

Enhanced finishing can really add value to the printed product and the best way to achieve this is for designers and printers to communicate **By Emily Miller**

# Final flourish

Enhanced finishing and innovative finishing methods could well be the saviour of the printed product. No longer the Cinderella to print's wicked stepmother, finishing is one area which can truly add value to the printed product and trade finishers and manufacturers alike are stepping up their game in reflection of this.

In the increasingly competitive market finishers and therefore manufacturers must seek to add value where they can. Mark Hogan, finishing marketing manager at Heidelberg UK, identified one way of adding value as adapting a machine to do more than its basic function for more advanced or specialised applications.

"Folders can be transformed into mailing devices or thread sealers by adding modular units to the core system. And even saddlestitchers come with options such as loop stitching, tip-ons and round corner cutting," said Mr Hogan. Functions such as the latter can make the world of difference on more interesting and design-led products, without leaving the finisher with a huge bill for a range of dedicated kit.

## More functions

Bristol trade finisher Folio recently installed a Heidelberg TH94 mailer. The TH94 performs a number of functions alongside the traditional fold, stitch and trim, perfect binding and bookletmaking, such as gluing, cutting, perforating and plough folding.

However, many designers are less concerned with the number of functions performed by their equipment, being more focused on making the functions they do have run more smoothly.

Packaging designer Burgopak is currently making a concerted effort to automate the finishing process of its



**Ga-Vehren builds bespoke machines and ID Data Systems in Corby recently used the company's Pack-Smart rotary feeder to produce plastic card and key fob packages for Tesco**

product, even though each box is different. "The principle behind every Burgopak is the same, but adapted," said production manager Jeremy Light. "There are largely three parts to each one. These bits are printed, die cut and laminated individually. They are then folded, glued and assembled with specific tapes."

At the moment, the assembly is done by hand but Burgopak is in the process of working with its manufacturers, who are based all around the world including the US, China and the UK, to change this. "We're working closely with a UK company to get automation and we're making considerable headway," said Mr Light.

## Choose partners carefully

Burgopak followed a lengthy process to choose its printers and finishers. "We've spent a lot of time and money choosing the right partners, getting them involved, doing sample runs,

making suggestions on ways the product could be improved and so on," said Mr Light. "Each package is an individual design from scratch, so on each project the design agency must understand how they are put together and create their artwork to suit our design."

## Keep customers informed

TTB Print Finishers, Tonbridge, aims to develop such an understanding with its customers. "We like customers to think of us as an extension of their business. We keep them up to date and that's very important. We try to get involved from the design stage. If customers come to us at the very beginning and think of finishing first we can give a better service," said production director John Abbott.

TTB recently installed a Bograma diecutter, which cuts shapes inline off the back of the company's other equipment, including a Hunkeler

mailer. It is using the kit for a number of specialist one piece mailers, as well as personalised books.

Mr Abbott believes the way forward is to perform specialist techniques that others don't offer. "People are looking for something different, not what everyone else is doing." The way to ensure this is through intense interaction with potential and existing customers.

Nigel Woolley, managing director of D & R Finishers, Basildon, said this is sometimes easier said than done. "Designers tend to talk to printers rather than finishers, even though finishing might be 75% of the value of the finished product," said Mr Woolley. "A buyer for large organisations understands the whole process of what they're buying and will talk to us, but ordinary members of the public talk to the printer because it's the first port of call."

## Services for POS market

D & R is a specialist finisher providing services for the POS market, from die and kiss cutting to automatic folder gluing, cardboard engineering and embossing.

Despite the fact that designers often fail to work closely with D & R, it has identified one area that they seem very happy with. "We make samples with our CAD system and plotter, and we adjust the sample until it's right. We then supply print guides showing the most economic way to print," said Mr Woolley.

This method allows designers to have a better idea of what their finished product will look like, and also means problems can be ironed out or creative briefs adapted at the earliest possible stage.

It is not just the finisher and the designer who can work together to add value to a service. It is also imperative



One of Ga-Vehren's US customers produced an award winning self promotional piece that involved personalising the packet of jelly beans, the associated leaflet and the outer. Ga-Vehren's md Lindsay Orr would like to see more of this type of work in the UK

that the finishing equipment manufacturer works closely with printer vendors to make sure that their equipment complements each other as much as possible. Duplo International, for example, liaises with printers and manufacturers from the development stage to create the most valuable kit.

"We work closely with printer vendors so we can smooth out problems; for example, they know they can't print an application all the way to the edge if it's going to be used on digital finishing products like our DC-545 and 645," said group marketing manager Ashley Whitworth.

#### Sales around applications

Mr Whitworth feels that it is hard to know what designers want as they often don't have access to enough information to make educated choices of their own: "Unless the finisher actively goes out to promote its kit and what it can do, designers won't know and will carry on as normal. We sell kit

very much based around applications because customers don't buy printed sheets," he said.

"Finishers should make sure they have a full portfolio, not just of everyday jobs, but also of the more tricky stuff they can do to give them a unique advantage."

Taking this a stage further are manufacturers that get the customer involved in actually designing the equipment they require for their finishing. Col-Tec manufactures bespoke collators for its customers, which are necessary for the very final stages of a specialised job. Managing director Paul Bailey said the company takes ideas directly from the marketplace and enhances the machines to do exactly what the customer requires. "We have been asked in the past to make a piece of kit to collate greetings cards with things stuck on them, such as pens, eyes or noses. The customer didn't think there was a machine that could do it," said Mr Bailey. "We increased the depth of the conveyor and modified the belts and the supporter." Mr Bailey said the client was happy, but the machine was still being defeated by cards with other items attached, such as badges. He was asked if the machine could be modified further to allow problem items to be dropped in by hand. "So we modified it. We had a bank of feeding stations, then a gap to put items in by hand, then another bank of feeding stations."

#### Bespoke machines

On the actual production side, Ga-Vehren builds bespoke machines for customers with specialist requirements in sectors ranging from magazine publishing to contract

packers, direct mail to plastic card manufacturing, the latter being its main application in the UK. Ga-Vehren also provides Pack-Smart pick and place systems for items that cannot be fed from friction feeders, such as CDs, DVDs and sachets. The servo-driven systems can work on the back of a number of different machines. ID Data Systems, Corby, recently used the Pack-Smart rotary feeder to produce plastic card and key fob packages for Tesco.

#### Preserve identity

The company needed to use bespoke pick and place feeders in order to put the brittle key fobs face-up and satisfy the design brief, and no traditional equipment could do it.

"We upgraded all the software on the kit itself to put the fob onto the card carrier in a more attractive layout," said ID Data's Marshall Haldane. These steps were taken to preserve Tesco's 'Hearts and Minds' red and blue

corporate identity that the supermarket wanted clearly visible on its card and fob. "It would not look good having a visually nice card adjacent to a set of barcodes," Mr Haldane said.

ID Data used its enhanced equipment to attach the key fob and card to a laser printed, pre-folded sheet. An optically readable number set was read on the carrier, a barcode on the fob was scanned and the magnetic stripe was passed through a reader to ensure integrity of matching before a hotmelt glue system was utilised to stick the items before a final fold ready for mailing.

"I was very proud of that job," said Ga-Vehren managing director Lindsay Orr, citing it as one of the more interesting applications for which the company's equipment has been used in the UK.

Ms Orr said that the UK market is often very conservative in its finishing, and that it could learn much from its counterparts across the pond.

#### UK could learn from US

"An American customer, Admail, won an MSFA award for a self-promotional piece. It affixed a packet of jelly beans to a carrier document using a Ga-Vehren attacher with a rotary placer. It fed a die cut document, affixed a window over the die cut, attached a personalised leaflet and the jelly beans, personalised the document and the jelly beans, folded it and then personalised the outer. That's the kind of work I'd like to see more of in the UK," said Ms Orr.

The Catch 22 seems to be that designers don't know what they can have, and print finishers don't always advertise their full capabilities. Manufacturers have the right idea and want to liaise more directly with designers, so if all three could work on communication it would go far in terms of adding value to the sector as a whole.



Burgopak aims to automate the finishing process, even though each box is different

## Be willing to test new ideas

Design company Wechsler Ross & Portet uses a range of finishing services. Production director Bill Allen gave his thoughts on how finishers could add value to their service.

'We use everything from the basic to the exotic, with Singer sewing, blind embossing, case binding and paper or fabric over board on the more specialist side.'

'Anything that finishers can do to educate the design (and to a certain extent the printing) community about finishing would be a positive thing. It's

an unfortunate fact that because finishing is the final stage before delivery, time problems accumulated at earlier stages reach a head at that point.

'Finishing is often the stage where things can and do go wrong. It needs to be recognised that unusual finishing, particularly hand intensive work, needs careful time planning and consultation in the early process. It's also about finishers being willing to investigate and test new ideas rather than shying away from something unusual.'