



# Great Print gets superb finish at **b2b1**

**W**hen you've got a reputation for quality, every investment decision has to be made with that in mind. But keeping your customers happy means finding equipment which is incredibly versatile as well," says Tony Coleshill, one of the two directors of UK-based b2b1 Print Solutions. "Whether it's one, a hundred, or a hundred thousand sheets, and whether it's on paper, cartonboard, or litho-lam, we'll take the job on. But to make good on that promise, we need to have the right equipment."

Diecutting at the Stockport plant had, until recently, been causing a bottleneck, and this was what led Mr Coleshill and his fellow director, Chris Antoniou, to decide that the time was right to invest in a new diecutter. "We already had an automatic flatbed," says Mr Coleshill. "But it was very slow, and was becoming increasingly unreliable."

With a work mix that includes both commercial print and folding carton, Stockport's b2b1 are capitalising on the versatility of their new Bobst diecutter.

So they went into the market looking for a machine that would deliver the quality and performance they needed, as well as offering the versatility to handle a wide range of substrates — from light papers to corrugated board. "The new Bobst 106 was far and away the best diecutter we saw. It did everything better than all the other machines we considered," explains Mr Coleshill.

### **Trials at full speed**

b2b1's procurement process went as far as taking two live production jobs to the Bobst Group Training Centre in Redditch, England,

where they were diecut and stripped using the same model of machine. "We first put a 40,000 sheet cartonboard job on, and it simply ran and ran at the machine's full speed of 7,700 sheets an hour," recalls Mark Barrow, b2b1's Finishing Manager. "It wasn't a simple job either — it was a tricky sheet of credit card sized products for a newspaper insert. Then we ran a corrugated job which was B-flute litho-lam. Again it was tricky because it was long and narrow — in fact it was almost maximum size for the machine. Like the cartonboard job it ran really well. We achieved something like 7,000 sheets an hour, fully stripped."

Having found the cartonboard and corrugated trials so useful, why didn't the company run trials on paper? "We already had experience of Bobst diecutters running paper," explains Mr Barrow. "Over the years we'd had a few jobs, on certain papers, that had caused us great problems on our old diecutter. When we'd sent those jobs out to our local trade finishers they couldn't run them either. The only people that could run them were those trade finishers that had up-to-date Bobst diecutters. That's how we knew we'd be alright running paper."

The model chosen by b2b1 comes complete with a number of features designed to aid production when working with light substrates like paper. These include a special registration device, extra-small format capabilities, a built-in tab inserter interface and integral side and front joggers.

With the Bobst now installed, the company has cleared their backlog of diecut work, despite only running the machine on a single day shift. "Because we're achieving put-backs in about 20 minutes, even on stripped jobs, the Bobst eats up the work," says Mr Barrow. "Its other big advantage is that it runs at about three times the speed of the old machine — and runs consistently."

For any company obsessive about quality, making ready quickly and running at consistently high speeds can feel like going against the grain. "It sometimes used to take us three or four hours to set the old machine to get the quality we need, and we often had to run quite slowly to maintain it," says Mr Barrow. "With the Bobst we set quickly and get better quality, while running at much higher speeds."

The reliability of the diecutter has been such that shop floor staff were surprised to receive after-care visits from representatives of Bobst Group's UK & Ireland team. "Once the machine had been put in we had installation training from Bobst's Graeme Doran, which went really well. I think that was in part due to the fact that he had been the one to run our work at the trials and so he knew us and the sort of work we have to run. After the training, our operators thought it was the last they'd see of the Bobst guys,"

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explains Mr Barrow. Instead, the company has had regular visits from John Ardern, one of Bobst's Technical Sales team, who has helped them with any remaining questions they have, and worked with b2b1's forme supplier to convert their tooling to the higher performance of the new machine. "Our operators are more relaxed now because they know that using the Bobst means they will get the quality and performance we need, but with very little hassle. They also know that the continuity of support is there if they do need help."

### Changing focus

Messrs Coleshill and Antoniou formed b2b1 in 2001, drawing on their years of experience in print production and print sales. "Over that time we had gained experience in a wide

range of markets from labels and paper through to cartons," recalls Mr Coleshill. "We felt that with the right equipment we could capitalise on that, which was why we invested in a Roland 700. The format meant we could handle size B1 trade work for B2 printers, as well as overflow work for B1 printers. At the same time we could build up our own accounts."

Initially the fledgling company handled mainly commercial print work, but the versatility of the Roland, and the proximity of carton manufacturer Carton Craft next door to its Stockport plant, meant that gradually b2b1 built up a portfolio of folding carton print jobs. "Carton Craft didn't have print facilities, so we did a lot of trade work for them," recalls Mr Coleshill. "Then, three years ago, they went into liquidation and we were in a position to take over a lot of their



L to R: John Ardern, one of Bobst's Technical Sales team with Tony Coleshill.

## DIECUTTER INVESTMENT

accounts, buy their assets, and offer jobs to most of their staff.”

The acquisition led to a shift of focus for the b2b1 team, with carton work now accounting for much more of their turnover. Yet this change has not resulted in any variation in the principles by which the company runs. “We’re still all about quality. Being able to take pride in every job is what drives us, and it’s what keeps our customers coming back, time and time again. They really appreciate the quality of work we do for them and it gives them supreme confidence when they place work with us. We’ve got some customers who have never visited us, even though we’ve done work for them for years, because they trust us to produce the quality they need. And some of the print managers we work with have gained more and more work because of the quality of our printing and finishing,” said Mr Coleshill.

The b2b1 directors are the first to give praise to the 26-strong workforce that makes this possible. “We’ve got some of the

best people in the country working here,” says Mr Antoniou. “They have the experience, the initiative, and the pride in their work that is needed to ensure every job is a first-class one.”

### Investment

The equipment list at b2b1 reflects the quality of the plant’s output. The new Bobst is complemented by the 5 colour Roland 700 with UV coater, as well as a raft of finishing equipment including guillotines and folders. These, unusually for a carton company, give b2b1 the capability to print and fold leaflets. A laminating line means that the company can also produce high quality litho printed sheets. Hand finishing capabilities allow them to tackle complex presentation and POS work.

Key among the company’s investments prior to the diecutter was the installation of a Fuji/Screen CTP system. As with many plants, plate making had previously been

outsourced, but the Fuji system has delivered such quality and flexibility that Mr Coleshill says they would now hate to be without it. “This CTP is such a phenomenal piece of kit. I honestly believe that in today’s market we’d struggle without it. Just having it gives our customers confidence that they can ask us to handle a rush job when they need it, while being sure that we have complete control over quality. On top of the standard Fuji/Screen set up, we’ve had some extra screening software added and it makes a real difference to the definition we can achieve.”

It is this attention to issues of quality and versatility that makes the two partners careful when making investment decisions. “Just as every job we run gets our full attention, so we believe we have to investigate every major capital purchase very carefully. Having done that we were sure that the printer and the CTP would give us the quality and versatility we had to have, and the same goes for the Bobst diecutter.”



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