

Joliet Pattern takes innovation to a new level with EFI thermoforming printer

Over the decades, screen printers have been known for devising unique solutions that turn seemingly impossible decorating challenges into production realities. And few companies have demonstrated this quality more clearly than Joliet Pattern Inc., a multifaceted display and promotional-graphic company located just outside Chicago in Joliet, Illinois. Taking innovation to a whole new level, company owner Andy Wood has let a dedicated production staff re-engineer equipment and reinvent the production workflow to satisfy a diverse group of clients that includes leading fast-food companies and giants of industry. Along the way, Joliet Pattern has built an impressive arsenal of capabilities. This culture of innovation, creativity, and invested employees who had been watching the trending new technologies for years, led to the company's most recent addition, an EFI™ H1625-SD hybrid roll/flatbed printer and EFI SuperDraw UV inks.

The imaging of things

Over the years, the bulk of Joliet Pattern's clients have been companies that in turn sell to highly recognizable names in the fast food and retail world, along with a handful of valued accounts they deal with directly, such as Dairy Queen and Rawlings Sporting Goods. To keep these sophisticated and demanding print buyers satisfied, Joliet Pattern has made it a priority to stay on top of new technologies and production techniques. Wood says the company spends 15% of its production time experimenting with inks, substrates, and printing methods in order to continually raise the bar on quality and efficiency. "We don't want to be followers," Wood says. "If you follow or stand still these days, you run the risk of falling behind and never catching up."



Challenge:

"We don't want to be followers. If you follow or stand still these days, you run the risk of falling behind and never catching up."

ANDY WOOD,
OWNER,
JOLIET PATTERN



JOLIET PATTERN

Located southwest of Chicago in Joliet, Illinois, Joliet Pattern is comprised of more than 50 skilled employees whose talents relate to design, engineering, digital printing, screen printing, distortion printing, thermoforming, point of purchase, print-on-demand, tradeshow marketing, specialty packaging, finishing, packaging, and fulfillment processes. The company has seen its products change as quickly as its processes, technology, and its customers' needs. While building a client list that now spans a wide range of industries, products, and markets, Joliet Pattern has always maintained equal value for its customers as well as employees. This drives the company to achieve excellence in everything it does.

Joliet Pattern pursues superior quality and exceptional value in all of its products and services. The company's goal is to reach beyond today's technologies and search for tomorrow's solutions. Its success is measured not only by customers' satisfaction but also by job quality. Joliet Pattern's employees seek to earn the trust and respect of their customers and suppliers, and they work to form lasting, true partnerships.

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Investing in digital disruptive technology

Not too long ago the company relied heavily on conventional screen while just beginning to install digital large format capabilities. Fifteen years ago Joliet Pattern was 90% screen and 10% digital print. Today the company is 90% digital and 10% screen print, with much of its digital printing work performed on three roll-to-roll EFI VUTEK® printers. Wood and his team were pioneers in screen printed/vacuum-formed processes over 25 years ago; they learned to distort art to fit molds with approximately three to four moves — which required three to four sets of screens and often weeks of time.

What Joliet Pattern was looking for was a digital ink that would stretch to deep draws required for molded point-of-purchase displays that were screen printed in the past. Having this would give the company the ability to distort art faster for longer runs and actually produce shorter runs directly off digital presses.

Joliet Pattern's staff took advantage of EFI's industry-leading color profiling process, which facilitates accurate color matching between digital and screen presses. This gave them the ability to service short-run jobs on the digital equipment as well as print sample pieces that will go to full production on the company's screen presses. The company's talent for innovation is now put to good use with the company's EFI H1625-SD printer, and Joliet Pattern is now able to eliminate several production steps from short-run backlit signage orders.

The H1625-SD, a 65-inch wide UV-curable printer with four colors plus white EFI SuperDraw inks, is expanding the company's capabilities in vacuum forming and thermoforming. Joliet Pattern is using it to create test prints on semi-rigid materials for vacuum forming, a process that produces complex depressions, elongations, and detailed forms on printed substrates. Changes to artwork can now be made and quickly reprinted and formed without one single screen setup.

Solution:

"Digital technology will give customers the ability to make their products less expensive and more efficient."

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Thermoformed inkjet graphics produced at Joliet Pattern

Configuring distortion art for conventional screen printing can take as long as a week. Now with the addition of its newest EFI printer, Joliet Pattern's designers can evaluate the grid that is printed along with the image on each prototype to determine how the art will move during distortion. Once they map the art's movement, the design itself is distorted and the cycle is repeated until design elements align properly with the distortions on the substrate.

Recently Joliet Pattern did five artwork changes in four hours followed by a customer sign off on the same day. This would have never been possible with screen printing — not to mention the cost of 20 screens that would have to be re-worked. "If a customer can knock that cost out of production, then digital technology will give customers the ability to make the product less expensive and more efficient," says Wood.

Staying in the lead

Taking chances on new technologies and reinventing old ones may seem a risky way to improve product quality, efficiency, and customer satisfaction. But it's a formula that has proven successful at Joliet Pattern.

Result:

Efficiency without the time and expense of screen setups — changes to artwork can now be made and quickly reprinted and formed, and jobs with multiple artwork changes can be completed the same day.

EFI fuels success.

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