

Firpress Printers

Print firm turns the page on growth with digital upgrade

A print firm in Cumbria is transforming its future after embracing digital technology and skills to unlock growth and boost efficiency.

Firpress Printers, based in Workington, has spent four decades serving customers ranging from schools and councils to major organisations such as Sellafield, CeX, and even the Houses of Parliament. With most services delivered in-house, the business has built a strong reputation across the region and beyond.

When the business hit a ceiling, with outdated systems holding it back, Made Smarter North West developed a plan to modernise through a combination of skills training and a £40,000 technology investment, supported by a £20,000 grant.

The results are set to be transformative. Quoting times will fall from hours to minutes, capacity will increase, and better data will help the business make faster, smarter decisions.

Co-owner Kerri Black said: *"Made Smarter gave us the confidence to take a step we simply wouldn't have taken on our own. This was a major investment for the business, and we needed to know we were making the right decisions."*

"The combination of expert guidance, practical support and the skills programmes meant we weren't just investing in new technology, we were building the knowledge and confidence across the team to make it work. That's what's made the real difference."

The Challenge

Firpress offers digital and lithographic printing, graphic design, signage, and promotional materials.

Co-owners Kerri Black and Paul Williamson took over the business in 2003 and have continued to evolve the company. A pivotal moment came during the Covid-19 pandemic, when Firpress diversified into large format printing, now a key part of its offer.

Despite its resilience, strong team, and loyal customer base, growth had stalled, not due to a lack of demand, but inefficiencies in how the business operated. A detailed review found it was being held back by outdated, paper-based processes and disconnected systems across quoting, production, and customer management, including spreadsheets and legacy processes.

This resulted in duplicated tasks, limited visibility, and inefficiencies across the workflow. Quoting was slow and inconsistent, often taking several hours and relying heavily on the business owners, creating bottlenecks and reducing responsiveness. Staff were spending up to 20 hours per week on manual tasks, while errors and rework increased costs and waste.

Firpress also recognised it was not operating at full capacity, with inefficient workflows and limited real-time insight restricting its ability to scale and compete in an increasingly digital and competitive sector.

The Solution

Technology Advisor Sarah Woodhams and Organisational Workforce Development Advisor Jacqui Anderson visited the business and, through a Digital Transformation Workshop, helped define a package of skills development and technology investment.

Firpress secured a £20,000 Made Smarter grant to support a £40,000 investment in PrintIQ, a cloud-based Management Information System that brings quoting, production, scheduling, inventory, and customer communication into a single platform.

The system will automate workflows, standardise pricing, reduce manual data entry, and provide real-time visibility across the business, improving coordination and decision-making.

To support implementation, Kerri took part in the Leading Digital Transformation programme, developing the project alongside the course. In parallel, team members across the business completed the Leading Change for Digital Champions programme, building a shared understanding of the transformation.

The Benefits

Investing in both digital skills and technology is set to transform how Firpress operates, improving efficiency, increasing capacity, and supporting sustainable growth.

Quoting times will reduce from three hours to 30 minutes, while administrative time will fall by around 40%, freeing up to 20 hours per week. Improved scheduling will increase production capacity by up to 25% without additional headcount, while real-time tracking will deliver up to 95% visibility and reduce errors and rework by up to 10%.

These changes will also free up the management team to focus on higher-value, strategic activity.

Commercially, faster, more accurate quoting is expected to increase conversion rates by 20%, unlocking



new revenue and supporting the creation of three new roles. The business also expects a return on investment within 18 months.

Alongside the technology, Firpress plans to upskill 10 employees, ensuring the capability and confidence to sustain change. Digitising workflows will eliminate more than 10,000 sheets of paper annually and reduce waste, supporting its ambitions to achieve net zero emissions by 2040, aligned with SME Climate Hub and UK Government goals.

The Future

With PrintIQ in place, Firpress has a foundation for future integration

with CRM systems, e-commerce platforms, and other digital tools. The business is also expanding its product offering and targeting growth in new markets, including healthcare, food and drink, and education, alongside larger B2B and export opportunities. Kerri added: *"It's about having the right tools in place to make better decisions day to day, work more efficiently, and grow the business at a pace that's sustainable and right for us."*



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Kerri Black
Co-owner

