

The Longier FR3750 hard at work at Eazy Print.



HANDS ON: The Longier FR3750

THE CHINESE BRAND LONGIER IS OFFERING A REASONABLY PRICED FLATBED PRINTER, BUT HOW WELL DOES IT PERFORM IN PRACTICE? NESSAN CLEARY ASKS USER PAUL SERELLIS OF EAZY PRINT IN EASTLEIGH.

From time to time you come across a new player in the wide-format inkjet printer market, such as Longier. Its range is built in China but now available in the UK and Europe courtesy of Gary Hall of Hallmark Equipment Services. The first of these was installed over the Christmas period at Eazy Print, based in Eastleigh in Hampshire.

Eazy Print mainly prints banners and exhibition graphics. It's owned by managing director Paul Serellis who says that he's planning to use the FR3750 to move into higher value work. He bought the FR3750 to replace an ageing Dupont Chromaprint 22UV and says that one of the main reasons he chose the Longier printer was because it was supplied by Hall, who had previously supplied him with the Chromaprint, noting: "His support has always been absolutely fantastic."

Serellis thinks the Longier does everything that he needs and has "been very well thought out". He explains: "It's got a proper roll-to-roll system for our PVC but also it's got the dedicated flatbed for boards so it's a good all-round machine."

He adds that whereas the roll-feeder is an afterthought for many flatbeds, the Longier roll system has been designed as part of the machine. Thus the roll feeder sits at the back and the media is stretched across the bed for printing.

He continues: "What clinched it in the end is that it has an upgrade path so we can add six extra heads and double the speed."

ABOUT THE PRODUCT

The Chinese made Longier range is distributed in Europe by Hallmark Equipment Services. The printers use UV inks with LED curing. The printheads are Konica Minolta 1024s, with one per colour and an option to fit up to 16. The standard set up is CMYK but options include light cyan and light magenta as well as white and varnish.

The basic machine is a flatbed UV printer. There's a roll-to-roll option but unlike most printers this is built into the printer so you have to order it from the outset.

The FR3750 takes media up to 2500 x 1450mm but there's a larger 3.2m wide version.

The prices range from £52,000 to £135,000.

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The Longier has six colours and there's an option to add extra heads for white ink and for a clear varnish. Serellis already has two extra heads set aside for the white ink but is considering buying four more and using them to double the speed instead. As it is, the machine is running flat out 12 hours a day and printing about 180m² of PVC a day.

Serellis says the cost of the ink is similar to the Dupont inks but estimates that he's using 30% less. He says that the maintenance is very quick, just a matter of giving the heads a quick wipe over. There's no formal service contract but Hall has come to check over the machine several times since it was installed at the end of last year. Serellis notes: "It was a big risk to buy the first in the UK and so we get a bit of extra support with that."

Serellis says that he's very happy with the machine and that the only downside is that the fastest three-pass mode isn't really usable because it causes banding so he runs everything at six passes. But he says that even so the machine is quite fast.

ALTERNATIVES

There are quite a few flatbed UV printers, though only a handful at these sort of prices.

MIMAKI

Mimaki makes the budget flatbed, the JFX200, which can produce up to 25m²/hr. It has a bed size of 2.5 x 1.3m, but there's no roll-fed option.

CANON

Canon sells the Océ Arizona range, which includes the 440, 460 and 480 available in two sizes of 2.5 x 3m and 2.5 x 1.25m and with an optional roll feeder.

INKTEC

Another option is the Inktec Jetrix KX series, which come with a roll-to-roll option. There's a choice of sizes from the KX3 at 1.2 x 1.2m up to the KX7 at 2.5 x 3m. These offer white and varnish as well as CMYK.