

ALPAC seduces Italian haute couture brands with the 5-meter all-in-one from ATPColor

In the heart of the Como textile district, there is a printing company that serves as a workshop of haute couture. Here, communication projects for the top luxury brands are created, and printing on fabric with sublimation inks finds its place.

“Tailor workshop” is probably a reductive definition for a company with 36 employees, which has been serving the communication needs of major Italian fashion brands for ten years. And yet, this is how ALPAC is defined by its general manager, Mauro Oliva, as he accompanies us inside the production department at the Rovello Porro (CO) headquarters in the heart of the Como textile district. He shares an image of the workshop that immediately reveals ALPAC’s philosophy: to offer visual communication solutions that are premium quality, tailor-made and turnkey at the same time. With that in mind, in early 2018, the production department was enriched with an ATPColor DFP2000, a 5-meter digital printer for printing on fabric with sublimation inks. The machine, introduced to expand the company’s soft signage offer, is equipped with an inline calender.

The value of a visual communication product offering also relies on the materials used

The ATPColor DFP2000 fits well with ALPAC’s business model, which focuses on small-volume production (or even unique pieces) with high quality standards. The company’s clients are the major brands in the fashion and luxury sectors, such as Prada, Giorgio Armani, Ermenegildo Zegna, Dolce & Gabbana, Pomellato, and Estée Lauder.

Oliva and his team design and produce fittings for display windows, fashion shows, corporate events and sales meetings, as well as solutions for showrooms and offices. They focus on the quality and uniqueness of their offer and aim to provide their customers with a complete solution. Each project starts with creative proposals — developed by the company’s art director together with the technical design department — continues with production, and ends with installing the finished product at the customer’s location.

Over time, ALPAC has equipped itself with roll-to-roll and hybrid digital printing technologies; finishing, packaging, and stitching machines; and a carpentry department. Next to the production area, there is a space where prototypes of complex products are shown to the customer.

It's almost obvious that a company like ALPAC is continually engaged in researching materials to increase the value of its creative proposals. The company has previously shown its willingness to seize the opportunities that textile printing can open up in the world of visual communication, buying two 160-cm Mimaki machines for direct printing on fabric with sublimation inks. And today, the company made a further step in that direction, becoming the second Italian printing company to install a 5-meter-wide digital sublimation printer.

A world to discover on the Italian market

In the last ten years, the world of visual communication has discovered the potential of fabric, but PVC is still predominant in Italy. Although looking ahead is a categorical imperative for ALPAC, a company cannot afford to cast its eye towards the future while ignoring its hallmarks. So ALPAC searched for and found a machine with features that would simplify its integration into production spaces and processes. First of all, the ATPColor DFP2000 is relatively compact, making it possible to introduce it in the production department without too much effort. And the machine is an all-in-one system, meaning it has an inline calender, which eliminates the need to move the printed fabric rolls to another machine for sublimation. The DFP2000 can be equipped with Ricoh or Kyocera printheads, and Oliva chose the former. The Kyocera would have guaranteed superior performance in terms of speed, but that was not relevant for ALPAC. Among the optional accessories chosen by ALPAC is the inline cutting system: the company, lacking a 5-meter-wide cutting table, preferred this solution to make its workflow even more streamlined.

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Interview with Mauro Oliva, General Manager of ALPAC

"Every machine we buy must be functional to our business model, which is based on providing the best service to the customer, from the design to the installation."

What does ALPAC offer its customers today?

Everything related to designing and producing a display window or a showroom, a space for an event or a meeting. Ten years ago, when the outdoor communication market began to suffer from oversaturation, we realized that we had to focus on a niche: design-production-installation, all under the same roof. As a result, today we talk directly with fashion and luxury brands buyers, and we are also able to develop projects starting from scratch.

How does soft signage integrate with your offering?

It's an important piece. We usually sell very tangible products, such as fittings made of wood, fabric, glass, or steel. But most of our value is in the service we offer and in our ability to bring a complete solution to the customer. Today, this has to include sublimation printing on a 5-meter size. It's the best on the market and we wanted our customers to find it here.

How did Italian customers welcome ultra-wide textile applications?

In the luxury market, the products have been welcomed with interest. But they are still something completely new, so customers still struggle to understand the real value of these applications. It's up to us to make an extra effort to get that value perceived.

What convinced you about the ATPColor DFP2000?

What won us over was the compactness. The machine's inline calender allows us to manage the printing process with simplicity. We evaluated alternatives that were more suitable for large volumes and 24/7 production. But they turned out to be incompatible with our business model, which envisages many different processes cooperating in production. We don't aim to maximize printing productivity. It had to be a functional choice to complete our service offering.

What other machinery do you have in place to process fabric-based products?

We have two stations for stitching, carpentry, aluminum profile machining and paint booth. We are able to provide a complete and certified lightbox, entirely in house.

How should the relationship between creativity and technology be managed?

It is always good for creative persons not to be limited. But they can't completely ignore technical limitations, otherwise we wouldn't be able to transform their ideas into products. Dialogue is needed, and we are fortunate enough to have the creative side of the process in

house. With full involvement from the very beginning of each project, it's easier to manage this potential conflict.



A lightbox realized for a Michael Kors window display.



A window display created for the Lacoste brand.



Working at ALPAC is not only synonymous with cutting-edge technology: there is also a very strong craftsmanship component.



Realizing the prototype of a complex installation.



The ATPColor DFP2000 printer installed in the production department of ALPAC in Rovello Porro (Como).



One of two flatbed cutting tables configured for finishing flexible material.