



THE DIGITAL WIDE FORMAT PRINTING MARKET CONTINUES TO EVOLVE

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Covid-19 has changed a lot within the printing industry and many new applications, even a new category – social distancing signage – have evolved. Predicted to reach a volume of US\$11.2 billion by 2025 (Markets and Markets), the wide format printing market is mature, but it has certainly not yet reached its heyday.

The wide and super wide format market has undergone its digital transition while certain analogue printing technologies, such as screen printing, continue to complement the overall mix offered by large format print service providers (PSPs) to their clients. In this regard, there's clearly still so much to be explored, compared, reviewed, etc.

Hand-painted signage always was a rare sight and is even more so nowadays – if you can find it at all. Developments in digital technologies – starting with the first digital wide format printer introduced in 1999 and presented at drupa 2000 – have since accelerated and come a long way. Even so, for PSPs today there are more and more new feats to be accomplished as client-demand increases for more surprising, more individual means of communication, for faster turnaround and for even more applications to be created. You could say in this sense that inkjet has no limit.

While long print runs are still more viable overall on analogue machinery, they are not being ordered as often as in former times. The digital transition means that more and more applications will become digital and this itself leads to highly specialised wide and super wide printers, many of which will be shown at drupa 2024. Such printers can deal with traditional applications, but more interestingly they enable innovative PSPs to showcase their ability to cater for new and unexpected market-niche jobs.

And most of all, to be able to viably produce short runs, personalised and customised projects, even one-offs, that help brand owners to do things not

previously possible so that their branding efforts reach their full potential.

Another big growth-factor in this sector is of course the environmental agenda, a global topic that extends far beyond drupa. As the world tries to reduce its negative climate impact, so printer manufacturers, PSPs and moreover the client ordering print (be it in a small or large corporation) are all considering how they can contribute to the environmental imperative.

The global pandemic has accelerated these client-driven requirements. Inks and consumables for wide and super wide printing, as well as the printers themselves, will be judged by visitors to drupa 2024 as to how well they fit into this context and into their own print shops. Many brands are willing to pay the extra dollar in order to obtain a more sustainable product, a trend that will continue into the future and which is likely to be reinforced by new regulations.

Wide and super wide format printers have been mainly developed to cater to the signage, advertising, marketing and communications industries. However, they can also make an entrance or even a slight dent in other markets thanks to their versatility which enables certain (mainly short run) jobs within the commercial, packaging and label industries, as well as proofing jobs later to be carried out on analogue machinery. Some can even make forays into areas formerly covered by lithographic equipment such as solar, printed electronics, RFID and all kinds of conductive products.

For the digital printing community and those considering entering the large