Leaf D: Evolving With Technology

Leaf d is a promising entity in the industry of printing. It is an essential facilitator of daily living with a futuristic outlook of the industry. With a vision to transform society to the ‘next level’ while respecting diversity, the company is headed by an equally inspired and creative visionary. The company that started three years ago has grown from strength to strength. Its success is no mystery. Investment in state-of-the-art technology by the company has elevated the standards of the printing industry, hitherto considered a humdrum operation to a business with panache. Niroon Buddhasiri, the man behind Leaf d spoke on the company’s latest investment and the future direction of the printing industry.

By Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane

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Leaf d may seem like any other digital printer that has swept the Sri Lankan market as a revolutionary transformation of the conventional printer. Its inspirational owner rates his business as a cut above the rest. His index of success as a digital printer is quality. Quality as a hackneyed phrase is often sermonised by many business owners, without any real focus on technology development. Quality in a product, according to Buddhasiri, cannot be achieved without technology. “Technology in the digital printing industry is expensive. Unless we invest in the latest technology we will fail to satisfy customer needs and also fail to be on par with global standards and competitors,” said Buddhasiri.

Leaf d is a service provider for a range of products that include, Point of Sale Merchandise (POSM) such as X-stands, A-stands, Pull-up stands, stall stickers, sticker mounting, ticket books and vouchers. The business stationery range produced by Leaf d include business cards, letter heads, envelopes, dockets, leaflets, certificates and identity cards. Personalised gift items such as mugs, birthday cards, T-shirts, party hats, puzzles and cut-outs are also made in addition to a host of other product possibilities such as printing on wood, jewellery boxes, albums, pens, mobile covers, canvas, labels, plans, posters and many more.

The printing industry, according to Buddhasiri was lagging where printers were virtually struggling with a shifting trend in demands. Printers were hardly able to produce urgent demands owing to a dearth in appropriate technology. His investment in the high-tech HP Indigo 5600 is a bold yet confident step to convince customers of the exceptional difference in quality. “Any industry will have challenges, but a visionary must be ahead of such challenges. I discovered that many areas had been neglected by industry operators. Until recently, Sri Lanka had to look to India for the quality output that only a machine like HP Indigo 5600 can guarantee, and Leaf d took that great leap forward by making a colossal investment.”

The HP Indigo 5600 Digital Press is described as a versatile press with excellent digital offset quality, very much a requirement for growing commercial industries. A

seven-colour sheet fed press, this latest machine is so versatile that service providers like Leaf d can expand their service portfolio by offering greater possibilities to clients, which could be an investment in business growth. This machine has enabled the ‘print on demand’ trend, where a conventional printer would shy away, a company like Leaf d can transform even the simplest idea into reality. Hence, Leaf d describes itself as an essential facilitator of daily living, with the ability to help individuals and entities turn their dreams into reality.

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As a print on demand service provider, Leaf d is well-equipped for short runs. The cost-effective element of this process rests in manufacturing limited quantities within a short span of time. “This is a very cost effective process, where a book could be printed for just 500 rupees, whereas a conventional printer would charge 50,000 rupees. But, it would not be cost-effective if our technologyis selected to print 500,000 books, whereas 500 would be a reasonable amount. Our cost is static if the volume is one or more, whereas in offset printing although the initial cost is high, whatever the size of the volume, the cost will remain the same. For large quantities, conventional offset printing is still the best.”

The basic tenet that drives business at Leaf d is making a dream a reality. Where a conventional offset printer may refuse to print a single book for a potential author looking to showcase the work, the technology at Leaf d, promises to open vistas of opportunities for an up and coming writer or entrepreneur for that matter without the burden of having to find the capital to make that initial investment. Printing a single book is child play with the technology at Leaf d, which in the words of its inventive owner is to enable and facilitate people’s imagination to reach fruition. A celebratory event, in the family or in the business can be enhanced with a special product, within a short time of 24 hours. This efficiency and short turnaround time is owing to the technology that has been introduced. The initiative is commendable given the fact that just three years ago, when Leaf d was launched, the starting technology had been limited to two black and white photocopiers and a single colour photocopier. Three years hence, the company has invested 300 million rupees in machinery alone, where the HP Indigo 5600 is the only machine of its kind in Sri Lanka. “As a nation we cannot be proud of the dearth in digital print

technology. Service providers must realise that the secret to success is being on par with industry trends, which calls for new technology. Technology assures excellence in product quality, but it is expensive. However, unless we invest in appropriate technology, we cannot reach global standards. We are proud of our investment, because it is saving time and money." In recognition of the company's commitment to quality, Leaf d has been given the accolade of being the only FOGRA Certified printer in Sri Lanka and the 22nd in the world.

The fact that volume does not matter in digital printing offers the best opportunity for the printing industry. With zero-wastage, accuracy and high resolution, conventional printers are outsourcing their tasks to Leaf d, as they cannot afford to invest in such technology and given the trend and evolving market demands, they have attuned themselves to accommodate the requests of clients. This trend, according to Buddhasiri is a step in the right direction, because while he continues to earn a return on investment, printers do not have to become obsolete due to a deficiency in technology, but use the high-tech services available with other printers. This way, many levels of service providers in the process make gains. "I encourage conventional printers to take advantage of the technology with us, because it is cheaper for them in the long-run. Moreover, they will not lose customers".

In spite of the risk of making such a gigantic investment in the architecture of technology, Buddhasiri is confident of a return on investment. The future of the printing industry, he reckons will be fraught with issues concerning labour, as there might be a dearth in machine operators, especially competent ones. And, given the fact that the corporate sector is so concerned about short turnaround time, digital technology will develop further in response to such demands.

"In a country like Sri Lanka though, the runs will be small as opposed to India, which is all the more reason to venture out; to look for opportunities beyond the border. The global market is huge and there are opportunities outside. Singapore for instance is thriving on print on demand. It is a country with so much potential, which gives medium volume printers like Leaf d to take advantage of the trends in that country. Singapore is already looking for such services here because of its cost-effective nature. Australia and Singapore are definitely two countries that Sri Lanka can profit from, because the cost of operating such technology is very high for

them. Sri Lanka can be the hub of printing in South Asia, given that we achieve accepted standards in quality," explained Buddhasiri.

Leaf d is equipped with a printing, designing and finishing department, serviced by over 100 committed employees. The Design Department has 30 designers, led by an Art Director, who will guide the client from designing the concept to the final product. With a concept of print on demand, its operations are geared to work 24/7. With their headoffice in Papiliyana, Leaf d operates three fully-fledged branches at Horton Place, Nugegoda and Malabe, which are geared to tackle any printing requirement. The demands of the corporate sector have been met by the investment made by Leaf d. From last minute printing needs to personalised orders, Leaf d is able to turn out the product within a short span of an hour.

"Two industries that can exploit this digital sphere are tourism and hospitality, where there is a demand for fast printing, which can be catered to by the digitised printing technology. The pharmaceutical and telecommunication industry, as well as educational institutions that have emerged in large numbers have a constant need for such short run requirements. The State sector is yet to make use of such advanced technology. The HP Indigo ElectroInk UV Red creates prints that are only visible under UV light, which is an essential security feature that would prevent counterfeiting or forging government ID cards and certificates," opined Buddhasiri.

Incidentally, Leaf d was the first to print on wood and remains the market leader. Timber with a thickness of four inches can be fed into the machine, in addition to glass, canvas and other material. Copies of canvas paintings and photographs could be printed with the same quality of the original or if not better. When considering the range of tasks the machine can produce, Sri Lanka as a nation has been backward and has opted to stay within the confines of established practices. This, according to Buddhasiri is not surprising given the volatility associated with huge investment decisions. Regrettably, the fear of investment have forced service providers to merely dabble in just five per cent of what the industry is capable of producing.

However, Buddhasiri emphasised that service providers must do justice to customers by improving industry standards than being stifled by rupees and cents.

Investing in the HP Indigo 5600 was a brave and a smart move. He embarked on making this investment because he had immense confidence in the evolving Sri Lankan market and the competency of his workforce.

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Buddhasiri strongly feels that the conventional printer will in time be restricted to the tasks of packaging and publishing. The packaging industry though is thriving, just as much as the printing of magazines and as the quantities therein are large, digital printing will offer the most viable deal for an entity looking to print just 100 magazines or pamphlets.

At Leaf d, 2016, is marked as a year of training. In an evolving business environment, learning is a constant need and a process. The emphasis on creating a learning environment, helps to lead the workforce to where change is taking place and accord them a glimpse of where the industry is heading, which according to Buddhasiri would be Singapore, a ‘happening place’ as it were, where innovation is a constant feature.

“It is not always that my employees agree with my vision and investment decisions. I am a positive thinker, based on which I have taken many initiatives, which has been a step in the right direction. But I consider employee feedback to be important, because even the most high-tech machine is useless, without human hands. Therefore, employees are the assets that drive this business. The success that my business has achieved is due to technology based on a commitment to quality and a well trained workforce with the skills to make use of that new technology.”

“Every year a new product or the same product with additional features or an upgrade is introduced. I attend trade exhibitions and product launches abroad, which gives me the opportunity to study the machine and collect information; I wait and observe how a recent technology takes root in other countries.”

A Member of the Australian Printers Association, Buddhasiri ventured on his own following stints at Kelani Cables, Union Assurance and Avalon Papers. He established Ranpath Paper in 1998 and maintain its pride as a leader in the printing paper industry today. His shift to digital printing was propelled by the industry grappling with inadequate resources. His inherent flair for marketing and a keen eye for detail coupled with passion have groomed him to be a self-made entrepreneur. Quality, he claims has been the DNA driving all his initiatives. This mantra has been his constant yardstick in every aspect of his life and business. The change in the industry is inevitable and Leaf d has already taken the lead. While the ‘wow’ factor as client feedback drives him to make more investments, there still remains a gargantuan task to embed this drift for good.