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Premium Commentary & Analysis

AI and Embellishments Dominated PRINTING United

By all accounts, the PRINTING United Expo, held October 22–24 in Orlando, was one of the most successful yet, if show floor crowds and a general sense of excitement and optimism are anything to judge it by. Here are some of the highlights of the show floor and the dedicated "Media Day."

By Richard Romano

Tuesday, November 04, 2025

Whew! The dust has cleared, the in-boxes have been tamed, the press releases attended to, and another PRINTING United is in the books. By all accounts, the Orlando show—held October 22–24—was one of the most successful yet, if show floor crowds and a general sense of excitement and optimism are anything to judge it by. In many ways, this year's show reminded me of the first PRINTING United Expo in Dallas in 2019—the industry was riding the crest of a wave and there was a sense of optimism the likes we had not seen in a long time. (But then, of course, was 2020, the less said about which the better.) Now it seems we have largely overcome the pandemic-era challenges and while new challenges remain, everyone seems eager to face up to them. It's very encouraging to see.

Trends and Influencers

Tuesday, October 21 was the dedicated "Media Day," which began with a session presented by Alliance Insights analysts Nathan Safran and Lisa Cross on "Top Industry Trends & Influencers," based on Alliance Insights (*né* NAPCO Research) surveys of the printing industry. The top challenge facing the industry in Fall 2025 is higher operating costs and inflation, which survey respondents indicated were outpacing price increase—or the ability to increase prices. And it's no surprise where the inflation was coming from: 90.3% of Alliance Insights respondents said tariffs had affected their business—and respondents cited the unpredictability of tariff policy rather than the tariffs themselves as the bigger challenge. Ergo, there is the possibility that these businesses could be delaying any major capital investments—even though they have their eyes of stuff.

So, in a nutshell, top concerns are:

- Increasing sales
- Maintaining profitability
- Business conditions/national economy
- Labor costs

Print businesses' priorities, then, are:

- Productivity
- Cost control
- Automation
- Capturing higher-value sales

In terms of automation, 87% of survey respondents felt that automation will make their businesses more resilient, and 85% said that automation was essential for staying competitive. And yet only 3% said their facilities were "fully automated," so everyone is still in the early part of their automation journey.

Despite concerns about cost control, 63.1% of survey respondents said they did in fact plan to make capital investments—and the top items were binding/finishing equipment, AI applications, and production inkjet equipment.

For the past several years, if one were to go to industry events and play the AI drinking game, one would be plastered in moments, and this year's PRINTING United was no exception, either in the opening Media Day session or on the show floor. Alliance Insights research was also highlighting its recent report *AI Adoption in the Printing Industry: From Curiosity to Competitive Advantage*.

Some of the highlights from the report that Nathan Safran cited were:

- 85% of those surveyed agreed with the statement "AI is critical to staying competitive in print."
- 83% agreed with the statement "AI unlocks new business opportunities."
- 42% agreed with the statement " those without AI will not survive."

Specific barriers to AI use include:

- Lack of industry-specific AI tools (those survey respondents need to check out the WhatTheyThink Newsfeed or walk the PRINTING United show floor).
- Lack of staff understanding.
- Lack of proven use cases.

In fact, though, those who are using AI report seeing increased profitability.

If you check out the report, there is an extensive section on those "proven" AI use cases.

Another theme of recent Alliance Insights research is "convergence"—although this is not a new trend and was in fact the impetus for the creation of the PRINTING United Expo to begin with. As Lisa Cross pointed out:

- 96% of print businesses surveyed serve multiple print segments.
- 94% said that print buyers are moving toward print providers that operate across multiple segments.
- 6% reported revenue increases by moving into new areas and 10.3% reported a profitability increase.

At the end of the day, the bottom line, said Cross, is "productivity not pricing."

Vendor Day

The bulk of Media Day featured a succession of select exhibitor presentations providing updates on what they were showing and/or introducing at the event.

Canon

Prior to the show, Canon had launched its new Colorado XL Series (see my write-up here), and at PRINTING United was also highlighting its varioPRINT iX1700 sheetfed inkjet press, the new varioPRESS iV7 B2+ sheetfed press (not on the show floor but via print samples), the imagePRESS V1350 digital press, and various wide-format printers from Canon's Colorado, Arizona, and imagePROGRAF lines. Canon also highlighted its broad range of PRISMA production and wide-format solutions.

Fujifilm

Fujifilm was showing its toner digital presses (the Apeos and Revoria lines), the production inkjet J Press, and its newest inkjet product, the wide-format Acuity TR. A 1.6m (63 in.) rollfed printer, the entry-level Acuity TR uses Fujifilm's AQUAFUZE water-based UV ink.

The company has also been heavily involved in digital embellishments, and was showcasing its new Silver and White specialty toners for the Revoria EC2100S and SC285S presses, where they join the existing Pink, Clear, and Textured Clear options. Fujifilm is also doubling down on embellishments by offering design classes for embellishments.

Durst/Vanguard

Durst was showing the latest units in its P5 series, including the North American debut of the Durst P5 500 TEX iSUB, a superwide 5m dye-sublimation printer with fully integrated inline fixation; the Durst P5 X flatbed—shown for the first time—that also offers a roll-to-roll option and up to 10 channels that can include white ink, varnish, and Fluo Glow neon inks; the Durst P5 350 HS hybrid printer, which offers speeds up to 930 sq. m/hr. (10,010 sq.ft./hr.) and which uses a double CMYK (D4) color configuration; and the Durst Tau 340 RSC E label printer, said to offer print speeds up to 170 ft./min. (upgradeable to 262 ft./min.).

Durst Group Company Vanguard used this year's PRINTING United to launch its latest wide-format printer, the Natchez, two UV flatbeds (the Natchez 300 and 3220) designed specifically for Natchez "challenging" substrates such as wood and corrugated boards. (Vanguard as of late has been naming its printers after

geographical features in its home state of Tennessee, this one inspired by Natchez Trace State Park.)
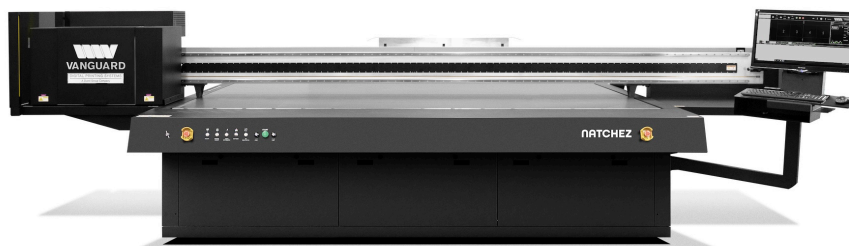
The company was also showing its recently launched Radnor hybrid wide-format printer, and its Harpeth automated print-to-cut system.

Kornit

Kornit's MO this year is that the major challenge for textile printing is that "the supply chain lacks agility," said Ilan Elad, Kornit President, especially when it comes to supporting shorter runs. Ergo, Kornit has been touting its MAX technology, aimed at replacing screen printing and thus enabling those shorter runs. The company was also showing its Apollo Printer, capable of up to 400 impressions per hour. But at its booth, the company was focusing more on customer interactions with show attendees, allowing them to provide real-life case studies on how they have transformed their businesses via digital textile and apparel printing.

Agfa

Agfa as of late has been naming its wide-format printers after large animals, and the "Unleash the Beasts" tagline is only one of the many puns the company has employed to refer to its extensive lineup ("a beast for every need"), which includes the single-pass Onset Panthera FB3216, which was being demonstrated with its complementary robotics for on- and offboarding. PRINTING United also saw the debut of the Jeti Bronco H3300 HS, a 3.3m hybrid printer. Other beasts in captivity (it's catching…) on the show floor included the Jeti Tauro H3300 XUHS (Agfa's fastest multi-pass printer) and the compact Anapurna Ciervo H2500. (I had been

unaware that *ciervo* is the Spanish word for deer.) There is also the SpeedSet Orca, a B1 inkjet press that has been designed to handle a wide range of substrates including folding cartons, microflute, and paper, as well as sign and display applications. (Why Orca? It uses water-based pigment inks.)
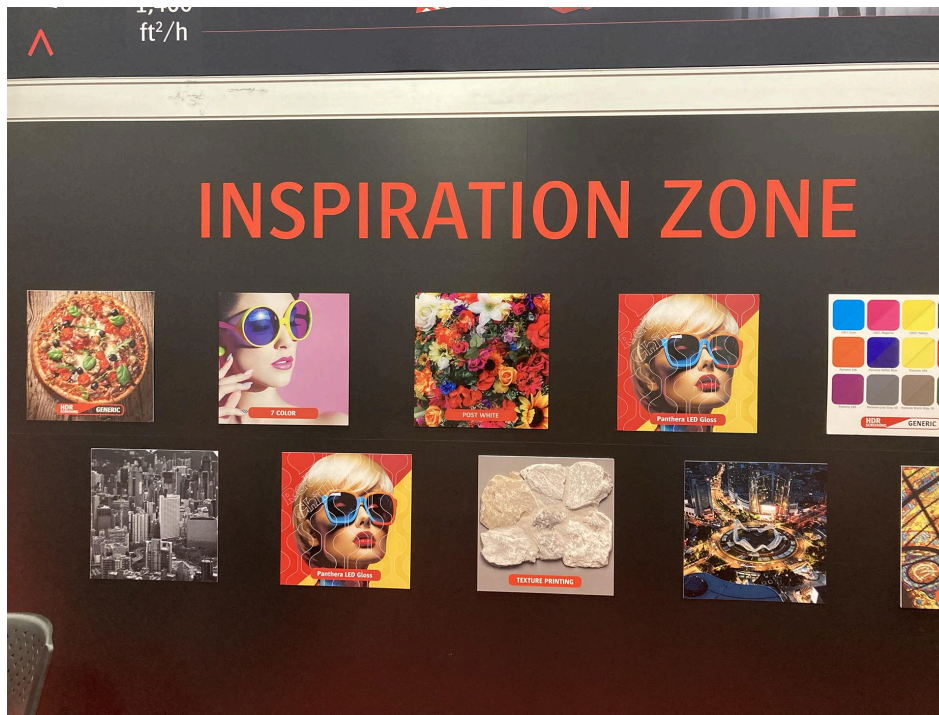
Müller Martini

Making its worldwide debut in Orlando was Müller Martini's Antaro Digital Perfect Binder, which is now capable of producing hardcover as well as softcover books—on the same machine, thanks to a new integrated endsheet tipper. Combined with the InfiniTrim "Robotic" trimming system and the Solema Mini-Sol stacker with Omega693 cobot palletizer, this is a highly efficient system for short-run digital book manufacturing.
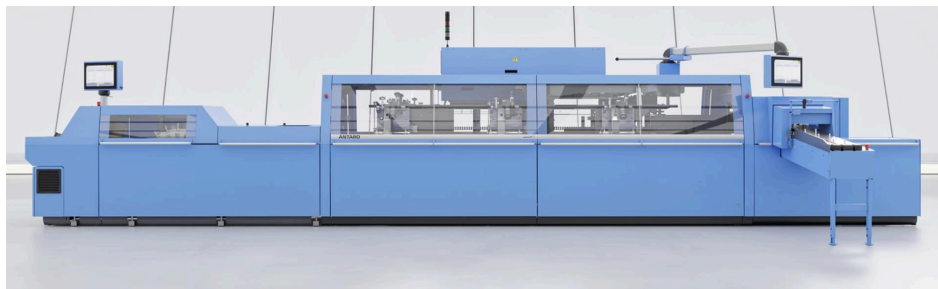
Müller Martini was also showcasing its many other binding and finishing solutions including the Hunkeler GEN8 EVO roll-to-stack solution.

Stahls'

Stahls' is a provider of equipment, materials, and services targeted at the apparel printing and decorating market, offering everything from heat presses, printers, cutters, and DTG printers, to heat transfer materials and fabrics, to education and support.

At PRINTING United, Josh Ellsworth—Manager of Stahls' TV and the overseer of the Stahls' On-Demand authorized dealer program —spoke about Stahls' Fulfill Engine, a complete e-commerce and production management solution specifically designed for apparel decorators, supporting all aspects of apparel production from order entry to fulfillment.

Stahls' has also just introduced its Liquid 3D dimensional printing feature which produces pre-applied decorations on hats and bags on-demand through Fulfill Engine.

Mimaki

Mimaki was highlighting its recently introduced JV200 Series eco-solvent roll-to-roll printers, the follow up to the CJV 150 (it's essentially the same machine, but without a built-in cutter), designed as a low-cost wide-format printer, as well as the TS200-1600 64-in. sublimation transfer printer.

For industrial printing applications, Mimaki was also showing the UJF-7151 Plus II UV-LED printer. Intended to be a "direct to object" printer, it has a 28 x 20-in. print area and supports objects up to 6-in. thick.

Let's See…What Else Was There?

A highlight of the Expo was a walking tour of the show floor presented by our friends at **Taktiful**, highlighting digital embellishment providers such as Konica Minolta/MGI, Scodix, Harris & Bruno, Xerox, and many more. It could be argued that this year's Expo was an Embellishment Expo, and given the size of the Taktiful tours, it seems that embellishments have finally arrived and have started to appear on everyone's radars. (And, hey, embellishments are certainly a lot cooler than AI.)

Scodix was one stop on the Taktiful embellishment tour.

As I wrote about last week, **HP** used PRINTING United to launch its HP Latex FS70 W, the "most productive" Latex unit yet.

Epson was showing its full range of display graphics and textile printing systems, including the launch of the 64-in. SureColor S8170 solvent printer, the company's fastest solvent printer yet. They also had a portion of their booth dedicated to "maker spaces," those increasingly common "labs" in schools and libraries where students or library patrons can…well, make things. In Epson's case, it was about using its textile printing equipment wht to make custo0m decorated apparel and other items. It was very cool.

There was of course a lot of other cool stuff to see at the show, which I'll be highlighting in future articles.

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About Richard Romano

Richard Romano is Managing Editor of WhatTheyThink. He curates the Wide Format section on WhatTheyThink.com. He has been writing about the graphic communications industry for more than 25 years. He is the author or coauthor of more than half a dozen books on printing technology and business. His most recent book is "Beyond Paper: An Interactive Guide to Wide-Format and Specialty Printing.