Interactive print – the anticipated change is imminent

At the forefront of innovation, Ricoh, with its new Clickable Paper cross-media technology, is on the verge of changing the way consumers experience printed media.

By Abby Vorster

Ricoh’s strength in the area of digital output solutions – given the organisation’s knowledge of analysing graphic data, and scanning and compacting it to reproduce and distribute high-quality imagery – has provided the perfect platform from which to develop this new offering. In addition, Clickable Paper is directly in line with the company’s vision to present a multi-channel offering to its customers while elevating printed media to a whole new level.

The groundbreaking solution applies to any kind of printed media including newspapers, magazines, direct mail, books, brochures and posters. All types of digital information or services can be linked including multi-media content, websites, social media and e-commerce services.

The technology is especially relevant to commercial printers, in-plant users and publishers, as it has the potential to empower these businesses to provide rich cross-media content to their customers. Where consumers are concerned, all they need to do is download the Clickable Paper app from iTunes or the Android market, providing them with the gateway to interactive media. Consumers or end-users will be able to instantly recognise clickable hotspots by the easily identifiable logo, which, unlike the unsightly QR code, is small, uncluttered and unobtrusive.

Benoit Chatelard, Ricoh’s general manager: solutions, production printing solutions in Europe, Middle East and Africa explains, ‘It epitomises Ricoh’s theme of “print and beyond”, and is set to change the way in which we experience printed media by exploiting all of the powers of the Internet. A typical example would be that of a child reading a Harry Potter book, who, by clicking on a “hotspot”, would be “transported” to rich online content. The technology can be used for many applications such as automatic translation or multi-language media, while tourism and hospitality businesses could leverage off the augmented reality of travel brochures etc.’

In addition, the technology is ideal for (yet not limited to) catalogues to link to product information and video demonstrations, online shopping, social media and maps to stores in the various regions of location; or for magazines to link to advertiser content online, promotional videos, event information and social media; and movie posters linking to official websites, trailers, functionality to purchase tickets online and social media.

How it works
Clickable Paper, which was invented in Ricoh’s laboratory in the US, is only as powerful as the digital content it is leveraged off. The concept is a shift of technology from a relatively traditional understanding of imaging capture and the workings of database management and IT to the deliberation of image exploitation in a way that is very different from simply reprinting it.

The technology includes three components. The first being the authoring phase, where the publisher or marketer, for example, identifies hotspots on the printed media, be it a logo, text or image, and assigns the associated rich media. ‘No editing, reformatting or adding of content is required. In fact, you can use anything that has already been printed as it does not only apply to media that is yet to be printed,’ Benoit explains.

From there, the cloud server phase comes in to play. It provides both the indexing and recognition technology used by the solution to index documents and their associated rich media in the Clickable Paper database. It must be noted that the tags connected to the clickable hotspots can be updated at any time.

There are no limitations as to when and how often digital content can be updated and linked to the Ricoh cloud.

The third component, from the point of view of the consumer, is the easy-to-use mobile app. When an end-user submits a query from the Clickable Paper app on a

Key features of Clickable Paper include:

- multiple hotspots per document without having to edit or reformat the original source material
- elegant authoring tool enabling online content to be associated with each hotspot
- support for a large database of authored documents
- a user-friendly mobile app for smartphones.
smartphone or mobile device, the query is analysed and matched. The rich media inks are then returned to the requesting device to be displayed within the app.

The underlying technology of Clickable Paper is Ricoh Visual Search, which establishes the relationship between information on printed paper with digital information and services on the Internet. This was developed at Ricoh Innovations in the US which develops innovative technologies and new business opportunities for the company.

As soon as the Clickable Paper offering is available for sale, the components will be available for use in combination by both content developers and end-users. Chateillard adds, ‘Clickable Paper is currently in its pilot phase, with pilot 1 having commenced last year in the USA, in November, and pilot 2 currently being rolled out in France and the UK. Ricoh expects to launch the fully enhanced solution in the marketplace during the course of 2013.’