

AXIS POWERS INTO DIGITAL

West Yorkshire printer Axis Print has recently added digital print to its established litho offering, and tells *Print & Paper Monthly* how it came about.

A B1 litho printer in Brighouse, West Yorkshire, Axis Print made the step into digital print as recently as June of this year. Its eight colour Heidelberg press has been printing high quality work incorporating Fuji's Liso hybrid screening for customers in the theatre and arts, greeting cards/gift wrap, and general commercial markets, since the 11 employee, £1.25 million turnover firm started in 2006.

But there was no way of competing at B2 and smaller format levels, so Axis Print turned to digital print. 'We felt we needed to offer something at the other end of the market,' explained Alex Greenman, co-founder and sales and marketing director. 'Budgets have been dramatically reduced and people are doing smaller quantities and they are much more cost conscious. We had found that with the smaller formats and volumes we just could not compete.'

Axis spoke to Fujifilm, which is its prepress supplier. Fujifilm's partnership with Xerox resulted in the company eventually settling on a Xerox 700 colour digital press.

'We now have the long end and the short end covered. There was a long series of discussions about what was available on the market and what our needs were; balancing capabilities with cost. We didn't look in detail anywhere else, but we had an eye on the market so we knew what machines did what,' said Ms Greenman.

For the time being, Axis is simply intending to use the Xerox press for shorter run jobs, enabling it to handle more work from existing customers that have used its litho capability, while also looking to attract new customers on the digital side, from whom further work of a longer run nature might potentially be forthcoming. Extending the digital press into variable data areas is something that is on the agenda in the longer term – personalised

greetings cards, for example, being one direction in which Axis might develop.

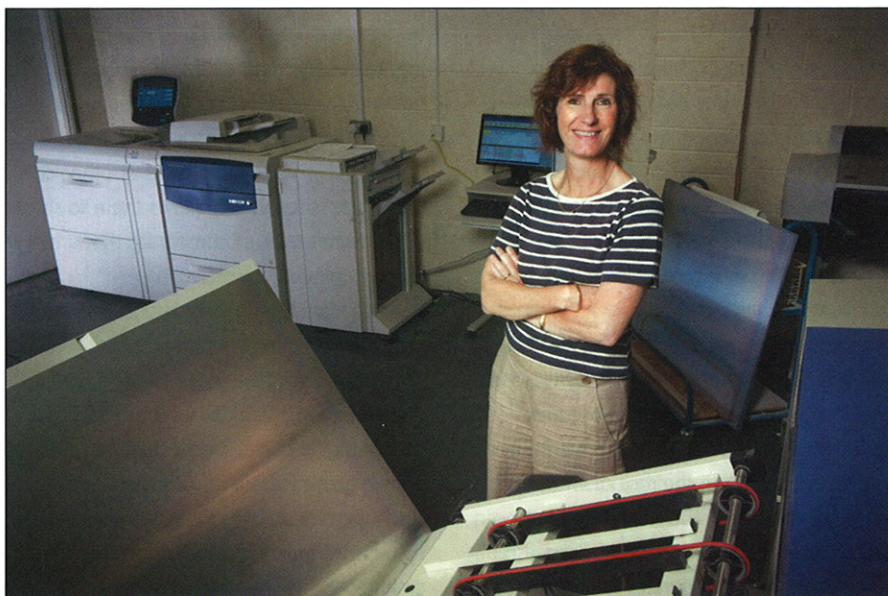
Ms Greenman continued: 'Fuji has been very helpful and listened to what our requirements were. There are so many different options but they were very attuned to what we needed. We went to IpeX to look at the press, and then we spent a day testing at Fuji in Bedford using our own jobs.'

The Xerox 700 has been supplied with an entry level Fiery RIP, which has only very

customers if digital is only spoken of as an addition to litho. She added that if the company were to become involved in variable data print, that approach would have to change.

'The biggest learning curve has been discovering which paper stocks work best, and working out the pricing structure, and we have had to spend quite a lot of time on that. It has also made us realise that there are other possibilities. For example, we have the capability now to print very short run A3 posters, and it has suddenly dawned on us that we can do larger ones like A1 size on our Epson proofer and be competitive. It's only by going down the digital route that you realise there are other possibilities.'

Simon Wood, prepress manager at Axis Print, is operating the Xerox, and has been impressed with the press. He said: 'It's all working well, no problems. We had some



Alex Greenman of Axis: 'The biggest learning curve has been discovering which paper stocks work best, and working out the pricing structure.'

basic VDP capability. On the finishing side, only inline punching and stapling were chosen, since Axis already has superior folding and stitching technology than was possible on the digital press.

In terms of selling the digital capability, there has been little change for Axis, said Ms Greenman. The company is focused on selling it as an extension of its existing (and trusted) capability, rather than as something different. This is a conscious decision, she said, because the view has been that there is more reassurance for

teething problems as you do with any new installation, but one thing that must be said about Xerox is that if you get a problem, there's an engineer there within hours.

'For me personally, apart from the back up registration, which can be a little bit fiddly to get spot on and could be a bit tighter, it's a very user-friendly and good quality system to use. But this is a B1 litho environment, where we expect the back up registration to be spot on. If we only had a digital machine we probably wouldn't even question that it's an eighth of a millimetre out.' ■