

First European installation of Kodak Versamark DS9050 printing system and Matti chassis at leader in its market space, VPrint...

VPrint chooses Kodak to stay ahead of the game



Entering the premises at VPrint, you are immediately struck by the order presiding over this mail-order printing firm. The company, which is situated directly on the Belgian/French border, has been in business for over 70 years and has offices throughout Europe. For the last 12 years it has been headed up by Roby van Daele, and in this time it has been transformed from an average printing house into a leader in its market space, producing personalised direct mail material for top consumer beauty and retail brands.

VPrint started out as a local printing shop, doing business with mail order shops on the doorstep in France. But the technology in house was weak, leading to reduced profitability. Since Van Daele took the helm a transformation has taken place. The premises have expanded from 11000 sq/m to 40000 sq/m still with plenty of room to manoeuvre and double the size of the business, and currently there are 150 employees - double that of 12 years ago. And with these changes the turnover has almost trebled from 8 - 10 million Euros to 25 million Euros. His goal of becoming a leader in this niche of the market (currently it has about 10 Europe-wide competitors), has been achieved.

As Van Daele explained, the philosophy of the current management team is to invest and re-invest, staying at the cutting edge of its chosen area of specialisation. And, in order to do so it has elected to place its trust in Kodak Technology for data printing and the personalisation of direct mail. As a family run business, not only is it able to react to market demands very quickly, bringing the flexibility its customers are looking for, but when an investment decision needs to be taken, the wheels are set in motion immediately. Over the years, the development of very close relationships with its customers has allowed the company to adapt its equipment and market knowledge, at their request, in order to provide the best solution possible.

12 years ago the company had one rotary press and two finishing lines for folding, labeling, gumming and personalisation, which included four inline printheads from Kodak. Today, conducting two thirds of its business in France, and three quarters of this is with mail order companies, it produces 3 - 4 million documents a day of fully

personalised, quality printed products, and boasts four rotary presses - two of which are 24-inch (610mm) and two approximately 25-inch (635mm) - and 15 finishing lines, 10 long and five short. Every piece of material that comes into the building is personalised and produced to order and must leave the premises within 24 hours.

The different finishing lines have been developed and adjusted with local mechanical engineers to be completely 'home-made' and targeted at the needs of the VPrint customers. Walking around the shopfloor it is obvious how sophisticated these finishing lines are, as they include seemingly endless possibilities for folding, glueing, scratch off ink, inserting, perforating, gumming, turning, etc, and of course personalisation at different points.

The personalisation has been carried out to date by 45 four-inch (101.6mm) and 16 nine-inch (228.6mm) Kodak Versamark D-Series printing systems which are positioned on the different finishing lines. This makes it one of the largest Kodak Versamark Printhead installations in Europe. The Kodak Versamark D-Series printing systems for high volume digital printing offer a broad range of printing systems with a comprehensive selection of printing features and functions to print variable information on- or off-line.



The latest addition to the VPrint technology is the first installation of its type in Europe. 16 nine inch (228.6mm) full-colour Kodak Versamark Printheads have been installed on a Matti transport system developed especially for this end application, producing full-colour reel-to-reel material on 2up duplex.

Pictured right: The Matti transport system featuring the Kodak Versamark DS9050 printing system.

This offline tight web system with one print tower incorporates the Kodak Versamark DS9050 printing system with Kodak Versamark DH90 Printheads and has a maximum speed of 152m/min, providing an enormous amount of flexibility and high volume output in a short production time frame. The motorised head positioning system allows for a short set up time, and it is targeted at end mailings requiring full-colour personalisation on offset preprinted reels.

This new investment goes to show the faith that Van Daele has in the colour personalisation market, and confirms his confidence in the Kodak Technology. 'We have enjoyed a very good relationship with Kodak over the years. I believe that to show true leadership in this market we need to be producing full-colour personalised mail pieces in extremely high volumes. The only technology that can handle this

currently is inkjet, and the technology is available now, with Kodak leading the way. I realise that this most recent investment presents a big risk to the company but I see it as a well thought out, calculated risk which will pay off in the coming two to three years. Customers need time to get used to the idea of printing in full-colour that which to date they have been doing in black-and-white.'

He continued, 'If we had stayed in the same place we were three years ago we would be producing a mere 60 per cent of our current turnover. My philosophy is that we need to speculate to accumulate and we will be communicating with a much wider target audience going forward. We need to be able to expand with our partners. We can use the new Kodak Equipment to print in black-and-white, as well as colour, so for the time being whilst we ramp up on the colour side we will be tapping into the B&W market with these sophisticated heads. We are also running tests with a number of customers for colour materials, and they are extremely happy with the results they are seeing.'

Roby van Daele is convinced that the transpromo market is the direction his customers will be guided into eventually, and as this is new to VPrint, Kodak is working closely together with the company to offer advice.



The efficiency and benefits that the mail order business can bring should also be of interest to B2C customers, and this is an area that Van Daele is hoping to break into in the coming months; 'We know that the effect that personalised mail has on the end target is far greater than placing an advert on TV or some other forms of awareness, and especially with the latest advances in technology such as Kodak's colour printheads, the ability to print colour personalised material at high speed, should open up a whole new range of target customers for us. I am extremely excited by the new possibilities this latest investment will bring us,' he concluded.

Above: The VPrint factory showing different mailing lines featuring Kodak technology.

VPrint also provides all of the in house expertise in data processing and management, analysis, and the control and production processes needed to produce sophisticated mail products. For example, if you are producing a mailing of two million addresses, you need to be certain that they are all correct and present and that there will be no wastage. They must also conform to all postage legislations. The company has an in house department dedicated to checking through customers' databases to clean them up and ensure the whole process runs as smoothly as possible.

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