

ME & MY MACHINE

Ga-Vehren tip-on machine



COLIN STOUT

Thames Card Technology nearly had its own tip-on machine designed, before plumping for a Ga-Vehren. It was a good decision, too, as Andrew Goodwin tells Caroline Horn

Customer loyalty schemes have become big business for companies with tip-on technology. Thames Card Technology entered this market 18 months ago with a Ga-Vehren tip-on machine, and quickly progressed to producing in excess of 100,000 items a day for one of its customers, Boots. To date, it has matched more than 6m items for the high street giant, with other customers including Do It All and Air Miles promotions.

While Thames Card originally looked at alternative kit, including the Bove continuous feed line – and even considered having its own machine designed – production director Andrew Goodwin says that the Ga-Vehren was finally chosen as the most versatile machine available. It was also the most frequently used by competitors. Since then, a second Ga-Vehren line has arrived, with an additional gluing unit and a variable feeder, to handle items larger than cards (like CDs).

The firm also has a Domino ink-jet addressing system, with up to eight-lines.

The Ga-Vehren, supplied in the UK by Press & Bindery Systems, matches items using a Lake Image camera. This reads the details on the laser-printed carrier while a magnetic stripe reader checks the card before matching the two together. A wide variety of papers can be used, with card thicknesses from 250 to 760microns.

But the Ga-Vehren scores highest in volume production. There is little computerisation on set-up, so while a simple job – say, a card fixed to a plain-sheet carrier – may require two hours to set up, other more complex work can take up to six hours. As Goodwin points out, this is not the machine to use for runs of anything under 20,000. It also takes a few hours for a new set-up to “bed down” completely, but once this is done, the machine runs smoothly and with a standard of accuracy that Goodwin describes as “excellent”. This is imperative for the work Thames Card produces. “If you are using it to stick CDs onto the front of magazines, registration is not so important; it doesn’t matter if it is a couple of millimetres out,” says Goodwin. “But with our customer-loyalty card clients, it does matter if a name and address cannot be seen properly in the window.”

Matching up

If numbers on the magnetic stripe are not correct, or certain characters on the card do not match the data on the carrier, the machine will stop immediately. However, there is a drawback – since the camera is further down from where the card and carrier are matched, there is a delay of 5-6 pieces before it stops, so the piece at fault is not immediately obvious, says Goodwin.

Thames Card does take some steps to reduce set-up times and to ensure smooth running. Although a card number cannot be changed, Thames can suggest that its customers use fonts that are easier to read, or that certain types of paper are avoided (particularly glossy, which is more difficult to attach the card to). Some jobs are, however, just plain difficult. For example, where two cards are being placed on one carrier, or where there is a lot of data on the magnetic stripe. In these cases, the line will run much slower than its usual speed of 10,000-12,000 an hour.

Goodwin highlights the importance of ensuring that suppliers provide materials that will go through the machines easily, for instance, the paper must be guillotined properly to give a smooth leading edge. Where new problems arise on certain jobs, Ga-Vehren technicians are willing to make recommendations for best production practices, or to help with suspected faults – even if the problem lies with the camera or the ink-jet system.

Goodwin adds: “Press & Bindery Systems is also good at keeping us up to date with any developments in areas like gluing. It’s not a case of buying a machine and never hearing from them again.” □

Factfile

Strengths

- Volume work
- Reliability
- Quality

Weakness

- Set-up times

Manufacturer’s response

The Ga-Vehren, which is US-built, is a modular machine and each of the 20 lines installed in the UK are different, says sales manager Lindsay Orr. Other options include: a divert module, which diverts mismatched items rather than stopping the machine; a rotary feeder for coins, keys etc; and a flap-opening or page-opening module. Ga-Vehren has recently introduced the 914, which will have its UK launch at Ipex. This, says Orr, is a result of demand for a simpler machine with faster set-up. It is also slightly smaller (up to A4). One has already been sold in the UK.

Price

£280,000 for above specification, including ink-jet facility and camera

Contact

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