ATC Groupe creates a promising future with EFI inkjet solutions

Based near Lyon, ATC Groupe is definitely one of EFI's most loyal French customers and, without doubt, one of the most dynamic print service providers (PSPs) in France as well. The company is a key player in the vehicle wraps, events, and decorative signage markets.

ATC's two new EFI printers – the 3.2-metre hybrid flatbed/roll-to-roll VUTEk HS125 Pro and the new 5.2-metre VUTEk 5r+ roll-to-roll LED printer – represent the next steps in the company's long-established working relationship with EFI.

"For over 25 years, our mission has been to keep ourselves at the forefront of technology and innovation. Our love of a challenge encourages us to innovate constantly in order to be able to offer tailor-made solutions and new products, sourced and tested by our R&D division," explains Christophe Aussenac, one of ATC Groupe's CEOs.

"Our first digital printer in 2000 was a VUTEk. Although there were already some wide format digital printers in the Lyon area, no one had a VUTEk; so we gambled on the fact that the equipment was different, one of very high quality and was the Rolls Royce of printers," says Aussenac.

Robert Combes, ATC's co-CEO and Aussenac's partner adds, "With VUTEk, we took a gamble by positioning ourselves at the high end of the market straightaway. It worked, the image quality was excellent, and it helped ATC look good too."

That first VUTEk was a gamble that the CEOs of ATC do not regret taking, as they have remained loyal to EFI ever since. The EFI VUTEk 5r+ is the 15th VUTEk machine they have purchased from EFI.

Innovators at heart

"We have seen the technology evolving with the transition from solvents to UV and from UV to LED, but we've also seen changes with ergonomics, loading
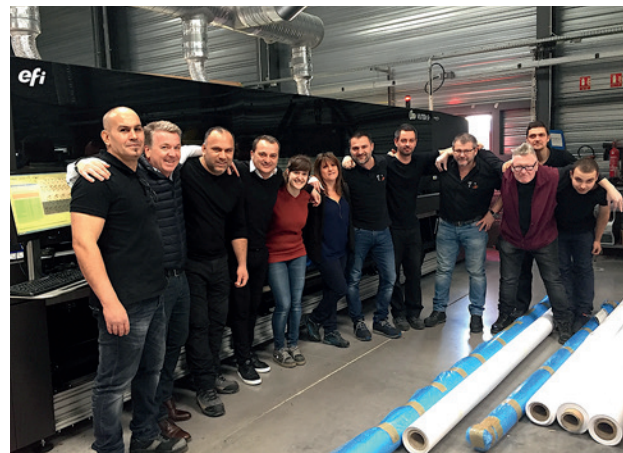
Challenge:

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Founded in 1991, ATC Groupe is a key player in the vehicle wraps and indoor, outdoor, and event signage market that is fully committed to printing signage, whether they are in wide or small format, and whether printing a single copy or a large order. The 64-employee company has been ISO 14001-certified since February 2013 across the entire company (production, administration, and installation) at its Lyon and Paris sites.

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Operator in front of EFI VUTEk H125 Pro.

and unloading concepts, soft signage graphics, etc.," Combes says. "EFI is a reliable company. They have not made technological missteps and have always been able to come up with the right answer to each of our challenges in terms of technology, innovation, and cost."

Part of the reason for the loyalty to EFI is that using top-quality VUTEk print technology eliminates risks when offering high-end graphics work. ATC looks for genuine partners when choosing suppliers – companies that are thorough when it comes to organisation, quality, and the environment. Remaining loyal to EFI has also enabled the SME to upgrade its equipment regularly and to introduce short depreciation cycles of three to four years maximum in order to maintain its technological edge.

"Digital printing is only one part of our graphics operations," says Combes. "But the machines are launching pads. It's up to us to invent the future by knowing how to use and get the best out of our printers to meet the challenge of innovation."

Solution:

"These days, with the HS125 and the 5r+, there's no need to compromise between speed and quality."

PIERRE GAIMARD, TECHNOLOGY AND COLOUR MANAGER
ATC GROUPE

View of the facility.

Punching above its weight

At ATC, the VUTEk HS125 Pro hybrid printer's main task is to print on rigid materials. "But we quickly discovered that the roll-to-roll function is very fast and efficient for large batches at high speed," says Combes.

The printer, which prints up to 125 boards per hour in production quality mode or 90 boards per hour in POP quality mode, uses six colours and two whites. The whites allow different configurations: they can be used for transparency, or as imitation micro-mesh (full colour-white-full colour) for the interior of windows, on large-size tinted substrate, or for other uses. "We get exceptional results using white when applying interior decoration or decorative signage for the first time," says Combes.

The HS125 Pro drives efficiency at ATC. As a highly automated industrial machine, it has an automatic bidirectional system and camera-controlled adjustment with points on the bed measured to guarantee perfect alignment and protect the heads. Plus, it uses ink tanks instead of cartridges for lower waste, with an RFID reader to open and fill the correct container.

"It's a perfectly designed printer; we had it working very quickly and just had to make some slight adjustments later on," Aussenac and Combes say. "It allowed us to apply for some large tenders and to put ourselves in a strong position for high-volume printing with no concerns whatsoever."

Seamless productivity in roll-to-roll printing

When they got to the stage where they needed to renew their machines, investing in a 5.2-metre wide printer was an obvious next step for ATC Groupe, "We already had the demand, so this allowed

Result:

"We do multi-roll printing with two or even three rolls of different widths without any problems. So, we can do all types of jobs, from the smallest to the largest, all with outstanding quality."

CHRISTOPHE AUSSENAC, CO-CEO
ATC GROUPE

us to offer very large formats without seaming, giving our customers higher-quality superwide-format graphics while reducing the time required in finishing.

"And, if you can do the hard jobs easily, the easy ones shouldn't be a problem," Aussenac says. "We do multi-roll printing with two or even three rolls of different widths without any problems. So, we can do all types of jobs, from the smallest to the largest, all with outstanding quality."

ATC's EFI VUTEk 5r+ printer has a seven-colour (CMYKcmk) plus white configuration. The greatest advantage for ATC is the improved loading system with almost no materials wasted — 20 to 30 cm at the front and back compared with 2 to 2.50 metres previously. This is a key feature for an SME that prints a large number of jobs on a wide range of media and has to set up and remove a lot of different materials. Inline slitters installed on the printer further increase functionality and throughput.

ATC's production manager and its technology and colour manager use the printers every day. They agree that LED is a real asset that allows fragile media to be processed at high speeds without risk. "The mercury lamps wear out and you have to constantly monitor the printer in case the material comes loose and makes the printing uneven," says Stéphane Thomas, the production manager.

"And, because it dries immediately, the job passes straight to finishing, which means we don't miss deadlines." The technology and colour manager at ATC, Pierre Gaimard adds, "These days, with the HS125, and the 5r+ LED as well, there's no need to compromise between speed and quality."

The two operators also note that the printers have evolved a lot in terms of ease of use and automation, making using them easier for users on a daily basis. This is confirmed by Aussenac, "Being part of a panel of European users, I can say that EFI listens to its customers and that our comments on the problems that we've come across, on improvements, and on after-sales service have been taken into account and used to make the machines more and more reliable."

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