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– Jonathan Lewis, Managing Director
Images Unlimited, Christchurch



Christchurch-based Images Unlimited specialises in large format printing and signwriting. Founded in 1997, the company was acquired in 2008 by the Lewis family, and today has a staff of 10, including two full-time sales people. Jonathan Lewis is the Managing Director of the company, and is carrying on the family history of printing both locally and in the UK.

Images Unlimited takes pride in handling the majority of its production in-house: from banners to posters to building and vehicle signage. So investment in new and better technology is an important part of their business strategy.

After some thorough research the company recently installed two new machines through Fuji Xerox: an Acuity Advance Select 4006 (6 channel) flatbed printer and an Esko Kongsberg XN24 cutting table with a 3kW MultiCUT-HP (High Power) tool head.

“We’d been looking around over the last couple of years for a flatbed printer, and had really done our homework,” said

Lewis. “In my opinion the Acuity is really the best flat-bed machine in the market in terms of both quality and speed of printing.”

Going flat out

Many in the industry regard the Acuity Advance Select flatbed as the ultimate platform for printing on rigid, flexible and even roll media. It produces near-photographic quality images across a wide range of creative print applications, and features technology which delivers superb performance on a consistent and reliable basis. The Acuity’s low ink consumption means it’s also affordable and economical.

The ability to print directly on to the final substrate had a big impact on Images Unlimited’s turnaround time. Previously, for example, a sign was printed onto self-adhesive vinyl on their roll-to-roll solvent machine, left for some time to dry, and then the vinyl was mounted onto a board to create the finished sign. Now they can print directly onto the signboard, with no downtime for drying. The need for multiple handling and a range of substrates is negated, and the production time has vastly improved.

“The Acuity has really speeded up our production process,” said Lewis. “Jobs that used to take us over an hour and a

half are now completed in ten minutes, so there’s a huge increase for us in our production efficiencies.”

Lewis is seriously impressed with the finished output as well. “The quality is excellent,” he said. “The colours are really vibrant and we are getting some good feedback from our existing clients that the quality of print that we’re producing is fantastic.”

Making the cut

The Kongsberg cutting table is a real hit with the team at Images Unlimited. The tool head’s super strong, liquid-cooled 3kW milling spindle operates at up to 180,000 RPM. This makes it perfect for jobs involving everything from flexible substrates, folding cartons, hard PVC and acrylic panels, right through to heavy-duty materials such as thick sheets of acrylic, wood/MDF and aluminium composite material.

“We are particularly keen on the cutting table,” said Lewis. “It saves us a huge amount of time. Any printer will tell you that the printing is really the easy bit; it’s the finishing that takes all the time. And that’s certainly the case in large format printing. Hand finishing may achieve a good quality and finish, but it’s not really conducive to volume production.”



Lewis cites the finishing of their customers' large format posters as a good example of this. Traditionally they were individually guillotined or trimmed by hand. "We now put a roll of posters onto the conveyor belt system of the Kongsberg. The system can trim the first ten posters, then automatically move the machine forward, register itself again and trim the next set, and so on, until it reaches the end of the roll. In just 20 minutes we can now do runs of large format posters that used to take us entire afternoons to trim out. It's a huge step forward for us in our production."

The cutting table is a big help with the signage area of the business, giving Images Unlimited the ability to produce three dimensional letters, fabricate signage frames and generally produce a much better quality product. The recently added i-cut Suite now handles how graphical files are sent to the printer and digital finisher. This makes better use of the Acuity and creates more accurate and efficient cutting paths for the Kongsberg table, which helps the company save time and labour, reduces material waste, and ensures consistently great quality output.

A perfect pricing model

Images Unlimited found the Fuji Xerox PPP (Price Per Print) lease arrangement

very appealing in an industry known for erratic workflow.

"The financing model that Fuji Xerox proposed was a major reason why we chose to go with them for these machines," said Lewis. "It's always been my view that printing equipment is much like computers: you buy the best possible equipment that you can, and in three years' time it's virtually obsolete because technology moves so quick in our industry. We didn't want to make capital investments in costly equipment that in a few years will be worthless to us."

Pleasing partners

Lewis appreciates his relationship with Fuji Xerox. "They are an easy company to deal with and they have a lot of resources available to us that we can use. During the installation of the machines they always had someone available to us to solve any problems that we had. As a company they spend a lot of money on training their own staff, which is always going to benefit their customers in the long run."

While the new technology is more sophisticated than the company's older machines and required a steeper learning curve to use, Lewis's team enjoyed learning new skills.

New opportunities

Both machines provide new capabilities and competitive advantages to his company which Lewis is eager to capitalise on. "We've had six successive years of growth and consolidation," he said. "This new equipment has really been an opportunity for us to take a big step forward in our production ability and take us into a different class all together."

"Our focus has been on expanding our range of services, being proactive in meeting the growing demands of the market and our customers, and of course, on attracting new business. These new machines have successfully addressed the limitations we had in terms of turnaround time, size and volume."

With the limitations addressed, Lewis was quick to spot new markets and opportunities opening up in the rapidly regenerating Christchurch business district. Although they've always been able to produce anything their customers have asked of them, the combination of the Acuity flatbed and the Kongsberg cutting table means Images Unlimited's ability to meet tight turnaround times without monopolising their resources will be even stronger.