



The BURNING issue

Offering a disc duplication or printing service can be a lucrative business opportunity for printers. **Lucy Kennedy** reports

At first glance, CD or DVD duplication and printing may seem like a niche sector for printers to enter into, but this multi-billion pound market presents a lot of opportunities for anyone looking to expand their business. From printing disc inserts to packaging and distribution, disc duplication offers a variety of sidelines, opening the door to a whole new sector for printers.

Practically everyone in the UK owns and uses Compact Discs or Digital Versatile Discs

as a method of storing large quantities of information. This is reflected in the business world, where information which would normally be printed out, is increasingly being stored on discs, instead of, or at least to complement hard copies. Company brochures, product guides and training material are a few examples of the types of information which are commonly stored on discs.

If you are tempted to enter this market, then there are a variety of things to consider. A key issue is whether to invest in equipment and start producing the work in-house, or

whether to outsource the work to a specialist company. Each option has its advantages.

Buying in equipment

There are a number of disc duplication/printing systems on the market and some of the more recognised manufacturers include Primera and Rimage. However, the latest development to have happened in this sector over the last 12 months is the launch of Project 37 - a UV cure digital inkjet printer for disc decoration. The machine is result of a collaboration between Sun Chemical and Copytrax Technologies, a specialist manufacturer of printing and coating equipment for the professional CD/DVD duplicator market.

The machine has been in development for over two years and was officially launched in June this year. With a flying saucer as a logo and a name inspired by Area 51, this is the newest technology to touch down in the market for some time.

Priced from £300,000 Project 37 uses single pass technology. It is controlled by proprietary software, and incorporates a fixed

replication and duplication

"Whilst some printers may consider that investing in a duplicator will save them money, on longer runs, 'Replicated' discs (sometimes referred to as 'pressed' discs) are significantly cheaper to manu-

facture than 'duplicating' blank media. In simple terms, 'Replicated' discs, such as those produced for retail are 'pressed' from polycarbonate from a stamper, rather like the old vinyl record, and this is far

cheaper to produce in runs above about 1000 units than duplicating a blank disc which has the ability to be 'burned' by a laser on a PC or duplicator to add the data."

Comment from CDRUK.

inkjet array using 24 of Xaar's OmniDot 318 piezoelectric, drop-on-demand, multi-pulse greyscale heads, which provide photo-quality resolution. The machine features an average output of one disc every three seconds using specially formulated UV curing inks.

Robin McMillan, Sun Chemical Screen Division's Marketing Manager for Industrial Inks says: "Project 37 is the only machine on the market that offers 24-head, single-pass prints at 1200 prints per hour. It has highest quality apparent 800dpi and produces high gloss durable prints at economic print speeds."

Copytrax's Managing Director, Steve Woods comments on the business opportunities opening up to printers who take advantage of this sector: "Duplication and print on optical discs up to now has been the domain of larger companies with pressing plants, these were designed for large runs i.e. 10,000 plus. The market has now expanded and moved to a fast turnaround short run business with full colour artwork on the disc face, more marketing and promotional material as well as presentations and electronic manuals."

As well as Project 37, Copytrax has a range of desktop disc printing equipment. "With a minimal investment you can make a nice business for yourself. The printers who have got into this have done very well, as they can add another string to their bow but also offer the full turnkey of paper and digital discs in house," adds Woods.

Outsourcing

Obviously, there are drawbacks to buying in equipment - from staffing issues to gaining enough business to recover investment costs. Outsourcing to a specialist allows printers to test the water in a particular sector, without

“ Information which would normally be printed out, is increasingly being stored on discs, instead of, or at least to complement hard copies ”



Disc packaging is one of a number of services printers can offer as part of a duplication business. This one has been produced by CDRUK

committing fully and takes the immediate pressure away from the company.

One such supplier is CDRUK, a company which specialises in the manufacture of CD/DVD discs and packaging for a range of clients in the print industry. The company says it offers a one source outwork solution to printers and print buyers for the production of discs and packaging. According to the company, whilst for shorter runs, it could be cost effective for printers to invest in a small duplicating machine, a specialist supplier can offer the advantages of a higher capacity and quick turnaround along with full colour high quality print, direct to the face of the disc, in runs from as low as 50 to as many as 500,000 and beyond. This broadens options for printers as they are not confined to the types of jobs they can take on, due to not having the capabilities to produce them.

Outsourcing can certainly provide more scope for printers, with CDRUK offering thermal, screen and litho techniques for disc printing - equipment which in general requires a large investment. Many specialists also offer extra services, such as bespoke packaging, inlays and booklets to go with the discs.

The future

Despite fears that broadband and large internet downloads will sound the death knell for discs, both Copytrax and CDRUK remain optimistic that the market is evolving.

CDRUK names disc 'covermounts', (free CDs or DVDs of albums or movies used

commonly on the front of magazines or newspapers as part of a promotion), as a growing area within the sector and says new technology such as the Blu-ray and HD-DVD discs are also developing the future of this format. "The recently launched Blu-ray disc offers up to 50GB of data on one disc, enough to store a movie in High Definition quality, or even an entire television series in Standard Definition, eliminating the need to pack and store multiple sets of separate discs," comments a company spokesperson.

Steve Woods from Copytrax says Project 37 has been designed with the future formats of Blu-ray and HD-DVD in mind and that discs will always be a popular format. He explains that presenting company information on discs - whether it is a sales catalogue or company brochure - provides immediate access to the information for the user. A link to the same material via email however, is dependent on the user going to the link and taking time to download the information.

It is evident that there is money to be made in the disc duplicating and printing market, with a whole host of additional opportunities available to those who take advantage of this sector. However, as with any new business venture it important to exercise caution and perhaps consider testing the market through a specialist supplier and then, depending on the amount of business available, profits and run lengths, going it alone, could be a feasible option.

Tip | In-house production

"Ask your existing customers if they have or will have a disc requirement in the future, also do they outsource existing disc production and were they happy with quality and turnaround?"

Steve Woods,
Managing Director, Copytrax

Photograph courtesy of One to One magazine