

‘Old’ is the new ‘new’: How Retrofitting Can Help Printers Pave the Way to Profitability

By Dario Urbinati, CEO, Gallus Group

With the past year having delivered a catalogue of complex geopolitical events and circumstances that continue to unsettle the market and throw doubt over company forecasts, there is sadly no surprise that today, many print businesses are facing an uncertain future. With profitability inextricably linked to press performance, it is only logical that in such difficult times, businesses often turn to evaluating their print solutions and exploring ways to drive productivity and efficiency, in order to ultimately bolster their bottom line. Critically however, in the current landscape, many businesses market-wide are also facing a lack of available funding with which to invest in new machinery, and are therefore increasingly cautious about committing to hefty capital purchases.

For many, this is where retrofitting could provide a vital lifeline, delivering a means of boosting performance and driving profitability – but without the considerable price tag of an entirely new print system.

Whilst the term ‘retrofitting’ might historically have conjured images of a few replacement parts in a dusty warehouse, we are now seeing a new realm of possibilities in how we can upgrade existing press setups, not to mention a real shift in how its perceived across the industry. Retrofit upgrades – which can include adding or amending auxiliary units to expand capabilities, modernizing machinery, or simply replacing outdated parts or software – enable businesses to transform their press performance, often turning them into highly efficient, highly industrialised, state-of-the-art machines that can achieve the most advanced levels of modern printing.

Crucially, retrofitting can deliver an all-important increase to profitability for converters, driving ROI – whilst also allowing them to flex with customer demand and market trends by adding or removing units based on current needs. In the current economic climate where interest rates are higher, margins are tighter and finding capital investment for new press purchases is more challenging – or completely unachievable – upgrading an existing press at a much lower investment rate is a great option.

If that weren’t enough, adding a digital print engine to a press opens the door to smart, connected printing. This is now widely considered to be essential in meeting some of the industry’s biggest and most serious challenges, including labour shortages, urbanization, parts supply shortages and rising costs. In addition, and for Gallus specifically, offering retrofit technology expands our business offering and enables existing Gallus solutions to deliver value for decades longer. Importantly, retrofitting technology also allows us to better support our corporate sustainability program, where presses are upgraded instead of being scrapped or recycled.

Classic machines, new thinking

In the printing industry, the most common technologies that customers retrofit are conventional presses – adding elements such as a flexo printing station, or auxiliary equipment like screen printing or cold foil. Customers are increasingly wanting to also add digital solutions such as full-scale digital print engines.

This is an option that we offer with the Gallus ESC 340, a conventional machine that can be turned into a full-scale hybrid solution with the addition of a Gallus Digital Print Unit.

When it comes to a customers' specific needs, the first job is to establish what kind of setup they have and their ultimate objectives. In all cases, presses are retrofitted to help solve certain challenges or meet growth opportunities. However, there are also cases where we see other technologies being added. For instance, when we retrofit machines, we often add state-of-the-art electronic components like bus infrastructure, HMI or main drive systems – indeed, we provide this for the Gallus TCS 250 press or the Gallus EM 260/340/410/510 series. Upgrading them ensures the availability of electronic spare parts that are currently hard to secure, extending their service window and truly future proofing them for years to come.

The art of retrofitting for success

Can any vendor provide retrofit services and implement them successfully? To do so, you need the necessary in-house skills in mechanics, electronics, software, applications and inks, to name just a few. Of course, it's also essential to have the required parts availability to provide those retrofit technologies – especially for seamless upgrades with minimal customer disruption. And once built and installed, it's also imperative to have a strong global network to support your customers in the field, wherever they're based. Founded during the recent pandemic and now forming a core pillar of the business looking ahead, however, our *Gallus Classics* division is proof that, when done right, retrofitting can breathe new life and new opportunities into businesses around the world.

In summary, retrofitting conventional systems with state-of-the-art technology not only extends the life and value of a presses for many more years, but helps meet some of the biggest challenges converters face today, enabling them to remain competitive and profitable. But, by also being able to add digital solutions, customers can benefit from the smart, connected print ecosystem and future proof their business. For me, this is imperative to the success of the labels and packaging market for today and tomorrow.