

Book printing is on a roll

Peterborough based all-digital book printer Printondemand-worldwide is the only company in the UK to run a roll feeder on an Océ VarioPrint sheetfed press. Now it has two more on order. *Simon Eccles* paid a visit.

Printondemand-worldwide (PODW) is a pioneering short run and on-demand book printer and direct mail house that's been all-digital since it was founded, some 15 years ago. It's based in a modern factory unit on the outskirts of Peterborough, that ticks all the green boxes.

A year ago it installed what managing director Andy Cork reckons is its fourth generation of digital production press, an Océ VarioPrint 6320 Ultra monochrome duplex machine. Although a cut sheet model, this was the first in the UK to be fitted with a roll feeder and inline sheeter, which cuts paper costs. Two more VarioPrint Ultra monochrome lines are now on order, again with roll feeders.

Mr Cork says that on-demand books now take four or five steps from input to completion, depending on how you count them, compared to the previous count of perhaps 18 steps using separate print and finishing units. This feat has been recognised by Océ, which last month presented POWD with its annual customer innovation award, for 'Automation in digital book printing'.

The company was originally set up as an inplant business called Copytech in 1995 and has always been all-digital. The name change to Printondemand-worldwide came seven years ago, reflecting the shift in business, although Copytech (UK) remains the name of the group holding company.

It has grown steadily in size through a mix of organic and company acquisitions. 'We plan to acquire a company per year,' said Mr Cork. 'We acquired the publishing companies for their catalogues and now have some 6000 titles. So we can be publisher, printer and distributor on a global basis.' In March he bought Athena Press, a self-publishing specialist also based in Peterborough.

Turnover currently stands at £3.3 million



The roll fed VarioPrint 6320 line, with the blue MBO finishers just visible at the end.

and the target for this time next year is £4.8 million. 'More importantly, we're holding our margins,' Mr Cork said.

He has an MBA in lean manufacturing processes and POWD has also consulted Vision in Print, the BPIF-run operation that advises printers on implementing this type of working.

Apart from operational efficiencies, the business as a whole is very 'green'. It has occupied its current 1570 m² building for two and a half years and this is BREEAM certified. All paper used is FSC and PEFC certified. POWD also regularly offsets carbon omissions. 'We were the first company in the UK printing industry to measure with a calculator the carbon footprint of what we produce,' said Mr Cork. 'It proves our dedication to developing an ethical business and we promote this fact as one of our fundamental business principles.' He says that Océ's environmental record was also important when choos-

ing it as a supplier – the VarioPrint 6000 family is said to be better than carbon neutral in its lifetime, thanks only in part to carbon offsetting.

Printing and binding is only a part of the full range of services developed by the company, which includes a self-publishing service called Fast-print with a lot of on-line hand-holding, a book title storage and online ordering service called BookVault, plus worldwide fulfilment.

BookVault can be accessed by all the major book distributors for placing short run or on-demand orders. For instance Osprey Publishing, a specialist military history publisher, will order runs of up to 700 copies from POWD, but above that it will go to an offset printer for economies of scale. 'It used to be 300 copies, but we've grown more efficient,' said Mr Cork.

As well as books, POWD handles personalised direct mail for a mixture of blue chip companies, public services, schools and local



Andy Cork: quality is a given.

councils. It also has a design department, mainly working on book covers, and a social media development department for both its own use and customers.

Both monochrome and colour digital printers are used to produce paperback and hard-back books. These can be made in short runs of a few tens or hundred of copies for larger customers. Single copies are made on-demand, mainly for the self-publishing market but also for personalised gifts – for instance Gift Republic licences children's titles from Ladybird Books in which customers insert their own choice of names for the main characters.

'We can handle any book size, and print in the UK, USA or Australia via partners,' Mr Cork said. 'We license out the BookVault software to Australian, Dutch and US partners – they pay us a monthly fee and we switch on what they can and cannot do, so for instance Holland can't output colour. Global partnership has to be the way to go. The cost of distribution is often more than the cost of publication for long distances.' When he visited the Peterborough factory, titles being produced that day were destined for India, China, Kenya and Lebanon.

With 4000 books going through on a typical day, efficient administration is vital. This is automated to a high degree thanks to a management information and customer relations management system developed in-house. It was first created five years ago and extended three years later with a 'dashboard' system that provides at-a-glance on-screen status reports to production and customer relations staff. 'If it moves, we measure it,' Mr Cork

said. Some information, such as stock levels, can be viewed by customers.

The printroom at the Peterborough factory currently contains six digital presses: the VarioPrint 6320 Ultra, a Xerox Nuvera 288 monochrome twin engine duplex printer, two monochrome Xerox Docutech 6180s and a pair of HP Indigo 5000 colour presses – the second one arrived last month. It also has a nearline perfect binding and trimming line in the same room. In an adjacent room is a Xerox DocuColor 8000AP colour press.

Another production room holds a great variety of finishing systems, mostly concerned with hard and soft cover application and preparation for mailing fulfilment. The majority of books have soft covers, but about 25% are case bound, Mr Cork says. There are also wire-o and saddle stitching facilities.

The HP Indigos are used for covers and for all-colour books, or where the majority of pages have full colour, though two colour is now offered too. The Xerox DocuColor is used for 'affordable colour' sections within books where the majority of the pages are printed mono.

Ultra doubles capacity

When the Océ VarioPrint 6320 Ultra was announced 2009, POWD ordered that, taking delivery a year ago. This doubled the capacity for monochrome book blocks. Now it has two more on order: a second 6320 Ultra and a slower 6250 Ultra, which will replace the three Xerox monochrome presses. The 6320 and 6250 hardware is the same and Océ offers what's in effect a performance rental scheme, so if POWD needs more speed from the 6250 temporarily, it can have this.

'The choice of Océ is mostly about efficiency,' Mr Cork said. POWD is the first company in the UK to run roll-to-sheet feeding with a VarioPrint press, which Océ first demonstrated at Ipex last year. It uses Lasermax Roll Systems equipment, comprising a standard unwinder linked to a DocuStream VP6000 sheeter which cuts the reels into sheets, which then go via a bridge unit into the side loading slot of the press. The printer can still feed cut sheets from its standard bins, so it can mix papers on the run.

The advantage is that roll paper is of course far cheaper to buy than cut sheet packs: Mr Cork says there's a 15% saving. A roll will last some six hours he adds, which is eight times longer than loading up the feed trays. It's especially relevant to a book printer like POWD, which prints continually on the same stock even if the runs themselves are short.

On the output side of the 6320 Ultra is a

roller conveyor leading to an inline MBO H&H finishing system, which notch binds the folded sections. The sections are then put on pallets and moved a few metres to the nearline perfect binding system. This comprises a Horizon Bookbinder BQ470 perfect binder, outputting to a conveyor leading to a Willstead Fastset 60/700 three knife trimmer. Bar codes are used throughout the job, so after the sections are printed, both units of the binding system set themselves up automatically, to adjust for the trim and thickness of the book blocks.

The other two VarioPrint Ultras on order will also have the Lasermax roll feed systems. They will also be the first UK models to have the new longer sheet option, which takes a maximum size of 320 x 500 mm (up from 488 mm). Mr Cork expects this to be particularly useful for the journal printing work that forms a significant part of POWD's business. 'They are very odd sizes,' he said. 'This means that we will be able to print them four-up.' The original 6320 Ultra will also be field upgraded to the larger size, he says.

'We don't talk quality anymore as it is a given,' Mr Cork sums up. 'We focus instead on communicating the supply chain and revenue benefits that our service brings. We now talk about bottom line benefits such as the reduction in costs achieved through reduced warehousing, shipping, handling, distribution and waste. Efficiency reduces costs and is hence a revenue generator and that is what our customers want to hear.' ■

Contact: www.printondemand-worldwide.com

What's an Océ VarioPrint 6320 Ultra?

The VarioPrint 6320 Ultra is the top model in Océ's family of cut sheet duplex monochrome digital presses. The 6000 range was announced in 2006, with the faster Ultra models coming in 2009. Océ claimed that the 6320 Ultra was the world's fastest cut sheet duplex monochrome print engine. It uses the company's Gemini single-engine duplex technology to print both sides of the sheet at a rate of 314 A4 pages per minute at 600 x 1200 dpi. The monthly duty cycle is up to a million impressions.

New features of the Ultra include ScreenPoint quality control and open platform integration. The first UK user of the 6320 Ultra was TJ International in Padstow (DP October 2009).

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