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## Insight

### Digital textile printing leads to UK manufacturing growth

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Recently we have seen that the digital textile printing industry has helped to re-establish textile manufacturing in some of the least expected countries, including the US and Australia, and boosting these industries. [Read more here.](#)

Now, it looks like the UK is beginning to capitalise on this trend. Where textile manufacturing almost disappeared only around a decade ago, digital textile printing is acting as a catalyst to bring it back, and there is an opportunity for investment.

The recent Meet the Manufacturer event illuminated such investment potential, with each emerging business appearing to have found its own niche. Knitting machinery giant, Shima Seiki, primarily exhibited garments created by their core flat-knitting machinery product range; another growth area for the British industry. [Read more here.](#)



However, Richard Webster, general manager at Shima Seiki Europe, did comment that following the sale of the SIP 160F3 flatbed DTG printer to new UK printing business Faering. Read more [here](#).

Faering also exhibited at Meet the Manufacturer, and revealed to WTIN that while the concept of digitally printing on woollen garments has initially been hard for them to sell, the business is receiving much support from a mainstream retail brand, and hopes to begin printing soon. Faering was also nominated for the Innovation Accelerator Award at the show.

Embracing another gap in the market, Sole Juice in Sheffield, UK, has developed a proprietary technology for dye-sublimation transfer printing on ready-made shoes. The patented equipment dye sublimates patterns – which are originally printed on a foil-like substrate – onto the constructed shoe using Sole Juice's thermal imaging technology, as shown in the video below.



Another business finding its own niche is Befab Be Creative. Based in Edinburgh, the company is working with designers globally to provide print runs of only one to five metres. Short runs are becoming increasingly common, as consumers demand greater individuality and customisation. Befab's short runs are thus appealing to independent designers who are selling bespoke items into their local markets.

In addition, the business has specialised in printing on natural fabrics and rayon, with reactive inks. Printing on natural fabrics is considered more environmentally friendly than printing on synthetic fabrics, and is also something that fellow exhibitor Think Positive Prints took into consideration when setting up in the UK.







Designs from The Silk Bureau on display at Meet the Manufacturer

Originally founded in Australia, the business received so many orders from the UK that its owners elected to establish a second manufacturing site. Think Positive Prints only prints on natural fabrics with acids and reactives, and its niche, as representative Brett Platt explained, is that the company has a team of research colour scientists, who are solely committed to developing a proprietary "Colorbox colour management system", which he explained ensures customers' favourite colours stand out on their chosen base cloths.

The Think Positive Prints business sits alongside well-known digital textile printer RA Smart, in Macclesfield. RA Smart operates one of the country's largest digital print facilities, with the capability to print on cotton, wool, silk and polyester. The company has exhibited at all three Meet the Manufacturer events, and told WTiN it is a good platform to meet potential customers.

Also branching out to include new fabric types in its business model is The Silk Bureau. Though, as its name suggests, the business initially began digitally printing on silks. It has since expanded its range of substrates to embrace customer demand.



Lemon Head Prints is probably the newest kid on the block in terms of the digital textile printers at Meet the Manufacturer. The business is based in central London, and focuses on curating a community of designers in order to connect businesses and traders with creative people.

In addition to the influx of bespoke independents taking up the digital textile printing opportunity, some longstanding British textile manufacturers have also invested in digital.

One business to note in particular is Stead McAlpin, which was also in attendance at the event. The company has printed textiles since 1835, and recently invested in an Aleph TXb-160s printer. Having previously only used digital to sample print, the investment signifies the business' commitment to the mass production of digital textile prints in the future. The Aleph printer has been up-and-running at Stead McAlpin's Cumbria facility for two months, using pigment inks, with sales director Alan Patching revealing the company is so far "very happy" with the printer's performance.

***With all this activity going on in the UK, we're interested to learn more about what's going on in your market. Where are you seeing growth in this exciting industry? Tweet us @TFall\_WTiN***