

Design studio and commercial printer
Solent Design Studio



SOLENT DESIGN STUDIO SETS FRESH COURSE WITH CANON

Company name: Solent Design Studio

Industry: Commercial print and design services

Founded: 1979

Location: Bishops' Waltham, Southampton, UK

Services: Digital print, litho print, digital large format, design

Relationship with Canon: 1 year

Objective

Boost digital quality and applications versatility to drive business growth

Challenges

- Enhance digital capability to broaden scope of short-run work
- Migrate work from litho to digital to increase business efficiency
- Expand applications portfolio with new substrates, formats and finishes
- Create clear points of differentiation and add value with customers

Approach

Inspired by the potential of premium digital print quality and applications versatility, Solent Design Studio made a bold triple press investment to catapult the business forward and access new opportunities.

Benefits

- Substantially improved digital quality enables continued migration of litho volumes
- Ability to pitch competitively for premium digital work
- Extended media options add creative scope and broaden product portfolio
- Ongoing mentoring boosts management team confidence

Canon

A lightbulb moment

Solent Design Studio is a family affair, founded in 1979 by the parents of the current management team as a small design and platemaking business. Today, siblings Martin, Craig and Jacqui Reynolds manage a full service print and design operation, serving a broad customer base in southern England, and delivering a wide spectrum of printed products including business stationery, flyers, brochures, catalogues, marketing materials, calendars, manuals and books.

The company has evolved from its litho origins, embracing short-run digital over the last decade as a means of delivering smaller jobs economically and meeting customer requirements for more dynamic marketing collateral in smaller quantities and with more frequent content changes.

When Canon made contact, a new digital investment was not Solent Design's first priority. As Managing Director Martin Reynolds explains: "For many years, we had been aware of the Canon imagePRESS offering, but frankly thought that it was too high-end for our needs. We were really sitting on our hands, knowing we would need to upgrade our digital kit in time, but unmotivated to make a decision. But during a visit to a trade show in Birmingham in late 2016, we responded to a long-standing invitation from Canon to visit its showroom in Birmingham (UK) and it was a light-bulb moment."

Having arrived with no immediate investment intention, buoyed up with the scope to enhance quality and develop their product offering, the Solent Design team went away to develop a plan that consequently saw them invest more than £170k in two colour digital presses – the 100ppm Canon imagePRESS C10000VP and an imagePRESS C750 – and an Océ VarioPrint 6160 for mono work.



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The entire experience with Canon from the moment we walked in was absolutely inspirational – the range of real applications we were able to see, the clear explanation of the technology solutions, the depth of knowledge of the Canon consultants, the sheer breadth of solutions from cutsheet to large format, toner to inkjet, even 3D. It was a world away from what we had seen from other digital press suppliers and it set our minds racing.

We were blown away by the build quality of the machines and the print quality we could see being delivered from the Canon digital presses. The full capabilities of the Canon equipment went way and beyond what we expected. We could see immediately how this would help us to take our business to the next level by targeting different types of customer with a higher calibre design and print offering.

Martin Reynolds
Managing Director

Compelling quality

The new Canon equipment is driving sustained growth of the digital business, which is now close to representing half the company's revenues, alongside its established litho print and design services.

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The quality of the output from the imagePRESS devices, even on uncoated stocks, is very compelling for our customers, and the costs per print are such that we can access new opportunities by taking on relatively small jobs for new clients and showcasing what we're capable of.

Our in-house design skills mean that we can offer customers creative suggestions for how to enhance their print, and the scope to work with such a broad range of substrates, gloss and matt finishes, including textured papers on the imagePRESS C750, enables us to bring these more ambitious concepts to life for clients at attractive costs.

Martin Reynolds
Managing Director



The imagePRESS output quality has enabled Solent Design to migrate a substantial proportion of litho work to digital, even for jobs that would previously have been unthinkable on anything other than litho. For example, regular marketing collateral work for a prominent heritage motorcycle brand requires deep solids, special colours and tints. “A year ago we simply wouldn't have attempted that work on a digital press. But when we ran test files on the imagePRESS C10000VP the results were exceptional – flawless solids, rich colours and smooth vignettes. When we show customers what we can produce digitally now, they're amazed.”

The Canon colour presses have also enabled Solent Design to win a new brief for small quantities of a 380-page in-store catalogue for a DIY brand. Previously, these would have been uneconomical to produce on the litho press due to the low run-length, while the company could not have met the client's quality expectations with its previous digital printer line-up.

And the benefits don't end at colour applications, according to Reynolds: “Where longer run mono work is concerned – say for print runs of five to ten thousand – we have been able to take advantage of digital production. In particular we've moved a customer manual application previously produced litho to the Océ VarioPrint 6160. I can't fault this press in any way; the paper comes out perfectly stacked every time and the quality is unquestionable.”

New opportunities

The duplex banner printing option for the imagePRESS C750 has also allowed Solent Design to expand into A4 landscape books, as well as producing smaller quantities of printed envelopes digitally. Thanks to the ability to handle heavier substrates up to 420 micron on the two imagePRESS devices and to accurately match Pantone colours, 90% of business card work is now printed digitally too, and Solent Design has been able to devise and produce ultra-short run packaging for promotional gifts, adding to its portfolio of products for clients in the events sector.

With the trio of Canon digital presses bedded in and running smoothly, the Solent Design team is looking more closely at how to market these extended capabilities, developing a full sample portfolio and opening doors with potential new customers. The client win-rate is steadily increasing, and Reynolds sees the company's enhanced output quality and extended product range as an increasingly important differentiator with larger customers and SMEs alike.

"For a long time, the market has been fairly price sensitive, especially for certain applications. Now though, we're seeing that customers who have tried budget options for their print needs are recognising the impact of quality on how people respond to their collateral, and understanding the impact that we can achieve with different substrates, for example.

"Thanks to the Canon solutions, that opportunity is wide open for us now. Not everything in print is commoditised, and our strength is in combining good design with great print to create a targeted concept that really meets the customer's brief. Whatever ideas we have for our business now, we feel that by working directly with Canon, we have a committed partner that will help us to make it happen."



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The partnership with Canon – both where the technology is concerned but also with the ongoing support from the Canon business mentors and the account management team – is making us a more confident business. We're sure of what we can do, we're competitive, and we're open to jobs that we would have declined a year ago.

Martin Reynolds
Managing Director

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