

popular in China and across Southeast Asia. Seoul-based converter Tomatec focuses on industrial roll labels. Its president, Seok Yong Jeon, says that with a lot of what is produced in Korea exported, a trade war between the US and China would be bad for the country's economy. Components for cars are given as an example, which are exported to produce finished products that are then sold into international markets.

DIGITAL

Mr Park of The Printing Industry News notes that the market for digital printing has slowed recently with many companies waiting to see which direction the market and technology takes. 'Digital is still very young in Korea,' says Munther. 'HP has been penetrating the market for a while, but it is a cautious market and they don't just jump in.' Despite this, he identifies Korea as a good market for inkjet and one of the best markets in Asia for Durst. Within 12 months the South Korean territory accounted for seven Tau 330 installations. The total is now nearer 20, which includes 330 and 330 RSC models installed directly at DdP Story, along with a Tau 150.

Further printers that have already invested in digital are Xeikon users Taeyungyang Grand

(TPYG) and All New Digital (AND) Korea, and Tomatec, which includes an HP Indigo ws4500 among its press portfolio. TPYG senior managing director Jong-Su Lee explains: 'Runs are becoming smaller and smaller, so to grow we need digital printing capacity.'

At TYPG, digital printing sits alongside two Mark Andy flexo presses and three Sanki intermittent rotary letterpress machines within its equipment portfolio. It is a similar story at Tomatec, which has two Mark Andy P5 flexo presses, 5- and 7-color models, in addition to other, older equipment such as an Arsoma press. 'Our digital press is not profitable enough to run on its own and is mainly used to produce short runs, samples and very urgent orders,' says Mr Jeon. Offset is likely to be its process of choice. 'Only having digital can make it difficult to maintain volumes and productivity,' explains Mr Hong.

CONVENTIONAL

As such, digital is not having it all its own way in Korea.

Mr Lee at TPYG notes how government action to curtail the installation of new gravure presses is helping drive such changes. 'Gravure printers are used to wider and faster technology. Narrower, slower presses are harder for them. In a

way this puts label printers in a strong position, as they are more comfortable with flexo and offset printing, and finishing techniques such as silkscreen and cold/hot foil.'

Flexo is also replacing letterpress and offset in a number of instances. Junha Lee, managing director at converter Formtec, which runs a fleet of Comco presses, sees flexo as rising in prominence due to productivity, higher quality and stability. Tim Klappe, managing director at MPS Systems Asia, says: 'Flexo printing offers many advantages in label and film printing applications such as wraparound and shrink sleeves, and even flexible packaging. Compared to gravure printing, it's a less expensive solution, especially for smaller and medium print runs with its capability of faster job changes.'

The MPS press was pre-sold to local printer DPS and is the first from the Dutch manufacturer into Korea. The company's CEO Soon Suk Lee notes that the addition of the first MPS press in the country makes his company a pioneer. 'We mostly use letterpress technology from Japan, Germany and the US in Korea. I wanted to do something different, so chose a flexo press from a Dutch manufacturer. Fine Webtech produces products for

the household, personal care, cosmetics and industry market segments. Sunghwan Jang, vice president at Fine Webtech, comments: 'The Gallus machines have increased our productivity and flexibility, and enabled us to expand our range of substrates. With the Gallus machines, we are competitive and can offer our customers the highest quality with the shortest delivery times.'

THE FUTURE

With this and the fact that and Korea is looking to add conventional printing, and DPS investigating adding digital printing, it's easy to see how vibrant yet challenging the market in Korea is.

By product, TPYG is to look at flexible packaging and growing IML in the markets it serves, notably Korea's milk industry. AND Korea sees offering additional packaging formats – carton and corrugated – in its future. Mr Jeon says: 'The label market is growing; as a company we have regularly achieved year-on-year growth of 20 percent over the last 15 years. In the near future it will be nearer 15 percent as competition increases in the market.'

Munter concludes: 'I'd love to have more markets like Korea, definitely.'