

RIISING COSTS, PRESSURE ON MARGINS AND THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE SET THE AGENDA AT THIS YEAR'S PRINTING UNITED EXPO. THE MEDIA DAY PRECEDING THE SHOW EXPLORED THESE ISSUES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RUNNING A PRINTING BUSINESS, FROM ASSESSING THE REAL PROFITABILITY OF JOBS TO PRESERVING EMPLOYEES' KNOWLEDGE. ON THE EXHIBITION FLOOR, THESE DISCUSSIONS CONTINUED THROUGH TECHNOLOGY PRESENTATIONS COVERING MANY SECTORS OF THE PRINTING INDUSTRY. ACCORDING TO THE ORGANIZER'S PRELIMINARY FIGURES, THE EVENT ATTRACTED 27,000 ATTENDEES FROM 100 COUNTRIES AND MORE THAN 850 EXHIBITORS.

Print under pressure. Finding an edge

Before the doors of the Las Vegas Convention Center opened on September 23, media representatives had an opportunity to hear analyses from PRINTING United Alliance. Held the day before the show, Media Day provided a broader context for the product launches and technology presentations that followed. Discussions about the state of the printing industry covered current economic challenges as well as changes in business organization, customer relationships and the use of data. Many of the findings addressed issues equally familiar to printing businesses in Europe.

SALES GROWTH UNDER SCRUTINY

One of the meeting's main topics was the difference between increasing revenue and improving profitability. PRINTING United Alliance's chief economist Andy Paparozzi pointed out that nominal sales growth can conceal stagnant production volumes and gradually declining margins. Higher costs for materials, energy, transport and labor increase turnover, but printers often have limited scope to pass the full cost increases on to customers. Sales figures alone therefore provide an incomplete picture of a company's position. Media Day also distinguished between cyclical and structural changes. Fluctuations in economic activity, inflation and financing costs require businesses to adapt to current

conditions. Meanwhile, developments in AI, data analytics, cloud solutions and robotics are changing how work is carried out and decisions are made. In the face of these changes, experience gained during previous downturns needs to be supplemented with new skills. Companies gain an advantage when they control costs more effectively, use data well and translate investment into better results.

EFFICIENCY FROM ESTIMATE TO INVOICE

Efficiency was discussed across the entire business. Every stage of handling an order deserves scrutiny: preparing an estimate, agreeing details with the customer, transferring data to production, completing the job, delivering it and issuing the invoice. Repeated tasks, unnecessary approvals and manual re-entry of information slow the process and take up employees' time. Reducing them can bring benefits even without changes to production equipment. This approach also informs decisions about business development. The meeting highlighted the importance of diversification based on identified customer needs and

Proceeds from the show support PRINTING United Alliance's year-round activities, including research, education and training. This connects the solutions presented at the Expo with work carried out between editions



a realistic assessment of the company's capabilities. Entering another print sector requires an evaluation of demand, skills, costs and expected margins. The popularity of a particular technology is only the starting point for that analysis.

KNOWLEDGE THAT LEAVES WITH AN EMPLOYEE

Amy Servi-Bonner, vice-president of PRINTING AI, presented a particularly interesting perspective on the practical use of AI. Her presentation addressed the organizational knowledge that printing

must rediscover relationships and practical details that their predecessor mastered over years of experience. This means longer onboarding, mistakes and additional pressure on the rest of the team.

Amy Servi-Bonner outlined an approach to retaining control of this knowledge by collecting, organizing and making it available within the company. AI can make this resource easier to use, allowing employees to ask questions and receive answers based on the experience of their own business.

Examples discussed at the meeting included agents supporting estimating and production management. Their role is to provide guidance relevant to a particular job function while recognizing situations that require human judgement. The sequence matters: first identify areas where knowledge depends on individuals, then capture and organize that knowledge, and only afterwards build the solution.

Control over data, access rules and responsibility for decisions remain equally important. Successful implementation should be reflected in business results: faster job handling,



According to the organizer's preliminary figures, the event attracted 27,000 attendees from 100 countries and more than 850 exhibitors

businesses accumulate over the years, often without recording it systematically. An experienced operator can anticipate how a substrate will behave at a particular humidity level, a color specialist knows an individual customer's preferences, and an estimator remembers unusual circumstances that can increase the cost of a job. Such information is often scattered among employees and never makes its way into job specifications, instructions or management systems. Its value becomes apparent when an employee leaves. Their replacement

more efficient employee onboarding or fewer costly mistakes. This approach provided a practical reference point for assessing the AI solutions on display at the show.

DIFFERENT SECTORS, SHARED PRIORITIES

PRINTING United Expo took place on September 23–25 and covered a broad range of print applications. Alongside commercial printing, the show featured technologies for wide-format printing, labels and packaging, apparel decoration, promotional products, industrial printing and mailing. It also addressed the needs of in-house print departments and graphics installation businesses.

According to the organizer's preliminary report, the event registered 27,000 attendees from 100 countries. More than 850 exhibitors occupied almost 93,000 m² of exhibition space. The total weight of equipment and technology brought to the show was approximately 2,200 tonnes. The organizer noted that all these figures were preliminary and subject to final verification.

The scale of the exhibition made it possible to compare technologies serving different markets and explore connections between them. For a business considering expansion, such an overview has practical value: it offers opportunities to compare applications, speak with suppliers and examine the requirements of a new sector. Visitors could assess both the capabilities of individual machines and their potential role within a broader service offering. In its post-show report, PRINTING United Alliance identified several themes running through different parts of the exhibition: automation, workflow optimization, AI, personalization, embellishment and production efficiency. Suppliers are developing solutions that streamline job delivery while enabling printers to offer products with greater value for customers.



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The Apparel Zone explored apparel decoration, while the new ASI Pavilion introduced opportunities in promotional products. The latter provided a meeting point between print service providers and the promotional merchandise market. Its inclusion broadened the perspective of companies seeking additional uses for their skills and new sources of revenue.

AI CLOSER TO EVERYDAY WORK

The returning PRINTING AI Pavilion was expanded for this edition. The dedicated area gave visitors an opportunity to explore practical applications of artificial intelligence in sales, production and business analysis within the printing industry. Bringing these applications together made it easier to navigate a subject that now touches an increasing number of business functions.

The insights from Amy Servi-Bonner's presentation also offered guidance on how to assess the possibilities on display. A specific problem can provide the starting point: handling enquiries takes too long, information is difficult to find, or a process depends on the knowledge of a few specialists. Defining the task makes it possible to determine what data will be needed, who will use the solution and how its usefulness will be measured.

The PRINTING United Expo programme included more than 200 educational sessions, panel discussions, demonstrations and additional activities. Exhibitor demonstrations

were complemented by Print Technology Tours supported by Taktiful and specialist meetings. Visitors could also watch graphics installation demonstrations.

The new Spill the Ink District provided a space for conversations and industry networking. Roundtable discussions organized in partnership with Print Mastermind added opportunities to exchange experience. Women in Print Alliance events also took place. This format brought technology presentations together with discussions about the day-to-day running of a business and professional development.

An expanded Student Day, organized in partnership with The Foundation for Graphic Communication Education, was another important part of the event. Preliminary figures recorded 174 students and educators. The programme included guided tours, demonstrations, career discussions and meetings with employers and technology suppliers. Seeing equipment in operation helped participants discover the range of careers available in printing and graphic communications.

More than 50 partnerships with media outlets and industry organizations supported the event's international reach, with Poligrafika among them. The organizer also emphasized that proceeds from the Expo support the Alliance's year-round activities, including research, education and training. This connects the solutions presented at the show with work carried out between editions.

The next PRINTING United Expo is scheduled for September 14-16, 2027 - once again at the Las Vegas Convention Center. By the close of this year's event, more than two-thirds of the exhibition space for the next edition had already been booked. For printing businesses, the task after September's gathering is to translate the possibilities they explored into their own plans: choosing investments, refining processes and preparing their teams to put them to use. AN