

A Monster Show

John Lynch shares his impressions and observations of the new developments on show at SGIA Expo 2013...

Why would a UK-based screen printer or decorator care about what happened at the USA's number one screen print trade show, the SGIA Expo 2013?

Because, like it or not, the biggest trends, discoveries and developments in our industry generally reveal themselves in the USA – often months if not a full year or more before they hit the European scene at shows such as FESBA or TVP. So, for a “Yank” working in the imprinted apparel industry and living in Europe for 22 years now, the temptation was too great for me to miss this year's show. And the fact that it was held in balmy warm Orlando Florida in October didn't hurt either.

The SGIA Expo is the granddaddy of American screen print shows. This year's event was described as a “monster of a show” and it truly was. I travelled to the show with my R&D Director, Paul, and we had a specific agenda of what we wanted to learn and discover. The show was literally “too huge” to see everything, so we did a lot of research in advance, and contacted most of the major vendors of suppliers and machine manufacturers in advance to make appointments. After three days of non-stop meetings, we sat down to review what impressed us most, and what appears most exciting to us. We came up with a list of four (and a half!) topics.

#1 Direct-to-garment

D2G had tremendous buzz at the SGIA, with all the D2G manufacturers, including DTG, Komit, Analet, Neoflex, Aeoon, Brother and Epson, having more crowded booths than ever before. From the level of interest, you can really see that D2G has gone mainstream, and almost everyone with a screen printshop is starting to give it serious consideration.

Indeed, the big debate these days is not ‘if’ but ‘what’ role DTG will play in the future, and the \$64 million question – whether it will replace traditional screen print. I think the answer to that question is that digital will co-exist peacefully with traditional screen print for long time to come.

If you have even a medium-sized screen printshop, you need to check out M&R's new i-Image STE CTS system with your local dealer.

There was a lot of interest around the new Epson SureColor SC-F2000 digital printer, which is due out in January 2014 (see ‘Epson Has Arrived’). Industry guru Scott Fresener says that if you are seriously considering an investment in D2G, you should wait a few weeks with your decision, until the new Epson is available, as it could be a ‘game changer’.

The topic of D2G is so important that I am going to cover it in depth in an upcoming article. If you are a D2G printer manufacturer or user, please contact me with your experiences.

#2 M&R / computer-to-screen (CTS) imaging

Without a doubt, the most significant stand on the show was the M&R booth, front and centre, with his CEO Rich Hoffman holding court. If you haven't met him, Rich is an impressive, larger-than-life character, who has probably done more for the screen print industry than any other individual in the business. If there was an award for ‘busiest man at the show’ Rich would have won it.

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Now, I must disclose that my company has always been partial to M&M machines, although we do have M&R equipment in our shop as well. What is so exciting about Rich and M&R is that they have so much damn experience working with the leading screen printers in the world that when you talk to them about your problems and issues, they simply ‘get it’ better than anyone else.

Among the many developments on the M&R stand the most exciting was, without doubt, the world's first all-in-one computer-to-screen (CTS) imaging and exposure system.

Printing on more and more difficult and unpredictable materials is certainly a ‘royal pain-in-the-arse’ for screen printers, but it also presents major sales opportunities.

The i-Image STE CTS system allows the screen printshop to cut out films and exposure units, and create picture-perfect screens, faster and cheaper than ever before. M&R had an entire screen department erected on their booth, where thousands of screen printers were about to test out CTS screen making on their own.

If you even have a medium-sized screen printshop, you need to check this out with your local dealer. There's gold in ‘them-there hills’.

#3 Developments in Inks

In the screen printing business, if print machines and screens come in first and second place of importance, then inks are a close third. It was strange, therefore, that most of the major ink manufacturers were not present at the show directly, but through their distributors. The ‘ink techies’ could be found mucking about, but not under their own flags.

Notwithstanding, the most visible trends were developments in PVC and phthalate-free inks – a trend that is being driven by the retail and sportswear markets in the USA. There are many new inks coming out, and all I can say is, if you are clinging to plastisol, as we all have done in the past, it's probably time to start seriously looking at eco-friendly PVC and phthalate-free. If you don't, you may miss the boat.

Second, there was plenty of discussion about printing on polyester,



John Lynch (right) with Paul Hejzl, Lynka's R&D manager.

including sublimation and migration issues. We are spending tons of energy on this issue lately, and I will report back when we have some conclusions. All I can say is that printing on more and more difficult and unpredictable materials is certainly a ‘royal pain-in-the-arse’ for screen printers, but it also presents major sales opportunities.

#4 Value-added decoration

There was a time when every printer dreamt of rows of identical screen print carousels. Not anymore. The machine manufacturers, both screen print and embroidery, are developing more specialised machines. At the SGIA we saw machines with a tiny footprint for small shops, machines that print labels inside the neck, machines that print sleeves, and machines that grow according to the printer's needs. M&M exhibited its new X-Treme press, which is reportedly “lighting fast and phenomenally

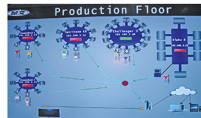
precise and delivers outstanding performance, accuracy and reliability along with superb ease of use.”

Also of interest were the rhinestone and sequin print systems, and a Tajima embroidery machine with laser capabilities.

4 ½ Education

The final thing we noticed, and that really stood out, was the fact that US small and medium-sized screen printers appear to be much more committed to expanding their horizons and increasing their knowledge through educational programmes. Whereas the EU-based shows usually have sparse attendance at industry education sessions, the US industry shows have ‘standing room only’ in the classroom.

In my company's ‘Core Values’, we specifically mention ‘continuous improvement’ as a key to long term competitiveness. I have no doubt that attending the 2013 SGIA Expo contributed to that aspiration. ■



A detail from the M&R stand.



John Lynch, is CEO of Lynka in Cracow, Poland, which he founded in 1992 and grew to become one of the leading apparel distributors in Europe. Lynka's success is largely attributed to its ‘one-stop-shop’ full-service business model. The company has received more than 40 international awards for the quality of its printing and embroidery. John has an MBA from The Wharton School, and is a past American Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneur of the Year, in Poland.

John would be interested to hear from Images readers. Email him direct with your comments and feedback: lynka@images.com.uk.
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