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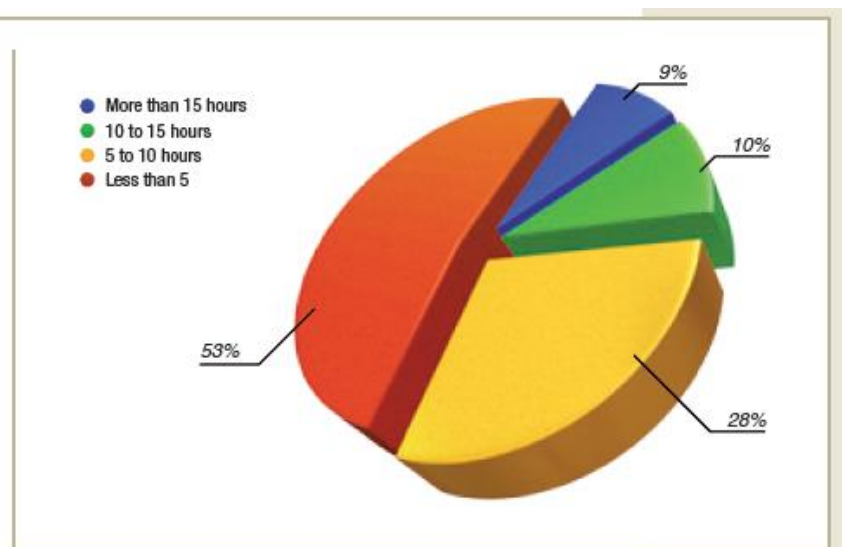
Cost Efficient Blankets for the Packaging Market

During a recent roadshow in South Africa, Trelleborg, and its new agent Thunderbolt Solutions, highlighted the inefficiencies and unnecessary costs that can arise from not using the most effective offset blankets for the printing environment concerned. The following article examines some of the points raised.

“One common problem is that people misunderstand price and cost,” says Wayne Stevens, Managing Director of Thunderbolt. “The price is what you pay the supplier to buy the blankets, but the cost of that purchase is a completely different ballgame. Most packaging printers have invested large amounts of money in their presses, but if they fit blankets that are not resistant to the normal rigors of printing, such as smashes, edge marking plus general wear and tear, then the efficiency of their press can be affected to the extent that profits are reduced considerably.”

The diverse range of thicker stock used in the packaging sector means that the potential for smashes is high and

it’s extremely important for blankets to be resilient. In a survey carried out a few years ago by Trelleborg, more than a quarter of respondents said that they experienced between five and ten hours of unplanned press downtime each week. The survey included printers from all



Hours of unplanned downtime experienced by printers (source Trelleborg’s survey 2012)

sectors, so it’s difficult to single out packaging printers, however, nearly 10 per cent of downtime was attributed to blanket smashes.

Matthias Horn is Regional Sales Director for Trelleborg’s printing solutions. “As a global player in the graphic arts arena we are able to see the ‘big picture’ in terms of where printers are losing money because of their approach to offset blankets. Wayne is

absolutely right about price and cost being confused. We constantly come across situations where printers buy on price alone and lose efficiency because of it.

“Trelleborg has more than fifty years’ experience in manufacturing offset blankets and we continue to invest heavily in research and development in order to create solutions that precisely meet modern pressroom requirements. We have a large range and experts who can help customers to choose the best option.”

The price/cost issue is more complex than it might at first appear. For example, one printer changed from the low quality blankets he had been using to those from Trelleborg, which, similar to other premium brands, were more expensive. The much higher resistance to smashes meant that he replaced blankets less frequently but, on balance, his monthly blanket bill changed very little. However, the reduction in press downtime resulted in a significant improvement to productivity and profits.

Stevens picks up the point. “South African printers have the option to fit cheap blankets imported from countries that do not operate strict quality controls. In this instance, it’s very much a case of you get what you pay for. With such blankets, it’s not unheard of for a blanket bar to come off during a run resulting in lost production and, quite often, damage to the press.

“Printers using cheap imports not only suffer from poor print quality - with ink transfer, registration and reproduction all adversely affected by the blanket’s inconsistent properties - they also have to constantly buy replacement blankets, they incur extra wash-up and chemical costs, plus increased stock waste. Trying to maintain, or even achieve, good print quality can be a major headache.

“But it’s also vitally important for printers to appreciate the different characteristics there are amongst blankets in the premium end of the market, because there are significant variations in choice, quality and press results. We have access to experts based at Trelleborg’s manufacturing facility in Italy and, if necessary, they will visit South Africa to help set up trials of the most suitable blankets at printer’s premises.”

Trelleborg enjoys an extremely high conversion rate when printers trial their blankets, and this is experienced across all sectors, including packaging, commercial, newspaper and heatset.

Tandym Print is a leading South African family-owned printing company and provides a good example of a recent convert to Trelleborg technology. Following the success of a month-long trial on a six-color Heidelberg CD 102, Tandym now uses Vulcan Easy Plus on three of the four Heidelberg presses at its Cape Town factory.

“We serve customers requiring high-end print quality and so used premium offset blankets on all of our presses,” says pressroom manager Clinton Simpson. “However, the Vulcan brand has an unrivalled reputation in the industry and when Thunderbolt Solutions proposed a trial we were immediately keen to take up the offer. Our Heidelberg CD 102 produces the greatest range of printed material, handling stock from 70 g/m² bond to 1.2 mm board, which means that we always use this press to test consumables.



Clinton Simpson is pressroom manager in Tandym

“During the first month our minders reported that the overall print quality was equal to anything that we had been achieving. The cost per blanket was similar to our previous premium product. The big advantages came from the ease of cleaning and the much greater resilience to smashes. Based on this feedback we decided to fit Vulcan Easy Plus to three of our four Heidelbergs, making a total of nineteen units.

“Having analyzed the blanket usage between March and December of 2016, and compared this carefully with the same period during the previous year, we were delighted to find that the superior longevity of Vulcan Easy Plus resulted in a 36 per cent reduction in blanket purchases. During weekdays our presses are in use around the clock and so this was a significant saving amounting to almost one hundred thousand Rand, approximately 7,000 Euro, over the ten months.”

In addition to these savings, the ease of wash-ups resulted in faster changeovers and greater press productivity at the Cape Town site. About 20 per cent of the orders handled by Tandym are packaging related, with the remainder being commercial.

“Regardless of the type of work, much of it is short-run, so the ability to make ready more quickly is very appealing,” says Simpson. “The capacity of the Vulcan to maintain

first class dot reproduction despite the number of blanket washes has also been impressive. Upon receipt of our order, Thunderbolt is extremely swift in delivering blankets, which are very well packaged and sealed. We haven't had any issues at all since starting the trial."

The complexity of print, with influences from consumables, chemicals, stock, the nearby environment etc., means that many printers rely on the advice of Trelleborg's experts to keep abreast of relevant blanket developments. In the near future Tandym intends to trial the new Vulcan Zenith. Designed for the general commercial market, Vulcan Zenith can be cleaned easily and enables the image of the previous job to be removed extremely quickly during start-up, ready for the next job.

"Since taking on the distributorship for Vulcan we have set up press trials with printers throughout South Africa," continues Stevens. "These have ranged from commercial printers to packaging groups and from commercial heatset to coldest newspaper printers.

"The response has been very positive and 2017 looks like being an exciting year in terms of the levels of interest in Vulcan and the sheer magnitude of solutions available. These range from blankets for use with the latest low-energy UV curing and low migration ink technologies, to products for coating applications and printing on non-porous substrates. There are specialist blankets for security work and products that are approved for use with food packaging.

"We work closely with the Trelleborg team in Italy, where the blankets are manufactured using state-of-the-art solvent-less calendaring facilities. We also work closely with Trelleborg's personnel in France, where blankets are cut and fitted with bars to the exceptionally high standards employed throughout the group. Only converted blankets are imported and we hold a wide selection of stock at our Thunderbolt premises in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, ensuring rapid delivery to customers wherever they are."

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