

Getting the message across

Balloon printing machines can provide a good business, whether in a factory, back of the shop or even in a garage. Here we take a look at some of the machines available. Ben Pennington reports on what the market has to offer.

Theming an event can be crucial; you may be trying to convey an important message such as 'Happy Birthday' or display a logo or company name prominently. Whatever it is you are trying to achieve, a balloon display with that key message remains an extremely effective way of getting your message across in a non-intrusive way. The technology that allows you to access this medium remains the preserve of a few specialist providers, however. These include Belbal, based in Belgium, Italy's Rifco, the US's Polyplate and Gravurequip in the UK. These companies provide balloon printing services and supply printing machines to a wide range of customers from balloon manufacturers and suppliers to the promotional products industry and also the smaller wholesalers and shops that rely heavily on balloon products for their survival.

Belbal, Europe's largest latex manufacturer and printer, offer several different types of printing machines and accessories to cater for all kinds of customers. For the smaller industrial print facility they offer the BSP08A, which is a compact silkscreen printer that is fitted with a hot air quick dry tunnel producing 20 balloons per minute. For the more heavy duty users they recommend the BSP12A, also incorporating a quick dry tunnel but weighing in at 1875 lbs, more than twice that of the BSP08A, and producing 40 balloons each minute. The next step up is the BAOP16, described as the 'ultimate machine', it can produce all-over prints at the rate of 40 balloons per minute. All of these models use state of the art pneumatic and electronic technology, using a minimum of moving parts, resulting in high performance reliability. They are equipped with similar print stations using the same screens to provide a consistent high quality print.

While these machines are all suitable for the industrial balloon printer, Belbal do cater for the beginner. The BSP04 is recommended for small personalised print runs, printing up to 6 balloons each minute. It is targeted towards the retailer and is a more compact and lighter unit than its larger industrial counterparts. Printing on all four sides of the balloon and on the top it comes with a built-in compressor and also available is the BSP05 which is an add-on station for the BSP04, that enables multicolour printing.

Belbal also offer a full hands-on training facility and all additional parts, such as the frames, the washmate to clean screens and lightboxes, and inks can be purchased from Belbal, making it easier for the purchaser to source products together. It is this follow up that Penny Berrington, managing director, of Belbal UK commented on when explaining the advantages of their products: "we enjoy an extremely good reputation for the supply of well made printing machines and

maintain a strong relationship with our customers because of our personal customer service," she said.

Rifco, based in Italy, have a long history of innovation in the balloon printing industry. In 1986 they developed a method to print photographs in full colour on balloons that gained recognition internationally. In 1998 they introduced a revolutionary new technique which they call 'shades printing' which covers the globe of the balloon in multiple colours. And in 2002 they introduced a patented square balloon with 1 neck and 3 long tails which are used to tie to 4 other balloons.

Rifco offers a variety of printing machines ranging from semi-automatic and automatic silkscreen machines to manual and automatic offset machines and spray balloon printing machines. Prices start at E4,200 (£3,000) and range all the way up to E44,400. There is also an automatic feeder available which can be adapted to silkscreen printing machines and will run by itself for 24 hours without any manual input.

Polyplate, a US-based company, was established in 1975 as plate-makers and paper printers. In 1989 Max Gardner and his staff developed the first poly Skrener automatic silkscreen latex balloon printer, the Poly Skrener 1000. The 1000 model is a basic economical printer for one-colour balloon imprints. It requires only a 6 square foot space and minimal set up time per imprint and can produce up to 30 balloons each minute. Growth of the balloon industry and demand for multicolour and all-over printing led to the further development of the 2000 and 5000 models. The Poly Skrener 2000 is a fully automated silkscreen printer, again installable in a 6 square foot space. Requiring only one set up to print two colours on two sides, it increases production time and reduces down time and balloon waste. The 5000 model is an automatic, all-over silkscreen fully automatic five station printer. It offers numerous imprinting combinations and has advanced pneumatic engineering and heavy duty construction to ensure easy maintenance and long lasting performance.

Gravurequip recommend their 1 colour 1 side printer as a low budget machine, available in semi or full automatic versions, and which is easily affordable. The ideal starter package for the smaller business to print their own balloons. The unit is also designed to be mobile. They describe their 1 colour on 2 side/2 colours on 1 side printer as the industry standard, available at an affordable price with a production rate of up to 30 balloons per minute it is a full automatic, easy to use 10 station machine.

For more information, contact:

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Polyplate 001 419 289 7763 Rifco 00 39 776 617197

Printing machine	Printing colour/sides	Productivity (balloons per hour)	Machine dimensions (h,w,l)	Balloon dimensions (diameter)	Manufacturers' description
Belbal					
BSP08A	1 or 2 colours on two sides; 4 sides in one colour	1200	72" x 36" x 48"	5" – 16"	The printer of choice for the smaller industrial print facility
BSP12A		2400	90" x 53" x 75"	5" – 16"	A heavy duty industrial silkscreen print machine incorporating a quick dry tunnel
BAOP16	2 colour, 3 colour and all-over print facilities	2400	6ft x 10ft x 10 ft	5" – 16"	The ultimate machine offering high quality print facilities at high productivity
BSP04	4 sides plus top print	360	30" x 30" x 60	5" – 13"	For small personalised print runs, very useful for the purchaser starting out in silkscreen printing
BSP05					The BSP05 is an add-on station for the BSP04 enabling multicolour print

Rifco					
RS-00	4 sides plus top print in one colour	500	55" x 50" x 60"	10" – 24"	The balloon semi-automatic silkscreen machine
R-04	4 colours 4 sides	500 x 160cm	75" x 60"	10" – 18"	The balloon semi-automatic silkscreen machine
RA-01	4 colours 4 sides plus top print	2400/1500 (4 colour/ 1 colour)	110" x 85" x 75"	10" – 18"	The balloon automatic silkscreen machine
T-01	4 colours 4 sides	1200 x 140cm	40" x 45"	9" – 16"	The balloon manual offset machine
T-03	4 colours 4 sides	360 x 170cm	60" x 55"	16" – 18"	The spray balloon printing machine
T-02	3 colours 4 sides	2400 x 170cm	65" x 50"	9" – 16"	The balloon automatic offset machine
RF-02					Automatic feeder can be attached to RA-01 and T-02 and runs by itself for 24 hours

Polyplate					
Poly Skrener 5001	colour 4 sides		71" x 40" x 28"	5" – 20"	Semi-automatic silkscreen latex printer offering the most economical way to bring silkscreen imprinting to your business.
Poly Skrener 1000	1 colour 1 side	1800	66" x 56" x 48"	7" – 16"	Economical silkscreen printer adds a versatile dimension to your balloon imprinting business
Poly Skrener	2 colour 2 sides	2000	66" x 56" x 48"		Increases production time and reduces down time and balloon waste.
Poly Skrener 5000	4 colour 1 side or 1 colour all over	1800	66" x 68" x 61"	7" – 16"	The most versatile and productive silkscreen printer

Gravurequip					
1 colour 1 side	1 colour 1 side				Low budget machine – the ideal starter package for the smaller business
1 colour 2 sides / 2 colours 1 side	1 Colour 2 sides / 2 Colours 1 Side	1800			Affordable with a high production rate and print quality