

AI IN THE DIGITAL PRINT SECTOR



A Q&A with Mark Stephenson, Product Manager, Digital Printing and Press Systems, Fujifilm Graphic Systems Europe.

1 Where, as far as you are aware, is AI already being used in the digital print sector?

Low level AI has been with us for decades. Anything that is automated, robotic or that replaces a human decision or action qualifies as AI. A press that monitors itself for faults, software that controls colour or page layout or even simple mail-merge functions can be described as AI.

2 Are there particular areas where it will be deployed first – and why?

It's already started, as described in the answer above, but there is certainly more to come.

PWC define three waves of AI:*

- Wave 1 (to early 2020s): algorithmic
- Wave 2 (to late 2020s): augmentation
- Wave 3 (to mid-2030s): autonomy

If we've already ticked the box for the first wave, then the second wave – augmentation – where AI starts to work alongside humans, is already well under way. In the world of digital print software analytics and dashboards, such as Fujifilm getFIT, analysis tools are advising customers of the most cost-effective or time-efficient print technologies to use for a given batch of jobs. Also, cloud-based colour management tools like Fujifilm's ColorPath can predict potential colour consistency issues across a fleet of devices or a cohort of operators.





3 Do you think people running digital print companies understand the potential of AI to their business?

It's a mixed bag. Some are grasping the developments and seeing the benefits while others will see AI as a threat. But the print industry is, in general, very good at adapting and integrating new technologies. Those who ignore the benefits will unfortunately be left behind. The survivors will be those who engage with their suppliers and partners to discover what value they can bring to the further adoption of AI in their business.

4 By 2030, do you think AI will be making operational decisions within digital print companies?

This is the nirvana of the third wave, autonomy, where we have systems that learn and, rather than just follow rules, begin to make new, more efficient or appropriate rules. Systems that constantly improve and develop to become greater than their original

brief or concept and make decisions on their own. However, we will always need humans to keep things on track. There are many stories of chat bots that develop racist tendencies or recruitment systems that pick men over women when left to learn from data alone. I'd like to answer this question more comprehensively but my task management system is reminding me that I have more pressing matters that require my attention.



*<https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics-policy/insights/the-impact-of-automation-on-jobs.html>

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