IPEX Trade Show
Birmingham, England (April 2002)

Canon booth exhibiting at IPEX.

I went to IPEX to gather additional information for the on-going FLAAR+BGSU course on "Digital Photography as Input for Wide Format Printing Output."

Agfa

Agfa had a large presence but away from the Hall 3, 4, 5 core area of inkjet printers and scanners. Agfa was down with the heavier artillery so I did not reach their area as often.

Their GrandSherpa version of the Mutoh Falcon 2 was improved over what was prematurely shown at Print' 01 last year in Chicago. Now this printer has similar printheads to the Epson 10000 and the Mimaki JV4. Difference is that the Mutoh is evidently not quite shipping yet. The Mimaki has been shipping for several months and evidently already sold several thousand printers worldwide.

Agfa people happened to ride the same shuttle bus for two days. They were very helpful since it was not always easy to find which of the 50 buses went to which of dozens of hotels.

Canon

Unfortunately no pigmented inks can fit through the BubbleJet printheads. This, plus lack of dealers in the USA, has resulted in low sales in America. Canon, however, is heavily funded with profit from their other divisions, so they don't need to make a profit to keep moving into large format. Thus it is rumored that Canon is coming out with a new proofer (I heard this at ISA tradeshow actually, not at IPEX).

Hewlett-Packard

HP had a huge display, actually several connecting booths. One booth was devoted to their Indigo digital printer (not a wide format but a digital printer roughly similar to the Xeikon).

The booth I was more interested in was

Kodak

At PMA the Kodak 5260 ran at full speed which was the first time it was possible to document the downside of piezo printheads at one pass or two pass mode. Perrennial banding streaks were obvious across the image. Same problem with Epson piezo printheads attempting their less slow speeds.

At ISA tradeshow the Kodak was no longer attempting to run at 500 sq feet an hour; they ran it only at 170 sq feet. At this slow photo mode the output looked very nice when laminated. There was no way to know what the output looked like unlaminated because it was not available for perusal.

At IPEX the printer was at slow mode the first day. On the second day the printer was no longer running due to severe banding in wide path. An hour later the offending image was removed but the printer did not move any more that I could see it. I would hope the printer was running the next two days but I was back in the USA by then.

The quality at slow mode, when the printer is in a good mood, is very attractive. But calculate your output at 170 sq feet per mode and realize it must be laminated (its nano-porous media, another name for micro-porous).

Next time to see this printer is at Photokina 2002, in September. Perhaps the pigmented ink will be out by then. Surely the software and hardware will be improved. Thus we will rewrite, update, and revise our assessment as is appropriate.

In the meantime, Kodak continues to spend tons of money with full-page ads with remarkable claims for the printers potential speed. These are the ads that generate lots of curiosity about what the printer is really capable of. So far we have not seen any outside documentation so we have written our own report based on what little information is available. As soon as we can see the printer in action (sustained continuous action) we will report back. Until that time, the FLAAR Reports stand as a landmark of practical tips.

"Most Popular Printer"

At most tradeshows the leading companies vie with each other to place their printers in as many other booths as possible. But only a few companies can afford this or are willing to handle the logistics. Thus Roland was notable by its lack of printers anywhere. There was no Roland corporate booth nor any major reseller that I could spot. Someone said that Roland had pulled out just a month before but I have no way to verify whether they ever intended to be present. It's kind of a major no-show however. Oce was the only other printer company I did not detect much evidence of. Not too many Mimaki's either. That is, however, usual for the Japanese engineering companies. They rarely show their products at tradeshows.

Mutoh was present through a major reseller.

Epson and HP managers must have labored hard to get as many of their printers into other booths as they did. I tried to photograph as many as possible. I would estimate about 5 Epson's for every 7 or 8 HP printers. But this shows how close Epson is nipping at the heals of the industry leader.

Inkjet Media

DuPont exhibited its Teijin films.

RIPS

Raster Image Processors were not well listed in the pre-show listings but once you actually got on the floor you could find many RIPs sort of at resellers and at other companies.

Electronics for Imaging (EFI Fiery) had a large booth but little or no RIPs for large format printers. EFI is probably making such a profit with copiers and laser printers they don't need the large format inkjet market anymore. Besides, there is not much room left for them.

PosterJet was in the Canon booth. The output on the dye inks of the Canon BJ-W9000 was of outstanding quality.

Shiraz is the RIP of AIR International. They exhibit prominently at CeBIT, DRUPA, and I would guess at other European tradeshows. Their home office is in England. Their nice RIP runs many many printers including the Encad Chroma 24. So far, however, we don't have any of their RIPs. I do not know of any
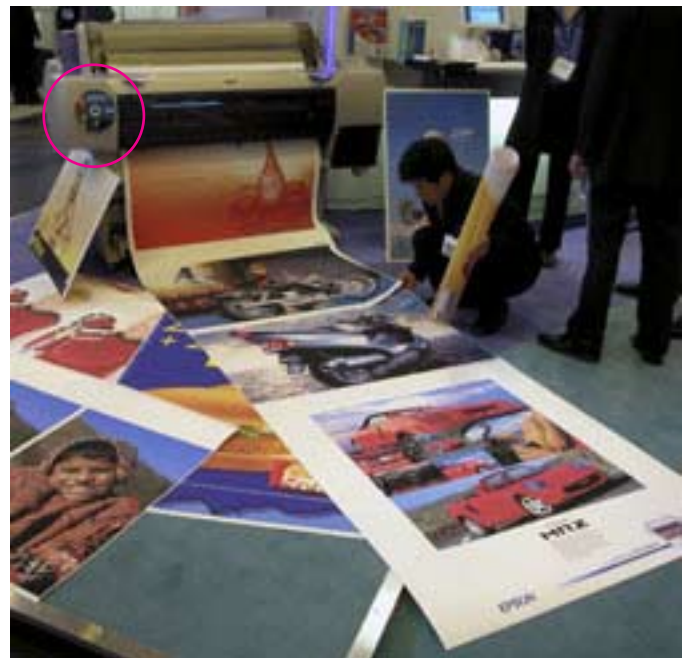
No-shows

I did not find Image Technologies Developments Wisp (Trafik). Since they are a UK company I would have expected them at a printer tradeshow. Of course they could have been somewhere that I over-looked.

Scanners

Heidelberg announced they were abandoning the desktop scanner market. They had previously rebranded Umax scanners. Heidelberg said they would decide within a month whether or not to get out of high-end prepress scanners as well.

Already last year evidently Agfa decided to get out of desktop scanners. They had previously rebranded Microtek scanners for that market segment. The scanner part of their website was down today when I tried to check. Agfa does, however, evidently still offer their nice 5000 dpi scanners, including the Agfa XY-15.

Did not see Umax or Microtek. Imacon had a large booth with all their scanners on display. Would be interesting to test their d-max and dynamic range in each of the colors, R, G, and Blue.

Screen and Purup-Eskofot were each exhib-iting there; the latter had merged with Barco recently. I presume the latter had scanners on display. Since we have found Fuji, Agfa, and Creo scanners so nice we have never been inspired to handle Screen or *** since they are not available to us for evaluation.

Creo had a large booth. Creo bought Scitex about two years ago; they called themselves CreoScitex for about a year and then dumped that venerable name. Too bad since it was an elite name in the industry. Creo no longer has the Jazz or Jazz+ (one of which was made by Microtek and sold by Microtek in an identical physical shell). I do not know who makes the new Creo replacement nor whether anyone else sells a rebranded version.

Fuji had a large display of their impressive scanners.

Global Graphics is going through the throes of corporate transition. But their venerable drum scanner was handsomely on display. ICG even has a new model out though I did not end up with any literature on it.

Color Management

Pantone had a nice exhibit.

GretagMacbeth

Digital Cameras

BetterLight was in the Hahnemuehle inkjet media booth.

PhaseOne was in the Hewlett-Packard booth but each time I went by this segment looked underutilized. The camera has no lights (that I remember), no scantily clothed female models, and hence no crowds. Just a PhaseOne on a tripod with a booth attendant who seemed bored due to lack of interest. Just not enough in this niche to excite many people.

Computer Monitors

Someone mentioned that IBM had a fancy new monitor on display so I went over there. Otherwise I never would have thought of even stopping in their booth. IBM does not really make much that fits in with graphics or digital imaging. Most people use Macs or if a PC at all, then a Dell.

But the monitor in the IBM booth was worth the visit. The quality is fabulous: 3600 x 2400 across 22.2 inches which results in a quality of 9 million pixels.

The 23" HD cinema display Macintosh monitor that Apple is so proud of is a mere half that, 1900 x 1200.

Books

PIRA is a publisher well known in England for its books on printing and printing market research.

Logo is the publishing arm of GretagMacbeth.

Seybold Publications had a booth. Was very enlightening to hear of all the pressure that manufacturers exert when a review is not in their favor. This reminds me of the Seybold publication on scanners. The author reported that the pressure from the scanner companies was almost unbearable.

When any manufacturer tries this tact with FLAAR we merely show them their own advertising and politely point out the features that most informed users might consider deceptive, misleading, and hence liable. We then point out the glaring discrepancy between the hype and what the product actual produces for an actual end-user. Our main point is that it's not our fault because we don't write the ridiculous claims they make in their ads. It's no wonder their printers can't produce the claimed speeds (or at least not with the claimed quality). Besides, FLAAR is a lot more benign than Ralph Nadar. That's because we prefer an educational role. An educated user will know enough to resist a misleading ad.

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