder can even cope with some diecut card shapes.

The DP60 Pro can take papers from 70 to 350 g/m² and plastics from 100 to 400 microns. The DP60 Paper is limited to 300 g/m² papers and does not have the conditioner for plastics.



The Meteor DP60 in MGI's Hemel Hempstead showroom.

its previous owners Tony Hards and Brian Godwin and relaunched as Intelligent Finishing Systems Ltd (IFSL). They decided to concentrate on traditional finishing (including Horizon) and did not take on the MGI distributorship. Mr Evans says that MGI Technology is on good terms with IFS' owners: 'Brian and Tony have been very supportive,' he said.

However the lack of a UK distributor last year was unfortunate for MGI, as it put on a good show of its latest kit at Ipex in May. This attracted a lot of attention from visitors, but it was hampered by not being able to announce a UK operating to refer prospects to.

JetVarnish to the fore

Initially the new company will be putting maximum effort into promoting the JetVarnish, on the basis that it's unique in the market. It's seen as relevant to practically any printer, working with conventional offset print as well as digital prints. Some 65 have been installed worldwide, of which 20 are in France, since sales started in earnest a couple of years ago. There are none so far in the UK, though Mr Evans says he's talking to a good prospect for the first machine.

'We find that once we get one into a country, it has such an effect on other varnishing providers that we sell more,' said Mr Abergel. 'We can put a 10% coverage onto 52 x 74 cm sheets for about 1p, with no writing, no plates, no screens.'

A printer could use it to sell up a job, for instance, says Mr Evans: 'You could afford to run a few spot varnish proofs on spec on a standard job, and show it to the customer, saying, 'for only 5p per sheet you could have this.' It really brings spot varnishing into the reach of short run and digital printers for the first time.'

The JetVarnish was initially announced at drupa 2008 with a B3+ format. However, according to MGI France's international sales and marketing manager Kevin Abergel: 'all the printers we talked to said it was a great idea, but they wanted something bigger for the B2 market.' MGI rapidly re-engineered it to a significantly larger format (520 x 1050 mm, with a minimum width of 210 mm) and able to handle sheets from 135 to 600 g/m².

Speed is quoted as up to 800 mm per second, with the first sheet out in 16 sec-

onds with no preheating needed. There's also the option of a second unit to print either a variable data spot (black only at present) or a second varnish formulation.

MGI has put a lot of work into the chemistry of the UV varnish, says Mr Evans. The UV curing unit is claimed to generate no ozone and also uses infra red to help the process. Certainly the samples are impressive, with much the same high gloss level as a conventional screen process UV varnisher. There's a choice of satin, gloss and ultra gloss fluids, plus a security fluid that only shows under UV light.

Although the idea of digital varnishing isn't new, there's nothing else so far that can create high gloss pattern varnish in B2 format. At least that is, nothing you can actually buy: at drupa 2008 Fujifilm showed Emblaze, a prototype B2 UV spot varnisher developed for it by FFEL, but this has never come to market.

The closest product available today is the Scodix1200 DigitalEmbossing press, which was used to create *Digital Printer's* front cover for the last issue (*December 2010*). However, Scodix is intended as a decorative 3D effect similar to physical embossing. The Scodix1200 costs around £250,000. JetVarnish costs £179,000 for the single unit model.

Full colour future

The JetVarnish technology also plays a big part in MGI's future development plans. By drupa 2012 we can expect to see it developed into a four colour B2 sheet fed digital press, says Mr Abergel.

MGI has already demonstrated full colour inkjet on a smaller scale with its JetCard, a specialist UV inkjet for four colour plastic card production. This was introduced at Cartes 2010 in Paris late last year.

In the meantime Mr Evans is considering taking space at the Northprint show in Harrogate in May this year, to get the name

David Evans.



and equipment back in front of UK printers. 'We want to build the brand, and we've got big plans, quite in your face,' he said. ■

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