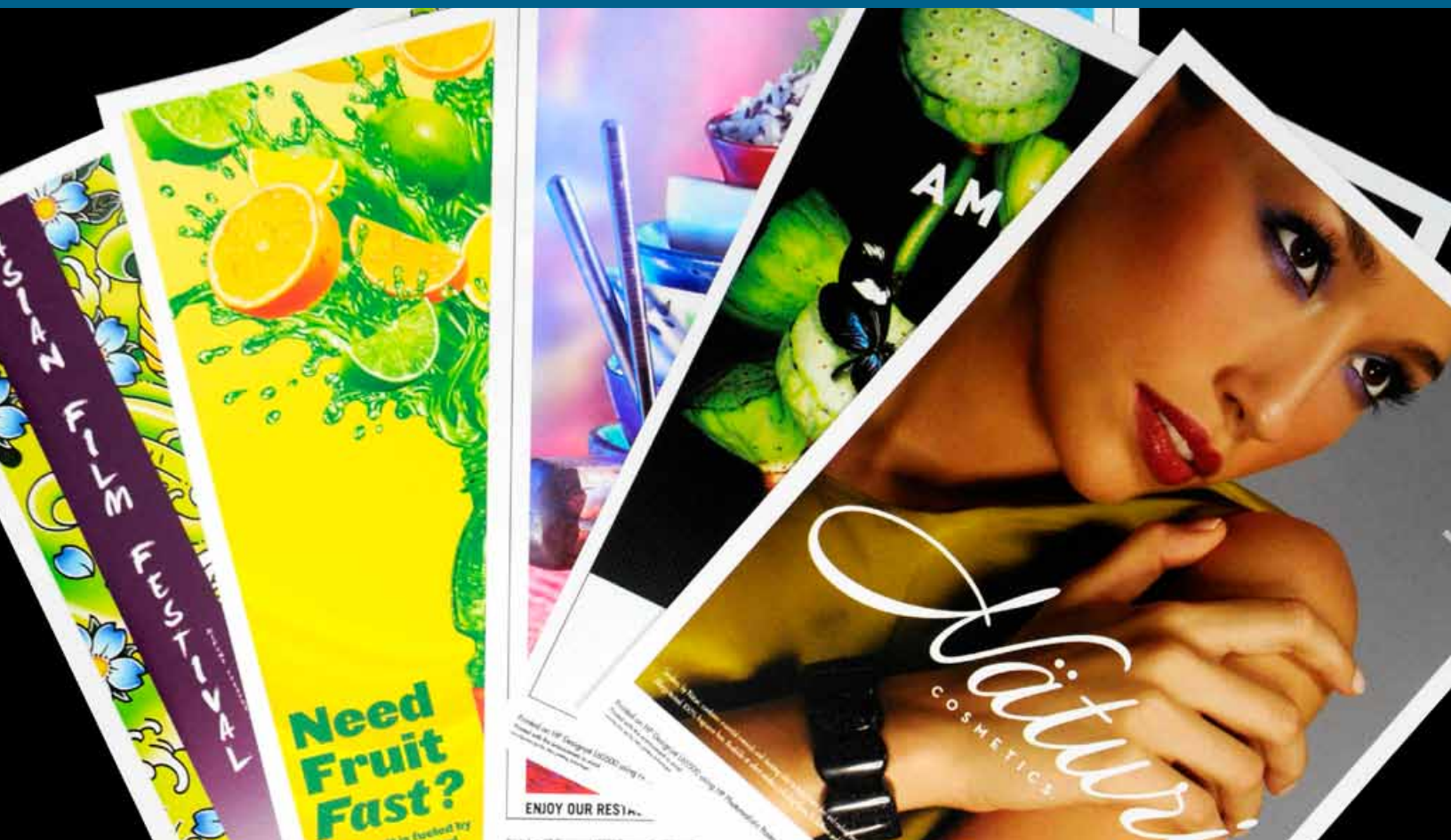


Will **Latex Ink** Replace Eco-Solvent Ink?



What is the new HP Latex Ink?

Introduction

Since latex ink is relatively new, in order to prepare notes for this report I made three long trips to HP to initiate basic research. The first trip was to Israel (HP Scitex), for a general introduction to the ink chemistry and to the green-initiative of HP.

The second research trip was to world headquarters of HP wide-format printers, in Barcelona, Spain. This and the trip to Israel were before the printers were announced officially, so before DRUPA 2008.

In July 2009 it was possible to have follow-up training and instruction on HP latex ink, again at the world headquarters of Hewlett-Packard wide-format printers in Barcelona. Each of these research trips was several days.

This present report is a photo essay because before I can undertake a full evaluation and comprehensive FLAAR Report it requires a site-visit case study: a visit to actual printshops where the latex printer is in a real-world situation.

Since several thousand printshop owners, managers, and printer operators are interested in learning more about the HP latex ink printer, we hope that a research and publication budget becomes available during 2010 to enable us to do a complete evaluation and fully illustrated view.



HP pre-DRUPA 2008 event at HP Scitex in Israel. This event lasted several days.



Dr. Ross Allen, an experienced scientist, lecturing on advanced technology at HP pre-DRUPA 08.



HP pre-DRUPA 2008 event at HP Scitex in Israel.



HP pre-DRUPA 2008 event at HP Scitex in Israel.



HP latex ink, a breakthrough against VOCs and solvent odor

HP latex ink samples are all over my desk. Latex ink documentation is atop them. This is HP's new latex ink that will replace solvent inks for wide-format print, and frankly may replace eco-solvent, mild-solvent, and lite-solvent inks too.



Brochure about HP latex printing technologies.

The examples of diverse materials printed with HP latex ink are print samples handed out at HP Scitex. There are about six different substrates. Dozens, scores, or potentially hundreds of sample materials were available at Drupa 08.

Full-solvent ink has a vile smell. Mild-solvent ink is a bit less painful than full-solvent. But mild-solvent ink still stinks, and requires serious ventilation.

Eco-solvent, when it first came out, was unbearable for anyone in the room. The third-generation eco-solvent ink is not as unpleasant, but still requires ventilation if you value the health and well-being of your employees. The current generation eco-solvent ink, used in the Epson GS6000, has most of the odor taken care of. In some ways it makes the ink more dangerous, because you are led to believe no ventilation is needed: any ink with significant amount of solvents needs ventilation, including the subtle ink of Epson.

With the new latex ink you will probably smell the material it's printed on rather than the ink itself. To me, the lack of smell of the ink is an important asset. However it is always good to ventilate any workplace environment. If you are printing with 100 degrees Celcius on some materials the heat will create an undesirable odor from the material. So even though the ink is not stinky, the media will emit odors.



Sample of the new HP latex ink for indoor/outdoor usage on traditional signage material.



Printed on HP Designjet L65500 with latex ink in adhesive substrate.



Portfolio of samples of HP latex ink on diverse signage materials for outdoor/indoor usage..

HP wide-scan thermal printheads will jet latex ink in a wide swath

The first time I had the opportunity to appreciate the details of the HP wide scan thermal printheads was at the pre-DRUPA 2008 event in Israel, March 10th. Since the wide-scan thermal printheads are associated with delivering the new latex ink, I will be updating this page as soon as there is time to photograph the printer in action (again, the need for a site-visit case study; there are no latex printers in Guatemala or in St Louis, Missouri; these are the two office locations for FLAAR).

Wide-scan printheads means the carriage covers a wide swath with each pass. This allows for faster printing. The printheads for the printer to jet latex ink (HP Scitex LX600, LX800 or Designjet L25500) offer a 12-picoliter droplet size. The HP 5000 and 5500 had a 14-picoliter drop for pigmented ink. Nonetheless, the target market for the HP latex ink is print service providers for indoor and outdoor signage.

FLAAR Reports

**Latex Ink
Printer Evaluation**



**HP Scitex
LX600**

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Part of the sophisticated sensor system area to detect and control rate of movement of media. This is potentially the most accurate media advance system in the world, and hence does not require interweaving to cover over failures in too much or too little advance.



Wide area HP printhead modules, a new trend that allows faster printing for serious production.

Latex inks are different than most other inkjet inks



HP latex inks installed in the HP Designjet L65500 printer, at DRUPA tradeshow 08.

HP latex ink is totally different than any current ink, though sooner or later someone else will try developing a latex ink too, or will improve the originally flawed Encad VinylJet concept and resurrect this or something similar. Indeed, resin-based inks are already available, launched at Graphics of the Americas 2010, ISA sign expo 2010, Sign & Digital UK, and at FESPA 2010 in Munich. The FLAAR Report on this Sepiax AquaRes resin ink is now available.

Now that the HP latex ink has been shown to analysts and key industry people at pre-DRUPA events, it is easier to realize that many of the rumors at ISA '08 were inaccurate: it turns out that the closest aspect comparable to the heaters required by latex ink would be other unusual ink of Encad. But the performance of the HP latex ink is far above and beyond anything even dreamed of by Encad VinylJet: the HP latex ink prints on much more than just vinyl. In terms of color quality the closest unique water-based inks would be Lumocolor from Staedtler (Germany) and Sepiax ink from Austria. But Sepiax ink does not require special heaters; the normal heaters in any Roland, Mimaki, or Mutoh printer are plenty. Lumocolor requires moderate heaters but nothing like that needed for VinylJet or latex ink. Of course the benefit of the heat curing is a performance resulting from the HP latex ink that was never achieved by the Encad VinylJet and was not achieved by Staedtler Lumocolor either.

There is a separate FLAAR Report on Staedtler Lumocolor ink and now on the even newer water-based ink from Sepiax Ink Technology.

“Magic Ink” from Eastech (Japan, Taiwan, Thailand) is solvent-based, not water-based. Some analysts have suggested it is a dye-solvent ink (if true this means that Magic Ink is not as long-lasting as a normal solvent ink, which tend to be pigmented).



One presentation in Israel indicated that the composition of the HP latex ink has been likened to jetting liquid cement, which is probably one reason the printheads are at 12 picoliter and not less. The fact the presentation was initially in Israel is no reflection that the ink is necessarily made in Israel whatsoever: the pre-DRUPA event featured the new HP inkjet press and new HP Indigo printers: all made in Israel. So this was a convenient venue also for announcing the HP latex ink.

The basic facts of the HP latex ink are readily available in white papers, background documentation, etc, that has already been handed out at pre-DRUPA briefings and is available on the HP web site. Since July 2009, a new set of background and technical papers are available and the latex ink chemistry is so much easier to understand. This material was provided at a recent international seminar at HP wide-format printers world headquarters in Barcelona but I assume that comparable information is available on the HP web site. It would have been so much more helpful if comparable information had been available on Staedtler Lumocolor ink, the new ink from Kiian (Manoukian, Tricky), Sawgrass M series inks, etc: no matter what you feel about HP, they sure do produce helpful documentation.



HP Designjet L65500, a latex ink printer exhibited at Drupa 08.



HP Designjet L65500, a latex ink printer exhibited at ISA 09. At left photo you can appreciate the front view of this printer and at right photo you can see the back of the printer.

Printable materials

Even inks (such as Sepiax) that print nicely on uncoated substrates they will print at a noticeably better visual quality on coated substrates. So latex ink follows the normal laws of chemistry: some materials accept the ink better when the material is treated. HP calls this HP Surface Treatment Technology which is a clever word-smithing. The primary material that requires surface treatment is DuPont Tyvek. But it is a nice gesture that HP states this clearly up front. When eco-solvent ink first came out all the printer manufacturers bamboozled the end-users to think that this new eco-solvent ink would print on low cost material (namely on non-coated materials).

Here are some third-party materials that work with HP latex ink

- 3M
- Avery
- Dickson
- Ferrari Stamoid
- Grafityp
- Intelicoat
- MacTac
- Neschen A.G.
- Oracal
- Seal
- Sihl
- Ultraflex
- Verseidag

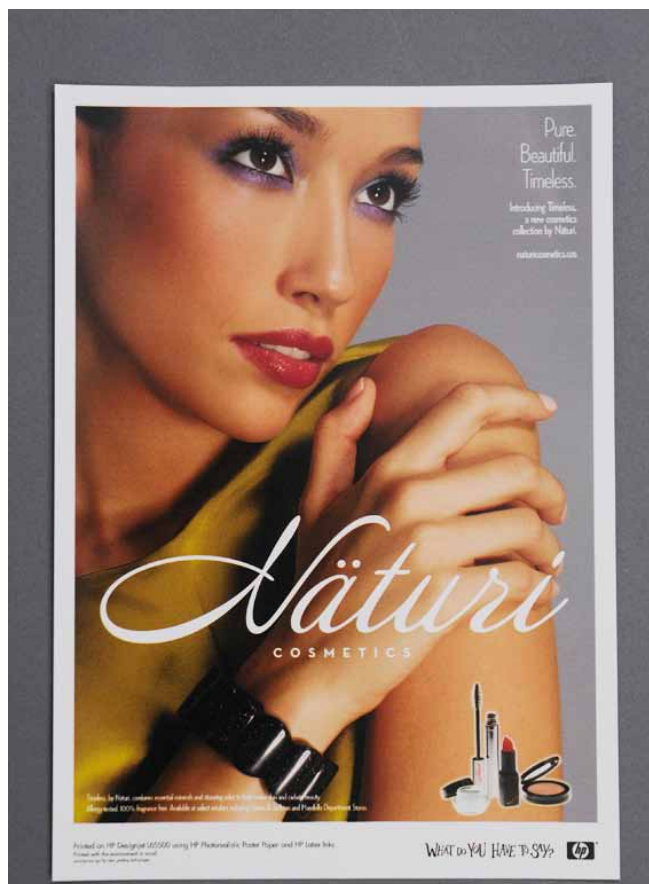
I spoke with one person who had experience with the HP latex printer and he said it was good for printing on backlit.

HP should be lauded for realizing that end-users will gradually move to after-market substrates. So instead of doing what Roland does (trying to lock users into Roland-branded costly media by means of offering ICC profiles for Roland media and providing a Roland-branded RIP that does not encourage you to venture to after-market media.

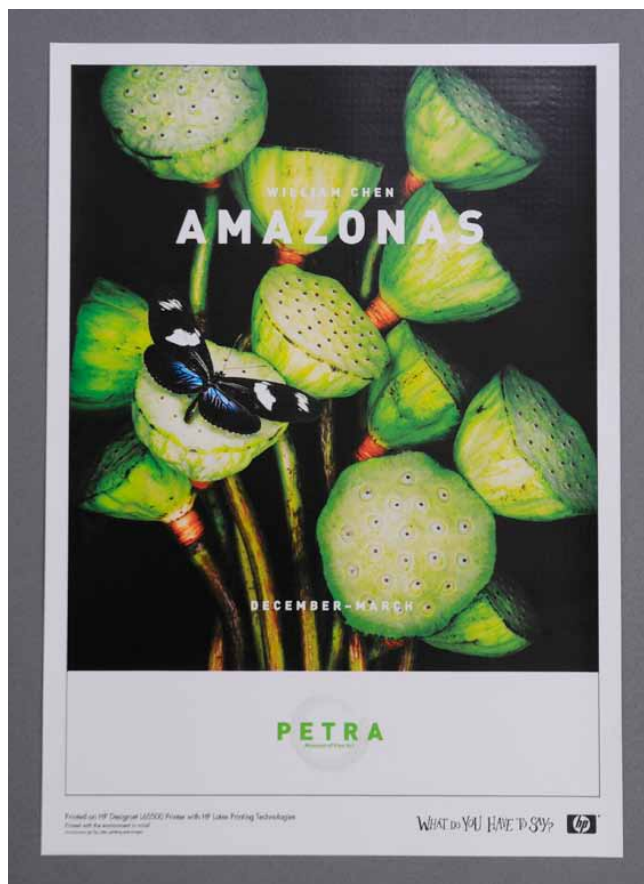
Official HP fact-sheets clearly list third-party substrates and state clearly that this after-market materials have been tested and validated: the list can be found on the HP web site (you should check it every few months, since the selection of substrates grows every few months).



Samples of diverse materials printed with HP latex ink, were available at DRUPA tradeshow 08.



HP Photorealistic Poster Paper printed with HP latex inks.



Durable frontlit scrim banner printed with HP latex inks.



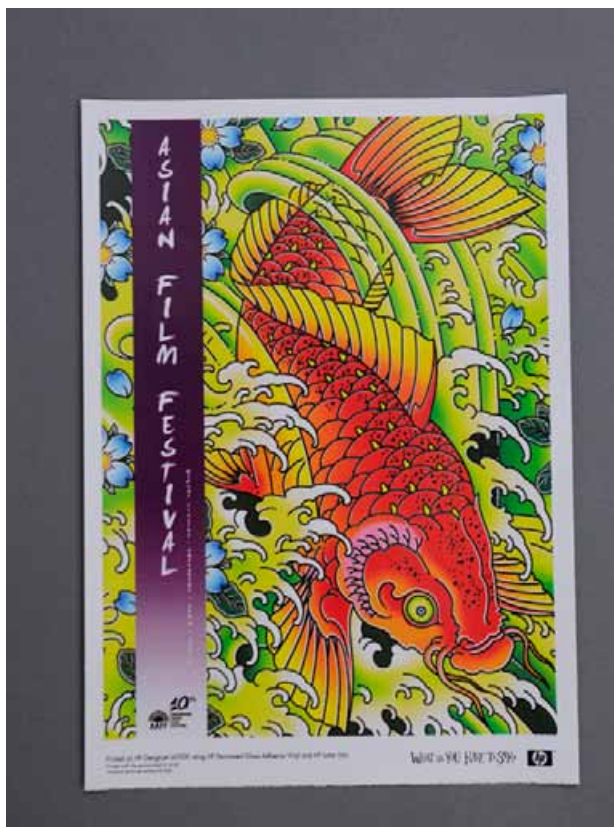
HP backlit scrim banner printed with HP latex inks.



Vinyl substrate printed with HP latex inks.



HP heavy textile banner printed with HP latex inks.



HP permanent Gloss adhesive vinyl printed with HP latex inks.



HP HDPE reinforced banner printed with HP latex inks.



At Fespa Amsterdam 2009 HP exhibited their HP Designjet L65500, here you can see some samples they were printing on it.

HP Optical Media Advance Sensor

This sensor is something not available for any Roland or Mimaki printer. Mutoh has Intelligent Interweaving but nothing like this optical recognition system of the media advance sensor. I will try to obtain some graphics to help explain the optical media advance sensor in future updates. But the result is less banding.

Mutoh's Intelligent Interweaving attempts to cleverly hide banding that can't be overcome by mechanical means. So it does not stop the banding, it merely makes the banding not as easily noticeable. But the HP sensor works at eliminating inaccurate media feeding so that there is no banding to hide.

The actual printer was unveiled at DRUPA 2008, on May 29th. By summer 2009 scores of the HP Designjet L65500 have been sold around the world. I have spoken with three owners so far: all three are satisfied and are glad they have this new technology. During May 2010 the name was changed to HP Scitex LX600 and a 3.2 meter version was introduced, the HP Scitex LX800.

General Observations on innovative inks

No major international printer manufacturer had the gumption to develop a printer to utilize Staedtler's ground-breaking Lumocolor ink. Neither Mimaki, Mutoh, Roland was able to get around Epson's veto on using a non-Epson ink with Epson printheads (Epson does not make the ink but requires anyone using Epson printheads to pay a tithe to Epson for every drop of ink that jets through an Epson head).

So one of the most innovative inks of the year 2004 never reached the market other than one experimental printer in the US, a few in Japan, and a few in Germany. Thus it is impressive to notice all the energy that HP has put into its latex ink program to create a printer new from the ground up specifically to handle the curing of this remarkable ink.

Bio-Solvent inks

When the bio-solvent ink of InkWare first came out, it was exhibited both in the VUTEk booth and in the Mutoh booth. There was massive PR from both companies.

I felt that a bio-ink was a great idea and I wrote several articles on this ink.

But then the bio-ink was no longer exhibited in the booth of VUTEk. There were major trade shows where bio-ink was not exhibited by Mutoh either. During this period the ink got a reputation that it easily scratched off and that it could be wiped off with cleaning liquids. I would guess that the absence of bio-ink from trade shows in these years was in order to improve the chemistry.

By the time the MuBIO ink reappeared, it no longer attracted the massive publicity that it had received previously. Among analysts and key industry people, the whole subject of bio-solvent ink fizzled.

Several after-market ink companies quickly issued bio-solvent ink in third-party formulas, but it seemed that some had a rather noticeable odor.

Although FLAAR would be interested in studying bio-ink in general, since it did not become a major ink worldwide, we are so busy working on latex ink, UV-cured ink, Sepiastix ink that we do not have bio-ink research in our current budget.

I have seen no VUTEk printer at any recent trade show that even mentions bio-ink. So if even the manufacturer of the ink does not offer it prominently in their own printers, this fact definitely dampens interest in bio-solvent ink.

Eco-solvent, Lite-solvent, Mild-solvent Inks

FLAAR has undertaken research projects on the intelligent interweaving of Mutoh Europe solvent printers (mild-solvent and eco-solvent). FLAAR evaluated the original Seiko ColorPainter 64s (before it was OEMed by HP as the 9000s, etc). Recently (July 2009) FLAAR began a new evaluation project on the new-generation Seiko H-104s, H-74s, and V-64s.

So FLAAR realizes that lite-, mild-, low, and eco-solvent printers are a viable ink chemistry for signage. We believe that solvent printers will continue perhaps another three to five years. And it is helpful to our thousands of readers that FLAAR continues to evaluate solvent printers every year.

But it is the clearly stated intent of the innovative latex ink chemistry to completely replace all forms of solvent ink: especially eco-solvent and lite-/mild-solvent. So the HP initiative will be especially disruptive for Epson, since it's GS6000 came late to the market (Roland, Mimaki, and Mutoh have the majority of the market share since they started with solvent ink many years before Epson).

In reality, by summer 2010, Roland, Mimaki, and Mutoh are all still selling eco-solvent printers and Seiko is still doing well with mild-solvent printers. Yes, a few people have switched to HP latex ink once the 42" and 60" models came out, but by summer 2010 the word got around about the limitations of latex ink: the extreme heat, the need for air-conditioning to overcome the heat, the resultant increase in electric bills, and other aspects.

We review everything in two new FLAAR Reports that came out the last week of May 2010: one is a comparison of HP latex ink with water-based resin inks from Sepiax; then comparing both of these with UV-cured ink and comparing with all kinds of solvent ink: full, mild, and eco.

Now a separate FLAAR Report is coming out on the HP L65500, HP Scitex LX600 and HP Scitex LS800. If you want the smaller sizes, L25500, these FLAAR Reports can get you started because they cover latex ink in any width of printer.


The next step in the learning process

In July 2009 it has been possible to hear comments from two owners of the HP Designjet L65500, but this was at a conference, and not in their actual printshops (in Poland for one; near Munich for the other). It is significantly more meaningful to learn when you are inside the actual printshop. So for the next update of this report, this will be realistic as soon as a field trip can be made to an end-user.

For an actual full evaluation, it is best if there can be visits to several end-users: Europe, North America, Latin America, and Middle East, because end-user needs and business preferences vary considerably by region. The needs and situation in Eastern Europe or the Balkans would be very different than in Western Europe. One is not better or worse than the other; just different. Since the eventual new "FLAAR Europe" office will be in Slovenia, we are particularly interested in doing printshop evaluations in the Balkan area or at least in Eastern Europe. And since our main office is in Central America (and as we have a fledgling Spanish-language web site), we are also interested in interviewing printshop owners in Latin America who have experience with the HP latex printer.

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SEPIAX




a new Water-based Resin Ink

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Latex ink

What are the true Pros & Cons?



And what about Sepiax ink?

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HP Designjet L65500 with latex print at SGIA 2009 trade show

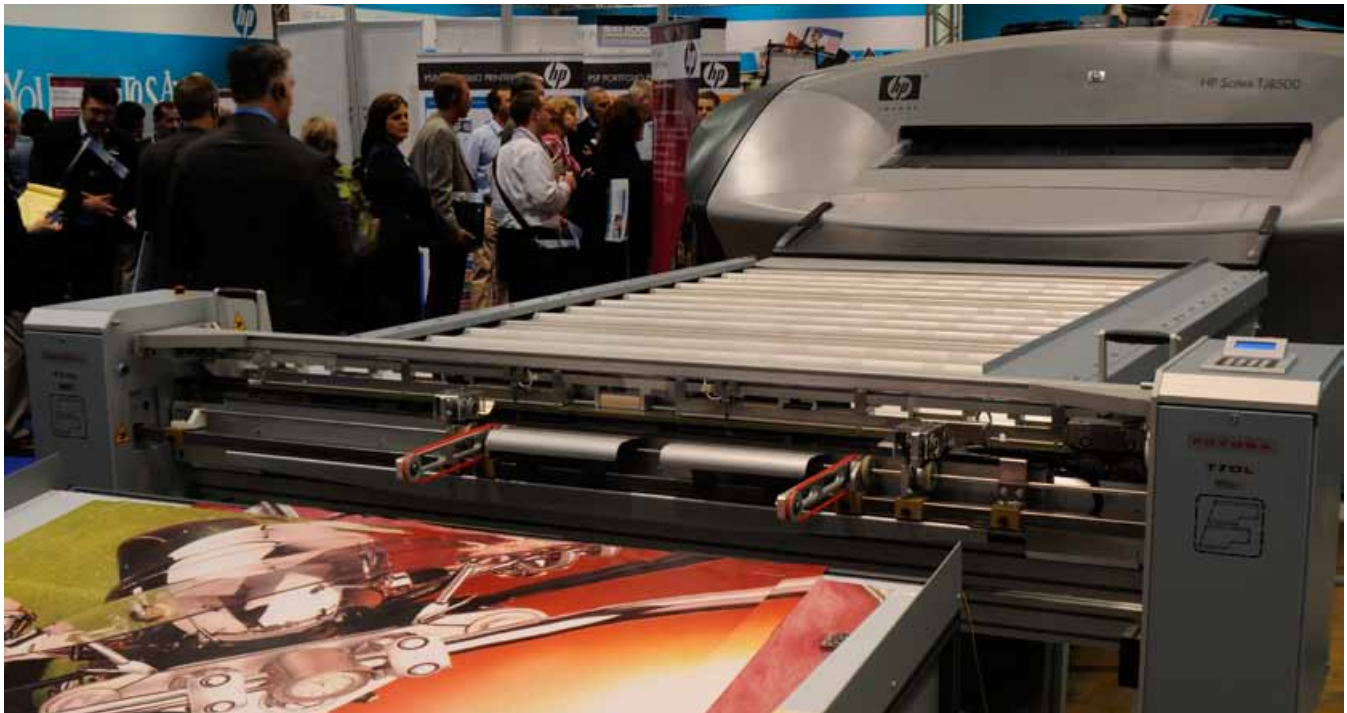


HP surface treatment technology of some material such as Tyvek, which previously was not really usable with solvent inks. Now you can utilize Tyvek-like materials with the new HP latex inks. We will be able to test and document this after evaluating the entire workflow in the future. This initial report is only based on what has been announced so far. We need to learn more ourselves before we can issue a review.



Here is the after-market “latex ink” that I found when I was visiting a printshop to inspect their solvent and eco-solvent printers. Instead of what I expected, I found this printshop also happened to be a beta test site for an off-brand third-party latex ink that worked with the heaters already on any Roland, Mutoh, Mimaki, Seiko ColorPainter or D.G.I. solvent printer. In other words, what if you can use a latex ink in any solvent printer that you already have? Originally I intended to study only the HP latex ink, but now I have an opportunity to study another latex-related ink that works in over nine-thousand eco, lite-, mild-, and full-solvent printers that are already in printshops around the world.

Some of the Printers that were Exhibited at the pre-DRUPA 2008 Event at HP Scitex in Israel



I really like the cutter aspect of the HP Scitex TurboJet, but there is not yet any FLAAR Report on any of the TurboJet nor the HP Scitex (former CORjet), one of my favorite printers. We hope to remedy this situation if opportunities for a testing and evaluation project are forthcoming. I am also interested in the dye-sub switch-over option of the HP Scitex XL-solvent printers. There is already a FLAAR Report on the VUTEk solvent/switch-over dye sub printer because of opportunities to visit their demo room and factory on three occasions during 2007. We also cover the Gandy printers due to two days at their factory in early 2007 and a pending additional visit during 2008.



Now that HP has bought ColorSpan, entry-level hybrid style UV printers are now part of the HP family. Unfortunately there are minor issues of ink starvation in the ink system and Ricoh printhead and some skewing issues for some flat materials. These are discussed in the separate FLAAR Report on the HP Designjet 45500.



HP Scitex FB6100 UV printer.



FLAAR Reports

HP Scitex FB 100



Formerly NUR Tempo UV Flatbed

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HP Scitex XP5300 UV printer.



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HP Scitex XP5100 & HP Scitex XP5300

Formerly NUR Expedio 5000 and NUR Expedio Revolution

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HPScitex TJ8500 UV printer.



The HP Scitex TJ8500 TurboJet has lacked competitors in past years. But from autumn 2008 onwards there will be some new competition, one at substantially less price and with added features (see attached FLAAR Report).

Summary

The first FLAAR Report on HP latex ink was issued after the pre-DRUPA training. Then a further update is the result of additional training on HP latex ink in July 2009. And now in summer 2010 we are updating this report as a lot more feedback is available from end-users (printshops that report what the HP latex printer is really like).

FLAAR notices that an increasing number of printshops wish to avoid solvent fumes. In the past UV printers were the initial solution. So both HP Scitex, Gandinnovations, Durst and other companies have produced new and increasingly better UV-curable inkjet printers. But UV is not as healthy as ink companies would wish we would imagine.

Five years from now, environmental regulations, restrictions, as well as recognition of the effects of some of these UV and remaining solvent inks will gradually create interest in water-based solutions to replace UV-cured ink systems. Staedtler's Lumocolor was the first attempt to satisfy this need, but because they had no printer manufacturing capability, and for a variety of reasons of their corporate positioning, this ink was not accepted by a single major manufacturer. But this was more a result of industry politics than there being inherent issues with the Staedtler ink.

Now HP is trying a different approach (latex ink), only for roll-fed materials. But if after-market ink companies can produce a latex ink which can be used directly in unmodified Roland, Mimaki, Mutoh, and Asian-made solvent printers, then some of the printshops will select the cheaper third-party solution (even if those inks do not offer all the benefits of the HP latex ink).

Three years ago everyone told me that LED curing would not work. Today both Mimaki and Roland are using LED curing for UV inks, and Sun LLC in Russia has been using LED curing for over two years now.

Two years ago every ink chemist that I spoke with said that cationic UV ink would not function for years. Yet Gerber has tamed this ink to some degree (I was at the Gerber factory, demo room, and world headquarters, and was given an opportunity to spend several hours with their head ink chemist). Even FLAAR was skeptical last year, but I visited an offset printing company in Chicago that had the Gerber ion, so now I have seen that cationic ink functions as well outside the lab in the real world printshops.

So the summary and conclusion to this report is that ink chemistries that were originally thought to be "impossible" may turn out to be the future of inkjet printing in the coming years. Latex ink may be one of these, but in the meantime other newer more advanced resin inks have come out from other companies.

But one thing can be said for HP latex ink: it is completely dry after curing, and yes, you can laminate it immediately and thus start your vehicle wrap the same day.

However, if you need to print on thin materials (that can't take the furnace-like heat), or if you need to print on uncoated Tyvek (instead of more expensive treated materials as required by latex ink), it is possible that the newer resin inks elsewhere are inks you should begin to learn about as a viable alternative.

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Most recently updated June 2010.

First issued 2008. Updated October, 2008 and July 2009.

Appendix A

Photo Essay on the pre-Release Seminars on HP Latex Ink, Israel



Enrique Lores.



Enrique Lores at the left (HP Barcelona), Yariv Avisar (VP and General Manager, HP Scitex), Stephen Nigro (Senior Vice President, Corvallis, OR) cut the ribbon at opening ceremony for new HP Scitex demo center in Israel



Dr. Ross Allen, at HP pre-DRUPA 2008 event at HP Scitex in Israel.



Dr. Ross Allen lecturing at HP pre-DRUPA 08.



Carolina Bernal assisting some people.



Amir Sheinman.



Eli Israeli.





Dr. Nils Miller.



Reality Check

Being a university professor for many years does not mean we know everything. But intellectual curiosity often leads us to enter areas that are new to us. So we do not shirk from entering areas where we are obviously not yet expert. In your years of wide format printing experience have encountered results different than ours, please let us know at ReaderService@FLAAR.org. We do not mind eating crow, though so far it is primarily a different philosophy we practice, because since we are not dependent on sales commissions we can openly list the glitches and defects of those printers that have an occasional problem.

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There is a free PDF that describes the UV-curable inkjet printer Subscription system. Subscriptions are available only for UV-related wide-format printer publications.

FLAAR Reports on UV-curable roll-to-roll, flatbed, hybrid, and combo printers are updated when new information is available. We tend to update the reports on new printers, on printers that readers ask about the most, and on printers where access is facilitated (such as factory visits, demo-room visits, etc).

Reports on obsolete printers, discontinued printers, or printers that not enough people ask about, tend not to be updated.

FLAAR still publishes individual reports on solvent printers, and on giclee printers, but subscriptions on these are not yet available; these FLAAR Reports on solvent, eco-solvent, and water-based wide-format printers have to be purchased one by one.

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Inclusion in this study by itself in no way endorses any printer, media, ink, RIP or other digital imaging hardware or software. Equally, exclusion from this study in no way is intended to discredit any printer.

Advisory

We do our best to obtain information which we consider reliable. But with hundreds of makes and models of printers, and sometimes when information about them is sparse, or conflicting, we can only work with what we have available. Thus you should be sure to rely also on your own research, especially asking around. Find another trustworthy end-user of the same make and model you need to know about. Do not make a decision solely on the basis of a FLAAR report because your situation may be totally different than ours. Or we may not have known about, and hence not written about, one aspect or another which is crucial before you reach your decision.

The sources and resources we may list are those we happen to have read. There may be other web pages or resources that we missed. For those pages we do list, we have no realistic way to verify the veracity of all their content. Use your own common sense plus a grain of salt for those pages which are really just PR releases or outright ads.

We are quite content with the majority of the specific printers, RIPs, media, and inks we have in the FLAAR facilities. We would obviously never ask for hardware, software, or consumables that we knew in advance would not be good. However even for us, a product which looks good at a trade show, sounds good in the ad literature, and works fine for the first few weeks, may subsequently turn out to be a lemon.

Or the product may indeed have a glitch but one that is so benign for us, or maybe we have long ago gotten used to it and have a work-around. And not all glitches manifest themselves in all situations, so our evaluator may not have been sufficiently affected that he or she made an issue of any particular situation. Yet such a glitch that we don't emphasize may turn out to be adverse for your different or special application needs.

Equally often, what at first might be blamed on a bad product, often turns out to be a need of more operator experience and training. More often than not, after learning more about the product it becomes possible to produce what it was intended to produce. For this reason it is crucial for the FLAAR team and their university colleagues to interact

with the manufacturer's training center and technicians, so we know more about a hardware or software. Our evaluations go through a process of acquiring documentation from a wide range of resources and these naturally include the manufacturer itself. Obviously we take their viewpoints with a grain of salt but often we learn tips that are worthy of being passed along.

FLAAR has no way of testing 400+ specifications of any printer, much less the over 101 different UV printers from more than 46 manufacturers. Same with hundreds of solvent printers and dozens of water-based printers. We observe as best we can, but we cannot take each printer apart to inspect each feature. And for UV printers, these are too expensive to move into our own facilities for long-range testing, so we do as best as is possible under the circumstances. And when a deficiency does become apparent, usually from word-of-mouth or from an end-user, it may take time to get this written up and issued in a new release.

Another reason why it is essential for you to ask other printshop owners and printer operators about how Brand X and Y function in the real world is that issues may exist but it may take months for these issues to be well enough known for us to know the details. Although often we know of the issues early, and work to get this information into the PDFs, access to information varies depending on brand and model. Plus with over 300 publications, the waiting time to update a specific report may be several months. Plus, once a printer is considered obsolete, it is not realistic to update it due to the costs involved. If you received a FLAAR PDF from a sales rep, they may give you an early version; perhaps there is a later version that mentions a defect that we learned about later.

For these reasons, every FLAAR Report tries to have its publication date on the front outside cover (if we updated everything instantly the cost would be at commercial rates and it would not be possible to cover these expenses). At the end of most FLAAR Reports there is additionally a list of how many times that report has been updated. A report with lots of updates means that we are updating that subject based on availability of new information. If there is no update that is a pretty good indication that report has not been updated! With 101 models of UV printers, several hundred solvent printers, and scores of water-based printers, we tend to give priority to getting new reports out on printers about which not much info at all is available elsewhere. So we are pretty good about reporting on advances in LED curing. But glitches in a common water-based printer will take longer to work its way through our system into an update, especially if the glitch occurs only in certain circumstances, for example, on one type of media. With several hundred media types, we may not yet have utilized the problem media. While on the subject of doing your own research, be sure to ask both the printer operator and printshop owner or manager: you will generally get two slightly different stories. A printer operator may be aware of more glitches of the printer than the owner.

If a printer is no longer a prime model then there is less interest in that printer, so unless a special budget were available to update old reports, it is not realistic to update old reports. As always, it is essential for you to visit printshops that have the printers on your short-list and see how they function in the real world.

But even when we like a product and recommend it, we still can't guarantee or certify any make or model nor its profitability in use because we don't know the conditions under which a printer system might be utilized in someone else's facility. For ink and media, especially after-market third-party ink and media, it is essential that you test it first, under your conditions. We have no way to assure that

any ink or media will be acceptable for your specific needs in your specific print shop. As a result, products are described “as is” and without warranties as to performance or merchantability, or of fitness for a particular purpose. Any such statements in our reports or on our web sites or in discussions do not constitute warranties and shall not be relied on by the buyer in deciding whether to purchase and/or use products we discuss because of the diversity of conditions, materials and/or equipment under which these products may be used. Thus please recognize that no warranty of fitness or profitability for a particular purpose is offered.

It is also crucial to realize that an ink (that we inspect, that works well where we inspect it), your printer, your printhead, the heat, humidity and dust conditions in your printshop, may cause that ink to react differently in your printer. And, there are different batches of ink. Even in the really big multi-national billion-dollar ink companies, occasionally one batch will have issues. There are over 100 ink companies; six colors per company, many flavors of ink per company per color. We have no realistic manner of testing each ink. The same is true of media and substrates. One production run can have a glitch: chemical or physical, even in the best of companies. A major Swiss-owned media company, for example, had several months of media which were almost unusable. Yet other kinds of media from the same company are okay (though we stopped using that brand and stopped recommending them after all the issues we ourselves experienced).

The user is advised to test products thoroughly before relying on them. We do not have any special means of analyzing chemical contents or flammability of inks, media, or laminates, nor how these need to be controlled by local laws in your community. There may well be hazardous chemicals, or outgassing that we are not aware of. Be aware that some inks have severe health hazards associated with them. Some are hazardous to breathe; others are hazardous if you get them on your skin. For example, some chemicals such as cyclohexanone do not sound like chemicals you want to breathe every day. Be sure to obtain, read, and understand the MSDS sheets for the inks, media, and laminates that you intend to use. Both solvent, eco-solvent, and UV-curable inks are substances whose full range of health and environmental hazards are not yet fully revealed. It is essential you use common sense and in general be realistic about the hazards involved, especially those which are not listed or which have not yet been described. FLAAR is not able to list all hazards since we are not necessarily aware of the chemical components of the products we discuss. Plus, there is no way to know if all MSDS sheets are honest to begin with! Our reports are on usability, not on health hazards.

Most inks are clearly not intended to be consumed. Obviously these tend to be solvent inks and UV-curable inks. Yet other inks are edible, seriously, they are printed on birthday cakes. Indeed Sensient is a leader in a new era of edible inks. Therefore the user must assume the entire risk of ascertaining information on the chemical contents and flammability regulations relative to inks, media or laminates as well as using any described hardware, software, accessory, service, technique or products.

We have no idea of your client's expectations. What students on our campus will accept may not be the same as your Fortune 500 clients. In many cases we have not ourselves used the products but are basing our discussion on having seen them at a trade show, during visiting a print shop, or having been informed about a product via e-mail or other communication.

Results you see at trade shows may not be realistic

Be aware that trade show results may not be realistic. Trade shows are idealized situations, with full-time tech support to keep things running. The images at a trade show may be tweaked. Other images may be “faked” in the sense of slyly putting on primer without telling the people who inspect the prints. Most UV inks don't stick to all materials; many materials need to be treated.

Or the UV prints may be top-coated so that you can't do a realistic scratch test.

Both personnel have many standard tricks that they use to make their output look gorgeous. In about half the cases you will not likely obtain these results in real life: in most cases they are printing uni-directional, which may be twice as slow as bi-directional.

Trade show examples tend to be on the absolutely best media. When you attempt to save money and use economy media you will quickly notice that you do not get anywhere near the same results as you saw in the manufacturer's trade show booth, or pictured in their glossy advertisement. Five years ago we noticed Epson was laminating prints to show glossy output because their pigmented inks could not print on actual glossy media. The same equipment, inks, media, and software may not work as well in your facility as we, or you, see it at a trade show. All the more reason to test before you buy; and keep testing before you make your final payment. Your ultimate protection is to use a gold American Express credit card so you can have leverage when you ask for your money back if the product fails.

Images printed at trade show may be in uni-directional mode: so you may not realize the printer has bi-directional (curing) banding defects until you unpack it in your printshop. Bi-directional curing banding is also known as the lawnmower effect. Many printers have this defect; sometimes certain modes can get rid of it, but are so slow that they are not productive.

You absolutely need to do print samples with your own images and the kind provided by your clients. Do not rely on the stock photos provided by the printer, ink, media, or RIP manufacturer or reseller. They may be using special images which they know in advance will look fabulous on their printer. Equally well, if you send your sample images to the dealer, don't be surprised if they come back looking awful. That is because many dealers won't make a serious effort to tweak their machine for your kind of image. They may use fast speed just to get the job done (this will result in low quality). Check with other people in your area, or in the same kind of print business that you do. Don't rely on references from the reseller or manufacturer (you will get their pet locations which may be unrealistically gushy): find someone on your own.

Factors influencing output

Heat, humidity, static, dust, experience level of your workers (whether they are new or have prior years experience): these are all factors that will differ in your place of business as compared with test results or demo room results.

Actually you may have people with even more experience than we do, since we deliberately use students to approximate newbies. FLAAR is devoted to assisting newcomers learn about digital imaging hard-

ware and software. This is why Nicholas Hellmuth is considered the “Johnny Appleseed” of wide format inkjet printers.

Therefore this report does not warranty any product for any quality, performance or fitness for any specific task, since we do not know the situation in which you intend to use the hardware or software. Nor is there any warranty or guarantee that the output of these products will produce salable goods, since we do not know what kind of ink or media you intend to use, nor the needs of your clients. A further reason that no one can realistically speak for all aspects of any one hardware or software is that each of these products may require additional hardware or software to reach its full potential.

For example, you will most likely need a color management system which implies color measurement tools and software. To handle ICC color profiles, you may need ICC color profile generation software and a spectrophotometer since often the stock pre-packaged ICC color profiles which come with the ink, media, printers and/or RIPs may not work in your situation. Not all RIPs handle color management equally, or may work better for some printer-ink-media combinations than for others. Please be aware that our comments or evaluations on any after-market ink would need the end-user to use customized ICC profiles (and not merely generic profiles).

Be aware that some RIPs can only accept ICC color profiles: you quickly find out the hard way that you can't tweak these profiles nor generate new ones. So be sure to get a RIP which can handle all aspects of color management. Many RIPs come in different levels. You may buy one level and be disappointed that the RIP won't do everything. That's because those features you may be lacking are available only in the next level higher of that RIP, often at considerable extra cost. Same thing in the progression of Chevy through Pontiac to Cadillac, or the new Suburbans. A Chevy Suburban simply does not have all the bells and whistles of the Cadillac Escalade version of this SUV.

Don't blame us... besides, that's why we are warning you. This is why we have a Survey Form, so we can learn when you find products that are inadequate. We let the manufacturers know when end users complain about their products so that the manufacturers can resolve the situation when they next redesign the system.

Most newer printer models tend to overcome deficiencies of earlier models. It is possible that our comparative comments point out a glitch in a particular printer that has been taken care of through an improvement in firmware or even an entirely new printer model. So if we point out a deficiency in a particular printer brand, the model you may buy may not exhibit this headache, or your kind of printing may not trigger the problem. Or you may find a work-around.

Just remember that every machine has quirks, even the ones we like. It is possible that the particular kind of images, resolution, inks, media, or other factors in your facility are sufficiently different than in ours that a printer which works just fine for us may be totally unsatisfactory for you and your clients. However it may be that the specific kind of printing you need to do may never occasion that shortcoming. Or, it may be that your printer was manufactured on a Monday and has defects that are atypical, show up more in the kind of media you use which we may not use as often or at all during our evaluations. Equally possibly a printer that was a disaster for someone else may work flawlessly for you and be a real money maker for your company.

So if we inspect a printer in a printshop (a site-visit case study), and that owner/operator is content with their printer and we mention this; don't expect that you will automatically get the same results in your own printshop.

In some cases a product may work better on a Macintosh than on a PC. RIP software may function well with one operating system yet have bugs and crash on the same platform but with a different operating system. Thus be sure to test a printer under your own specific work conditions before you buy.

And if a printer, RIP, media, or ink does not function, return it with no ands, ifs or buts. Your best defense is to show an advertising claim that the printer simply can't achieve. Such advertising claims are in violation of federal regulations, and the printer companies know they are liable for misleading the public.

But before you make a federal case, just be sure that many of the issues are not user error or unfamiliarity. It may be that training or an additional accessory can make the printer do what you need it to accomplish. Of course if the printer ads did not warn you that you had to purchase the additional pricey accessory, that is a whole other issue. Our reviews do not cover accessories since they are endless, as is the range of training, or lack thereof, among users.

The major causes of printer breakdown and failure is lack of maintenance, poor maintenance, spotty maintenance, or trying to jerry-rig some part of the printer. The equally common cause of printer breakdown is improper use, generally due from lack of training or experience. Another factor is whether you utilize your printer all day every day. Most solvent and UV printers work best if used frequently. If you are not going to use your printer for two or three days, you have to put flush into the system and prepare it for hibernation (even if for only four or five days). Then you have to flush the ink system all over again.

Also realize that the surface of inkjet prints are fragile and generally require lamination to survive much usage. Lamination comes in many kinds, and it is worth finding a reliable lamination company and receiving training on their products.

Also realize that no hybrid or combo UV printer can feed all kinds of rigid materials precisely. Some materials feed well; others feed poorly; others will skew.

Although we have found several makes and models to work very well in our facilities, how well they work in your facilities may also depend on your local dealer. Some dealers are excellent; others just sell you a box and can't provide much service after the sale. Indeed some low-bid internet sales sources may have no technical backup whatsoever. If you pay low-bid price, you can't realistically expect special maintenance services or tech support later on from any other dealer (they will tell you to return to where you paid for the product). This is why we make an effort to find out which dealers are recommendable. Obviously there are many other dealers who are also good, but we do not always know them. To protect yourself further, always pay with a level of credit card which allows you to refuse payment if you have end up with a lemon. A Gold American Express card allows you to refuse payment even months after the sale. This card may also extend your warranty agreement in some cases (check first).

Most of the readers of the FLAAR Reports look to see what printers we use in our own facilities. Readers realize that we will have selected the printers that we like based on years of experience and research. Indeed we have met people at trade shows who told us they use the FLAAR web site reports as the shopping list for their corporate purchases.

Yes, it is rather self-evident that we would never ask a manufacturer to send a product which we knew in advance from our studies was no

good. But there are a few other printers which are great but we simply do not have them in our facilities yet.

So if a printer is not made available by its manufacturer, then there is no way we can afford to have all these makes and models in our facility. Thus to learn about models which we do not feature, be sure to ask around in other print shops, with IT people in other corporations, at your local university or community college. Go to trade shows.... but don't use only the booth...ask questions of people in the elevator, in line at the restaurant, anywhere to escape the smothering hype you get in the booth.

Realize that a FLAAR Report on a printer is not by itself a recommendation of that printer. In your local temperature, in your local humidity, with the dust that is in your local air, with your local operator, and with disorientation of the insides of a printer during rough shipment and installation, we have no knowledge of what conditions you will face in your own printshop. We tend to inspect a printer first in the manufacturing plant demo room: no disjointed parts from any shipment since this printer has not been lifed by cranes and run over a rough pot-holed highway or kept in smelting heat or freezing cold during shipment.

Taking into consideration we do not know the conditions in which you may be using your hardware, software, or consumables, neither the author nor FLAAR nor either university is liable for liability, loss or damage caused either directly or indirectly by the suggestions in this report nor by hardware, software, or techniques described herein because.

Availability of spare parts may be a significant issue

Chinese printers tend to switch suppliers for spare parts every month or so. So getting spare parts for a Chinese printer will be a challenge even if the distributor or manufacturer actually respond to your e-mails at all. Fortunately some companies do have a fair record of response; Teckwin is one (based on a case of two problematical hybrid UV printers in Guatemala). The distributor said that Teckwin sent a second printer at their own expense and sent tech support personnel at their expense also. But unfortunately both the hybrid UV printers are still abandoned in the warehouse of the distributor; they were still there in January 2009. But Teckwin has the highest rating of any Chinese company for interest in quality control and realization that it is not good PR to abandon a client or reseller or distributor all together.

Recently we have heard many reports of issues of getting parts from manufacturers in other countries (not Asia). So just because you printer is made in an industrialized country, if you are in the US and the manufacturer is X-thousand kilometers or miles away, the wait may be many days, or weeks.

Lack of Tech Support Personnel is increasing

The recession resulted in tech support issues: some manufacturers may need to skimp on quality control during a recession, or switch to cheaper parts suppliers. Plus they are not hiring enough tech support during a recession. So the bigger and more successful the company, in some cases the worse these particular problems may be.

Any new compiled printer may take a few months to break in

Any new printer, no matter who the manufacturer, or how good is the engineering and electronics, will tend to have teething issues. Until the firmware is updated, you may be a beta tester. This does not mean the printer should be avoided, just realize that you may have some downtime and a few headaches. Of course the worst case sce-

nario for this was the half-million dollar LUSCHER JetPrint: so being "Made in Switzerland" was not much help.

Counterfeit parts are a problem with many printers made in China

Several years ago many UV printers made in China and some made elsewhere in Asia had counterfeit parts. No evaluation has the funding available to check parts inside any printer to see if they are from the European, Japanese, or American manufacturer, or if they are a clever counterfeits.

Be realistic and aware that not all materials can be printed on equally well

Many materials don't feed well through hybrid (pinch roller on grit roller systems) or combo UV systems (with transport belts). Banding, both from poor feeding, and from bi-directional (lawnmower effect) are common on many UV-curable inkjet printers.

It is typical for some enthusiastic vendors to claim verbally that their printer can print on anything and everything. But once you unpack the printer and set it up, you find that it requires primer on some materials; on other materials it adheres for a few weeks but then falls off. And on most hybrid and many combo printers, some heavy, thick, or smooth-surfaced materials skew badly. Since the claim that the printer will print on everything is usually verbal, it is tough to prove this aspect of misleading advertising to a jury.

Not all inks can print on all materials. And at a trade show, many of the materials you see so nicely printed on, the manufacturer may be adding a primer at night or early in the morning: before you see the machine printing on this material.

We feel that the pros and cons of each product speak more than adequately for themselves. Just position the ad claims on the left: put the actual performance results on the right. The unscrupulous hype for some printers is fairly evident rather quickly.

Be sure to check all FLAAR resources

Please realize that with over 200 different FLAAR Reports on UV printers, you need to be sure to check the more obscure ones too. If a printer has a printhead issue, the nitty gritty of this may be in the FLAAR Report on printheads. The report on the model is a general introduction; if we discussed the intimate details of printheads then some readers might fall asleep. And obviously do not limit yourself to the free reports. The technical details may be in the reports that have a price to them. Our readers have said they prefer to have the general basics, and to park the real technical material in other reports that people can buy if they really want that level of information.

So it may be best to ask for personal consulting. The details of the problems with the ColorSpan 5400uv series are rather complex: namely the center row of the Ricoh printheads. This would require an expensive graphic designer and consultants to show the details. And the design of the printhead would probably be altered by the time we did any of this anyway. So it is essential to talk with people: with other end-users, and with FLAAR in person on a consulting basis.

Acknowledgements

With 19 employees the funding has to come from somewhere, so we do welcome project sponsorship, research grants, contributions that facilitate our educational programs, scholarships for co-op interns

and graduate students, and comparable project-oriented funding from manufacturers. The benefit for the end-user is a principle called academic freedom, in this case,

- The freedom of a professor or student to speak out relative to the pros and cons of any equipment brought to them to benchmark.
- The freedom to design the research project without outside meddling from the manufacturer.

Fortunately, our budget is lean and cost effective as you would expect for a non-profit research institute. As long as we are not desperate for money we can avoid the temptation to accept payment for reprinting corporate PR hype. So the funding is used for practical research. We do not accept (nor believe) and certainly do not regurgitate corporate PR. For example, how many manufacturer's PR photos of their products have you seen in our reports or on our web sites?

Besides, it does not take any money to see which printers and RIPs function as advertised and which don't. We saw one hyped printer grind to a halt, malfunction, or otherwise publicly display its incapacities at several trade shows in a row. At each of those same trade shows another brand had over 30 of their printers in booths in virtually every hall, each one producing museum quality exhibits. Not our fault when we report what we see over and over and over again. One of our readers wrote us recently, "Nicholas, last month you recommended the as one of several possible printers for our needs; we bought this. It was the best capital expenditure we have made in the last several years. Just wanted to tell you how much we appreciate your evaluations...."

FLAAR is a non-profit educational and research organization dedicated for over 36 years to professional photography in the arts, tropical flora and fauna, architectural history, and landscape panorama photography.

Our digital imaging phase is a result of substantial funding in 1996 from the Japanese Ministry of Public Education for a study of scanning and digital image storage options. This grant was via Japan's National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan. That same year FLAAR also received a grant of \$100,000 from an American foundation to do a feasibility study of digital imaging in general and the scanning of photography archives in particular.

The FLAAR web sites began initially as the report on the results of these studies of scanners. Once we had the digital images we began to experiment with digital printers. People began to comment that our reports were unique and very helpful. So by 1999 we had entire sections on large format printers.

FLAAR has existed since 1969, long before inkjet printers existed. Indeed we were writing about digital imaging before HP even had a color inkjet system available. In 2000 FLAAR received an educational grant from Hewlett-Packard large format division, Barcelona, Spain, for training, for equipment, and to improve the design and navigation on the main web sites of the FLAAR Network. This grant ran its natural course, and like all grants, reached its finishing point, in this case late 2005.

In some cases the sponsorship process begins when we hear end-users talking about a product they have found to be better than other brands. We keep our ears open, and when we spot an especially good product, this is the company we seek sponsorship from. It would not be wise of us to seek sponsorship from a company with a sub-standard or otherwise potentially defective printer. So we usually know which printers are considered by end-users to be among

the better brands before we seek sponsorship. After all, out of the by now one million readers, we have heard plenty about every single printer out there.

We thank MacDermid ColorSpan (now part of HP), Hewlett-Packard, Parrot Digigraphic, Color DNA, Canon, Gandinnovations, and other companies for providing funding for technology training for the FLAAR staff and our colleagues at Bowling Green State University in past years and for funds to allow us to attend all major international trade shows, which are ideal locations for us to gather information. We thank Caldera, EskoArtwork, EFI Rastek, EFI and VUTEK, OTF (Obeikan), Drytac DigiFab, Barbieri electronic, Seiko II, Parrot Digigraphic, AT Inks, Sepiix inks, Sam-Ink, Dilli, Grapo, and WP Digital for providing funds so that we can make more of our publications free to end-users. During 2000-2001 we had grants to cover all the costs of our publications, and all FLAAR Reports were free in those early years. As that early grant naturally expired after a few years, we had to begin charging for some of our reports to cover costs. Now (in 2010), we are seeking corporate sponsorship so we can gradually make another 20% of our publications free to our readers.

Since 2006 we do a major part of our evaluations at a factory and headquarters demo room. Since the university does not fund any of these trips, it is traditional for the manufacturer to fund a research sponsorship. In the US this is how most university projects are initiated for decades now, and it is increasing. In fact there is a university in Austria that is not an "edu" but is a "GmbH", funded by the chamber of commerce of that part of Austria. In other words, a university as an educational institution, but functioning in the real world as an actual business. This is a sensible model, especially when FLAAR staff need to be on the road over a quarter of a million miles per year (roughly over 400,000 km per year total for the staff). Obviously this travel is hosted since unless money falls from heaven there most realistic way to obtain funding to get to the demo rooms for training is direct from the source.

It has been helpful when companies make it possible for us to fly to their headquarters so we can inspect their manufacturing facilities, demo rooms, and especially when the companies make their research, engineering and ink chemistry staff available for discussions. When I received my education at Harvard I was taught to have a desire to learn new things. This has guided my entire life and is what led me into wide-format digital imaging technology: it is constantly getting better and there is a lot to learn every month. Thus I actively seek access to improving my understanding of wide format printer technology so that we can better provide information to the approximately quarter-million+ readers of our solvent and UV printer web site (www.large-format-printers.org) and the over half a million who read either our wide-format-printers.org site or our roughly half million combined who read our digital-photography.org and www.FineArtGicleePrinters.org sites.

Barbieri electronic (color management), Caldera (RIP), ColorSpan, DEC, Durst, EFI, EskoArtwork, Gerber, Grapo, IP&I, Mimaki USA, Mutoh, Obeikan, Dilli, Drytac, GCC, NUR, Oce, Shiraz (RIP), Sky AirShip, Sun, Teckwin, VUTEK, WP Digital, Xerox, Yuhan-Kimberly, Zund have each brought FLAAR staff to their headquarters and printer factories. AT Inks, Bordeaux, InkWin, Sepiix, Sam-Ink, and Sunflower ink have brought us to inspect their ink manufacturing facilities and demo rooms. Notice that we interact with a wide range of companies: it is more helpful to our readers when we interact with many different companies rather than just one.

We have visited the world headquarters and demo rooms of HP in Barcelona and received informative and helpful technology briefings

from HP about every two years. We are under NDA as to the subjects discussed but it is important that we be open where we have visited. Mimaki Europe has had FLAAR as their guest in Europe to introduce their flatbed UV printer, as have other UV-curable manufacturers, again, under NDA as to the details since often we are present at meetings where unreleased products are discussed. Xaar has hosted an informative visit to their world headquarters in the UK. You don't get this level of access from a trade magazine writer, and I can assure you, we are provided much more detailed information and documentation in our visits than would be provided to a magazine author or editor. Companies have learned that it's a lot better to let us know up front and in advance the issues and glitches with their printers, since they now know we will find out sooner or later on our own. They actually tell us they realize we will find out on our own anyway.

Contributions, grant, sponsorships, and project funds from these companies are also used to improve the design and appearance of the web sites of the FLAAR Information Network. We thank Canon, ColorSpan, HP, ITNH, and Mimaki for providing wide format printers, inks, and media to the universities where FLAAR does research on wide format digital imaging. We thank Epson America for providing an Epson 7500 printer many years ago, and Parrot Digigraphic for providing access to their digital equipment, also for providing three different models of Epson inkjet printers to our facilities on loan at BGSU (5500, 7600, 7800). We thank Mimaki USA for providing a JV4 and then a Mimaki TX-1600s textile printer and Improved Technologies (ITNH) providing their Ixia model of the Iris 3047 giclee printer.

We thank 3P Inkjet Textiles and HP for providing inkjet textiles so we could learn about the different results on the various textiles. IJ Technologies, 3P Inkjet Textiles, ColorSpan, Encad, HP, Nan Ya Pepa, Oracal, Tara and other companies have provided inkjet media so we can try it out and see how it works (or not as the case may be; several inkjet media failed miserably, one from Taiwan, the other evidently from Germany!). We thank Aurelon, Canon, ColorGate, ColorSpan, ErgoSoft, HP, PerfectProof, PosterJet, Onyx, Ilford, CSE ColorBurst, ScanvecAmiable, Wasatch and many other RIP companies for providing their hardware and software RIPs.

We thank Dell Computers for providing awesome workstations for testing RIP software and content creation with Adobe Photoshop and other programs. We also appreciate the substantial amount of software provided by Adobe. As with other product loaned or provided courtesy of ProVar LLC (especially the 23" monitors which makes it so much easier to work on multiple documents side by side).

We thank Betterlight, Calumet Photographic, Global Graphics, Westcott, Global Imaging Inc. Phase One, and Bogen Imaging for helping to equip our archaeological photo studios at the university and its archaeology museum in Guatemala. Heidelberg, Scitex, CreoScitex (now Kodak) and Cruse, both in Germany, have kindly provided scanners for our staff to evaluate.

We really liked some of the results whereas some of the other products were a bit disappointing. Providing samples does not influence the evaluations because the evaluators are students, professors, and staff of Bowling Green State University. These personnel are not hired by any inkjet printer company; they were universities employees (as was also true for Nicholas Hellmuth). The testing person for the HP ColorPro (desktop printer) said he frankly preferred his Epson printer. When we saw the rest results we did not include this Hewlett-Packard ColorPro printer on our list of recommended printers, but we love our HP DesignJet 5000ps so much we now have two of them, one at each university.

Sometimes we hear horror stories about a printer. The only way we can tell whether this is the fault of the printer design, or lack of training of the operator, is to have the printer ourselves in-house. Of course some printer manufacturers don't understand the reasons we need to have each make and model; they are used to loaning their demo units for a week or so. That is obviously inadequate for a serious review.

Some of the media provided to us failed miserably. Three printers failed to meet common sense usability and printability standards as well (HP 1055, one older desktop model (HP Color Pro GA), and one Epson). Yet we know other users who had better results; maybe ours came down the assembly line on a Monday or Friday afternoon, when workers were not attentive. One costly color management software package was judged "incapable" by two reviewers (one from the university; second was an outside user who had made the mistake of buying this package).

So it's obvious that providing products or even a grant is no shield from having your products fail a FLAAR evaluation. The reason is clear: the end user is our judge. The entire FLAAR service program is to assist the people who need to use digital imaging hardware and software. If a product functions we find out and promulgate the good news. If a product is a failure, or more likely, needs some improvement in the next generation, we let people know. If a product is hyped by what an informed user would recognize as potentially false and misleading nonsense, then we point out the pathetic discrepancies very clearly.

This is what you should expect from an institute which is headed by a professor.

Actually, most of our reviews are based on comments by end users. We use their tips to check out pros and cons of virtually every product we discuss. You can't fool a print shop owner whose printer simply fails to function as advertised. And equally, a sign shop owner who earns a million dollars a year from a single printer brand makes an impact on us as well. We have multiple owners of ColorSpan printers tell us that this printer is their real money earner for example. We know other print shops where their primarily income is from Encad printers. Kinkos has settled on the HP 5000 as its main money maker production machine, and so on.

Yet we have documentation of several print shop companies whose business was ruined by specific brands that failed repeatedly. It is noteworthy that it is always the same brand or printer at both locations: one due to banding and printheads then simply no longer printing one color; the other brand due to pokiness of the printer simply not being competitively fast enough. Same with RIPs, we have consistent statements of people using one RIP, and only realizing how weak it was when they tried another brand which they found substantially better. Thus we note that companies which experiment with more than one brand of product tend to realize more quickly which brand is best. This is where FLAAR is in an ideal situation: we have nine RIPs and 25 printers. Hence it is logical that we have figured out which are best for our situation.

Grant funding, sponsorship, demonstration equipment, and training are supplied from all sides of the spectrum of printer equipment and software engineering companies. Thus, there is no incentive to favor one faction over another. We receive support from three manufacturers of thermal printheads (Canon, ColorSpan and HP) and also have multiple printers from three manufacturers of piezo printers (Epson, Seiko, Mutoh, and Mimaki). This is because piezo has definite advantage for some applications; thermal printheads have advantages

in different applications. Our reviews have universal appeal precisely because we feature all competing printhead technologies. Every printer, RIPs, inks, or media we have reviewed have good points in addition to weaknesses. Both X-Rite and competitor GretagMacbeth provided spectrophotometers. Again, when all sides assist this program there is no incentive to favor one by trashing the other. Printer manufacturer ad campaigns are their own worst enemy. If a printer did not make false and misleading claims, then we would have nothing to fill our reviews with refuting the utter nonsense that is foisted on the buying public.

It is not our fault if some printers are more user friendly, print on more media than other brands. It is not our fault that the competing printers are ink guzzlers, are slow beyond belief, and tend to band or drop out colors all together. We don't need to be paid by the printer companies whose products work so nicely in both our universities on a daily basis. The printers which failed did so in front of our own eyes and in the print shops of people we check with. And actually we do try to find some redeeming feature in the slow, ink gulping brands: they do have a better dithering pattern; they can take thick media that absolutely won't feed through an HP. So we do work hard at finding the beneficial features even of printers are otherwise get the most critique from our readers. Over one million people will read the FLAAR Information Network in the next 12 months; 480,000 people will be exposed to our reports on wide format printers from combined total of our three sites on these themes. You can be assured that we hear plenty of comments from our readers about which printers function, and which printers fail to achieve what their advertising hype so loudly claims.

An evaluation is a professional service, and at FLAAR is based on more than 11 years of experience. An evaluation of a printer, an ink, media, substrate, a software, laminator, cutter or whatever part of the digital printing workflow is intended to provide feedback to all sides. The manufacturers appreciate learning from FLAAR what features of their printers need improvement. In probably half the manufacturers FLAAR has dealt with, people inside the company did not, themselves, want to tell their boss that their pet printer was a dog. So printer, software, and component manufacturers have learned that investing in a FLAAR evaluation of their product provides them with useful return on investment. Of course if a printer manufacturer wants only a slick Success Story, or what we call a "suck up review" that simply panders to the manufacturer, obviously FLAAR is not a good place to dare to ask for such a review. In several instances it was FLAAR Reports that allowed a company to either improve their printer, or drop it and start from scratch and design a new and better one.

And naturally end-users like the opportunity to learn about various printers from a single source that covers the entire range from UV through latex through all flavors of solvent.

We have also learned that distributors often prefer to accept for distribution a printer or other product on which a FLAAR Report already exists.

We turn down offers of funding every year. These offers come from PO Box enterprises or products with no clearly visible point of manufacture. Usually the company making the offer presumes they can buy advertising space just by paying money. But that is not what our readers want, so we politely do not accept such offers of money.

Contributions, grants, sponsorships, and funding for surveys, studies and research is, however, open to a company who has an accepted standing in the industry. It is helpful if the company has a visible pres-

ence at leading trade shows and can provide references from both end users and from within the industry. Where possible we prefer to visit the company in person or at least check them out at a trade show. Obviously the product needs to have a proven track record too. Competing companies are equally encouraged to support the FLAAR system. We feel that readers deserve to have access to competing information. Competition is the cornerstone of American individualism and technological advancement.

FLAAR also covers its costs of maintaining the immense system of 8 web sites in three languages and its facilities in part by serving as a consultant such as assisting inkjet manufacturers learn more about the pros and cons of their own printers as well as how to improve their next generation of printers. It is especially useful to all concerned when manufacturers learn of trends (what applications are popular and for what reasons). For example, manufacturers need to know whether to continue designing software for Mac users, or concentrate software for PC users. So the survey form that you fill out is helpful to gather statistics. You benefit from this in two ways: first, you get the FLAAR reports in exchange for your survey form. Second, your comments bring (hopefully) change and improvement in the next generation of printers. When we do survey statistics, then the names, addresses, and telephone numbers are removed completely. A survey wants only aggregate numbers, not individuals. However, if you ask about a specific brand of printer, and do not opt out, we forward your request to a pertinent sponsor so you can obtain follow-up from that brand, since we ourselves do not have enough personnel to respond to each reader by telephone. But we do not provide your personal information to outsiders and our survey form has an opt out check-off box which we honor.

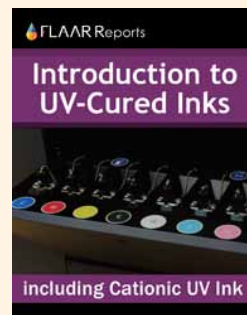
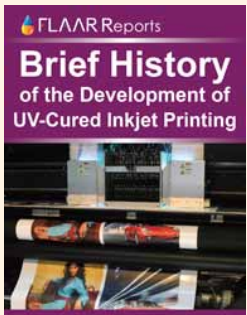
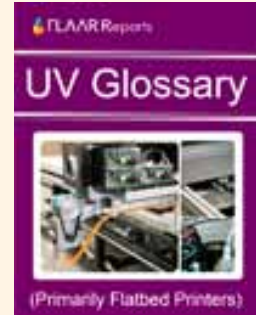
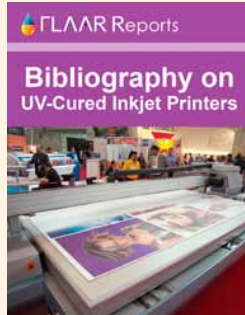
FLAAR also serves as consultants to Fortune 500 companies as well as smaller companies and individuals who seek help on which printers to consider when they need digital imaging hardware and software.

A modest portion of our income comes from our readers who purchase the FLAAR series. All income helps continue our tradition of independent evaluations and reviews of inkjet printers, RIPs, media, inks, cutters, laminators, and color management systems.

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Introduction to UV Curable Inkjet Flatbed Printers



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Comments on UV Inkjet Printers at Major Trade Shows 2007-2009

<p>List of UV Printers Manufactured in Taiwan 2010</p>	<p>UV Market TRENDS</p> <p>Observable at FESPA Digital Europe 2009</p>	<p>TRENDS, Part II: Markets & Technologies</p> <p>UV-cured printers at ISA 2009</p>	<p>TRENDS, Part I: Analysis One by One of the UV-cured printers</p> <p>ISA '09</p>	<p>UV Cured Printer TRENDS at Dubai 2010</p>
<p>TRENDS of UV-Cured Wide-Format Printers</p> <p>Shanghai '09</p>	<p>UV COMBO FLATBEDS</p> <p>Shanghai 2009</p>	<p>TRENDS IN HYBRID STRUCTURE UV PRINTERS</p> <p>Shanghai 2009</p>	<p>UV Roll-to-roll</p> <p>Observable at Shanghai 2009</p>	<p>UV Flatbed Printers</p> <p>at APPEXPO, Shanghai '09</p>
<p>Trends in Wide-Format UV Printers</p> <p>Observable at SGIA '09</p>	<p>UV-Cured Inkjet Printers at VISCOM ITALY 2009</p>	<p>Learning more of UV-Curable TRENDS</p> <p>By visiting viscom Paris '09</p>	<p>UV Printers Trends 2008</p> <p>SGIA '08 PART I</p>	<p>Flatbed & Roll-to-Roll UV Printers</p> <p>SGIA '08 Part II</p>

UV Printers Manufactured in China, Korea and Taiwan

<p>Chinese UV Inkjet Printers 2009</p> <p>Comprehensive FLAAR Inventory</p>	<p>UV Printers Manufactured in Korea 2009</p> <p>Trends, Markets & Applications</p>	<p>UV Printers Manufactured in KOREA 2010</p>	<p>List of UV Printers Manufactured in Taiwan 2009</p>	<p>List of UV Printers Manufactured in Taiwan 2010</p>
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