



CASE STUDY

FLEXO PRINT SOLUTIONS THAT STICK



Systems Labelling Limited, the UK's largest independent label printer, was established in 1989 and today employs over 120 staff working split shifts 7 days a week across 3 sites in Deeside, Runcorn, and Essex. It is committed to innovation whilst providing environmentally smart labelling products across a broad range of sectors, including dairy, food, chemical, household, logistics, beverage, and cosmetics with a turnover last year of £15m+, predominantly from UK business.



Systems Labelling

INNOVATIVE LABEL TECHNOLOGY

In an extremely competitive marketplace, Systems Labelling has retained customers for decades and recruited blue chip names both in the UK and Europe.

In 2008, the Flintshire County Council presented Systems Labelling with their "Innovation Award," recognizing their track record for developing innovative products for the packaging industry, and in 2009 they received two Glyndwr University "Inspiring Enterprise" Awards—"Excellence in Customer Service" and "Success Through People."

One of the challenges Systems Labelling's prepress department faces on a daily basis is managing the multitude of job files submitted by their customers.

"The quality of the Adobe Illustrator® files we receive varies widely," explained Robin Barker, Systems Labelling's Reprographics Director. "Approximately 50 percent of them contain improperly prepared artwork and embedded images requiring corrections and adjustments before they can be truly print ready. We were struggling along, dealing with these issues, and it was laborious and time consuming."

With a goal of finding a tool that could help them simplify and streamline the management of their Illustrator job files, Systems Labelling started to research the available products in the market. Their search led them to Astute Graphics' Phantasm CS Publisher plug-in for Adobe Illustrator.

IMAGE RE-LINKING

Phantasm CS Publisher's Relink Embedded Images tool simply and efficiently extracts one or more embedded images without having to pour through artwork layers, eliminating other manual and more time-consuming methods. It also provides additional information such as the embedded image's colour mode (RGB, CMYK, multi-ink, etc.) and allows automated or individually selected image exportation.

Non-automated methods for relinking images typically can take from 5 to 10 minutes per image for extraction and repositioning back into the Illustrator file, plus plenty of scope for error in the process. If a document arrives with three embedded images needing relinking, the time-savings can be as much as half an hour for conversion to linked status.

"Using the Relink Embedded Images tool has allowed us to correct problems without having to lose time and increase costs by returning the files to the agency or customer for corrections," Barker commented.

“The software links to the image and allows us to quickly check the ppc, make conversions if necessary, and move on.”

INK COVERAGE AND FLEXO DROP-OFF

The Phantasm CS in-line Illustrator-based Ink Coverage check system gives the prepress team the ability to quickly access various setup profiles and switch instantly between artwork and visual highlights of specific areas of concern.



In flexo, drop-off levels (minimum dot) can lead to visually poor cut-off areas in artwork, especially in commonly used vignettes and drop shadows. Barker explained that Systems Labelling can hold their process to a 1 percent dot, but settings below that can create problems.

An ongoing issue was drop-off levels set at .4 to .8 percent, but reading as 1 percent in the Illustrator files, giving the impression that Systems Labelling's standards were being met. As Illustrator doesn't provide a method to check for ink coverage or flexo-related drop-off levels, the workflow had to be disrupted, exporting artwork to alternative systems and cross-matching areas of concern for correction within Illustrator.

The Phantasm CS Ink Coverage tool highlights these types of problems in approximately 5 percent of the jobs flowing through the Systems Labelling's prepress department—problems that in the past might not have been caught before going to press.

“Now, items such as drop-off levels literally ‘jump out’ at us,” Barker stated, “helping us eliminate potential issues further on in the workflow.”

Less product is scrapped because it does not meet quality specifications and delivery delays are avoided because file issues are quickly and efficiently managed, generating cost savings for both Systems Labelling and their customers. It has proven to be a valuable quality control tool.

SWAP (MAP) INK CHANNELS

Special ink setups are often required for flexo and packaging applications to achieve the customer's desired colour results. Controlling and adjusting artwork for these special ink sets requires

experienced users with an in-depth knowledge of Illustrator's finer points of ink handling, plus time-consuming operations to control any combination of vector and raster artwork. Phantasm CS Publisher's Swap Channels intuitive tool maps channels, removes spot inks, introduces new channels based on existing levels, and removes or controls alpha channels, simplifying and speeding up the processing.

“Although we are just beginning to use the Swap Channels tool,” Barker continued, “we can already see its potential for helping us continue to improve Illustrator print file inspections and preparations.”

CONCLUSION

Barker wrapped things up, stating that “overall, Phantasm CS Publisher is fantastic. We trialed it for a couple of months and fell in love with the toolset. It is very user friendly and very cost-effective. The learning curve for the staff was incredibly short, and our productivity improved almost immediately. Best of all, for our customers, the integration of this new tool was seamless.”

In today's business climate with increasingly tighter deadlines, Phantasm CS Publisher can prove to be a valuable tool for any prepress or print company. On the basis of two hours per week per operator being saved, the return on the investment can be realized in less than a fortnight.

Improved workflows, rapid ROI, and happy customers—Phantasm CS Publisher delivers it all!

FURTHER INFORMATION

Systems Labelling Limited: www.systemslabelling.com

Artwork Guide for flexo printing produced by Systems Labelling:
www.systemslabelling.com/downloads/A-Guide-to-Artwork-for-Flexo.pdf

Phantasm CS Publisher plugin for Adobe Illustrator®:
www.astutegraphics.com/products/phantasm/publisher.html

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