

Making a mark in the printing industry

Print Lab is Singapore's first and only one-stop print service solutions provider

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IT IS hard to picture the humble origins of local printing giant Print Lab when it is now equipped with a full suite of state-of-the-art printing machines and occupies more than 30,000 sq ft in a three-storey building.

In 2007, Print Lab started as a two-man venture with Muralikrishnan Rangan as CEO. As an engineering graduate from RMIT University, Mr Murali saw huge potential in modernising the traditional printing industry. Defying conventional wisdom that it was a sunset industry in Singapore, he established Print Lab with neither much capital nor the essential printing facilities.

The business got off to a rough start, but despite multiple setbacks in its initial years, Mr Murali's faith and passion in the enterprise remain unwavered.

In 2009, Print Lab successfully secured its first major client, OUB Centre. The company has since expanded to its current major customer base of 34, with 150 support staff.

Today, Mr Murali's can-do attitude remains the backbone of Print Lab's culture. According to him, no print job is too big or too challenging. Even though it is the market leader with 70 per cent market share, Print Lab is

prepared to scale greater heights.

In July 2014, a strategic merger of Print Lab, Alliance Graphics and Concept Print brought together distinctive expertise in the different areas of the printing business to foster a stronger brand – which retained the name of Print Lab.

"Today, print jobs that used to take customers three to four days with the involvement of multiple vendors can be completed in less than a day because we have everything they need under one roof," said Mr Murali.

By providing a combination of print and design services, Print Lab is Singapore's first and only one-stop print service solutions provider.

Price advantages

The growth of Out-of-Home Media (OOHM) advertising expenditure is accelerating in the Asia-Pacific with an expected compound annual growth rate of 8.6 per cent between 2014 and 2020, and it is estimated to reach US\$18 billion in 2020. OOHM contributes to over 60 per cent of Print Lab's total revenue, and Print Lab is working to secure more of such contracts with global partners such as Unilever and JCDecaux. Besides offering price advantages over printing services in the West, as a specialist in OOHM advertising, Print Lab collaborates closely with its customers to tailor to their intended impression and effect.



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In keeping up with the increasing environmental consciousness of newer generations, Print Lab is also transiting towards a greener supply chain. Besides using Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper and 100 per cent biodegradable soya based ink, over 70 per cent of the total materials used over their product life cycle are collected and recycled. This commitment to driving sustainability was also recognised by Unilever's yearly audit for environmental friendliness.

To survive the unrelenting expectation of the advertising industry, innovation has to be in the business DNA. A few years ago, seeing the burgeoning potential in ad digitalisation, which is more sustainable and cost-efficient, Print Lab began incorporating digital printing in its product offerings for a dynamic mix of ad mediums.

Print Lab also sends a special team around the globe to scour for innovative new products. An example would be the lightbox signage that originated from South Korea. The signage was initially rejected by local authorities for installation on exteriors of buses due to its bulky nature. However, Print Lab undertook extensive research to develop a prototype lightbox sticker that is merely millimetres thick. Today, they are seen on Tiger Beer bus advertisements in the CBD area.

Taking pride in its young and dynamic workforce, Print Lab promotes a proactive and participative culture where employees voice their ideas

without any judgement. Employees are also encouraged to bring their sparks of inspiration to fruition. This empowers everyone to spur innovation and encourages the nimbleness required to serve global brands.

Moving forward, Print Lab is turning its attention to e-commerce, which has revolutionised businesses and retail in the past decade.

In the works is a re-alignment of strategies to initiate Asia's first e-commerce printing portal which would allow customers to access Print Lab's advanced printing technology at low and affordable prices relative to their home countries.

Regional expansion

Print Lab is also aiming for regional expansion through printing everything in in South-east Asia that global firms such as Unilever, JCDecaux and McDonald's require. This ensures consistency at lower costs.

Talent recruitment, however, remains a constant hurdle to its HR department. Said Mr Murali: "Young Singaporeans today look for jobs that can offer them a decent salary and work-life balance. More often than not, they turn away from hard labour jobs such as manufacturing, or ones which requires weekend commitments."

It is not uncommon for the Print Lab team to dedicate overtime hours and weekends to fulfilling orders on time. Fortunately, the firm is always working on more offerings – such as a robust company culture and extensive talent development programme.

In the span of a decade, Print Lab

has defied the odds and achieved remarkable success within the printing industry.

To cement its status as a market leader and expand its presence overseas, Print Lab looks to fortify its position as an integrated one-stop printing solutions provider by maintaining its excellence in quality, innovation and customer service.

■ The writers are students from NUS Business School



Celebrating Singapore's Enterprising Spirit 2017

This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the E50 partners and the NUS Business School. Print Lab was among the winners in 2016. The annual E50 ranking is co-organised by The Business Times and KPMG, sponsored by OCBC Bank, and supported by Spring Singapore, IE Singapore, Singapore Exchange and Singapore Business Federation.

