

Independent label

Words: Andy Scott.

The recent endorsement by Kodak NexPress of Label Connections' PCL3 digital range meant that these die cut labels now carry the double seal of approval, from HP, for the Indigo Series 3000 sheetfed presses, and Kodak.

Managing director Lesley Turner started the business back in 1993 with just £7000 from a redundancy pay off. 'Initially, the intention was to produce just another range of self-adhesive labels,' she said. 'We soon decided that the time was right to produce something completely different.'

There then followed talks with print manufacturers to find out just what they needed from a self-adhesive label.

'Up until then labels had been on a sheet size that was dictated by the size of the label,' explained Ms Turner, so there were about 20 different sheet sizes and formats were different for every single label size. You didn't know what you were going to get until the labels turned up.'

Simple solution

The firm came up with the PCL format, which is very simply an A4 label sheet, with 13 mm lay and grip edges, with 2 mm gutters between the labels, and with a solid waste matrix.

Having patented the format, the firm then had to wait three months before it got its first order – from paper merchant Wiggins Teape (now Antalis), 'simply because they had run out of their own label stock'. However, the merchant group is still a customer today, and is one of the stockists of the labels.

'Because at the time PCL was so different from other label stocks on the market,' she continued, 'it took at least two years before we really started to see a big increase in customers changing to the format, but once people have used the labels they don't tend to change back.'

'Quality and service is what the whole business has been based

upon,' said Ms Turner, with the firm now supplying, just in the PCL range, over 90 different label sizes, in 35 material options with over 90% of despatches, ordered by the customer, manufactured and shipped in the same day. The whole reason for the development of the range was to have a label pre-printable by a 'wet' process (litho) that could be overprinted if required using a hot, dry toner based process.

Whereas before there were three distinct ranges for litho, laser and copier, with these labels all the necessary elements of each were taken and put into one stable format.

Digital advent

'With the advent of the new digital presses, in particular the Indigo, we started to look at the possibility of producing another universal label range printable by all the new technology, whilst retaining the litho printability,' commented Ms Turner. As the development process began, the company talked to HP, and has worked very closely with the press manufacturer to ensure compatibility with the Indigo process right from the start.

Label Connections has worked consistently with base paper manufacturers to develop a range suitable for Indigo and laser printing, but still able to be used on conventional litho printers. 'The development has been horrendous,' revealed Ms Turner, but after five years and a lot of co-operation from the paper mills, the technicalities have been resolved and the materials now have the coatings for the broad spectrum of print processes needed.



Clearly, knowing and understanding your market, coupled with the technical expertise necessary to develop the products, explains why both HP and Kodak now approve the range. 'We have also been talking to Xerox with a view to finalising approval for the iGen3 and DocuColor machines; and have begun discussions with Océ, Konica Minolta and Canon,' she stated.

Working closely with major machinery manufacturers the company develops its ranges to suit the new generation of machines. ■

The knowledge

- Label Connections was established in 1993.
- Clients (stockists) include Antalis, Robert Home, Howard Smith, and most major paper merchants.
- Products include PCL A4 Universal Labels, PCL3 Digital labels, and traditional office labels.
- A product binder for the digital range has been developed. This provides information on machine settings, base samples and technical data for the current 12 materials and 20 plus label sizes.
- The company has appointed Eurostic as its first German distributor, and is also in active discussions with other potential European distributors.