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PRODUCT OF THE WEEK

Fastbind BooXTer Duo

As on-demand enjoys a popularity surge, the BooXTer can bring fast and easy binding to the table, says *Philip Chadwick*

The Fastbind BooXTer Duo has been launched at what appears to be a sweet spot for the short-run book market. The demand for small and niche bits of kit has accelerated over the past few months thanks, in part, to companies having to tighten their belts financially in light of the current recession. However, according to Price, Fastbind product manager at UK distributor Ashgate Automation, there's a bigger market available that the company intends to target.

"The markets we are aiming for with this machine are the office, repro, photographic and public sector," explains Price. "The print market has also been impressed by the machine."

That shouldn't necessarily come as a surprise. For obvious reasons, print firms are becoming more interested in kit that doesn't cost the earth. Digitally printed short-run publications are increasingly common in book publishing. Therefore, having a bit of finishing kit that can bind a book in seconds can give a firm that little bit of extra kudos.

Back to school

Despite the extra firepower that it promises, the BooXTer is by no means a heavy-duty piece of equipment. While others in the market can churn out thousands of products, the BooXTer is pitched at a very different type of user.

As Price explains, buyers will be keen to use this desktop machine for one-off publications, photo albums or reports – in the education sector it's already proving popular for the production of yearbooks.

"It's been good for schools," says Price. "The photographic market is another one we're stepping into. The problem in this market is that PUR binding can't cope with photographic paper but the BooXTer can. We have yet to find a stock that doesn't work on this machine."

This is one of the key selling points for a machine that can bind documents 8mm thick, regardless of stock, and in formats from A6 up to SRA3.

The BooXTer's versatility is down to its powerful electronic stapling unit that can handle anything from photo paper and coated stock to normal copy paper. The maximum thickness of a cover is 5mm and the finished look and, in particular, the feel of the book, is a key selling point, according to Price.

"There is a foam edge on the book in which the stitch goes through," he explains. "As the stitch goes into the spine of the book, it sinks into the foam. The end result is you can't feel the stitch in the book, which is not usually the case with a softback book. Presentation is a strong point on the BooXTer."

So too is the price. The cost of a higher volume binder could set you back several thousand pounds – even some of the entry-level machines can cost as much as £10,000. In contrast, the BooXTer will only set you back nearly £1,500 – not a huge outlay if small volumes are your bread and butter. "We see it as complementing the rest of our Fastbind range of machines," explains Price.

That range of products includes the popular Fastbind Casematic – another table-top machine that can produce personalised short-run hardback covers. The Casematic can handle 100 books per hour, however Ashgate will not divulge the speed of the BooXTer machine, and there's a perfectly logical reason why.

"There's no mention of speed because it entirely depends on the operator and the thickness of the cover," explains Price. "For example, if you're binding something that incorporates 80gsm copier paper, requiring three to four stitches, it will take around 10 seconds per book. A larger SRA3 book is likely to take more time physically to finish."

Pushing the limits

Price says that the BooXTer can handle runs from one to 100. That said, there are a few customers that have pushed the machine, and themselves in the process, to the limit. "There have been some customers that have used it to bind around 1,000 to 1,500 books. That's quite a few man hours," he adds.

The incorporation of a foot pedal to work the machine can help the operator, as it leaves hands free to handle the material. Ashgate explains that this approach allows a user to "enjoy hours of continuous work without fatigue". Also



BooXTer Duo: the foot pedal allows a user to "enjoy hours of work without fatigue"

incorporated on the BooXTer is a transparent window allowing an 'optimum view' to the illuminated stapled area. The gravity-aided positioning deck and the adjustable back support is designed to aid the alignment of the pages.

Ease of use

"With this machine there is no set-up time – it is perfect from book one," says Price. "In the case of larger machines, such as perfect binders for example, you would need it to be operated by someone who has a specific knowledge of that kind of equipment. With the BooXTer, anyone can jump on and use the machine – you don't need specific print finishing knowledge."

Those kind of features are what Price believes make the BooXTer a unique product; it's likely to carve out a "good little niche market". So what competition does it face? Well, according to Price, there isn't anything directly comparable out in the market.

"We haven't come up against anything to compare it with," he adds. "It's the next evolution for Fastbind. People who come to see the product say it ticks all the boxes. We are quite excited about the scope of the machine and it really has

THE ALTERNATIVES

RENZ DTP 340M

While there may not be any direct competitors to the BooXTer, Renz has a desktop device that is capable of both binding and punching documents. It allows users to select any wire bind they like, including wire comb, plastic comb and spiral binding. Renz adds that the die changes are quick and simple, taking less than a minute.

Max book thickness	35 sheets (70/80gsm)
Binding method	wire/spiral
Punching width	up to 34cm
Machine dimensions	36x49x25cm
Max speed	20,000sph (70/80gsm)
Price	£1,950
Contact	Renz UK 01707 270001 www.renz.com

DUPLO AUTO BOOKIE PRO

Like the BooXTer, the Auto Bookie Pro is a desktop machine designed for applications such as newsletters, handbooks, booklets and local magazines. The stapling is controlled by an automatic timer, which counts down from the moment the set is placed in the unit. It will automatically process the document when the time is up. It can produce booklets in A4 and A5 sizes, while the machine has up to six additional memory settings.

Max book thickness	15 sheets (80gsm)
Binding method	staple
Max binding size	297x432mm
Max speed	seven sets per minute
Price	around £1,000
Contact	Duplo 0137 246 8131 www.duplointernational.com

massive potential. We have had only two shipments so far but its impact has been a lot better than expected. It's been a case of word of mouth, which can usually take a good few months. We have been surprised at the amount of interest."

Ashgate isn't the only kit supplier that has been experiencing more interest in smaller devices – it was one of the key themes around last week's Northprint show in Harrogate, Yorkshire – and the company is in a good position to gauge the mood of the market having sold Fastbind equipment for nearly the past 10 years.

"We have noticed an upturn in low cost investments," says Price. "People are willing to spend smaller amounts on products that will give them a high return on investment."

The traditional model of print-on-demand seems to be shifting. The concept that the market is the preserve of the copy shop or commercial printer is not necessarily the case anymore as companies look for in-house options for their print and finishing.

The BooXTer moves Fastbind firmly into that low-volume end of the market, which is an area that's worth exploring for equipment manufacturers right now. With the on-demand book market now buoyant, the BooXTer will serve a very niche, but potentially lucrative, market. ■

SPECIFICATIONS	
Max book thickness	8mm
Binding method	staple
Max cover thickness	5mm
Book sizes	from A6 to SRA3
Machine dimensions	46x43x35cm
Binding types	hard cover, stripe back, soft cover, staple back
Price	£1,495
Contact	Ashgate Automation 01865 891904 www.ashgate.co.uk

www.printweek.com

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