

Wide Format Printers Inks, Media, Cutters, Laminators, RIP Software

Nicholas M. Hellmuth



Summary on 2013

as we enter 2014

SGIA2013

SOUTH
Meeting Rooms
← S210A - S210E
→ S220 - S230

SOUTH
↑ South Hall A, A1, A2
↗ South Hall B
↑ Food Court

SOUTH
Meeting Rooms
↖ S310 - S331 ↑

SGIA
EXPO



SureColor
OUTDOOR SIGN
TECHNOLOGY

SureColor
TECHNOLOGY
DYE-SUBLIMATION
SERIES





Introduction

This is simultaneously a report on what products were exhibited at SGIA 2013 and therefore also a summary of what was available during 2013 as a base for 2014.



RIP software

Plenty of RIP software companies were present at SGIA 2013. Some had their own booth; others were clearly visible inside booths of printers which featured their software.

RIP software is essential for most printers. Having a good brand of RIP software is a benefit. So we have worked in past years to evaluate RIP products: many years ago we have been flown to the French headquarters of Caldera and have been flown to the Wasatch headquarters in USA.

We recommend an open RIP software, meaning one whose brand name and origin is clearly indicated. During the coming year we will discuss more of why a RIP is useful and what to avoid when choosing a RIP brand on our various web sites including.



Color Management

Most printer expos are weak in color management. Either there are zero color management company booths, or else the spectrophotometers are hidden deep in a booth of a printer manufacturer.

It is easy to think that you have escaped color management by using canned ICC color profiles. Nonetheless, we highly recommend that print shops, even small ones, learn about color management. You can improve your quality significantly. Plus, if you and your printer operator know color management you can lower your ink costs and match client logo colors more easily.

Each of the students in the FLAAR evaluation centers were able to learn color management (during the six years we had our test center at two different universities: one in USA, one in Guatemala). Even with a learning curve, if you are patient you can learn color management, and ICC profiles. And once you know the basics, you can achieve higher quality and more professional looking output.

MIS Software

Many trade shows have few booths on MIS software, but in such a case you can learn about MIS software in the efi booth. Several RIP brands are now also adding MIS software capabilities to their software packages.

Finishing: Cutters

“Finishing” means everything you should think about for your prints after they come out of the printer. Finishing means laminating, coating, cutting, etc.

Basic roll-fed cutters are so well known that we do not evaluate them. CO2 engravers and CNC routers are also traditional (pre-inkjet, pre-digital) equipment. We have evaluated CO2 engravers and have visited manufacturing companies who make CNC routers but there are too many Chinese brands to realistically keep track.

We focus on flatbed XY cutters and at least list special cutters (such as FOTOBA).

The main brand of flatbed XY cutters are as follows:



Kongsberg, was at their own booth of ESKO, and also in booth of Xpedx, a distributor.



Zünd America had their own booth.

FLAAR has been flown to the Zünd factory in Switzerland so we are familiar with their quality. We have been flown to the demo center of ESKO Kongsberg in USA so have experience with this brand.

As soon as it is possible to get access to other brands we will add additional evaluations.



FOTOBA cutters (for roll-fed signage material).

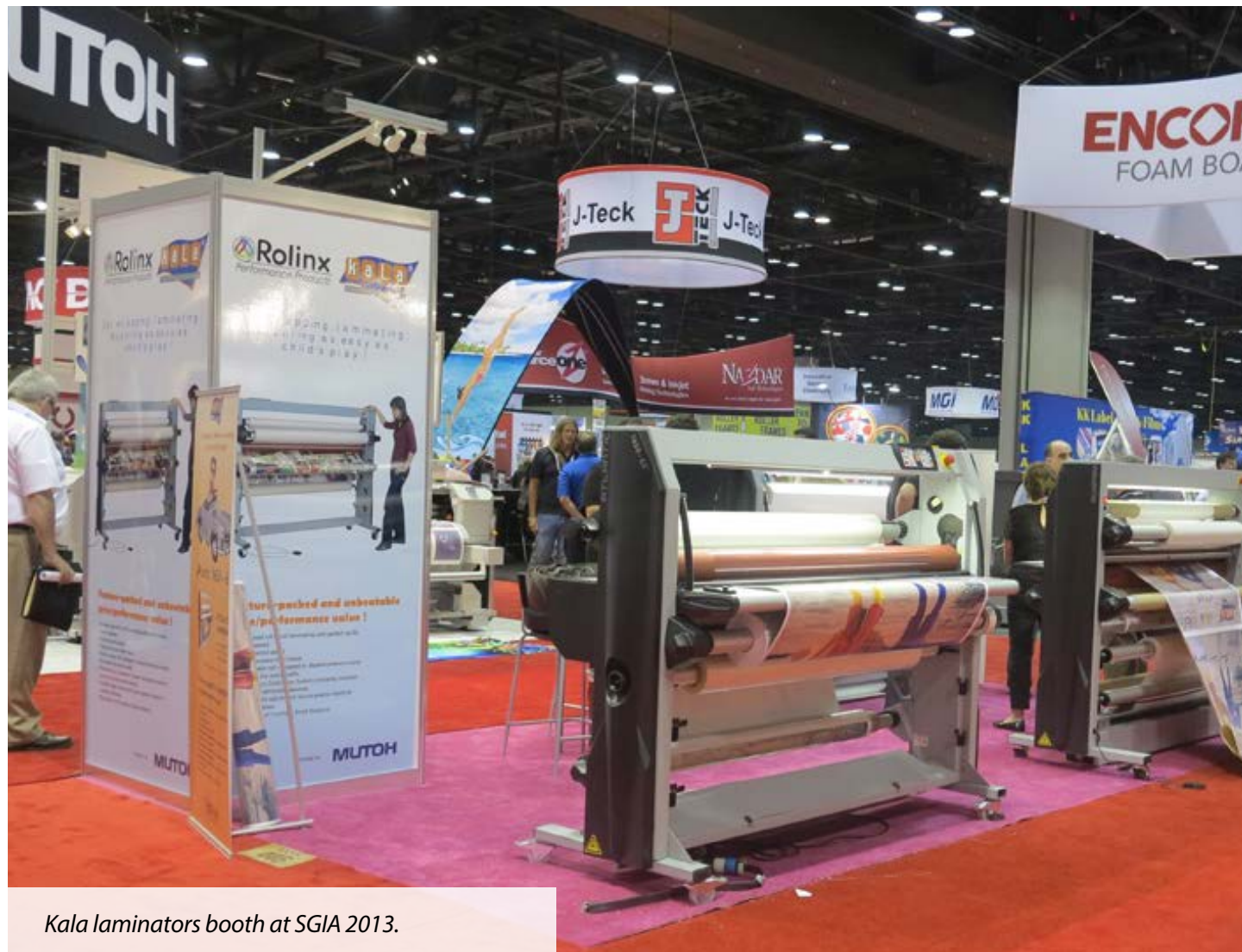
**Finishing Portion of the Workflow:
Laminators and Coaters**

Finishing is creasing, cutting, folding. But even before this, you have lamination. A step which is usually forgotten is coating. Coating is not the same as liquid lamination even though coating is liquid. Coaters are often not widely exhibited or since coating is not always understood, people don't always make a beeline for a booth with coaters.

FLAAR has inspected print shops with professional level of coaters, so we have learned how useful a coater can be.

There were an adequate number of laminator brands. If you want to see where these brands come from, attend either of the two main expos in China.

Flatbed style lamination applicators are another kind of manner other than roll-to-roll or liquid laminator. Most roll-over laminators are made in Europe, not in China, but that is changing rapidly.



Kala laminators booth at SGIA 2013.



In a single PDF there is no way to show every booth.

The file size needs to be less than 5 MB because some corporate sites do not allow receiving attachments larger than 5 MB.

We prefer to not have the photos tiny; and it is essential to have each file a dpi size so it can be printed at least on a desktop laser or short-run digital press. So the result of the PDF weight limit plus the reader response that they prefer nice healthy size photos means that it takes us a dozen separate PDFs to show every booth.

What you have in your hands is the photo essay which is a general introduction and review of what was available at SGIA 2013.



Distributors at SGIA

We counted at least 40 booths of inkjet printer distributors. If you added T-shirt and other dye sublimation equipment distributors there were even more. Actually there were probably several hundred distributors exhibiting at SGIA (and many hundred booths, since there were also manufacturers, trade magazine booths, etc.).

Here is a list of inkjet printer booths which stood out (this is a polite way of saying that we may have missed a few, since if an aisle is crowded its hard to see a 10x10 booth name).

Note that the distributors listed below are booths of inkjet-related products. We have separate reports on textiles, flatbed cutters, laminators, inks, media & substrates. But here are the names of the companies in the first category which we noticed:

- Advantage Sign Supply
- All America Mfg & Supply
- Axiom America
- Colex
- Condé Systems Inc.
- Innovative Digital Systems
- DigiTech
- DGS
- Expand Systems
- Ez Hi Tech
- Gans Ink and Supply Co.
- Global Imaging
- Graphics One (GO)
- Gregory Inc.
- Grimco
- IEC – Interstate Electric
- Infinity Digital
- InkCups Now
- Innovative Digital Systems
- It supplies
- Johnson Plastic
- Lawson screen and Digital Products Inc
- Media One Digital Imaging Solutions, LLC
- N Glantz & Son
- National Azon
- Nazdar
- Next Wave
- Omni Print
- Oldham
- Polytype America Corporation
- Professional Marketing Services
- Print LAT
- Regal Graphics
- Richmond Graphic Products Inc.
- Reprographic Technology Intl
- Siser North America
- Tubelite Company Inc.
- TW Graphics
- USTECH Inc.
- Xpedex





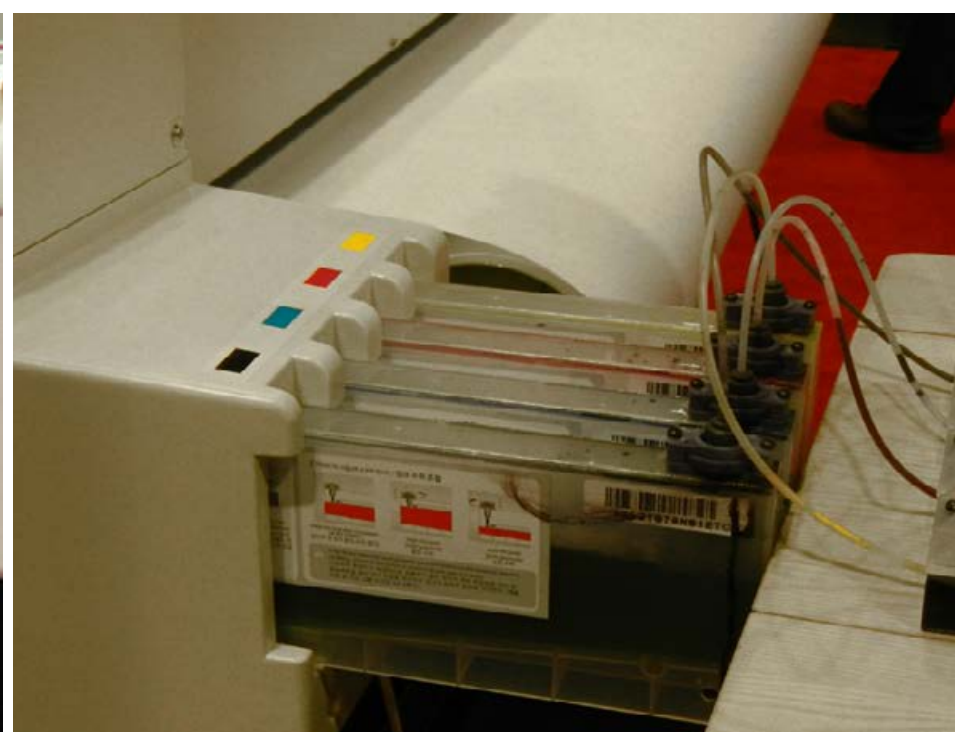
Graphics One booth.



Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth at Graphics One (GO) booth.



Mutoh RJ900x at Graphics One booth.



Mutoh RJ900x ink system.



Application Zones look good on paper

But at 80% of the expos around the world, Application Zones are either empty or abandoned more than half of every day. Only car-wrap zones get consistent attendance.

SGIA had a good selection of application zones; they seemed more active than at most other expos.

- PDAA Graphics Application Zone
- Color Management & Workflow Solutions Zone
- Strategic Sustainable Solutions Zone
- Digital Textile Printing Zone
- Digital Signage Innovation Zone



Franchises

Sign shop franchises are popular especially in the USA. So it was nice to see two major franchise brands at SGIA.

FAST SIGNS International Inc.

www.FastSigns.com

SIGNARAMA

www.SignaRama.com



What does FLAAR do at an expo

At every trade show owners, managers, and printer operators come up to us to express appreciation for the FLAAR Reports.

We are ourselves grateful in return, for hearing of their results from what printers, inks, etc which they have recently purchased. It is sad to learn of two print shops in different parts of the world which each had a tough time when reality hit of having bought the cheapest brand of printer. When we learn these facts we update our discussions of what to expect if indeed you succumb to the temptation to buy a really cheap printer. The main issue is lack of tech support, lack of engineers for repairs of this brand in your country. We will have more comments on reality checks in our upcoming FLAAR Reports for 2014.

At a trade show we are interested in evaluating

- Textile inks and textile printers
- T-shirt printers (inkjet and toner-based)
- UV-cured printers, and now also, SUV-cured printers
- Solvent, latex, and water-based printers
- After-market inks
- Flatbed cutters
- RIP software, MIS software, Color Management tools & software
- Distributors

Plus, our increasingly speciality is detecting the major trends in the industry. Here it really helps to have been a research professor of wide-format inkjet printers in a previous life.

Toner-based Printers

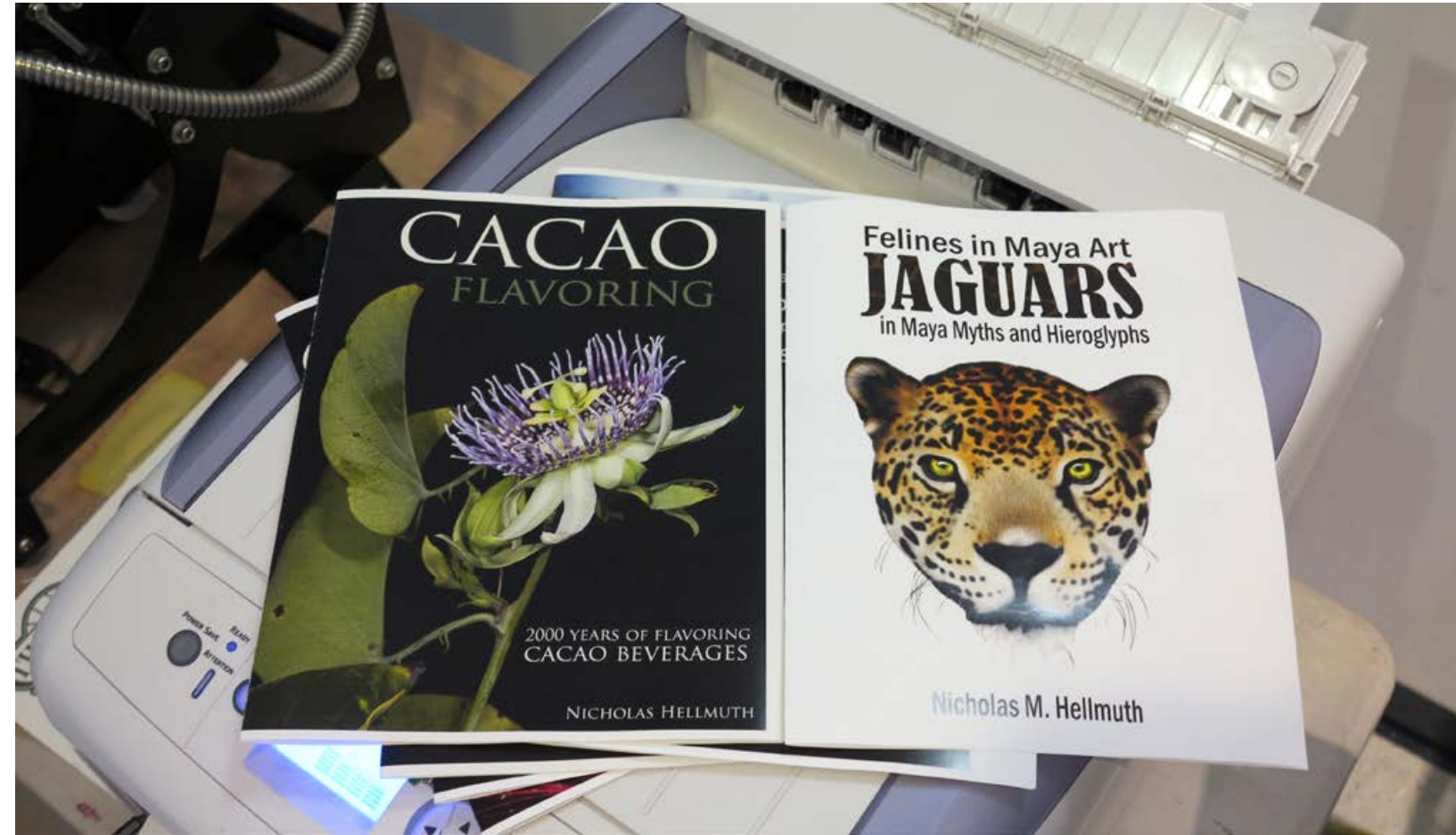
If an expo has toner based printers, if there is time, we will do test printing of our evaluation samples. The Xerox booth at Sign Africa in Johannesburg and the Xerox booth in Sign Istanbul in Turkey printed test samples for us recently. But at SGIA, even with four of us, we were occupied the whole time with inkjet printer workflow products, so it was not realistic to do any samples.

Since a trade show can be rather busy, it is often more realistic to test toner printers in the demo room of the pertinent distributor. Thus we appreciated that Graphics One flew us to their demo room in California about two weeks after SGIA.

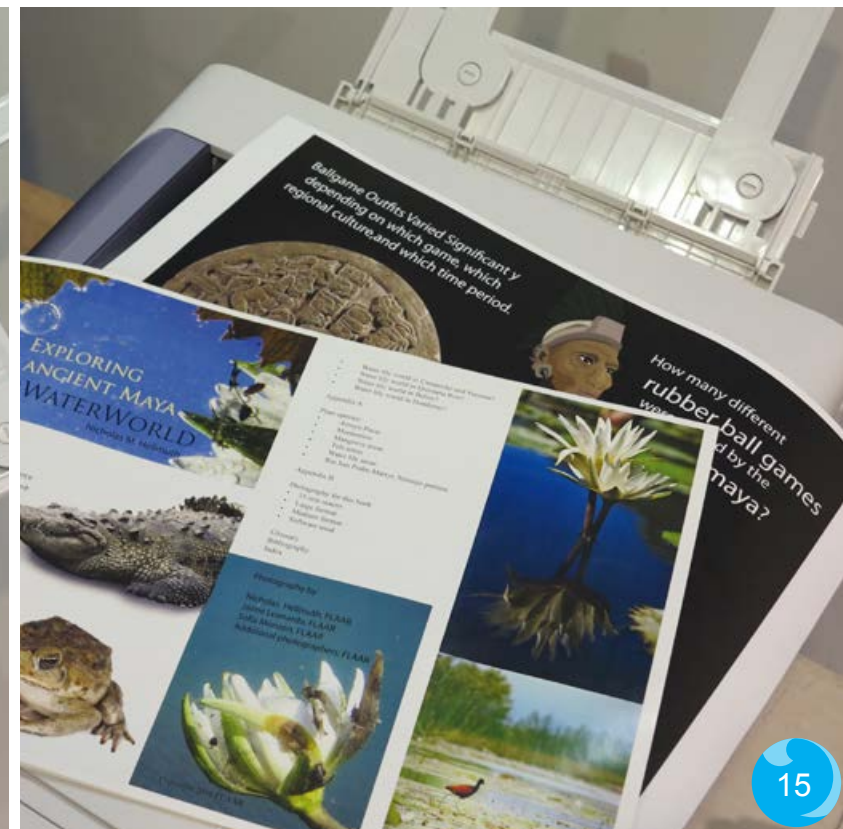


Here you can see the full range of samples produced in two days with the GO DUO desktop printer.

This printer produced better quality than a \$144,000 Xerox DocuColor 5000AP. Hopefully a Xerox Phaser or newer model Xerox or a Xerox iGen4 can do better than the older DocuColor 5000ap.



Here are the test results coming off their GO DUO desktop printer. The test prints are photographs from forthcoming books by Nicholas on Neotropical plants of Guatemala, from a 36 megapixel high-res digital camera.



Textile Printers

Reggiani Machine is a high-end Italian printer manufacturer, present at SGIA through New Wave Media Solutions. Their manager, Steve Urmano, has abundant experience, and is currently VP of Hardware Marketing (at New Wave Media Solutions) for North and Central America. These are key areas for FLAAR since we are at home in the USA but our primary office is in Central America (Guatemala) since FLAAR has always been a multi-lingual institute.

The advantage of **DigiFab** is their experience for years (actually decades). I can still remember visiting printer expos over a decade ago; the brightest color textile samples at every expo were consistently in the booth of DigiFab.

DigiFab is a family-owned and operated business. We also enjoy their multi-lingual ability since FLAAR is multi-lingual. We do evaluations of printers, inks, media, and RIP software all around the world. DigiFab has also expanding their presence to other countries. We see them at FESPA and the giant Serigrafia, Sign expo in Brazil.

Another benefit of interacting with DigiFab is that they offer a textile-oriented RIP software. Yes, any RIP can be tweaked to handle printing on fabrics, but sometimes it helps if the people behind the RIP are knowledgeable about all the textile inks, fabric materials, and post-production workflow.

Their web site is www.DigiFab.com

Splash of Color is also a company with long experience, especially with Roland printers. We appreciate the courtesy to our staff during SGIA extended by Keith Faulkner, President.

In the separate FLAAR Report dedicated to textiles, we list every textile printer company which had a booth at SGIA and every T-shirt printer company at SGIA.



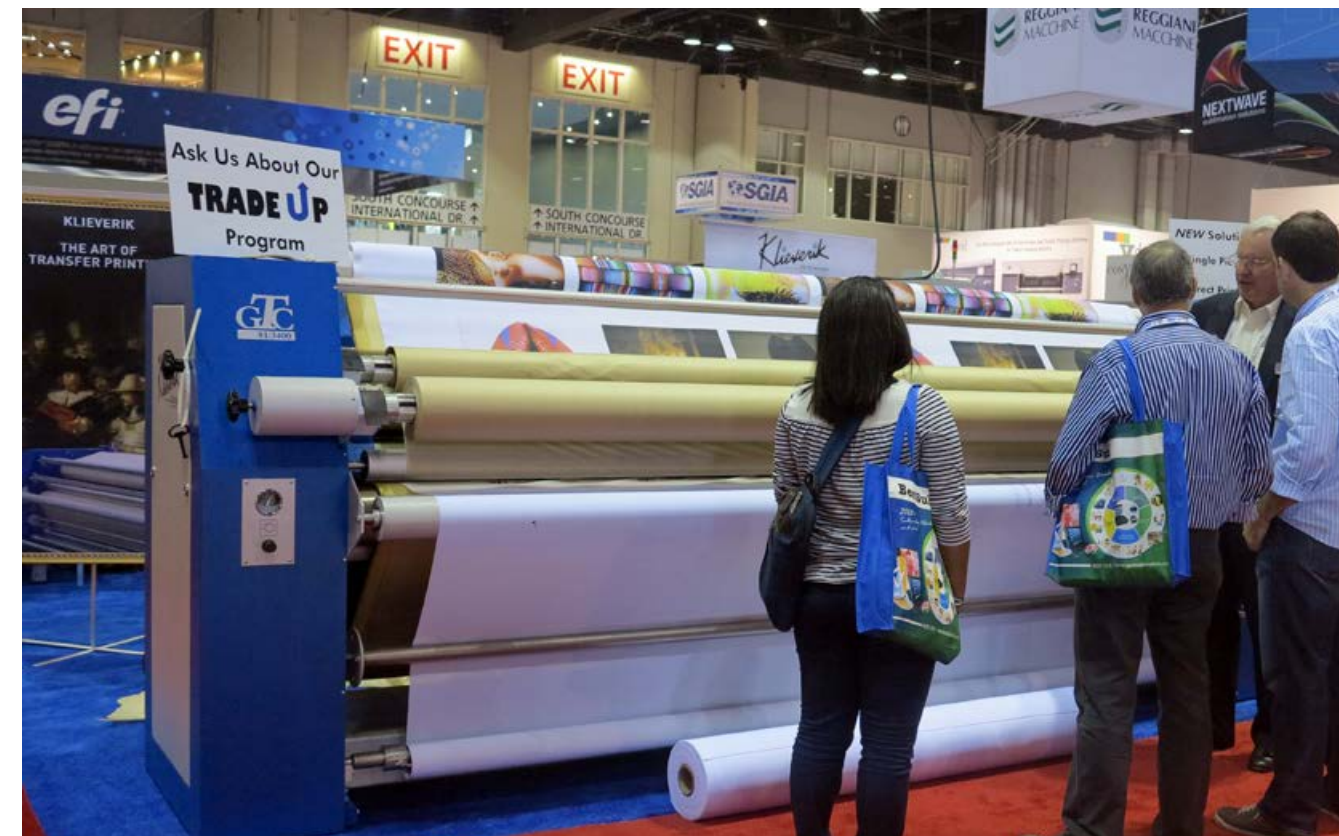
Textile Printers



Calendering Machines



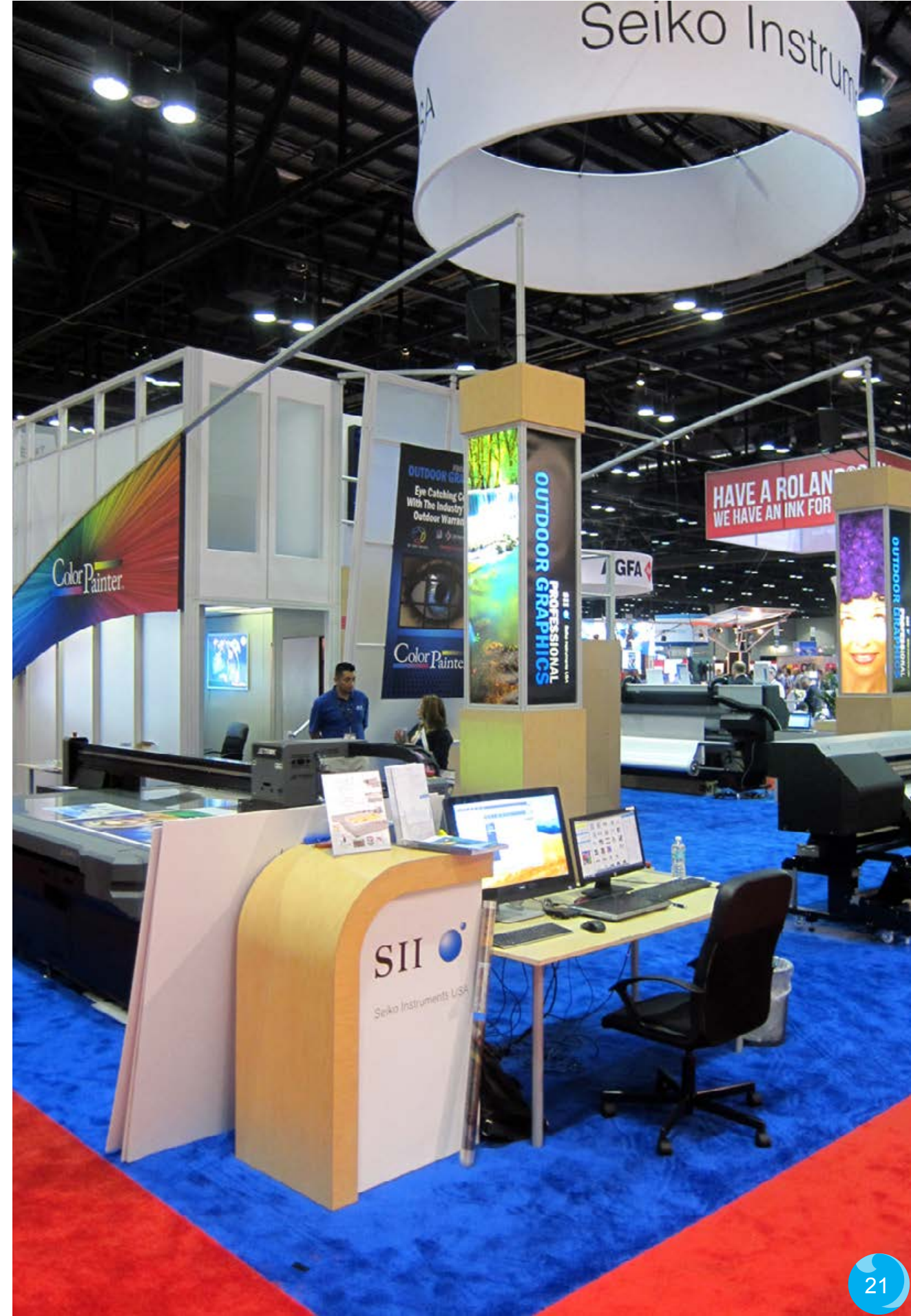
DigiFab BP-64 textile printer.



Mimaki TS 500-1800

Solvent Printers

Seiko II, Mimaki, Mutoh, and Mimaki had their booths with staff experienced in all aspects of printing signage with solvent inks. We are most familiar with the ColorPainter series of printers from Seiko II. As soon as a visit is arranged to the Seiko demo center in California or Japan we will do an in-depth evaluation of the new ColorPainter M-64s.



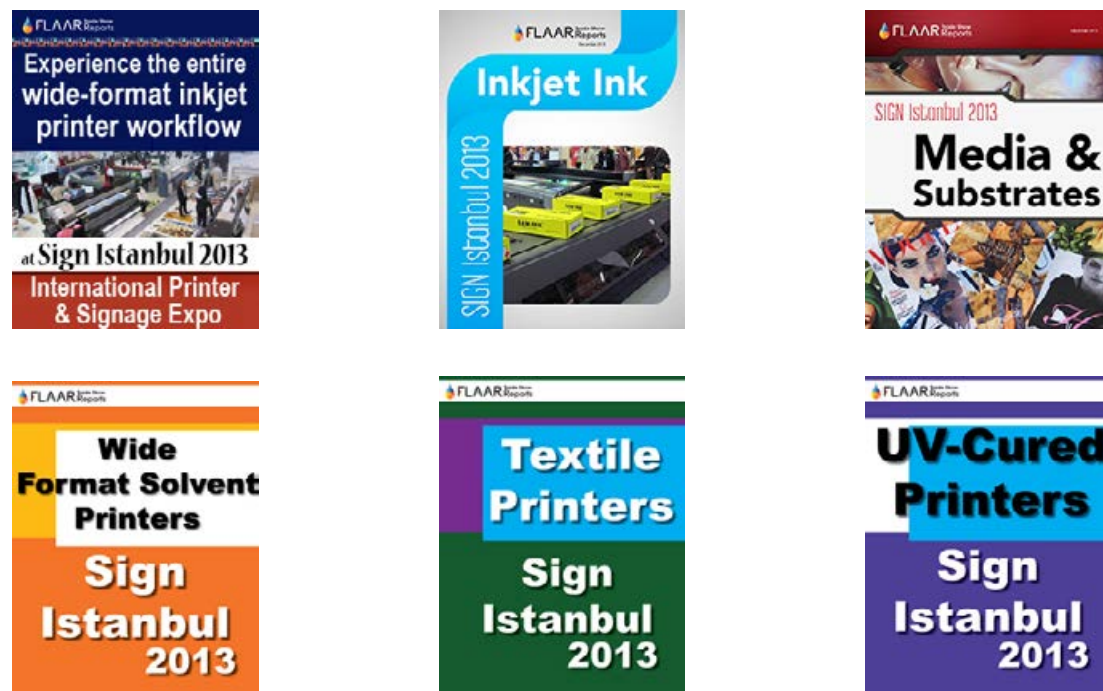


We also have lists of all the solvent printer brands at the largest printer expo in China; the expo organizers of AP-PPEXPO flew five of us to Shanghai. Due to the size of this printer expo it takes five to inspect all the inks, media, substrates, printers, and cutter brands of all Asia.



To show every brand and all models of solvent printers we made a complete list of every single printer in every single booth at Sign Istanbul, a few weeks after SGIA. The expo organizers flew two of us to Turkey so that we could itemize the full range of products at their expo.

The more people who are brought to an expo, the more realistic to issue full reports on each major wide-format inkjet product category. At SGIA we studied primarily textile printers, T-shirt printers, UV-cured printers, SUV printers, Memjet (water-based) printers, inks and media, and distributors.



Memjet Printers

The first significant wide-format printers with Memjet MEMS technology printheads were introduced at Graph Expo 2011. I then saw the OWN-X brand at LabelExpo Europe in Brussels.

Oce and FujiXerox unveiled their Memjet technology printhead machines at Drupa 2012.

At FESPA London 2013 it was possible to inspect the VORTEX of Reprographic Technology, courtesy of Erik Norman, Vice President Sales & Marketing. This is the OWN-X machine. At SGIA I spent more time studying all three: VORTEX, Oce, and Xerox (Xante was not present).

At Sign Istanbul for the first time I saw the Chinese competitor. So now we are issuing a separate FLAAR Report update on this technology. Prior to the arrival of the Chinese version, it was clear who the main brands were. But what if the Chinese Memjet printer functions just as well but is significantly less cost? I know the Chinese company for many years, and thus know their key people. So here we have a potential opportunity to see how well they have been able to engineer a Memjet-based 42" printer.

UV-cured printers: large format

- There are so many classes of UV-cured printers:
- The big industrial machines of Inca Digital and HP Scitex
- The grand format conveyor belt printers of Durst and efi VUTEK
- The dedicated flatbed printers such as Agfa, Gandy Digital, Oce and Fujifilm, JETRIX, and all the brands from Asia.
- The roll-to-roll UV-cured printers, again from Durst, efi VUTEK, and Matan.

Actually there were about 24 brands of UV-cured printers at SGIA. In the entire world there are roughly 45 brands and over 101 models.

To be realistic, we find it is most practical to focus on the brands where the manufacturer has provided access to make it possible for us to inspect their printers. Thus Oce flew us to their factory in Canada about six years ago. We have been to the Durst factory five times in Brixen, northern Italy and four times in Lienz, adjacent southern Austria. I was at the Inca Digital factory (but flown there by Sun Chemical to evaluate their FastJet concept printer).

Dilli has flown me to their factory in Korea (about 5 years ago), so I have seen their R&D capability.

Close up, CET X500 UV printer carriage.



Mimaki JFX 500-2131 UV flatbed printer.





EFI VUTEk has brought FLAAR staff to their factory on many occasions plus recently we have inspected several print shops (in Dallas, Texas and in Johannesburg, South Africa) which had efi VUTEk printers. The level of satisfaction of the owners was very clear.

What was most notable is that in each of these print shops, almost 90% to 100% of their earlier models the last several years are brands totally other than efi. In other words, they are testing efi VUTEk and finding them a pleasant advance to what they already have. It is usually the print quality they like.

Plus two more printshop owners who stopped to chat with us in the aisles at SGIA, have asked us to visit their print shops (one is in Illinois; the other is in Maine).

Each owns a VUTEk printer and each has made extensive comments precisely on what are the advantages (both these printing companies are large enough to have many printers, so they have lots of experience with different brands).

Again, each of these print shops who now has an efi VUTEk, each one previously had totally other brands. One had tried a latex printer as well. In other words, the owners, managers, and printer operators can very clearly and precisely indicate what was perhaps not perfect about each brand and model; and what was better and helped their company be even more successful.

So now we have four cases of print shops who have switched to efi VUTEk: two we have visited already, and two we will hopefully visit in 2014 (as soon as winter ice storms have abated)

So as soon as there is a budget to get a FLAAR team to inspect these printshops, we will fly to each one in early 2014. It takes two of us to do a realistic inspection, evaluation, and then write the review. The second person is especially helpful since one of the print shop owners specifically mentioned that the efi MIS software package was a definite asset. So when we evaluate the printer, we also need to evaluate the entire system: RIP software, MIS software, color management, ink options, and the printer itself.



SUV printers (Solvent + UV)

Mimaki was innovative and introduced the first SUV printer at FESPA 2012. Due in part to the delay in having the actual printer really available around the world, three other brands began to offer SUV printers. At SGIA two more brands offered SUV options.

So a few weeks after SGIA we were flown to California to inspect the SUV change-over system offered by Graphics One. We now have two reports on SUV, so much more than just Mimaki.



Here is the SUV add-on system in the GO booth at SGIA.

But to really learn about the pros and cons of a printer, especially a new system, we tend to prefer to visit a demo center. So we were flown to California and driven to a test center (the printer was at a professional test center rather than just in the demo room).



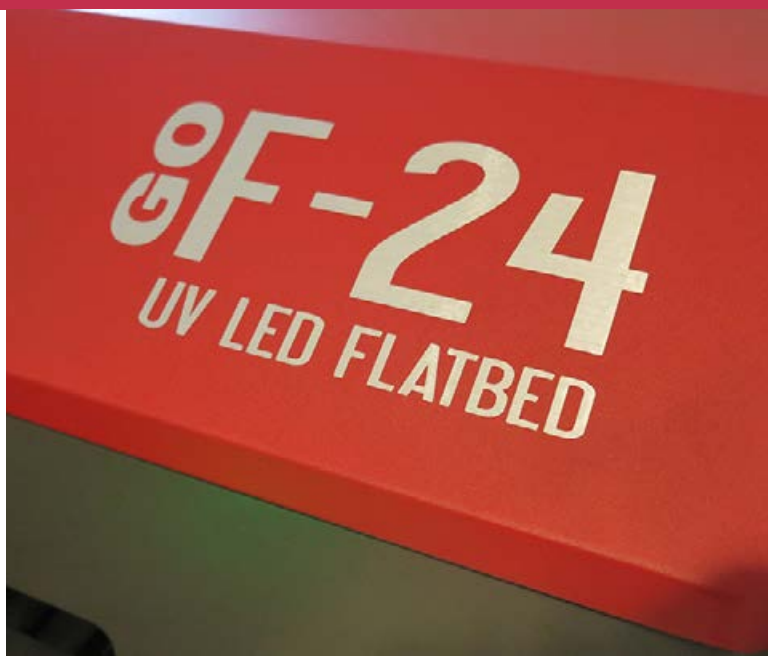
Here is Nicholas being briefed on the weeks of test results of the SUV printer, especially on the wide range of diverse kinds of media. We put in a lot of time and effort to learn about exciting new ink chemistries so that we can provide fresh knowledge to our way over half a million readers around the world. Frankly what I learned about SUV ink potential was not what I expected. This is why we have issued two reports based on inspecting printers at FESPA and at the test center in California.



UV-cured printers: desktop and-sized

There was a new model of desktop sized UV-cured printer in the booth of Graphics One. Since more people are asking about mid-sized flatbed printers, we are increasing our coverage of this class of printer. The GO F-24 UV LED Flatbed Inkjet Printer is relatively new.

The printer chassis is made in Japan. The RIP software is made in USA. The printer is assembled in Singapore. The overall machine system is conceived and designed in Australia; and available via Graphics One for North America, Mexico, Central America, and South America including Brazil.



Many of the requests FLAAR receives asking for tips on what brand and technology and ink to select are from companies who produce promotional objects, or other pieces of material which need customized decoration. In other words, lots of companies who manufacturer small things need to decorate them, and they are skipping silk screening and going direct to digital.

Since they are not sure what ink is best for their often atypical material, they e-mail or telephone FLAAR to ask for assistance. The challenge is that on some special materials most normal inks simply peel off, lift off, crack when the object is bent, or get scratched too easily.

Lawson also offers desktop sized UV-cured printers, as do a dozen other companies, several of which exhibited at SGIA (Azon, EZ Hi Tech for example). Since most of our family architectural companies were started in St Louis, we are aware that Lawson is in St Louis. But most of the time we are around the world, over 150,000 miles air travel every year, so we are rarely in Missouri.



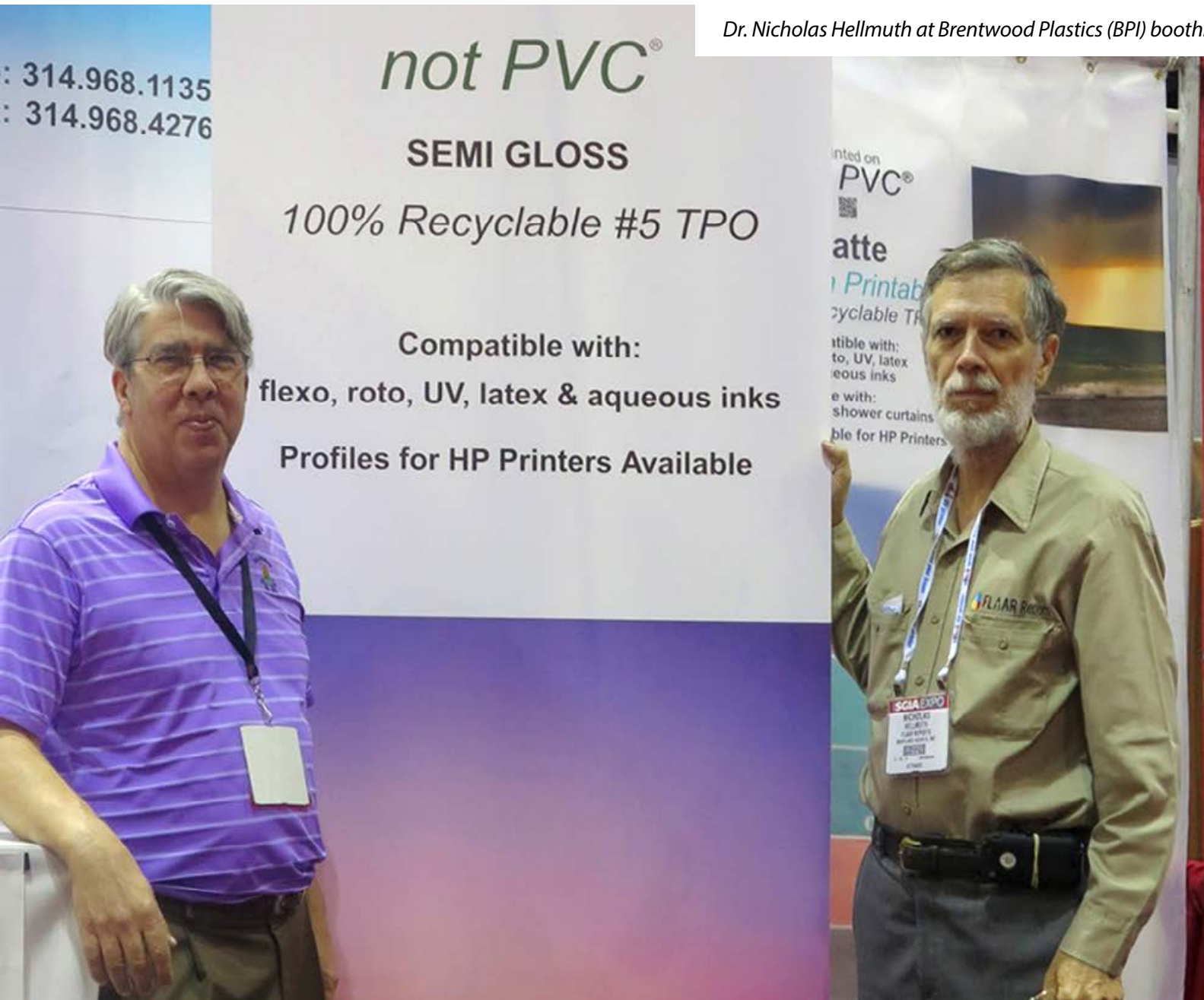
Specialty Printers

An increasing number of people from around the world are asking us to assist them find a reliable manufacturer of printers for specialized industrial purposes. So we are taking notes on printers for unusual sizes, shapes, and materials.

After-Market Inks

There were about 24 after-market ink companies at SGIA. The booth I visited the most often was of the company Sam Ink, where we have been to their factory, in Singapore, twice.





Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth at Brentwood Plastics (BPI) booth.



Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth at Aria booth.

Media & Substrates

68 media and substrate companies had a booth at SGIA. We study media for fine art photographs, giclee, signage, building wrap, and all current applications. We also enjoy finding unique kinds of media, such as that in the booth of Brentwood Plastics. I have visited their company, since it is not far from the USA office of FLAAR. Sam Longstretch is President. But we have not examined or reported upon their media, since at an expo such as APPPEXPO in July in Shanghai there are over 153 media companies, so our media and substrate team are pretty busy.





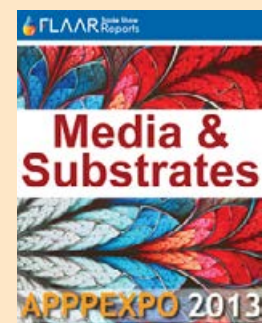
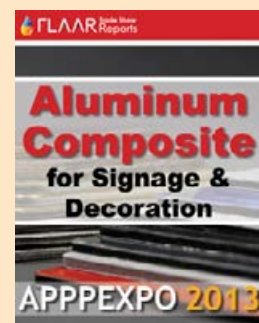
The primary location for factories to produce media is China. Here you see Nicholas in one of them. Media companies around the world fly us to their factory so we can inspect their brand.



Korea is another country with many media manufacturers and also distributors (a distributor finds good media at other factories and helps make them available in many countries). Here I am in the booth of SMI of South Korea.

Plus we are interested in each and every kind of thick and hard substrate, especially honeycomb sandwich material. This is made primarily in America and Europe.

Here are a few of the FLAAR Reports on innovative substrates to print on.





At SGIA we continued our research on PE, a technical textile used for billboards and building wrap. PE is lightweight and is significantly more eco-friendly than traditional PVC. Plus PE is easier to ship (due to its light weight). But all great products have also something they can't do, in this case, uncoated PE can't be printed with solvent or latex ink.



The PE we know the best is the ARIA brand. We have twice been to their impressive factory south of Guangzhou (a bit north east from Shenzhen and Hong Kong). The manufacturer, Yeong Jeou is backed by individuals and companies in USA, Malaysia, Taiwan, and China.

We look forward to visiting other factories of other brands of media in the future.

We visit with key industry people

It is useful to attend a trade show to meet with people in the aisles. For example we ran into James Gill of FUJIFILM Dimatix (Spectra printheads). We have known him for over a decade. Dimatix managers attend most international expos. We have found they are accessible and knowledgeable, about the industry in general in addition to about their printheads.

It was a pleasant to see the booth of Lubrizol.

We enjoy meeting people at an expo whom we first met literally over a decade ago in another country in their earlier corporation. So it was nice to visit with Rainer Esters from Germany, now General Manager of ca (color alliance).

Altogether it was possible to visit with key people in the world of inks, media, printers, cutters, laminators, and RIP software. Sorry there is not space to list or show all of them.

Trade Magazines at SGIA Expo

POPSign Magazine of Korea had a booth with two active booth attendants handing out their magazine. Normally magazines from EU or other countries to not exhibit outside their country, but POPSign Magazine is at expos all around the world.

The head person at Vd, vision digital, Mexico, was at the expo, Lic Mariana Leon Olea. This magazine had a strong page count of 64 pages, so twice the page count of another brand. Vision digital also covers photography equipment, which is an intelligent idea since it takes a good photo to create a great sign. If the image itself is iffy no printer can improve it.

Since FLAAR is bilingual and with experience especially living and working for years in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador and Peru, we like the Spanish language magazines also. You can see more at their www.vision-digital.com.mx.

Dealer Communicator and TRADE SHOW TIMES, Fichera Publications has an active team at printer expos across the USA. Their web site is www.dealerCommunicator.com

Most of the major USA trade magazines had a booth at SGIA and/or their magazines were available. There

were many, I list a few which I subscribe to since they focus on wide-format inkjet printers and related equipment. For magazines for which we write, or for magazines on whose Board of Advisors we serve, or for magazines which have requested articles we include their web site (although often we are so buried with our own trade show reports we regret that we can't always finish articles for magazines),

We also write articles for trade magazines in Mexico, Europe, Middle East, and South Africa. FLAAR is worldwide since we do not focus on commercial aspects; our interest is to provide documentation, evaluations, reviews, tips, and information which you would expect of a research professor at a university (in an earlier life).

Wide-Format Imaging has transitioned well over recent years from originally a reprographics magazine into coverage of wide-format printing. Wide-Format Imaging magazine had a nice state of the industry report.

Digital output magazine was of healthy page length (and its usual large page size).

Ken Mergentime, executive editor of Sign & Digital Graphics magazine, was also present. I especially enjoy the articles on ink by Dr Ray Work in this magazine. Their web site is <http://sdgmag.com/>.

We at FLAAR recommend trade magazines because they provide a steady stream of info on new product launches. FLAAR Reports does not reproduce new product launches since we do not reproduce PR releases. We prefer to wait and see the printer or ink or media out in the real world. So we do not compete with trade magazines. They already cover fully what they do well and there is no need for another web site to repeat what is already accomplished.

Our interest is learning about trends, learning what products don't work quite as well as their PR releases claim so loudly. Our interest is to provide information to distributors and print shop owners on which products are from companies who are respected in the industry.

We especially focus on learning, understanding, and then explaining the differences between products produced in Japan, in Korea, in Taiwan, and in China. I have lived six months in Japan and have worked with print, ink, and media manufacturers in Korea, Taiwan, and China. Plus FLAAR has attended printer expos in Japan, Taiwan, and China indeed we offer total coverage of the three biggest print expos in China every year.

As an example, many companies have flown FLAAR to Korea to inspect their printer, ink, or media factory. So we have first-hand experience in Korean engineering, plus we are familiar with the business culture of Korea. When a brand wants a FLAAR evaluation we tend to stay two days so we can become familiar with the products in a way beyond what you see at a printer expo.

These are all reasons why we do not seek to compete with trade magazines; our staff is pretty busy producing our FLAAR Reports based on in-situ studies around the world. In fact this is why it has taken so much time to prepare this initial report on SGIA since we were being flown to Istanbul, to California, etc much of the time. But all these evaluation visits enable us to have a global perspective not realistic if you have to stay with your family or at your office most of the time. Our family are the print shop owners, trade show organizers, distributors, factory managers around the world, and industry analysts.



Trade Show Organizer Booths

Most trade shows offer complimentary booths to trade show organizers. In rare instances even to expos which could be considered competition. But I did not notice a single trade show booth at SGIA (perhaps I simply did not see them).

Yet there were more FESPA expo staff walking the floor at SGIA than I have ever noticed at any other trade show. It would definitely be more helpful for the industry if expos had their own complimentary booth.

At the recent Sign Istanbul expo, I visited the booth of D-PES and APPPEXPO, the two largest printer expos in China: complete competitors of each other, but with their booth side by side.



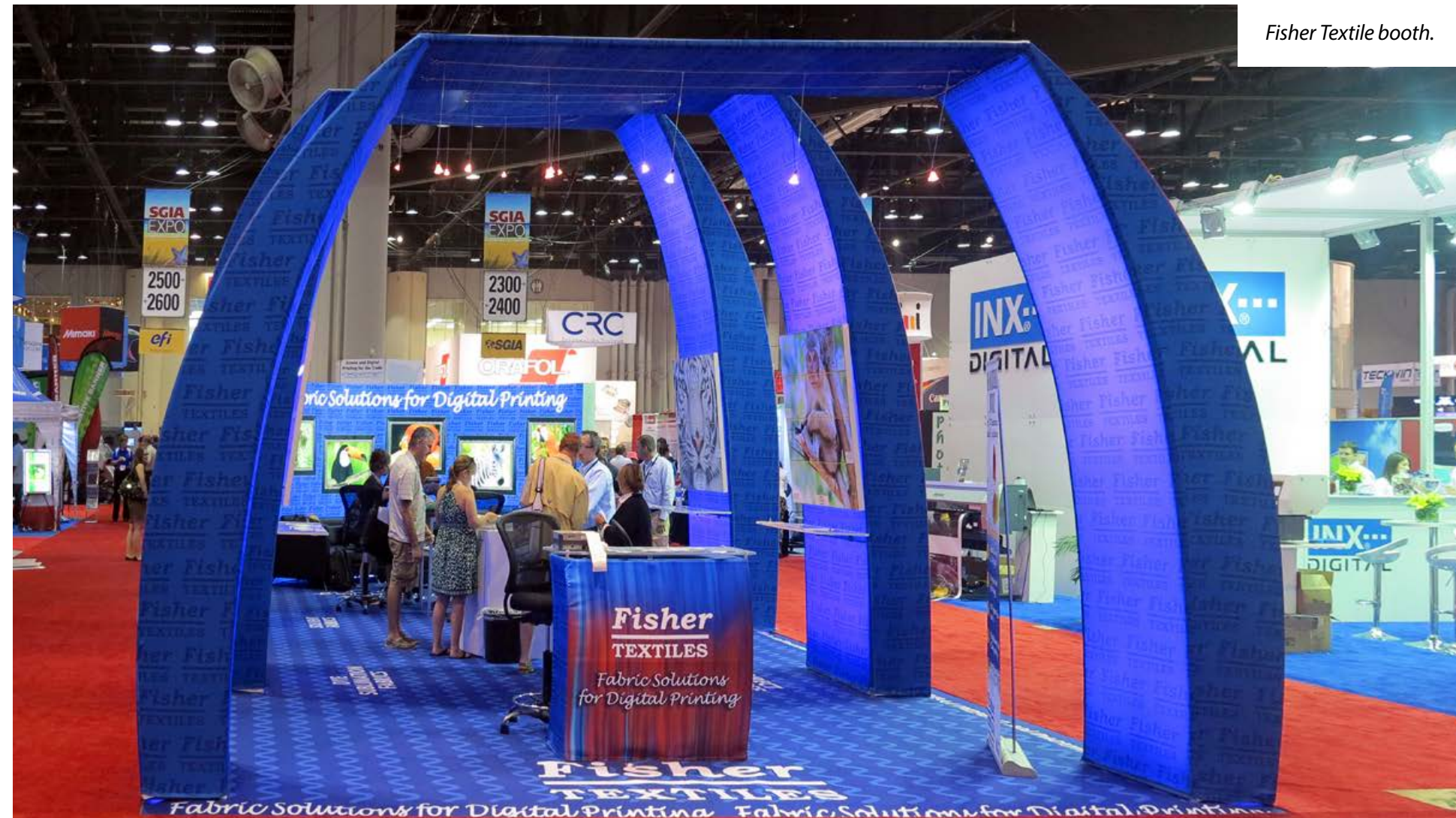
Great Booth Design Deserve Recognition

The purpose of evaluating booth designs is to assist exhibitors: distributors, manufacturers, and other people who realize that a better booth can potentially attract more people. Several booths at SGIA were really nice, either as an overall booth structure (Clear Focus and Fisher Textiles) or having a specific notable feature of a booth structure (Siser).

In other cases it was an individual display which deserves mention. Here are some of the companies which deserve recognition. I hope that the people on their staff, or the outside design team, will be credited with their good work.

Here are some of the well-designed booths or features:

- **Clear Focus**, the entire booth
- **D.G.I.**, fluorescent dye sub ink, water-based
- **Fisher Textiles**, their entire booth concept
- **Graphics One**, small chamber with fluorescent dye sub ink
- **Siser**, the end wall



Fisher Textile booth.



Clear Focus booth.

Global Imaging shown a stoning booth decorated with textile printed with UV printer.



The single most popular FLAAR Report which we have issued is about booth behavior. We titled it "how to make sure no attendee wants to enter your booth." We have also written a whole series about booth design "how to design a booth so unattractive that people will skip your booth."

Most readers realized that the purpose of our comments was to assist people to design more attractive booths and to suggest that booth personnel not bury their face into their iPhone or Samsung or iPad. And many attendees have commented that devoting your entire attention to eating your lunch inside your booth is only appropriate if your booth is selling restaurant fixtures at a restaurant or hotel expo. I thought that booth personnel have been flown to an expo to assist attendees to learn about products or services?



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- Overhead banners (usually hung from ceiling girders)
- Booth wall exteriors, especially long back walls of larger booths
- decorations inside the booth
- decorations on any wall you see as you walk by the front of the booth
- free standing booth decorations (usually not on a wall)

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Graphics One, exhibited small chamber with fluorescent dye sub ink samples.

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Graphics one booth.

Too many other trade shows have ossified and thus lost attendees and exhibitors

The unfortunate habits that most expo organizers do includes putting in double-width aisles in too many places. The reason is embarrassingly obvious in some cases: so they can pretend to be sold out; so they can pretend they have two full halls. And the most dubious reason is if an expo organizer uses aisle space to claim a larger square-foot expo occupation area. This is self-defeating since the empty space in the overly-wide side-aisles is too obvious.

Putting in a triple-width aisle is even more of a self-evident guise to be able to claim "floor space" is larger.

The best example of this frankly awful habit of multiplying the width of the aisles to fake floor space count, was VISCOM Milano in 2010 and 2011; the expo finally went even further downhill last year (still exists but only a hollow-shadow of what it was in 2007-2009). It was so weak in 2012 that FLAAR did not bother to attend.

Why, why do expo organizers simply not learn to face reality: double-width aisles is the worst way to "combat" fewer booths and smaller booth size. The Chinese expos are growing: a single Chinese printer expo is larger than all US expos put together. Naturally we support printer expos in USA, and we also encourage people to attend FESPA Digital (usually in the EU but in 2013 in UK).

On the subject of trade shows, VISCOM Madrid was the first international expo to really collapse due to the year 2008 financial crisis (which started in the USA). VISCOM Madrid kept attempting to have an expo in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. For 2013 sometimes they would claim to be offering one; other times they had no clear information. I was told that no VISCOM Spain was held in 2013. This kind of branding for Viscom is not good for their brand which is confusing enough as it is, since there is no standard name for each expo. FESPA is much better at branding their regional expos. We hope VISCOM can recoup, but it will take some frank admissions, drastic improvements, and .

SGIA is really doing a good job, and as a result are considered the premium sign expo for the USA. I would enjoy attending sign or printer expos in Canada, but so many other expos host our team to visit their expos in other countries that we have never attended any expo in Canada.

Co-locating is always good

The technical textile expo (of IFAI) was directly adjacent to SGIA and added a lot of exhibit space. I have spoken with several manufacturers who exhibited or attended an IFAI expo in past years (when the IFAI expo was by itself, not co-located with a larger expo). The impression given is that not much traffic existed in the aisles. As a direct result, not many wide-format inkjet companies exhibit any more. So moving this to adjacent to SGIA is definitely a good idea for the technical textile world.

But for 2014 they will not co-locate with SGIA, but instead have their expo by itself, in Minneapolis. I can remember with SGIA attempted to have its expos in cities other than Orlando or Las Vegas: Minneapolis is easy to each by plane and has an excellent highway system. But how in the world can IFAI have attendance in Minneapolis of even a fraction of what they had being adjacent to SGIA?

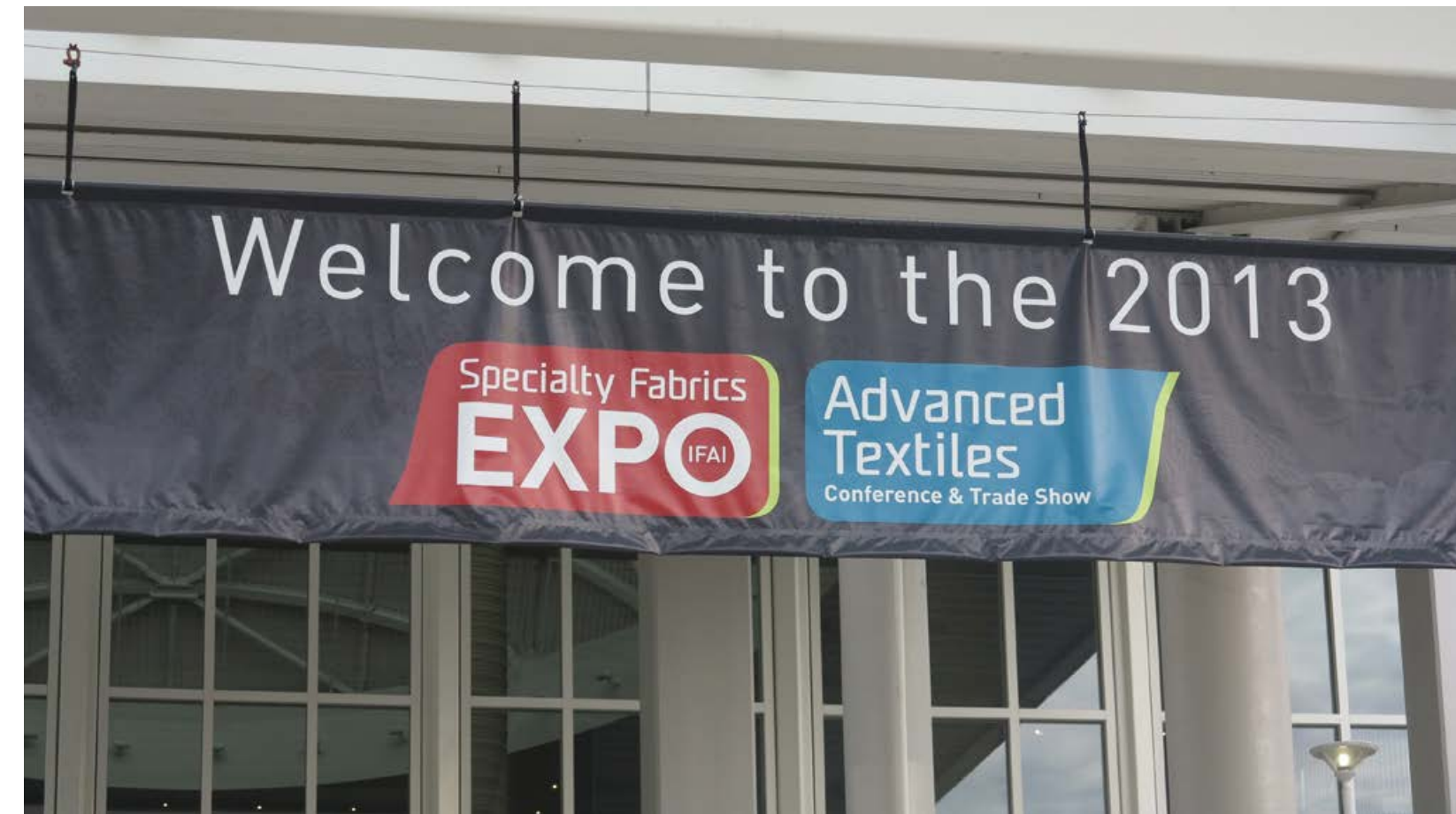
Since there was so much to see at SGIA I visited IFAI expo only on the last day. It was effectively empty of visitors, literally empty. Yet it had a lot of exhibits. Actually many media companies who normally exhibit at SGIA switched halls and exhibited at IFAI.

The only other trade show in the last ten years with as few visitors as IFAI on its last day was GlassBuild America in Atlanta about three years ago. I would never return to an expo as empty as that (actually it had lots of exhibitors, but on the last day close to zilch visitors).

I sure hope that the attendance at IFAI was better the first two days, as I would estimate it was.

IFAI is focused in part on architectural use of technical textiles. My family background is architecture, first Hellmuth, Yamasaki + Leinweber was the firm. After Yamasaki left to design the World Trade Center on his own (the twin towers in New York), my father formed a new company, HOK Architects (Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum). So I studied architecture at Harvard and two of my brothers are architects plus a cousin (another Hellmuth) is currently President of HOK.

Since architecture is part of my upbringing, I hope in the future that IFAI will return to co-locate with SGIA or ISA, and that the co-location will be implemented more than just being side-by-side.



What could be improved about the overall venue?

Two aspects of the Orlando airport have deteriorated into being worst than anything in a Third World Country; baggage took almost half an hour.

Waiting for a cab took even longer. The cab check-in system at the Orlando airport is the dumbest in the world. The attendant has to write down where you are going; the driver of each cab has to get out of their cabs, hike to the check-in table to turn in a ticket.

This wastes everyone's time. Las Vegas is better (though often there are not enough cabs at the airport during really busy hours).

SGIA, if I understand correctly, is moving their expo to Las Vegas for the next two years. It would be a valuable investment to have expo organizers interact with the local taxi associations. Taxi-waiting time at the Las Vegas airport varies tremendously; it can take up to 45 minutes during a busy hour on a busy day. Or just a few minutes during an off-hour or off-day.

What would be nice if it could be improved?

We at FLAAR Reports encourage people to attend and to exhibit at expos. We support expos. So we wish expos to be successful.

Unfortunately, some expos get stuck in a particular local tradition, and they keep repeating the same mistake every year.

Running people out of the expo at precisely 5pm is still an issue here. The "we are closing, please move out" message this year was not as rude as in the past two years. Those recent years the "get out now" message was excessive. It was mainly exhibitors who complained (since they spent their money to buy booth space and if they have a client who just arrived at closing time, they would like to be able to attend to the client without having a repeated series of rude messages broadcast at high volume).

Aisle markers too far away to see; in other words, either too small, or not enough for each long aisle.

At least the aisle markers were not overloaded with excessive advertising. An aisle marker should have the letter or number of the aisle, period. Aisle markers are inappropriate to use as billboards. At most a sponsor logo is understandable, but that is not the true purpose of an aisle marker. The best aisle markers avoid being money-grubbing by being clean of sponsorship messages.

But at least SGIA did not have advertising over the toilets or wash basins in the bathroom!



In many cases around the world the expo organizers fly us to the expo to be sure there is specifically a FLAAR evaluation of all aspects of their event. In return for the airfare and hotel for our team, we provide the expo organizers detailed feedback on how attendees felt, how exhibitors felt, and how their expo measured up to international, regional, and local printer expos elsewhere in the world.

These expo reports are private, and are to help the organizer significantly improve their event. We have 15 years experience attending expos in the USA and over a decade attending in Europe.

For the last six years FLAAR has the largest presence at Chinese expos of any research and educational press organization that we know of (due to the costs of sending teams to China many times a year, we can understand why a normal trade magazine will rarely send teams to so many expos so far away).



Analysis on Lectures and Workshops

Since I have lectured at printer expos and Open House events around the world, in both English and Spanish and German, I have gained experience in lecture programs for trade shows.

Any trade show which offers lectures, but does not make lectures a focus, results in lecture rooms being empty. SGIA and GOA focus on their lectures, so their programs do well.

A primary concern about a lecture is whether it is a sales pitch by a sales manager of one brand, or is it a helpful discussion of real-life pros and cons by an independent speaker. Since sales managers don't need to be paid by an expo organizer, this class of presentation is the standard slot-filler at most expos. Fortunately many of the sales managers are good public speakers and often visiting their lecture is a logical adjunct to visiting the booth of the same brand. So it is understandable that most lectures at most trade shows are brand-focused.

We enjoy giving lectures at Graphics of the Americas, every year. We can provide the audience with information on trends and on printer workflow products.

FLAAR lectured for many years at Graph Expo, but three years ago they changed managers, dropped their wide-format pavilion completely, and switched all their lectures to offset press topics!

Our Focus

Wide-format inkjet is our focus. There are already plenty of resources on screen printing. We enjoy seeing the doming technology (Mockridge Doming Systems is one exhibitor of this technology at SGIA). But our readers like us to concentrate on wide-format inkjet.

However we also keep track of inkjet even when smaller than wide-format: so we study 3D printers which use inkjet printheads. We also evaluate toner printers: office type and short-run digital presses.

During the recent years we have increased focus on T-shirt printers, since there are so many ink chemistries involved: toner, disperse dye, dye sublimation, and pigmented ink.

"Large format" is usually defined as printers 24" and wider. However there is an increasing number of desktop sized printers and mid-size UV-cured printers. Dozens, indeed scores of these are coming from China.

Unfortunately only some of these brands function adequately; usually the problem is that the inks clog too easily in Epson printheads; or the printers have low-bid components which cause the printer to fall apart or wear out before six months. Increased focus on evaluating desktop sized and mid-size UV-cured printers is essential. These are definitely not wide-format, but companies around the world ask our help to suggest desktop printers for them to print promotional items.

Chinese engineers are fully capable, and when they want to make a completely functional printer they can do this. But the traditional philosophy is to make a product as cheap as possible; so too often the printers simply don't function. We recently visited a distributor in the US who tested a mid-sized desktop UV-cured printer which worked only a few hours. We hear the same story from other users on other brands.





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Nicholas Hellmuth

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