



Steve Cropper, Managing Director, Gemini Print

Partnerships power the possible

An award-winning business shares its experience of how a vendor partnership unlocked its potential and enabled it to look to the future with optimism despite the pandemic.

Like most savvy business owners and indeed morally responsible humans, managing director of Shoreham, West Sussex-based Gemini Print, Steve Cropper takes the issues of sustainability and environmental impact very seriously.

“It’s not about just looking good, we’re not about that, it’s really about doing the right thing,” states this industry stalwart.

Indeed, in February last year the circa-£20m commercial litho and digital print firm, which also has offices in London and Newcastle, was announced as top scorer in the 2019 KODAK SONORA Plate Green Leaf Awards, coming joint highest in the UK and Europe.

The award is open to any of the 4,000-plus businesses globally using KODAK SONORA Plates, with 16 areas across Gemini’s operations coming under the microscope for investment in sustainability and environmental practices.

A long-time Kodak partner, some 20-plus years according to Cropper, 150-staff Gemini was an early UK adopter of the manufacturer’s SONORA Process Free Plates, implementing them across the business in 2016.

“You have a chance to set an example when you run a company. There are a lot of people – both staff and wider community – who will buy into what you do and what you’re trying to achieve, so being green, recycling for example, is vital.

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“Switching to KODAK SONORA Process Free Plates was just one of the many ways we could do our bit for the environment,” Cropper explains.

The move was part of a wider revamp of Gemini’s workflow and pre-press capabilities at the time, upgrading its MAGNUS Q800 Platesetters and its existing PRINERGY software, incorporating INSITE remote proofing and PRINERGY Evo. The business runs a raft of litho equipment, while its sheet-fed digital firepower comprises two NEXPRESS production presses and a DIGIMASTER 9100s.

in the cloud. We knew Kodak had that offer with PRINERGY on Demand, so we approached them.

“Our whole focus was on making our processes within the company one-touch as opposed to many touches and after talking to Kodak and Tharstern, they gave us a clear plan and route to get to where we are now,” Cropper says.

And after testing in the second half of 2020, in November Gemini Print became the first UK business to go live with KODAK’s PRINERGY on Demand cloud-based, subscription platform.

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Hands-on boss Cropper, who joined Gemini Print 35 years ago, working across everything from deliveries to production, has since risen to steer the business through some seriously choppy waters including a global recession, special measures, a merger and acquisition, an MBO and currently, of course, Brexit and ‘The C Word’.

His grass-roots approach to running the business, including a recent 18-month period where he worked with the sales team to better understand their processes, has not only created an integrated working culture but has given him a solid view of what investments the business needs to move forward.

“I’ve surrounded myself with good people in key areas. People that challenge me and the business, and that’s important to me,” he states. “We’re more professional now than we have ever been.”

A key part of the picture, he says, has been his relationship with Kodak. It was down to this that he began exploring the future-proofing of the business, following the 2016 upgrades, a process that has led to a recent UK first.

He explains: “We started looking at where we needed to be in certain areas of the business such as automation, servers and data security. We knew we wanted to change our MIS platform and link as much software as we could to it and also explore options for putting as much as possible

“We’ve had contact with Kodak and Tharstern throughout, but to be honest the integration has been seamless. Users before and after wouldn’t know if we were on premise or in the cloud,” he says.

“We now don’t have to worry about on premise server upgrades, operating system maintenance or security breaches. All of that has gone away.”

Cropper notes the timeliness of the new system, explaining that with the advent of home-working, staff are now connecting seamlessly, with none of the previously cumbersome issues that could crop up.

“It means we just can focus on getting our product right for the customer instead of having to worry about the technical upkeep of the systems,” he adds.

And while global circumstances are making business unpredictable, Cropper remains cautiously optimistic about the road ahead, with numerous automation projects now in progress helping to boost its growing online portal management offering, improve customer care through delivery tracking and grow its design and mailing divisions.

“Kodak and our other partners have really supported us and made this all possible. They’ve been critical to its success,” Cropper states.

