

review

printer



By Bill Schiffner

When Gerber Scientific Products rolled out their Solara UV2 hybrid inkjet printer last year, it was positioned for shops wanting to print durable outdoor and indoor signs, point-of-purchase displays, banners, and backlit signage that were instantly dry and ready to install. Building on a number of features from the original Solara UV design, the Solara UV2 offers the option to print either flatbed or as a roll-to-roll and can accommodate a variety of materials up to 60-inches wide including rigid materials up to .5-inches thick. With only a small conversion process of the included flatbed tables, the unit can also be switched to accept different material types, enabling shops to run a full material portfolio for all kinds of output applications.

The Sign Shop

The first US shop to have the Solara UV2 was The Sign Shop of Birmingham, AL, who installed the unit in November 2005. "We are a medium sized shop with five employees," says Brad Ward, production manager. "We do a large volume of work with the small amount of people we have on staff. We handle a lot of real estate signage, wholesale signage, retail banners as well as metal signs."

Ward says that in the summer of 2005 they were discussing adding new equipment to their mix. "We were strictly a solvent printer-based shop but we decided we wanted to move into other areas by adding a flatbed, so we started doing a lot of research on that market. We liked what we read about the Solara and its extensive color gamut. We were the first in the country to beta test and purchase the Solara UV2. We liked it right away when it was installed in November," reports Ward.

The major reason they went with the Solara was its color gamut. "There are not many printers in the UV market right now that can touch this printer in color reproduction. Gerber's inkset and multi-drop technology allow us to produce a broad range of beautiful and vibrant colors critical to the production

Gerber Solara UV2



The Sign Shop's Brad Ward checks on a job coming out of their Solara UV2.

of stunning signs and graphics. The colors we are getting out of the Solara UV2 are amazing—we are printing reds and other colors that our solvent printer couldn't even dream of hitting. Brilliant colors that really pop, really outstanding reds, oranges and greens. That was the main reason we chose the Solara over other products in its class," he points out.

The Solara UV2 comes supplied with profiles for various medias. "Creating custom profiles or downloading third party profiles will not be an issue with this printer. Gerber obviously took special care in developing quality media models. Because there is no ink evaporation there will be virtually no color inconsistency between substrates from different manufacturers. In addition, setting up for various changing material thicknesses is a breeze. It takes roughly three minutes to switch substrates. We have the option to print roll-to-roll on flexible materials. When jobs require rigid materials, we use the flatbed. The conversion from one printing method to another is a simple, one-man operation. With minimal training virtually anyone can run this printer," says Ward.

He reports that the unit has also helped speed up their production cycle. "Since we've had it in the shop it has allowed

us to turn jobs around quicker with less labor involved. We can get jobs out in one day that used to take two or three days. We've taken what was once a three step process and made it into one. With some of our customers like real estate firms we now can just print it out and let it go to. Running the Solara UV2 takes only one man to do the job. In a shop of five that is very important. Plus the ability to hit vivid spot colors is invaluable to our company. Sign painters red is no longer a problem," he says.

Ward adds that the UV inks allow easy maintenance with low odor and no ventilation requirements or harmful VOCs. He also likes the printer's sturdy construction. "It is a very solid machine. It's built like a tank," he concludes.

Signmax

Across the pond in Great Britain is another Solara UV2 user—Glen Titherington of Signmax. "We had the Solara UV2 installed in October 2005. We were asked to be a Beta test site

by Spandex, who are the European distributors for Gerber. We chose the Solara because it is a cost effective introduction to direct to substrate printing. The print quality is fantastic," says Titherington.

Signmax is a sign manufacturer specializing in wide-format printing and CNC router work. "Our company was established in 1996 and we now have seven employees. Most of the work we do involves full color printing onto vinyl and banner as well as direct to substrate with the Solara."

Titherington is also impressed with the unit's color reproduction. "The unit's top features are the vibrancy of the colors compared to solvent printing and the ease of use because there is no drying time for the prints and no overlaying onto the substrate. The Solara has been a real time saver for us. It has helped my business in that I can now offer new services to my clients and because of the time saved on overlaying prints, the staff's time is freed up to do other things," Titherington concludes. ♦



Glen Titherington of Signmax with their Solara UV2 which was installed in October 2005.

Solara UV2 Highlights at a Glance

- **Printing Technology:** Piezo, drop-on-demand
- **Print Head Set:** One print head per color
- **6 Colors:** C,M,Y,K,V,G
- **Resolution:** 300x360 dpi native resolution, 600 dpi apparent resolution
- **Maximum Printing Width:** 59 1/2 inches
- **Inkset:** Gerber UV Inks—230ml cassettes



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