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PRESS RELEASE

Digital Textile Printing – Finally Taking Off?

Web Consulting, KonicaMinolta and Stork discuss the growth of ink jet textile printing at IMI ink jet conference

For many years the industry has been talking about digital textile printing with ink jet. Textile appears to represent a huge potential market, but ink jet penetration has been slow to move out of niche applications.

Speaking at the IMI European Ink Jet conference in Lisbon in November, Stewart Partridge of Web Consulting talked about the digital textile market “finally igniting” with the arrival of higher productivity platforms in 2003. The impact of these machines, from companies such as DuPont, Reggiani, and Robustelli, has helped ink jet grow to over 65mill m2 of printed textiles in 2005.

Stewart Partridge explained that there are several drivers for this growth in digital textile printing. Firstly, growth is returning to the traditional textile printing industry, following a slump in the mid to late 90’s. Demand is now returning to pre-slump levels. Secondly, the technology solutions are falling into place with ink jet printheads, inks, fabric treatment and materials handling all now available for effective systems building. As a result, the economics of ink jet printing now match screenprinting for runs up to 500m2 and with ink prices falling and output speeds increasing, this trend should continue.

But he added that there are still more challenges for ink jet to overcome if it is to expand seriously into mainstream textile printing applications. Colour control and management is critical – ink jet textile printers need to extend the gamut to mimic analogue capabilities - and Web Consulting also expects the pressure on platform and consumable costs to increase. One future direction could be the customisation of platforms for specific textile applications, driving the need for different ink deposits and resolutions.

Akiyoshi Ohno, Managing Director of KonicaMinolta IJ Technologies agreed that the market for textile printing is taking off. In his presentation at the IMI conference, he identified the growth of the mid-range sector of the market, where machines are printing 1,500 to 5,000m²/month. This is the sector dominated by DuPont's Artistri printer; Robustelli's Monna Lisa and KonicaMinolta's TP-V. KonicaMinolta expect more companies to enter the textile printing market, perhaps initially targeting flag and banner applications and then moving into mainstream textiles.

Jorg van der Meij, Marketing Manager of Stork Digital Imaging presented an alternative view, suggesting that by using Stork U See software, multiple low-end printers can consistently produce the same output as a smaller number of mid or high-end machines. This is Stork's concept of a digital printing mill where designs can be created anywhere in the world, then samples printed and products produced - a concept which has become a commercial reality.

The building blocks of the Stork U See digital textile standard are approved hardware, software, consumables and working procedures, which enable the production to be identical to the approved sample and each re-order to be identical to the first batch. The customer also benefits from shorter lead times, shorter run lengths and freedom of design.

Stork now has four digital sampling centres around the world and a digital printing mill in Bangkok, where 16 printers have an annual capacity of 500,000m². Stork plans investment for up to 2mill m² per year capacity in Bangkok and also to expand the number of its sampling centres. All the output is fashion and customers include major retail names such as Victoria's Secret, Puma, Next, Felina and Nautica.

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PHOTOS

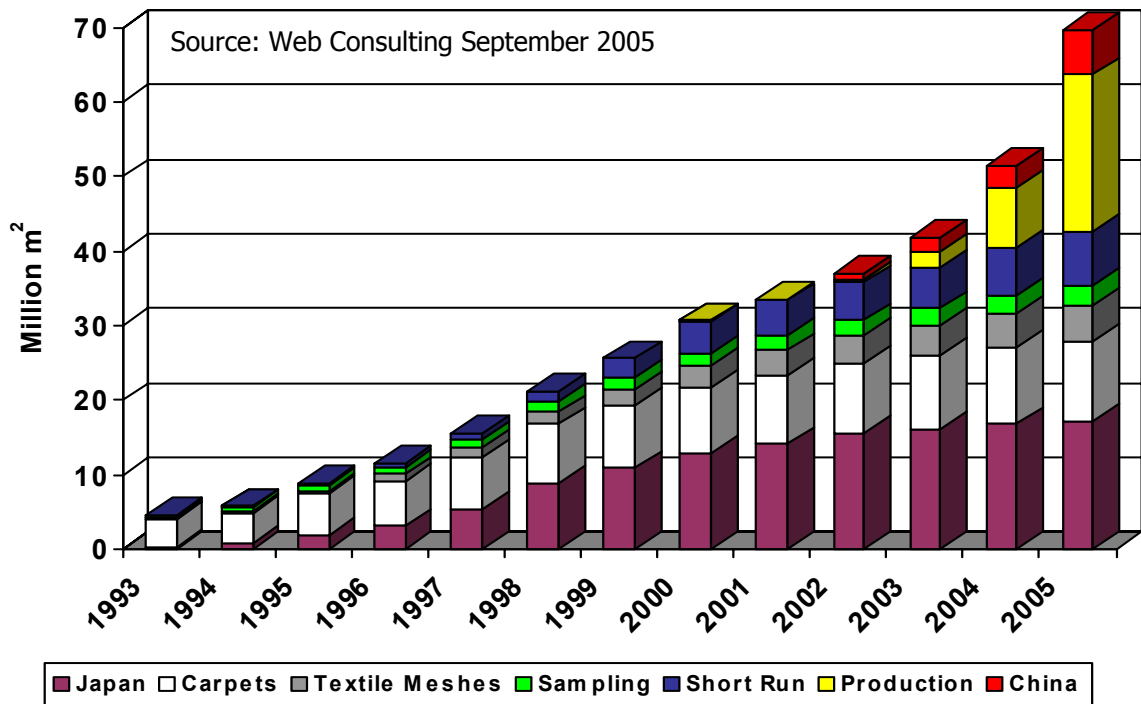
High-resolution images are available for download from the Press Centre on the IMI web site www.imieurope.com



Jorg van der Meij, Marketing Manager - Stork Digital Imaging



Akiyoshi Ohno, Managing Director – KonicaMinolta IJ Technologies



Digital Textile Growth Ignites – Digital now ~0.2% of “traditional” textile printing

Web Consulting Ltd – September 2005



About IMI

The Information Management Institute runs the largest and most comprehensive conference and seminar programme in the digital printing industry. Each year over 2,000 industry technical and management personnel from over 600 companies attend around 20 events covering all forms of digital printing.

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