

BUILDING A HOT BUSINESS

Specialist Printing Worldwide joins a conversation with Lars Nilsson, Fredrik Skanselid and Tommy Forsberg about an inspiring growth story

Inspiring stories of creativity and growth seem solely focused on digital printing these days. But things are starting to change, not least the recent reports of growth from Sakurai. Lars Nilsson recently spoke to a Swedish company called Hot Screen, poised to invest in five new Sakurai machines, and discovered another growth story from the world of screen-printing.

Lars Nilsson: Fredrik – I understand that Hot Screen, based in Southern Sweden, is a real growth success story for screen-printing. Do tell us more?

Fredrik Skanselid: We think screen-printing has gone a bit backwards and want to use the approach of other industries to get across the key points and values of screen-printing. It still has huge potential and perhaps as digital grabs the attention, only a few people are seeing this. Since 1999, Tommy Forsberg has been in charge of development and production at Hot Screen. I purchased the company with my wife only three years ago. Our previous work was unrelated to the print sector having a track record from investment and helicopters.

Since the acquisition, we have introduced lean production and improved our environmental performance as well. We think that our print shop today is one of the most modern in terms of lean production, automation and environment. I also think how we work together as a team is unique, as well as our focus on the environment. Screen-printing uses a lot of water but we now have a system that recirculates and cleans the process water. All water leaving Hot Screen



Hot Screen's inviting interior entrance area



Owners of Hot Screen, Anna Skanselid with CEO Fredrik Skanselid

is crystal clean and Ph neutral. The new factory is designed using power that is self-supplying, and everything is recirculated, we are self-supplying regarding heating and hot water to our factory.

LN: Why did you choose to buy Hot Screen in particular?

FS: We were looking for a business with strong growth potential but also one with a great team already in place. And we got this right, I think. We were looking for production companies that had an interesting position in the market and one we could grow. By coincidence we were looking at the heat transfer business and we had the possibility to do this deal with Hot Screen.

The company had a turnover of €4 million, 18 employees and a smaller factory – 10km from where we are now. We acquired Hot Screen in January 2014. Together with Tommy and the rest of the staff it was clear we had plenty of possibilities. But we needed a new factory in order to create real lean production and the space to grow.

We were able to add all the machines we felt necessary to optimise our production and included all the staff in this discussion. We created a layout with a lean concept. Then we invited architects to lay out the building the machinery and production.

Now we are turning over €7 million and employ 31 people.

LN: So the business is focused on garments?

FS: Our particular niche is an environmentally certified and approved industrial washable heat transfer for work clothing and leisure. The main market is Sweden, Finland and Norway, but the trend is growing and we are moving towards the rest of the European market. Employers pay for workers' clothing so they like to have the branding on it. Generally, branding is on the increase, so clothing is a key element here.

We only deal with the image heat transfer itself. We then supply to print companies that deal with the actual image printing. Our resellers do that. We do all the big chains

Continued over



Hot Screen's impressive premises in Fjärås, Sweden

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The customer service area at Hot Screen

work and this keeps us pretty busy. At the moment we do 80,000 transfers per day.

LN: So you have increased production hugely in this time. How have you achieved this?

FS: I guess we have the focus on one product and we improve upon it. The markets that are growing well seem to be the specialist printing sectors that serve niches. The printer that has trouble is the one who is trying to do many things as his attention is too divided.

We have gained business from some of the producers and we have the expertise, capacity and environmental credentials. It is harder for the companies to compete with our delivery time, cost and quality.

The larger companies we are working with are forced to use us as we have the right qualifications for the environment so they are obliged to choose us. We will have ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 by May of this year and I don't think a lot of heat transfer print shops have this capability.

LN: So when buying a business such as Hot Screen what is the key value you are investing in?

FS: In one word, I have to say it is the people. We saw quickly that there was potential with the people. There were already a lot of good ideas, but much was not possible to act upon, due to the old structure. But we came in with an open mind and it just started to bubble. As we have got leaner, we have been able to grow and improve our production. It was clear the company was boiling with good ideas but was not able to do it all. We like the Google feeling, that happy people make happy products. We have a joint energy about what we do, we are all really committed, we like to have music, chill out areas, a gym, a car wash facility and we have all created this environment which fosters team spirit. They have a feeling how they like to work, what kind of furniture, what kind of desk and everything. So it is an environment created by all of us. For example, the guys who work with the machine decide where it goes and what kind of machine we need to invest in.

LN: Why Sakurai technology?

FS: We are replacing all of our machines and we are moving to a fleet of Sakurai machines, basically because we think it is the best. It



The company's research lab

is the Servo driven machine, the MS80. Its makes a big difference to efficiency and quality. It is faster, more precise and allows more adjustment than the traditional machines. It has some unique features like prolongation of print impression. You can do a lot of interesting effects to allow printers to do the job really well. The quality improvement takes us a big step forward by doing this. And our four-colour process means we can increase resolution. The image is much higher resolution than before and comparable with digital printing. And the screen-printing technique beats the digital printed heat transfer in the aspects of wash ability, speed and environmentally factors speaking, it beats any of the competitors hands down. And this, therefore, improves the economic performance. The technology lowers error of margins, as the precision is so good. There are fewer registration problems.

It is also adaptable. We tend to run 50 to 100 piece job runs. We think it is also easier to set up the registration quicker and better. What you can do after adjustment is very compelling. So you can save a job that may have been a wasted doing it with an old-fashioned cylinder press to compensate for any mistakes through the shrinkage of sheets or the placement of pictures onto the frame.

By investing in Sakurai, the machines don't vary; they make the same quality and this is good to achieve a great standard. For me it is so simple, for the future we may have twelve machines, having great production and achieving the great same standard is really important and a great advantage instead of having varying machines from different companies that complicates things and doesn't make it lean.

One thing to say when we did the investment with Sakurai is that we think that their machinery is several years ahead of the competition. We also have several cylinder presses and we have one



One of Hot Screen's five new Sakurai SD MS80 servo driven machines



Part of the company's generous pre-press area



Hot Screen has its own internal waste water treatment plant

Sakurai from 1998 and it is still the best machine we have in the whole fleet. This says a lot about the quality. This is important to mention we have a number of other machines that are newer, but still not as good as the Sakurai machine.

What is also important is the pre-press machinery supplied by Grünig and SignTronic as this works well with Sakurai technology and is a vital part of the whole process. Then, in terms of drying, the Natgraph product is very important too. Our strategy is to partner with the key producers so that we all work together to mutual success with the best partners in the market and get a great tool box of expertise. Lars Nilsson from Marabu, too, is an important cooperation in our success.

Nilsson is Managing Director of Marabu Scandinavia, responsible for Scandinavia, UK and The Netherlands and is an approved distributor for Sakurai equipment sales in Sweden. He has, along with Ulf Nilsson (no relation) developed a strong partnership with Hot Screen.

Specialist Printing Worldwide: Lars – explain your experience please and how you think the market has changed?

LN: I have been involved for 25 years with screen-printing joining in 1985. In 2001 I became Managing Director of Marabu for Scandinavia.

Screen-printing is in a big change. Traditional graphic printing is more or less disappearing due to digital and, before this time, it was increasingly under threat from offset.

However, one of the fastest growing applications is the textile transfer business.



The high-end computer-to-screen section in Hot Screen's pre-press facility



The spacious and efficient production floor at Hot Screen

Still a lot is produced with screen even though printers may have digital available. Even if something is printed digital in four-colour, screen-printing is still needed. Direct printing to garment is to be replaced by textile transfer. The growth for direct, to workwear and sportswear is growing this business.

One of the key advantages of digital may be short run, but you can do this with screen-printing. So, whilst we hear so much about the development of digital printing, is screen-printing developing also?

Of course, screen-printing technology has changed considerably over the years and it has improved. As well as this, pre-press has also improved. The companies with the screen-printing technology that have the most modern pre-press, modern machines and drying, are heat transfer. It is very modern, sophisticated and industrial.

When I started in the business, textile printers might typically work out of a garage. Today these guys are the most advanced – more so than any other graphic printer in the past.

The printer that Hot Screen uses is the Sakurai servo driven MS80, driving all the sequences differently. With the direct servo you do not have the acceleration, as there is no gearing. You reach the optimum print speed before you reach the printed area and you keep it stable until the job is finished. Before you might have had to print 60 colour sheets, so this will save a lot of registration sheets and there is a huge saving.

SPW: Tommy - why is selling screen-printing equipment somehow more straight forward?

Tommy Forsberg: In screen-printing, because it is a more mature technology, people tend to know what they want. Digital is different. One may want speed and single-pass without really having a thorough knowledge of the technology. So people are more likely to make wrong choices and you still get people comparing apples and pears. This isn't their fault; it is just a factor with an evolving technology market.

SPW: So what makes Hot Screen different?

TF: Fredrik is an entrepreneur never

making compromises with improvements for environment, staff or productivity. The change of four fully working cylinder printing machines to four new Sakurai MS80DS is a true proof for that, even if it works, he is willing to invest to make it perfect.

SPW: What is your view of Sakurai equipment?

TF: I can only say from what I understand is the best in the market. This is a stable name in the market. We have there the ability to support the customers. In all of the years I have worked, with Sakurai equipment there is never a breakdown – the machines just run and run. If you think of the thin material market, to win this business, you need to be using a cylinder machine, and Sakurai is simply the best. ■

Tommy Forsberg is Production Manager and Fredrik Skanselid is CEO/Owner at Hot Screen. Lars Nilsson is Managing Director of Marabu Scandinavia



Hot Screen has its own in-house gym

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