

RMIT University students colouring our world with Epson

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case study



RMIT University

RMIT University's School of Fashion and Textiles is one of Australia's most high profile institutions in training designers for industry and small manufacturing enterprises.

Challenges

- Need to achieve consistent colour
- Excessive print time delays
- Achieve high levels of detail in both colour and black-and-white prints

Solution

Epson Stylus Pro 7800 24-inch large format printer

Benefits

- 75+ per cent savings in print costs when compared to print bureaus
- Ability to print on a number of different medias while maintaining colour integrity
- Total control over the entire printing process

"It's actually quite startling to see the colour gamut capabilities of the Stylus Pro 7800's eight-colour inkset compared to other printers. The Epson is quite simply far superior when it comes to really pushing the colour gamut boundaries."

Patrick Snelling
Program Leader BA Textile Design
RMIT University

It seems that regardless of where you are or what you're doing, the influences of textile designers are readily apparent. The sheets on your bed, the materials used for car, bus, train and plane interiors, your clothes and even the carpet on which you walk – they are all the result of meticulous effort on the part of textile designers; and a growing number are BA Textile Design graduates from RMIT University's School of Fashion and Textiles.

A three-year full time program, the BA Textile Design degree provides graduates with the skills and knowledge required across a range of careers, such as freelance and in-house design, design management and trend forecasting. Hardly surprisingly, computer aided design and large format printing play important roles throughout the program; and Epson Stylus Pro 7800 printers have become the large format printers of choice.

Vital industry experience

In order to gain valuable real world experience prior to entering the workforce, Years 2 and 3 students are given the opportunity to participate in Industry Partnership Awards, where students deliver project concepts based on professional industry briefs.

In 2007, around 35 of the students worked on projects for motoring powerhouse General Motors Holden (GMH) and Dryen Australia, a Melbourne-based manufacturer of high quality bed linen and accessories. Competing for line honours, which bring with them financial reward and the chance to work on the project with the business partner, the students undertake the development of a comprehensive presentation portfolio consisting of dozens of A2 and A3-sized prints.

With nothing less than near perfection required for the portfolios, students make heavy use of one of the School's 24-inch Stylus Pro 7800 printers. The alternative? An external print bureau. But according to Patrick Snelling, Program Leader BA Textile Design, it's an alternative for which few, if any, students opt.

"If we removed the facility for our students to use the Stylus Pro 7800, accessing a local print bureau in Brunswick is not an option so we would be faced with extreme delays and high print costs for students," Snelling says.

“A single A2 sheet, for example, costs the students only a few dollars to produce on the Stylus Pro 7800, because we charge only for the consumables used. At a print bureau, on the other hand, that cost suddenly skyrockets to around \$60-80.

“So, for a student to create a design portfolio for an IPA (Industry Partnership Award), such as the ones with GMH and Dryen, it’s a case of about \$120 as opposed to \$500.”

Quality: The critical difference

Cost, though, is only one of the factors. Quality, above all else, is what both students and faculty look to as being the critical difference between the Epson large format printers and print bureaus.

“Once a student hands over a file for printing to a print bureau, all control over quality gets handed over as well,” Snelling explains. “Suddenly, there’s no control over paper, inks, colour profiles and the myriad of other factors that all work together and dictate the quality of the final print.

“Using the Stylus Pro 7800, our students have total control; and during a presentation to a client, it’s quality of print that often plays a crucial and telling role in ultimate success...or failure!”

According to Snelling, who has decades of digital printing experience under his belt, it’s the precise marriage between ink and paper that gives a high quality print a major – and noticeable – edge.

“When it comes to prints created using the Epson printer, we adhere strictly to a policy of using only genuine Epson inks and papers,” Snelling says. “Any deviance from that and the quality becomes an issue.”

Fine detail

In creating the artwork for the Holden design project, students needed to do much more than develop the colours and design work. In many cases, the two-dimensional artwork must accurately depict the three-dimensional texture of the fabric. To achieve this effect for GMH, students embossed fabrics into the surface of plaster.

Once completed, a digital reproduction is created using a high-resolution scanner, then fine-tuned in either PhotoShop or Illustrator.

For the final image, the texture is overlaid with colours and design, resulting in a near-to-perfect digital representation of the proposed fabric. The challenge has always been, though, to generate prints that match every detail, shadow and colour.

“That’s precisely one of the reasons we opted for the Stylus Pro 7800,” Snelling says. “It’s a printer that has exceptional capabilities when it comes to creating prints with high levels of detail, both in colour and black-and-white. When it comes to printing the

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Patrick Snelling, RMIT

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textured fabric designs, the result is so good that it's like looking at an actual piece of fabric – which is precisely what we want.”

Having been involved in digital printing for many years, Snelling recognises that print quality relies every bit as much on ink and paper as it does on the printer itself. “I know from first-hand experience that even two papers, which are branded with the same specifications yet produced using different processes, can have entirely different ink absorption properties; and this has a major influence on the final print,” he says.

“By standardising on Epson printers, inks and papers, we're gaining prints that have colour and detail precisely matching what was intended.”

Colour your world

Almost above all else, it's the colour capabilities of the Stylus Pro 7800 that Snelling touts as being so crucial. Particularly with the increasing demand for colour accuracy from surface and product designers – highly skilled people with technical knowledge required to create colour matching across a mix of plastic, textile and metal surfaces.

“The interior of a car, for example, has a wide range of coloured surfaces – textured metals, textiles, dull matte and shiny plastics,” Snelling explains.

“When our students presented their concepts to Holden, they had to take all of this into consideration and ensure the colour finishes they were proposing were accurately reproduced in their final folios.

Using a combination of differently textured Epson papers, such as the Premium Glossy Photo Paper, Textured Fine Art Paper and Doubleweight Matte Paper, students at the School are able to print on a variety of finishes while still maintaining the integrity of the key colour.

“It's actually quite startling to see the colour gamut capabilities of the Stylus Pro 7800's eight-colour inkset compared to other plotters,” Snelling says. “The Epson is quite simply far superior when it comes to really pushing the colour gamut boundaries.

“What our students are achieving with the Stylus Pro 7800 demonstrates how digital printing is impacting on more and more industries,” Snelling continues. “Just as importantly, it demonstrates the need for a printer that delivers quality – every time.”

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