How dangerous are products from the East?

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Until recently, the advantages of computer driven large format digital printing equipment has been the exclusive domain of the largest players in the signage industry. Many of the smaller competitors have always considered digital to be expensive and complicated to operate. This perception is starting to change radically as Eastern technologies place the small business operator in a position to compete head-to-head with industry magnates. In the last decade, manufacturers in the East have put a huge amount of focus into this kind of technology.

Manufacturers in Asia are recognised as some of the best “reverse-engineers” in the world. We now import some of our most reliable technologies from Eastern regions including vehicles, household appliances and business technologies. The notion that inferior products are manufactured in these regions is by now thoroughly outdated and these days it’s virtually impossible to purchase any technology where at least some of the components (if not the complete devices) haven’t been manufactured in countries like China, Japan, Taiwan and Korea. A simple look around your home and office at all the technology should be enough to render the notion that inferior products come from the East glaringly ridiculous. Research supports the finding that well supported brands that were previously thought of as “cheap” are undergoing brand shifts in the market towards “good value”. Think about how perceptions have shifted on brands previously synonymous with cheap, “Toyota now stands for reliability, Dell for personalisation, Virgin for rebelliousness and Walmart stands for choice.” (Source: www.interbrand.com).

The secret to taking advantage of the massive cost savings offered by these regions’ manufacturing protocols is using a local distributor who supports and stands by the product. Would you really have confidence in that IBM Lenovo notebook if the nearest support centre were in Shanghai? Some local distributors have put a lot of time and effort into establishing personal relationships with manufacturers in the East. They have trained technical support staff abroad and personally visited factories. No business can afford to invest this kind of commitment, time and money in bringing...
an inferior product to market that can damage an established reputation. The problem occurs when some unemployed electrician /IT student/ techno-enthusiast jumps on the internet, does a bit of surfing, emails somebody and gets an email back and then calls himself a distributor and tries to sell you a “quality product” that he’s never seen anywhere except on his computer screen and never spoken to anybody at the factory about. It’s important to establish that a tangible relationship exists between the manufacturer abroad and your local distributor. It doesn’t matter where the product is manufactured, if there’s an ocean between you and the nearest service centre, you might want to reconsider your purchase decision.

Of course not ALL products manufactured in the East are fantastic. There are many pitfalls. There are plenty of obscure tiny sweatshops knocking off products in garages in Shanghai somewhere using the internet as their main distribution channel. That’s why it’s important to use local distributors that have experience and a track record with products from these areas. Reputable companies in the East plough a lot of money back into R & D to develop their product lines and partner with reputable distributors around the world. Reputable distributors visit manufacturer’s factories, they are involved in the process and partner with them to bring the best technologies to local markets in line with their reputation.

Digital outdoor printers represent an ideal illustrative case-in-point. Nashakele Distribution has a well established reputation in the local South African market. Our senior technical staff is trained abroad onsite at the product manufacturing facilities enabling us to offer top notch local installation, training and ongoing support. Our Nashprint digital outdoor printer and dye sublimation ranges represent years of cumulative experience and engineering to arrive at a product that is not only affordable and easy to operate, but fully supported locally by competent technical staff that can be communicated with effectively without having to resort to learning to speak Mandarin!

The days of the company with the huge overheads, the “too many chiefs and not enough Indians” syndrome, the expensive equipment and high running costs are numbered as their leaner competitors are able to compete more and more aggressively. The last thing a printing business can afford in this competitive market is to overcapitalise by investing in unnecessarily expensive equipment with expensive inks and running costs. The average end user these days is an astute businessman who wants a decent job done at a reasonable price in a reasonable time. Suppliers who are paying too much for their machines are already starting to struggle to compete and in some instances are forced to sell work at a loss, simply to try to minimise their capital exposure. The average outdoor printing client isn’t interested in the “smoke and mirrors” sales pitch that Chinese products are in some way inferior. If they are offered a reasonable quality at a reasonable price, they really don’t care if your aunt Martha hand painted it in her kitchen using nothing but food colouring and a rusty spoon.

Nashakele has been supplying the market with Asian products for many years. It was often a slog to promote Eastern brands in a market resistant to products coming from that region. Unfortunately some profiteers did brands immeasurable harm by not supporting them properly. Only now are we starting to find our track record winning out over fallacious perceptions about these brands. In the current economic climate, businesses really can’t afford to overlook opportunities to minimise capital outlay for equipment any more, yet they still need to put themselves in a position to compete in the marketplace. Products from China and other Eastern countries offer an ideal compromise.

The vast majority of digital printers manufactured globally have many of their components manufactured in China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan. They get rebranded and repriced in other countries certainly, but most of their base manufacture gets done in the East. It makes sense to go directly to the source for the best price if local reliable onsite support is available.

Research confirms a growing global familiarity and trust in Chinese brands such as Lenovo notebooks, Gree air-conditioners, Chery and Haier to name but a few. It is a valid point that in the current economic climate businesses can no longer overlook opportunities to achieve the same results at a reduced cost implication. With less work generally available, it has never been more important to maximise profits effectively.

How do you feel about the quality of products from China and the rest of Asia? Write to us at graphix@infixion.co.za