

Smartprint Group

An Epson signage and screenprinting film solution



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Garry Donpon
Managing Director
Smartprint Group

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Smartprint Group

From a graphic design one-man show start point in 1996, Garry Donpon has evolved his business to the stage where it now has 14 full time employees, operates from purpose built premises and, relaunched in 2008 as Smartprint Group, is the Toowoomba region's most versatile and quality-driven design and print company.

Underpinning that position is an incredibly dynamic business model that reflects ever-changing trends in the design and print marketplace.

Challenge: Achieve digital workflows

With the growth and expansion of the company, Smartprint Group became a one-stop shop, delivering graphic design, screenprinting, offset print brokerage, point-of-sale materials, banners and a host of other design and print related services.

But with that broad service delivery, Garry and his team were faced with significant challenges arising from outsourcing costs, internal labour intensive processes and a steady decline in offset print brokerage profits.

"We had recognised several years ago that digital printing was definitely an answer to many of our challenges," Garry states. "But what we needed were large format digital printers that delivered absolute quality – which is one of our most critical go-to-market customer values – without the enormous price tag. Importantly, we were looking for a solution to address the cost- and labour-intensive processes required of traditional screenprinting."

Solution: Epson Stylus Pro 9880 and Stylus Pro GS6000

Searching for the ideal digital print solution was a task that took Garry a few years; and it wasn't until he evaluated the Epson Stylus Pro 9880 that he saw at least part of the solution. "At the same time as I was looking at the Pro 9880 as a screenprinting film production printer, the Stylus Pro GS6000 came on to the market," he says.

"And with that, it was obvious to me that the two printers would meet every single one of our challenges."

That led to Smartprint Group implementing an entirely new in-house print and film production environment based around the Epson Stylus Pro GS6000 and Stylus Pro 9880; and it's an implementation that has been a continual source of business benefits since day one.

Faster and more economical screenprinting

When it comes to screenprinting, which remains one of Smartprint Group's busiest operations, the Stylus Pro 9880 is saving the company

significant amounts of time and money by means of the ability to introduce an entirely new film production workflow.

Now, instead of employing a workflow centred around sending files to a third party bureau for film creation, or using Rubylith that is contour cut and "weeded" to produce a film positive, film is created using the Stylus Pro 9880. In contrast to the two previous methods, which were expensive, time consuming and required valuable staff resources, film is now being produced virtually on-demand.

"The use of Rubylith to create the film is, in our business at least, a thing of the past," Garry states. "Gone are the days of having people sitting around for hours and picking out the waste material. All our films are now generated in-house with the Stylus Pro 9880; and the quality of black we achieve with the Epson inks is ideal for the film negatives."

Once printed and dry, the in-house created films are taken to a workroom where the stencil is created and the screen-printing process begins. "It's all about our ability to be more competitive in a highly competitive market and ensure we provide our customers with constantly improving levels of service," Garry explains.

From offset to digital

When it comes to the Stylus Pro GS6000 and its place in Smartprint Group, it's all about the changes in consumer demand. Where large quantity print runs were the norm for everything from stickers to point-of-sale materials, shorter and on-demand print runs are becoming ever more prevalent.

"With short print runs, screenprinting simply isn't economical," Garry says. "And this is where digital printing really comes into its own, especially with the Pro GS6000."

"Customers can come in and order anything from bumper stickers to Corflute signs in small quantities, and we're able to run them off in a fraction of the time and without having the customer incur the set up costs that have always been the case with any form of printing. Essentially, we're providing a more dynamic service to our customers that's less expensive than the alternatives and meets the market changes head on."

And then on to banners

In keeping with Smartprint Group's dynamic business model, the introduction of the Stylus Pro GS6000 enabled the company to bid for, win and deliver, the production of 88 four metre, double-sided exterior banners for the local Council.



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"The Pro GS6000 is the ideal printer for this sort of project," Garry explains. "It has the media handling capabilities that provide us with the flexibility to choose the most appropriate vinyl, as well as having the solvent ink-based durability that's critical to producing exterior signage."

Given that the banners consist of four sets of 22 – one for each season – and that they will be used for three months per year over a four-year period, the durability of the Stylus Pro GS6000 solvent ink set will be standing a true test of time, and the results of that test clearly visible to all.

According to Garry, though, it's the Stylus Pro GS6000's three-stage heating system that underpins the banners' quality and durability. "In vinyl street banners, it's crucial the ink actually get right into the pores of the material. So when the material goes through the first stage of the heating system, the pores open up, which enables the ink to penetrate.

"With the other two stages, the ink is dried and that means it won't smudge when it's handled or taken up by the printer's automatic take-up reel."

A safer work environment

It's worth noting that even though the Stylus Pro GS6000 utilises a solvent ink, Smartprint Group has its printer located in a general office environment – an environment with no special ventilation required to deal with the chemical/odour hazards that go hand-in-hand with other solvent ink printers.

Garry explains: "One of the main reasons we opted for the Stylus Pro GS6000 was actually the new ink from Epson. When you look at other solvent printers and the huge costs involved in setting aside a room and purchasing special ventilation to deal with the solvent ink odours, it suddenly becomes a major issue.

"With the GS6000's new ink, which is odourless and non-carcinogenic, we were able to implement the printer, get it into production – and generate revenues – without having to spend anything extra."

In summing up Smartprint Group's Epson focus, Garry says: "Aside from everything else, you have to look at the worldwide market and see just how many non-Epson printers actually use Epson print heads.

"So if you're going to buy a printer with Epson heads, you really need to ask yourself what reason there is keeping you from buying a machine built in its entirety by Epson!"

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