

VIETNAM GROWTH

Owner of Vietnamese DTG print house Gau Uniform, **Ngô Quang An**, offers his opinion on DTG technology in emerging markets. **Joe Link** reports

Direct-to-garment (DTG) printing is a rapidly-evolving sector and it is becoming integral to the success of web-to-print business models, feeding the customisation trend.

The last few years have witnessed several high-profile DTG announcements. However, for DTG printing to truly succeed, analysts suggest it needs to enhance its presence in countries that were originally slow to adopt digital technology. How DTG fairs in emerging markets will be a strong indication as to its long-term success.

Emerging market

South-east Asia is currently home to a lot of activity in the DTG space. Countries including Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand are all looking to increase textile production, both domestically and abroad, and are increasingly turning to digital solutions to achieve this.

Ho Chi Minh-based Fluxmall DTG is a small-scale OEM and experienced distributor

specialising in DTG solutions and it is working hard to expand the technology's presence in the region. One of its customers is Gau Uniform, which provides uniforms and T-shirts for youngsters in Hanoi.

The young company first experimented with DTG printing in 2015 when Ngô Quang An, Gau Uniform's CEO and co-founder, "first realised the effective outcome DTG products brought." It was shortly after this that the clothing producer first became aware of Fluxmall DTG.

The popularity of Gau Uniform's DTG solutions have enabled the business to grow. The company has expanded its workforce to 150 and now occupies a 1,000 sqm factory which, as well as printing, contains a cut and sew division.

However, the print house's first foray into the DTG market didn't go entirely to plan. Ngô says: "In 2015, the cost per print was still very high and there weren't that many choices regarding DTG printers. It was not until the end of last year that we truly invested in this technology."



Advantages

DTG operators have reported a number of benefits to the technology, which include design versatility, low minimums and improved sustainability thanks to the use of pigment inks. Ngô says: “The ability to recreate details and vibrancy from the artwork onto garments, which is more challenging for other printing methods, really appeals to us. Even if it is possible for more traditional printing methods to print at the same speed and accuracy, it requires special techniques.”

Ngô credits the success of his products to the machinery it purchased from Fluxmall along with the OEM and distributor’s efficient aftercare service.

He says: “Fluxmall themselves came to our factory to support the machine set up, offered training, and checked the operating process together with our workers. They also provided the initial consumables and materials as we were a new customer.”

Following the advice of Fluxmall, Gau Uniform implemented TexJet series printers from Greek DTG OEM specialist Polyprint.

Dmitry Sarbaev, Fluxmall DTG managing director, says: “The Polyprint Texjet series is using Epson print head technology, as are many well-established companies, such as Roland, Mimaki and Mutoh. The success of these machines comes from Polyprint’s specialised knowledge base, which makes DTG printing an easier and more efficient process. The machines are equipped with DuPont Artistri Brite pigment inks for the Vietnamese market which are also fully compatible with Epson print heads.

“The installation process at Gau Uniform was delivered in the form of two-day training programme, where the unboxing, hardware setup and a full ‘how-to-use’ description was explained,” continues Sarbaev. “Fluxmall engineers also explained ink usage, first start up, and the importance of daily, weekly and monthly maintenance.”

Fluxmall also helped Gau Uniform to utilise CADLINK Digital Factory v10 Polyprint edition, as well as offering tips and tricks regarding the DTG printing process and a thorough explanation of the warranty. Sarbaev says: “We trust that educating our customers in the most detailed way is central in achieving their new machines’ smooth operation.”

The DTG digital printing segment is relatively new in South-east Asia and so it is important for companies to enjoy a good experience when they implement the technology for the first time. And, in spite of the technology being new, Ngô is confident that DTG printing will grow in the region.

“As I see, the development of personal customisation trends for end users – together with the expansion of print-on-demand (POD) within the field of garment printing in particular, and in the printing service in general – opportunities for the DTG market in South-east Asia are huge,” says Ngô.

Market trends

However, there is a reshoring and nearshoring movement currently taking place and, with a growing install base of digital manufacturing solutions in western economies, the trend doesn’t appear to be slowing down. This is because the latest technologies are making it a more viable proposition for manufacturers to move production closer to the end consumer and target market, in response to a growing demand due to trends like fast fashion and print-on-demand (POD).

Analysts also point out that logistics savings are an added lure for manufacturers considering reshoring or nearshoring production back to the West.

Nevertheless, companies in emerging markets – like Vietnam in South-east Asia - are rebelling against the traditions of their predecessors by adopting developing technology in order to compete with the high volumes and low lead times that are achieved by rival manufacturers in the West.

Ngô believes his company has the potential to ship orders around the world, and Amazon’s recent arrival into Vietnam is seen as a great opportunity for the company. But, for now, Gau Uniform is taking it year-by-year and plans to manufacture 35,000 DTG products in 2019 alone. These products are solely for the Vietnamese market, which suggests that the technology has been well received in the emerging market so far.

Meanwhile, unlike in the West, countries in Asia do not suffer from an increasingly problematic skills shortage. And in the case of Ngô, the prospect of operating some of the latest most high-spec digital textile printers was very appealing. He says: “There are lots of sectors for which you serve when you operate DTG printing equipment. Textile and fashion for young people is the one that brings me and my team a lot of excitement. The fascinating things here are becoming one of the product constructivists and working alongside loads of creative people in fashion design, facing new challenges every year in this non-stop and evolving industry.”

Gau Uniform believes that innovation, as well as appealing to a new generation of workers, is integral for companies looking to expand their presence in the digital textile printing market. For this reason, Ngô says that the company will be launching a service stores system, which expands the company’s platform for the needs of the POD trend, later this year.