720 Grad puts the HP Designjet Z3200 PostScript Photo Printer through its paces

At a glance

Industry: Professional Photography and Graphic Design

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Challenge

- 720 Grad was invited to trial the HP Designjet Z3200 PostScript Photo Printer. The company wanted to see how well it would perform in its design agency environment.

Solution

- The company put the HP Designjet Z3200 PostScript Photo Printer through its paces by printing a variety of images on different media and examining the results.

- HP Self-adhesive Gloss Polypropylene for intense color prints.

- HP Professional Satin Photo Paper for the rich detailed photo prints professional photographers require.

Results

- The HP Designjet Z3200 PostScript Photo Printer provides prints of impeccable quality regardless of the media used, giving the company flexibility.

- Embedded spectrophotometer simplifies and automates calibration and profiling processes even for non-expert users.

- Lifelike color and exceptional tonal range with less mixing of colors, thanks to the 12-ink system that includes new HP 73 Chromatic Red ink.

- Embedded TIFF, JPEG, and Adobe®Postscript® 3™ RIP enables direct job submission, queuing and nesting – saving time and money.

720 Grad is a small but elite agency that provides visual communication from the heart of Europe. Its lean infrastructure allows it to assemble a tailor-made team of experts for each project.

"People like a story which makes them the best medium for conveying messages. Images are essential to a story. And large prints are the most emphatic way to present these images," explains Peter Schäublin, managing director, 720 Grad. "We are an advertising and graphics studio with a deep affinity for photography. This means that we are faced with a wide variety of print tasks, from a 2m^2 mega photo print with the highest quality requirements, to lesser-quality draft prints."

A tempting invitation

With this constant need to produce high-quality large format reproductions, the company is always on the lookout for new print technology. When HP came calling offering the HP Designjet Z3200 PostScript Photo Printer for a trial period, 720 Grad jumped at the opportunity.

"I have exhaustively tested it with massive files, chased several files at a time through the wires – black and white, color, on various printing materials. And the conclusion is that the machine runs and runs. Even 3GB file didn't crash the system," adds Schäublin. "To achieve the best quality, I send the image to the HP Designjet Z3200 using the HP printer software. The great thing about this software is that it is installed on the printer and I can send data from any computer in the network via a browser with the IP address of the HP Designjet Z3200."

This 12-ink HP Designjet, with HP 73 Chromatic Red ink, delivers long-lasting gallery-quality prints in black and white and color. Calibration and profiling are made simple with HP DreamColor Technologies and the embedded spectrophotometer, which helps 720 Grad generate custom ICC profiles in-house. In order to put it through its paces, Schäublin selected a range of images which would push it to the limit.

Optimal quality on any media

"I first chose an image from a series taken in India, where some friends of mine run an aid project, and where I was privileged to take portraits of some of the widows. Using Adobe Photoshop®, I converted the 20-megapixel image to black and white and interpolated it to 80 x 120cm with 300 dpi," he continues. "What the machine produced far exceeded my expectations. The printer cleverly interprets and interpolates data in order to tease so much out of each file that by the time it's finished, I have a perfect-quality image."

Schäublin also experimented on a variety of media to find out how the HP Designjet would perform on different papers: "I have used HP Professional Satin Photo Paper, which provides a richness of detail that once again exceeds all expectations and a better optical density than the HP Premium Instant-dry Photo Paper. The HP Matte Paper has also really won me over for printing technical illustrations, while for photos, I prefer HP Matte Litho-realistic Paper. Because the paper is selected on the printer, not via the printer software, you can print the same job on different media without reloading."

Flexibility with high performance

The device also enables 720 Grad to send a PDF with multiple pages or several images to the printer at the same time, where a nesting function ensures that the pages are optimally arranged on the inserted roll. This feature has proven very helpful for everyday agency work. The overall flexibility of the printer, combined with its outstanding print quality, mean it can cope with even the most challenging of jobs.

"Every so often, something very special comes in. Wolfgang Franke, an outstanding 3D airbrush illustrator, called us after receiving a 70 x 100cm print of one of his illustrations that he was not at all happy with," says Schäublin. "We asked him to bring in the print and the file and sent the same data to the Z3200. This established that the colors on our printer are more precise and the degree of accuracy is significantly higher."

Following such a successful trial run, 720 Grad is keen to keep its new large format printer.

"The HP Designjet Z3200 is an excellent large-format printer so following the trial; we actually went ahead and purchased it. It is phenomenal to see what the printer software coaxes out of even deeper-resolution images," remarks Schäublin. "Anyone who needs to print large images with outstanding quality should seriously think about getting the HP Designjet Z3200, for example photographers, agencies and designers. And if you enter the price of the material used, the software calculates the cost per print. This makes the device very useful for environments in which different people or companies share the use of the printer."

With the HP Designjet Z3200 now in place for the long term, the company is keen to explore other solutions from HP's portfolio. That's why it also took the opportunity to put more HP technology through its paces by testing the HP Z8100 Workstation and the HP DreamColor LP2480zx Professional Monitor. Again, Schäublin was delighted with the results.

"I was skeptical because I don't associate HP with workstations but this machine was fast, stable and outperformed the Apple Macs we use in-house. The best part is the fact you can easily swap out components and customize the workstation. That gives us more freedom and means the device will last longer," concludes Schäublin. "Meanwhile, the monitor provides richer black tones, a more saturated color and an overall more faithful reproduction of the image. It's also more comfortable to use for long periods."

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