

# MBA takes change in its stride

**Customers requirements of the printing process are changing in the areas of marketing and transactional communication, and north London printer MBA is helping them find intelligent solutions**

**M**BA has been the best kept secret for 25 years says Bachar Aintaoui. He should know, since he started what is rapidly becoming a £30 million direct mail and transactional print business back in the 1980s. It started out as a fulfilment house, but by following the requirements of its customers, MBA has become a full service business, where print is used as a means to an end. The company also handles web design, marketing campaigns and document life cycle management for a wide spread of blue chip customers.

The head office is at its central print factory in Tottenham, north London. In addition, there is a satellite operation in Warrington, an envelope production facility in Milton Keynes and also an on-site print operation in Peterborough, which MBA runs for Diligenta. Last year the company acquired the business of SR Communications which took turnover to £29.3 million. "If we get to £30 million this year, we will be very happy," the managing director says.

The economic climate is responsible for the slow down, but MBA is not sitting back and waiting for conditions to improve. "We knew that unless we were to re-engineer our business, we would come out of the recession a lot weaker," says Aintaoui. "The constant downward pressure on price shows that what we are doing as an industry is not working, because price is the only way to differentiate."

MBA intends to break this spiral with a mix of technology, its approach and offering to customers, but mostly by continuing to adapt and change with customers as it has done for the last 25 years. This has taken the company into transactional printing, document management and direct mail in addition to fulfilment and mailing. Along the way it has picked up jobs demanding high levels of security and integrity, including



a very high proportion of the nation's pay slips. Consequently it has a full house of accreditations including ISO 14001 for environmental management with FSC, ISO 9001 for quality management and ISO 27001 for security.

Swipe cards are used to limit access

*(Top) Bachar Aintaoui, Chairman of MBA Group Ltd with the Xerox 980 Colour Continuous Laser Press. (Below) The two Xerox 980 presses are the first to be installed in the UK*

to the right areas, soon to be updated to biometric systems.

Document management covers up-stream design of the document, whether printed or seen on a web site, creation of a web site via PURLs, through automatic generation of a personalised letter from the information supplied, right through to archiving these forms for the period the customer wants.

While most of the contract customers are based on the transactional side, there is an equally strong direct mail business, each using the line up of cut sheet and reel-fed Xerox mono printers, the two iGen3s and HP Indigo. "It is about having the same machines, but with different points of approach," says sales director Kevin Stewart. He joined the business five years ago with a strong direct mail background. Jarrod Green, as head of corporate sales, looks after the transactional side of the business. As well as access to a common park of up to date digital presses, backed by extensive sheetfed and web litho printing, the two sides share common ground in delivering intelligence embedded in the printed document.

"The client is looking for more meaningful innovation that can provide a genuine return on investment," says Aintaoui. "The only way to give customers that better ROI is by using their biggest asset, which is their database. They can only use that effectively if they treat customers as individuals.

"The technology we have been looking at will allow them to do that."

MBA has been looking for the answer for four years, examining the technologies and approach to provide high-speed long run personalisation. "To a very large extent the machine is not as relevant as what it can deliver, because unless you can supply your customers with the platform, what we are delivering

as an industry is going to come under even more pressure," he adds.

The technology answer for MBA has been two Xerox 980 lines, both offering quality duplex colour and linked to sophisticated Hunkeler paper handling lines for printing reel to variable length cut sheet, and including Technau dynamic perforation. The set up is going to deliver a variety of communications and will minimise most offline finishing that is required.

MBA did not buy these machines because it is already a strong Xerox customer (one of the few in the UK to be a Xerox Premier Partner), but because this was the technology that offered the most in terms of delivering print speed, quality and flexibility.

This is because the Xerox 980 uses a unique cold fusing technology. Standard electrophotography uses heat to melt and fuse the coloured toners which are used. There is an impact on the paper, which loses humidity and can become difficult to handle as a result. Consequently paper choice is limited and web printing very difficult to achieve. Inkjet requires pre-treatment of the paper in order to ensure a consistent finish to the paper for the ink to adhere to. Cold fusion has none of these drawbacks. An intense flash of light melts the toner and fuses it to the paper. Heat generation is negligible and as a result, the process is suitable for almost any kind of substrate, including plastics and lighter weight papers that are suited to keeping postage weights down.

For MBA the benefit is that the machines become another output option in the factory where mono, highlight colour and full colour are meshed seamlessly. It is also using a toner technology, albeit with a different fusing method, which offers the kind of familiarity that moving to inkjet could not do. Training and managing colour is going to be more straightforward. Already there is evidence of this as MBA begins to work on the profiles for the different papers it uses and to match as closely as possible the output of its other colour presses. Quality is significantly better than samples that Xerox has handed out.

They are being installed at the right time. Customers from all sides are



**MBA Group's 135,000 square foot Head Office in north London offers both digital and litho printing capability, hand enclosing, and data and electronic media services**

looking to get the most from their print spend and control over transactional documents is in a number of cases passing to marketing departments.

"If we did not have these machines we would have had to have more iGens," says Stewart. "This technology is going to provide big savings on longer runs."

Aintaoui adds: "What is happening in transactional printing represents the biggest opportunity and the biggest challenge. These are customers that understand data and they are changing the look and feel of their documents to cross boundaries in marketing. They want to use dynamic messaging and are moving from mono to full colour. Where companies are running loyalty cards, image quality is important."

When working on a marketing campaign, MBA will design a mini web site to reflect the customer's main site, but will remain separate from it. This allows MBA to adjust the message very quickly as the results from the campaign come in. Locking it into the main web site would restrict this kind of swift response, he points out.

MBA's team of programmers, handling web site creation and data manipulation, operate from both London and Warrington. They work on ensuring that the messaging on the original

document is correct, right through to optimising the effectiveness of the web page or printed mailing, so that it includes the intelligence to provide the ROI for the client.

"This is not commodity printing," he says. "But using this new technology does offer a cost saving over what we had before."

It results in the heady mix of a value added but cost effective approach. The Peterborough facilities management operation has expanded to take on more services and to cover more end users, proof that MBA has that approach right. It supervises a fleet of printers plus some on site print, handling the larger volumes and overflow work in Tottenham.

It is an intelligent solution to the issue. Likewise the MBA team stays abreast of other changes that align it with its customer base. For example, its corporate social responsibility strategy has boosted recycling rates and cut wastage. Most of all though it is about delivering the message that customers want to get across in the most effective way. "What customers are doing at the moment is not working," Aintaoui says. "They need to change what they are doing and as a business we are set up to respond to these changes."

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