

ONE STEP AHEAD

Shaping chaos into productivity: David Forrester Zamith looks at how screen printing adapted to the pandemic and what it needs to do to continue to evolve



David Forrester Zamith is Chairman of Ruy de Lacerda

As a result of the Covid-19 global pandemic, lockdown in Portugal, as elsewhere, caused normal economy to halt, with no sales and no orders, and with production and logistics chains broken. In Europe a chaotic situation emerged with a lack of adequate face masks and PPE due to dependence on overseas products, particularly from Asia.

The opening up of the European market to Asia and the 2008 financial crisis caused a hecatomb at the Portuguese Textile Cluster but a fashion-home-technical response turned this around and emerged as an advanced and competitive industry, anchored in the Textile University & Technologic Centre's ability to increase exports on added-value technical textiles.



SignTronic STM TEX Pro 10online unit at Decordecad. For a perfect screen lab SignTronic recommends yellow light (UV-free light conditions)

TEXTILE TRANSFERS

With the support of CITEVE – the Technological Centre for the Textile and Clothing Industry of Portugal, when Covid-19

"When Covid-19 threatened textile industries they reinvented themselves and started producing face masks"

threatened these industries they 'reinvented' themselves, obtaining highly sought-after official medical certifications and started producing face masks and other protective

materials; locally to begin with and now exporting globally. After the lockdown these industries gradually moved to a more balanced situation, with more e-commerce

than before, whilst keeping face masks and PPE as part of their textile product ranges.

Whether employing direct print (screen-digital-hybrid) or using textile transfers (screen-digital), there was a boom in the screen printing transfers sector with several investments related to pre-press automation, CTS (computer to screen) technology, printing, drying and transfer melt powder units.

All over Europe the rate of textile transfers using screen printing is growing as the technology fits the demands for colour intensity, ink deposit, washing characteristics, durability, image repeatability as well as add-ons such as adhesives or flame retardants.

Screen printing's popularity for textile transfers is related to standardisation assured by CTS technology, being filmless, and not incurring process bottlenecks in the prepress department. With easy, flexible and fast stencil-making it is possible to make from 50 to 500 screens per day.



Face mask decorated with textile transfers using screen printing, courtesy of INO SD Print

automation on the shop floor anchored in innovative technologies.

Pre-pandemic Decordecad had just installed a new STM CTS system, the

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advanced STM-TEX New Generation 4 Technology Stencil Master. The company intends to modernise its business with a new industrial layout, investing in new ColorGATE image software, a new SPS Vitessa Cylinder printing line, and a new INO wicket dryer.

"Our pre-press department is fundamental and CTS is the heart of screen printing technology," said Paulo Mota, Decordecad's Managing Director. The company's investment plan is underway and Decordecad is on target to be "fully up to date" after the pandemic is over, based on "a new shop floor layout, automated processes, with advanced digitalised and better green technologies," he added.

RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

A recovery and resilience plan is in place to help European economies and societies to be more sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital

transitions. As the digitalisation in automation processes continues to evolve, human skills must also be updated. A new internal digital education action plan for

industrial strategy should be supported by each country's academia, technology centres and professional schools, local competences centres, in-house industry training, and by using the Industrial Technical Training Centres of existing screen printing suppliers. 'Re-Skilling & Up-Skilling' is an emerging trend that needs to be implemented in a strategic way to strengthen the innovation, competitiveness and growth potential of the economy and support the creation of new jobs. ■

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Ceramic decal detail

CERAMIC DECALS

Another example of resilience and strategic vision comes from Decordecad-Ílhavo in Portugal. The company was already a technological leader when in 2012 it installed the first STM-TEX CTS system with full automation from Swiss companies SignTronic and Grünig-Interscreen, anticipating what Industry 4.0 now signals as important steps towards digital