



Kodak brand still matters in media

April 6, 2017

In early 2012, Eastman Kodak licensed the worldwide distribution of its wide-format inkjet media products to Brands Management Group. It was probably the smartest things Kodak did that year.

Wide format inkjet media had until then resided with the Kodak Packaging Products Group. (Who knows why – it just was.)

And with all the massive change, all the trauma that once great American company had been through in the previous decade, one characteristic of the corporate culture which endured was its embrace of the rigid, stand-alone business unit – along with a ‘silo mentality’. Anyone who has ever had anything to do with Kodak in a business sense in the last 30 years or so will attest to the unbreachable height and density of those Kodak silos!

So until BMG took over, Kodak wide format inkjet media was sold pretty well exclusively to customers of the Packaging Products Group. (It’s probably called something else now – another Kodak cultural tick is changing the names of its business units at least twice a decade for no apparent reason.)

Prior to BMG coming on the scene, professional photographers were able to source Kodak inkjet paper via their own dedicated silo, Kodak Professional – but only up to 17-inch rolls. And without any great enthusiasm from Kodak Professional – they were more interested in selling the media which their own silo owned. Retail minilabs? Forget it – they were supposed to embrace the Kodak Apex dye-sub ‘ecosystem’ promoted by the Kodak Alaris Consumer Products silo. (And that’s worked out well, hasn’t it?)

When inkjet product specialist BMG announced it intended to sell Kodak Wide-Format Inkjet Media products to a whole range of customer groups – ‘to imaging professionals in the wide-format print-for-pay, professional photography, fine art reproduction, sign, in-house corporate graphics, point of purchase, advertising, exhibit, and reprographics markets’, it effectively liberated wide format paper from its former Packaging Products silo.

This was good news for third party distributors of Kodak products like Independent Photographic Supplies (IPS), the Australian and New Zealand Kodak products distributor to the professional and consumer photographic industry.

‘The Kodak name was still strong locally among store owners and consumers. Perhaps more so than in other parts of the world, people still saw value in the Kodak brand,’ explained IPS managing director, Stuart Holmes.

‘When inkjet media went to BMG they were more than happy to supply 17-inch – which was previously the limit in the Kodak Professional silo – but also 24-, 44-, 50- and 60-inch widths as well.

‘Just about every photo lab and many pro studios these days have a wide format printer.



What Kodak managed to realise was the convergence between the pro, graphics and consumer photo specialty markets.'

But the real challenge was to come – persuading BMG to sell even smaller widths, to respond to demand created by the new dry minilabs from Epson, Noritsu and Fujifilm which were slowly replacing silver halide film processor/printers around the world.

The key was to persuade one of the drylab manufacturers to agree to having Kodak paper supplied with its printers and inks. Without that level of cooperation there would be possible warranty issues down the track.

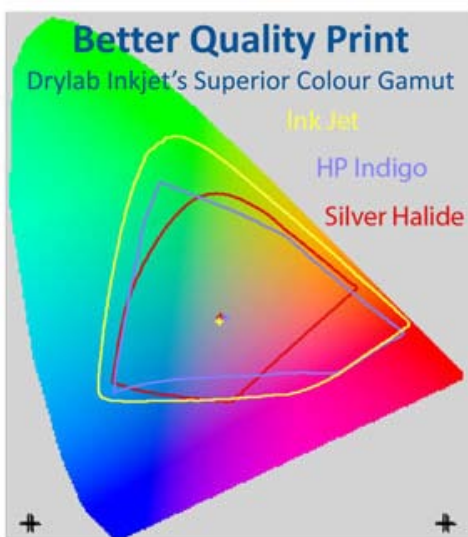
IPS was the official Noritsu distributor for Australia and New Zealand and approached Noritsu to test its dry labs with Kodak E Lustre paper.

Ultimately, Noritsu declined the opportunity, preferring to continue to recommend Noritsu-branded paper (gloss and semi-gloss surfaces) with its machines.

The IPS approach to Epson Australia was more successful. Epson had only recently entered the dry lab market with its D3000 and D700 printers and agreed for IPS to come on board distributing its printers and ink along with the range of Kodak branded K/Pro papers.



— IPS was instrumental in Kodak's inkjet paper range being made available in drylab widths.



Epson Drylab - Mapping inputs is easier in Epson Surelab Inkjet, due to the shape of the Profile & the overall larger Colour Gamut

NB - Kodak Endura Ag-x traditional, and Best in Market

'We then went back to BMG and asked can we have Kodak paper cut to 4-, 5-, 6-, 8-, 10- and 12-inch minilab sizes,' said Stuart. 'We explained that the Kodak brand still had value in Australia and New Zealand and so using Kodak-branded paper made the transition from wet to dry more comfortable for both stores and consumers with this brand equity.'

'BMG realised this could be true in other parts of the world as well, and agreed so long as we would commit to placing minimum orders.'

'This way our customers are getting all the benefits of inkjet – including larger gamut, and better image quality than silver halide – while not being exposed to dramatic changes like an unfamiliar media brand...They are selling prints with a trusted name, and with the same weight and feel of traditional photo paper. It even bends the way AgX does in the hand.'

'So we are saying to the market you are transitioning from one trusted product to

another,' Stuart explained.

'Half our business is still in traditional Ag-x photo paper, which we wholeheartedly supply and technically support, but when a customer wants to change technology, we want to make sure it's to some form of "real photographic product" rather than just digital toner press, like Indigo, iGen, or any other photocopier type output.'



— Academy School Photography switched to inkjet printing using Epson D3000s with Kodak paper.

The real proof-of-concept was towards the end of 2014, when IPS won the contract to install a bank of 13 Epson D3000 dry lab printers in a leading Australian schools photography lab, Academy School Photography and Production in Adelaide.

Stuart explained that it was the ability to offer the genuine Lustre surface Kodak-backprinted paper that swung the deal, as the 'look and feel' and the Kodak branding were all familiar to Academy's customers, thereby instilling confidence in the quality of the resultant prints.

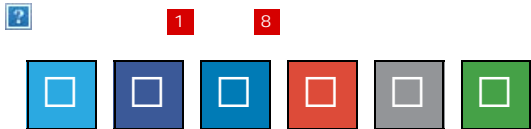
(An added benefit of inkjet over silver halide in schools photography, which often involves printing text onto photographs, is that inkjet text is far crisper than that achievable from the silver halide process. This holds true for photo books with captioning as well.)

BMG's willingness to respond to the innovative suggestions from IPS has paid handsome dividends, with the range of shorter minilab widths rolls now selling around the world. (IPS is painfully aware this is the case, as grey marketers are now trying to move into the local market with the same products!) It's also helped Epson establish a foothold in a new segment of the printing market in Australia and New Zealand.

The range has now been expanded from 'E' Surface Lustre paper to, Gloss, Metallic and now a fully flat professional Matte surface, with plans for more surfaces in the near future. This gives the specialist lab owner an expanded choice of printing media, differentiating themselves from the mass merchants.

Moreover, while Kodak Alaris has raised the price of silver halide paper three times in the past 30 months, the price of the Kodak Professional range of inkjet papers hasn't changed.

With high and ever-increasing electricity costs in Australia, and with silver halide labs using about 70 percent more power – Stuart says the price of inkjet photo printing compared to silver halide is now 'virtually line ball', while the quality delivered is arguably better, and the range of media is greater.



3 THOUGHTS ON "KODAK BRAND STILL MATTERS IN MEDIA"

John Atkins on [April 10, 2017 at 8:51 am](#) said:

Not sure what what real Photographic product is. I guess its an old thinking photographers idea. I think the practising photographers don't try and compare one with the other, they are all photographic prints even the Indigo, and they choose what suits

their business model. You commented Ink is better than silver, yes in some cases it is, but it is still more fragile than silver with its image sitting on top of the paper.

Reply ↓



Stuart Holmes

on April 20, 2017 at 11:15 am said:

Hi John, thank you for your response I guess the point of saying "real photographic" as opposed to a Printing Press 'ala Indigo Printing Press (or, the like), which I agree has its place, but we contend doesn't replace either Ag-x or Drylab. IPS has compared Colour Space Gamut Charts on all three technologies in fact (trad. Ag-x, Indigo Press & Inkjet Drylab) & Epson Drylab is by far superior to the other contemporaries, not that Ag-x is unsuitable it's just different. BTW, I've asked the ProCounter/ PhotoCounter Editors if they would mind including that Colour Space Gamut Chart into this article as a reference? And, also the modern Epson Drylab uses a true Kodak K/Pro Photographic Paper Base, with a Special Inkjet Emulsion Coating on it called "microporus" which is colour fast, therefore ink does not sit on the surface, it is locked into the emulsion, making it robust, long lasting with beautiful gradation.

To be clear though, IPS ardently supplies & supports both Ag-x & Drylab technology & output – It is your decision as the Lab Owner what suits your customers needs & your business best.

Reply ↓

Phil Gresham on April 21, 2017 at 1:00 pm said:

John wet is better than dry until your wet lab breaks down and the cost of repair is not viable.

Wet is faster but as Stuart says the two are fast becoming similar with consumable costs. The big saving for dry is in very low service and maintenance and much lower electricity. But I guess you are running on solar and Tesla batteries being in SA

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