



2008
November

Textile Printing Resurgence

So the UK were going to be a service based economy with banking and insurance leading the way to future prosperity. Our vibrant economy riding on a wave of surging house prices will carry the nation forward. Small fortunes being lent to people who will never be able to repay the debt. Millions in bonuses being made by sharp witted dealers. Who needs manufacturing? We can shove it all out to lands far away where people will work for one meal a day and a roof over their heads. Better still have them sleep under their workbenches for six hours before their next 18 hour shift. Is this not all about the Emperors new clothes? It is worse than that it is obscene.

To add insult to injury world governments have been talking for some years about a new ISO Standard. ISO 26000 Social Responsibility that is aimed as an all encompassing standard including Human Rights, Health and Safety, Environmental Standards in fact every aspect of how, industry, government, labour, consumers, nongovernmental organizations, in addition to geographical and gender-based balance behave. So far it is a three hundred and forty seven thousand word document that will not actually be a law just a recommendation however to quote:

*“To increase comparability of SR (Social Responsibility) activities, **all** organisations **should report** on their activities and the impact of their operations concerning **all core issues** covered in ISO 26000. If an organisation does not consider an issue relevant to itself, it should explain why (“**comply or explain principle**”).”*

Note the emphasis on **all**.

Now there are only one hundred and eighty one thousand two hundred and fifty three words in the New Testament. So are they trying to invent a new religion. It will be produced in all the languages of the world; well it would have to be to respect ethnic diversity. Don't worry you have got until 2010 before it hits your inbox. The three hundred plus specialists have a few more conferences to attend yet. At one of their recent meetings a point for discussion was the: “Criteria for stakeholder identification and prioritisation were defined more concretely.” So that's alright then?

It is likely that someone will write to this esteemed journal and claim my figures are inaccurate. Maybe they are but it is the principle of an all encompassing system on how we should behave, communicate and even think that scares the heck out of me. I would like to think that any fair thinking business person would wish to behave in a socially responsible manner without having to have a value system imposed. Would you be allowed to print a T-Shirt with “Mary Poppins for Prime Minister?” If you dared maybe you could confess it during your ISO 26000 audit to be absolved of this PC crime.

T-Shirts are increasing as communication media. Pop groups and other recording artists are finding that promotional T's are a very good income generator. Their profits were previously made from CD's but they have been dramatically reduced by down loading from the internet. T-shirts and other printed promotional items are proving a very acceptable but necessary source of income to the performers. Unless you are a top act



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attached to a major record label the volumes required are relatively small and ordering many weeks ahead can murder their cash flow. The effect of this trend is to see more and more examples of print being sourced locally in the UK.

Mark Colenso MD of Colenso Screen Services Limited is a supplier of Wilflex inks. He commented: "Sales of textile printing inks particularly Plastisol type are buoyant in the UK. We are seeing continued growth in a sector that was considered to be dying." The point he made was that the applications were these niche markets.

One thing is clear that fashion changes very quickly with suppliers having to respond in days rather than weeks. The historical textile printing capital of Leicester has virtually disappeared as a printing centre. The large production units have been closed down as work has been transferred off-shore to India and the Far East. This is fine for the applications that will tolerate extended deliveries in sea containers but with inventories in shops and wholesalers being reduced. Due to the cost of credit the mega deals of the not to distant past are becoming flights of fantasy. All these factors reinforce the slow resurgence of textile printing. Even digital textile printing is stimulating the market for top quality screen printed designs. Once the client realises they can have an image applied to their garment very quickly with digital printing they also want the special effects that they have seen on other garments that only screen printing can offer.

In the work ware market companies such as The Promotion Company of Hull Limited are booming and Richard Oldroyd their main man puts it down to high quality service to a local market. Companies in the Far East and India cannot possibly compete with the complete product offering that he can offer.

Plastisols are still a key tool for the textile printer and there is justifiable concern about the use of PVC and Phthalates in their formulation. In response to this manufacturers are providing PVC free, Phthalate free and formulations that have neither.

What are phthalates?

Phthalates are liquid plasticisers, that are added to polyvinylchloride (PVC). Once heated the plasticisers are absorbed into the resin and act as a softener, resulting in a flexible plastic film.

There has been much spoken and written about the negative health effects of phthalates to what degree these dangers are as stated is contradicted by other opinions. Suffice it to say that as with many chemicals whose use has been common place in the past their use are is now being challenged this being the case with both PVC and phthalates.

PHTHALATE FREE PLASTISOLS



Ink suppliers are dealing with this by providing inks that are either phthalate free, PVC free or both. These inks claim to have very similar characteristics to Plastisols and from the end users point of view they are indistinguishable. Companies such as Wilflex, FujiFilm Sericol, Grafcoc and others all have inks that fall into this category.

Garment textile printers have a much wider spread of inks available to them that conform to increasing regulation. Heat cured water based, others that will cure at room temperature.

KORNIT 931 DS



Mark Smith Sales Director of Adelco Screen Process Limited observed: One of the fastest growing areas in textile print is on line marketing where a browser can choose an individual design from a huge back catalogue or up load their own design and receive a one off printed garment by post within days. There are already several very large such suppliers and in fact the largest is in the top 100 of Googles worldwide search for printed T-shirts. Adelco supplies a wide range of screen printing equipment and now the Kornit 931DS machine, being the highest speed Digital Textile and Garment printer available in the world at present.



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The combination of screen printing and digital printing in this market is a real winner. What was needed was a web based system to pull it all together and RSKNetShirt package from RSK Tech does just that. It is a powerful yet flexible online garment designer that allows the customer to create their own online garment design. Customers can pick and choose from an almost infinite combination of products, colours, text fonts, logos and personalized artwork or photos. This is an innovative business opportunity that can enable companies make full use of their capabilities, increase turnover and boost profitability.



The e-commerce website template is customised to suit the individual garment decorators. Once installed and fully operational companies are finding 25% or more of their business comes through this portal and that is 25% they would not have obtained previously.

It is really encouraging to see a market sector that is on the up. We all need something to cheer us up in these challenging financial times and what better than a bespoke T-shirt saying what we really think of financial charlatans who screwed up the system but be careful you don't upset the thought police or you may be confronted during your ISO 26000 audit!