

Digital printing: A fast growing vibrant sector in Pakistan

Digital printing is fast making its mark in Pakistan's textile industry. In just a few years the market of digital printing has shown remarkable growth. The global share of digital printing is only 5% at the moment at best. However, this share was only 2% just a few years ago. The growth in this sector seems to be exponential due to a number of reasons.

Digital printing is a process in which prints are directly applied to fabrics with the printer. Similar to the inkjet printers used widely in the offices and homes, the technology is used to print on different fabrics according to the demand. The great features of digital printing can be seen both in terms of operational as well as environmental advantages. The digital textile printing processing uses the remarkably reduced amount of water and the energy cost is a fraction of the conventional rotary printing. However, the biggest advantage from the perspective of a final consumer of products is the ability for customisation at a nominal cost. Digital printers can deliver in a very short time smaller lots as required to maintain exclusivity for high valued garments according to fast-changing designs and fashion.

In the last ten years the textile industry of Pakistan has been struggling with intense international competition due to the uncompetitive cost of production in Pakistan which is a result of high energy cost, low liquidity due to government export refunds being stuck in the pipeline for years about 200 billion Rupees worth and an overvalued Pakistani Rupee.

The exports have been stagnant by and large and declined in yarn and fabrics which are basically commodities with very low margins. The progressive and forward-looking textile manufacturers considered this dire export scenario and starting investing in the retail market of Pakistan with over 200 plus million population and a large middle class of about 80 million people. With the fast opening retail outlets and shopping malls, the demand for the apparel for women has seen amazing growth over the last 20 years.

The traditional apparel printing has been done on flatbed printers and rotary printers. The investment in rotary printing is very high and requires not only space but plentiful water and large print orders to be feasible.

The digital printing meets the demands of today's market perfectly. The cost of production of digital printing is coming down every day with the declining cost and availability of digital inks. It is important to note that the high cost of inks has been the main deterrent to the development of the sector. Today millions of metres of fabrics are being printed every day to meet the seemingly insatiable demand of discerning consumers belonging to all segments of our society. A perfect match of digital printing is the growth of online shopping made possible with the high-speed internet and 4G technologies. The retailers sometimes sell their first lot on the internet before the official start of the season.

The technology that makes this magic possible will be on display at the DPS World exhibition at Lahore expo centre from 20-22 October 2017 being organised by FAKT Exhibitions. The exhibition will showcase the best of digital printing technology under one roof. Leading exhibitors such as SPG Prints, MS Printing Solutions and among many other shall welcome the leaders of textile industry to offer them solutions to make it possible to achieve remarkable margins by venturing into digital textile printing.◆

