



**2009  
October**

**Indoor and Outdoor Signage**

Sign here please? Is something we hear far less of with the introduction of “Chip and Pin.” Conversely signs providing both instruction and information are increasing day by day. We have the EU to thank for most of the growth, somewhere in Brussels there is a mole with contacts in the sign and print industry who is insisting on warning labels, posters and displays being produced for every conceivable human activity. These explain whether you can do it, can't do it or the consequences of same. Soon there will be naughty steps on street corners and in offices for those who transgress. They will probably be fitted with ashtrays and coin operated HEPA filters to pay the carbon levy. Just think about the signs, labels and demarcation tapes that will be needed for these “Wayward Stations.” Be aware that many of these will have to be specific colour matches and be lightfast for seven years. So where do we turn but to screen printing where the inks we can use are much more stable than those used in other processes.

Whilst on the issue of lightfast inks a client was visited by a salesman representing a well known digital printing machine supplier who stated categorically that the UV curing inks used in his digital printing machine will maintain their colour “for ever, far longer than any other ink.” Well they would under that assertion. My client told the salesman he was talking rubbish. The point is if the salesman had sold the equipment to an unsuspecting novice the salesman would have been long gone before the problem of UV instability became obvious. The quality of digital printing inks is increasing and as nano technology and other such molecular miracles catch so pigments and inks will develop. We often forget that the largest users of pigments are the cosmetics and coatings industry. So when you hear of some exotic pigment it is likely to have evolved from painting oil rigs or the most attractive form of indoor and outdoor advertising lipstick and nail varnish.

For sign practitioners who wish to create fluorescent coloured, metallic, effect and glitter the thick film process of screen printing is an essential unless they buy in expensive coloured substrate.

The hand bench screen printing machine is still one of the most effective tools a printer can have and they can be picked up second hand for next to nothing. A brand new piece of kit will pay back in weeks. Any colour, any substrate, any working environment, a hand bench is suitable for printing from one to one thousand images very simply and cheaply. They are not practical for four colour process in all but the expert hands but line colours and specific colour matches are right up their street.

I had a poignant letter from a printer with many years experience in screen printing who was made redundant for the first time in twenty years. He said as a hand bench screen printer he was “unaware of the digital age, believing in very lean times, screen printing would always be economic.” He was right. However later on in the letter he said that his unsuccessful job search “highlighted that screen printing has never publicised itself too well.” Sadly there is a great deal of truth in that statement.

At the other end of the scale the managing director of a very large display producer considered that he would not be able to fully service the needs of his customers if he



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only had digital printing. He felt that the future of large format printing will be digital but even the current range of higher speed digital equipment that print fifty to ninety sheets per hour were no match for a screen press that can be set up in half an hour and easily print four colours at 350 sheets per hour. This means that after 60 sheets the screen press is faster. With ink prices for digital at typically £1.00 per square metre and screen £0.30 per square metre, even with stencil costs included he said this can make screen printing more economic after 90 sheets. When you add into the equation the Return on Investment Calculations as compared to the amount of substrate you can process, the screen printing process is the winner and is likely to be so for several years. I can hear the roars of protest from digital equipment suppliers but that is the view of someone who has both processes and selects the one most suitable for the application. For companies who want to get into screen printing to share the advantages of having a wider production spectrum they will find equipment is competitively priced as new and even more so used.

Quazar International is an example of a company who has developed a niche market in easily transportable road sign designed for the Police and Telecommunications market. The need to constantly innovate is crucial as regulations evolve. The signs have to be easily stored in the boot of a police car, the back of vans and operate under the most arduous conditions. What is also interesting is their approach to export markets where, with the use of their website it is possible for customers across Europe to order country specific designs.

### QUAZAR INTERNATIONAL GRABS YOUR ATTENTION



Quazar have developed a reputation for innovative and often bespoke products. From this a comprehensive range of road-signs and barrier systems have evolved – all designed with the same basic elements. In every case the aim of Quazar is to produce products that exceed the working requirements of their customers. The combination of specialized reflective substrates innovative mechanical design and the ability to print highly resistant ink systems with the screen printing process make Quazar International leaders in this area of signage. As with so many screen printing applications you see them every day and don't realise what an important part they play in our lives. Of course the

### QUAZAR SIGNS IN EUROPE





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company is also in the business of supplying badges for high visibility clothing. These are an obvious extension of their hazard warning sign business.

At times when people read these articles they may think I am banging a lonely drum for screen printing, well they could be right because the perception broadcast in the market is that screen printing is finished. No it isn't finished it has changed its focus away from the near photographic quality of many graphics application that anybody who can afford a digital printing machine can achieve, to premium applications where the skill of the screen printer is needed. The simple fact is that the spread of applications has reduced considerably but those left are highly profitable. You can ignore the unique selling point and stay with the crowd if you wish. The measure is when your screen printed chip and pin card is refused in the machine, then it is too late.