Photobooks – a top priority for the modern PSP

Creative photo products are a great area of growth for print service providers (PSPs) as they allow for the generation of new revenue streams. GRAPHIX finds out more about the print engines and associated technology that are assisting PSPs in gaining market share. By Abby Vorster

The digitally printed photobook is probably one of the most popular creative product offerings of the PSPs today. The more beautiful and impressive, the better, as a photobook is a timeless piece of art to be cherished forever.

One PSP – Q-Photo – which is a leader in the photobook arena – maintains that product innovation is key in producing a product that requires the emotional buy in of the consumer. ‘Shortened turnaround times, accentuated product offerings and the adoption of a combination of production lines including the HP Indigo Press are what keep us ahead in the game,’ says Q-Photo managing director, Liezel Geyser Hahn.

In fact, HP maintains that it is helping PSPs’ customers hold on to their memories with photobooks printed using its technology. The high productivity and automated end-to-end solutions of the HP Indigo digital presses allow the PSP to print up to 320 000 photobooks per month with one-of-a-kind quality.

The new HP Indigo WS6600p, a photo printing press that showcases improved ease-of-use, versatile applications as well as outstanding print and colour quality across all photo substrates, features a novel imaging oil system, powerful and scalable Production Pro Print Server, and a Print Care 1.8.4.1 in addition to an inline scanner for diagnostics and troubleshooting.

The HP Indigo WS6600p includes light cyan, light magenta and light black inks, which create photo-realistic imaging when added to the standard CMYK ink set. This feature enables professional and consumer labs to replace traditional AgX production at a lower financial and environmental impact while maintaining product integrity.

According to Wilhelm Imaging Research, the dark permanence rating of the pages produced on the press using Flexi Schoeller photo paper is more than 200 years. The application-focused web press platform is a basis for end-to-end solutions for various pre-press and post-press photo products such as cut prints, layflat books, book covers and calendars.

The HP Indigo WS6600p Digital Press is available now.

New versions of an unrivalled system

Leveraging its operating experience with more than 1 500 Photobook Builder products sold worldwide, KIS Photo-Me has introduced new versions of this unrivalled system. Its range for silver-halide minilabs now includes a new model with the Photobook Builder 20x30, which binds large photobooks or photo cards up to 19cm x 30cm.

With this new model, busy one-hour print shops will be able to address the profitable photobook market without having to increase their staff complement. Large format photobooks represent the biggest volume of this product ordered online. As the Photobook Builder is fully automated, minilab shops will be able to offer these larger format products to one-hour clientele, and will benefit from the very high margins.

Other models in the silver-halide range include the classic Photobook Builder 15cm x 20cm, and the Photobook Builder Ag+ Multiformat. The latter, unveiled earlier in 2012 at the PMA show in Las Vegas, in the USA, offers the flexibility of delivering photobooks or photo cards in two sizes i.e. 14.5cm x 20cm and 19cm x 20cm. The system detects the length of input sheets and automatically adapts its production process.
The Photobook Builder technology is now compatible with inkjet printers. Inkjet minilab owners will now have the same capability as Ag+ minilab owners and will benefit from the business potential presented by the product. The Photobook Builder Inkjet Multiformat represents an exciting profit-generating system designed to turn these minilabs – regardless of the brand – into powerful on-site production systems for top-quality photo-books and folded greeting cards. Output size and productivity are identical to the silver-halide model at 14.5cm x 20cm and 19cm x 20cm. Prints from inkjet minilabs are simply stacked in the feeder and the Photobook Builder does the rest automatically. Books with as many as 30 pages can be produced, while a 10-page photobook is finished in just over two minutes, and up to 20 photo greeting cards are folded and glued in about 20 minutes.

A trio of solutions
Ronnie Cox Graphic Supplies now offers three different solutions for photobook manufacture. The first is the conventional case-making system supplied by CMC Italia in Italy. This system is an integration of the three basic processes of cover gluing, placing the cover and spine boards in register onto the cover sheet and the turning in of the edges, and pressing. The machinery required can be supplied as one complete case-making station, or as three separate machines. Ronnie Cox’s Paul Cox adds, ‘To complement the process, CMC offers casing-in machines, book presses and an end-paper making device. And for bespoke work, the range includes a joint pressing machine and round cornering/corner cutting machine.’

Short run hand-fed devices as well as longer run automated equipment are available. However, he explains that ‘this type of equipment requires some level of skill and knowledge of the book binding process, which may not be present in some of the facilities wishing to offer photobook products’. Providing a solution to this problem, Ronnie Cox now offers the OPUS range of photobook equipment, which is designed for short run production and requires very little technical knowledge of the book binding process. It consists of premade covers and a metal binding channel that is used to secure the pages to the covers and provides a simple yet attractive and functional alternative to the conventional case-making process. The hard case-type front and back covers are available in a leather look or more conventional linen finish. Cox explains, ‘The metal spines are covered to match the appearance of the covers. The pages to be bound are simply placed in between the covers and the metal binding channel is secured to the spine for a permanent and yet simple photo book. For added security, the pages to be bound may be stapled close to the binding edge. This staple is concealed in the metal binding channel and is therefore not visible on the finished book.’

For personalised covers, OPUS offers an alternative process that allows for the manufacture of a bespoke or personalised set of covers. The process is simple, fast and requires no specialist skills. Most importantly, the set up cost of the capital equipment required is under R35 000 for the complete manufacturing and binding machinery range. Books from just 3mm to 35mm can be manufactured.

Ronnie Cox also offers the butterfly binding fully automatic book block manufacturing machine from Kisun in Korea. Folded sheets are glued to backing boards, and then to each other, resulting in a true lay flat panoramic spread for each double-page spread. Cox adds, ‘The only limitation in this process may be in the size of print required for an A4 landscape book, which requires a print of 594mm x 210mm, which will yield a finished book of 297mm x 210mm (landscape format). However, the new range of digital print machinery
that can handle that sheet format will overcome this hurdle and open the market for true lay-flat A4 (and larger format) landscape format books'. In addition, a complete range of case making and casing machines will compliment this particular machine.

The comprehensive offering

With a strong focus on providing complete solutions to customers for all printing needs, Kemtek Imaging Systems’ wide range of post-print Duplo equipment presents unique finishing and binding solutions that support increasing consumer demands and shortened turnaround times.

The DC-745 slitter, cutter and creaser is Duplo’s most powerful multi-function finishing solution for digital colour print, being the ideal companion for mid-to-high-volume production digital presses. The machine has been developed on the DC-645 model and takes a significant step forward in delivering increased productivity and versatility, not only processing jobs faster, but also finishing a wider range of applications in a single pass.

Johan Faurie, product specialist at Kemtek explains, ‘Now you can produce innovative, full-bleed applications, more quickly and accurately. The combination of PC control, integrated image recognition and motorised tooling delivers what we call “automated precision”.’

A PC controller provides the operator with multiple means for managing the system, starting with a graphical programming tool, which allows rapid job creation, editing and storage. Job history can be recalled for review, while preferred settings and defaults can be chosen to minimise operator set-up time.

Faurie adds, ‘Digitally printed media is often deformed and loaded with static. What the DC-745 does, to reduce the risk of damage to images, is use a combination of multiple air vents to lift and separate the sheets from the top of a 150mm-depth high capacity unit. The top sheet is picked up and fed by vacuum using a super-wide feed head, registering to a side lay that is adjustable for image skew.’

In addition, the DC-745 boasts a long list of innovative functions, which allow jobs to be processed with great accuracy and absolute minimal possible wastage at more than 40 sheets per minute and up to 50 sheets per minute at full speed.

Kemtek’s binding solution from Duplo, the automated FKS PrintBind KB-4000 PUR, presents accurate and secure PUR binding on demand. In fact, it raises the benchmark in perfect binding through its high productivity and cost efficiency. The machine works with a unique closed PUR application system. The volumetric slot nozzle ensures that PUR glue is applied on the spine at any time. In addition, for even better adhesion and faster processing of books, the solution provides active EVA hotmelt side gluing.

The benefits of PUR melt include its strong adhesive and extremely strong bind on all coated and digital printed papers; it is temperature resistant, ideal long-term properties and its optimal lay flat quality. EVA hotmelt also boasts a list of advantages including its ease of use, short setting time and fast finishing.

Faurie adds, ‘One of the key attributes of the KBA-4000 PUR is its easy-to-use touch screen. This comprises the complete set up of the machine, including all functional parameters. Nipping time and nipping pressure can even be adjusted.’

Whether from a business-to-business, or business-to-consumer perspective, there is a wide variety of photobook solutions currently available to suit the diverse budgets synonymous with today’s PSPs. Ultimately, what the PSP wants is to provide a highly personalised service that is efficient and gets the consumers’ photos out of the shoebox (or off the PC these days) and into a beautifully produced, timeless photobook.