

Mission: Industrial



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'Industrial print' is the word on everyone's lips at FESPA 2015, but it's a confusing term that is interpreted differently, depending who you talk to.

Some use the term when talking about high production volumes and speeds, but this excludes many of the most dynamic and exciting industrial applications that are driving growth in the print community.

'Industrial print' is not one sector, but a group of markets where printing is used, often as part of a manufacturing process or as a functional element in the creation of the end product. It is usually not the main focus of the manufacturer's business, or is a speciality within that business.

There are three quite distinct areas of 'industrial' print, Functional, Industrial and Speciality print and each of them comprises further niche areas.

Functional print involves the application of ink or coating in a way that supports the process and/or function of a product. An everyday example would be the use of conductive ink in the creation of electronic circuits within devices, where the printed element is intrinsic to its function, such as mobile devices, antennae, heating circuits and or photovoltaics. There are also biomedical applications, for example blood glucose test strips are screen printed.

Industrial print covers the areas where print's role is to label, code and/or mark a product, for identification, information or surface decoration. Examples would be printed information panels in cars, on white goods and other electricals, kitchenware, printed packaging or high-volume promotional products.

Speciality print is where print is used to personalise or individualise a product, not necessarily for promotional purposes. This may include one-off speciality applications. Examples would be items such as decorative glass and ceramics, doors, furniture and textiles.

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working for you.

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'Industrial print' – one term, many processes

Industrial print today also involves different processes, including screen printing and industrial inkjet, along with other specialist techniques such as pad and flexo printing and potentially in combination.

Screen industrial

Screen printing is still arguably the most flexible and universal of the processes, with the capability to print on any substrate, any shape, any size with a high quality outcome. Screen inks can be precisely deposited - even in fine lines and dots - to varying thicknesses depending on the product application.

The economics of screen printing also mean it is still the favoured process for higher production volumes. Inks are readily available, mature and proven, and screen printing is relatively easy to integrate within an industrial manufacturing workflow. Screen can also be readily combined with offset, pad, flexo and digital in a hybrid production environment.

Digital industrial

While screen remains the dominant process today, digital technology is revolutionising industrial screen printing workflows, and digital output is making rapid inroads in industrial print production too.

Innovations in ink, hardware and materials are opening up new choices for printers to transition to digital inkjet production, where the manufacturing economics and scope for customisation make this attractive.

The generation of screen printers who have embraced digital technology for their graphics output – especially those working with large format flatbed devices and rigid materials - are eager to experiment with new substrates and inks. Digital technology and consumables may enable them to access niche business opportunities in the 'speciality' segment, décor being a particularly appealing niche.

The beauty of digital is that volume is irrelevant – a printer may be able to deliver amazing one-off printed products, using an existing output device in combination with alternative substrates. The more unique the product they create, the greater the scope to differentiate their business and carve out a highly profitable niche.

One thing is certain: the frontiers of the print universe are moving, with exciting opportunities opening up for printers, regardless of their heritage, dominant process or sector specialism.

Specialist 'industrial' applications are combining inks and substrates to create amazing products that open vast new horizons for printers. The real scale of the industrial print opportunity is unknowable. 'Print' is being redefined as the combination of ink and materials, often in multiple dimensions.

Sun Chemical has a long history supplying niche, high-tech industrial print markets across multiple production processes.

We're also a leading OEM supplier to manufacturers of digital print engines. This means we're uniquely positioned to spot advancing trends in industrial print, and to use our knowledge and experience to help customers.

If your print mission is Industrial, visit us at Sun Chemical Mission Control on Stand C1 & C5 in Hall 8 FESPA 2015 to find out more about how we see print's industrial future.

Examples of industrial print, using Sun Chemical screen and inkjet inks, are also on display in the Industrial Print Showcase in Hall 8 of FESPA 2015.

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