Fashion-minded

How to handle the most sought-after raw material for footwear and hand-bags.

Digital printing conquers the leather fashion industry: a swissQprint digital printer has helped a small leathercraft business to develop into a medium-sized enterprise that manufactures high-quality semifinished products for footwear and fashion accessories. Its name: Ricci Enrico S. r. l. of San Mauro Pascoli, Italy.

The story began back in 1972 in a small workshop where Enrico Ricci produced high-calibre fashion accessories by hand and supplied them to renowned footwear companies. The company still bears its founder's name, but now employs a 30-strong workforce on a production area of 3,000 square metres (32'291 ft²) and posts annual sales of two million euros. Ricci Enrico S. r. l. is headquartered at San Mauro Pascoli in the Italian province of Forlì Cesena. This region is also home to some of the world's leading footwear brands including Sergio Rossi, Pollini and Casadei.

The company is now managed by Gianluca and Elisa Ricci, the founder's children. They stepped in at the end of the 1990s to support their father with the ongoing development of the business. They began by introducing digital processing methods for cutting and stamping. As well as increasing production capacity, this move triggered a diversification process. Digital printing was integrated in 2013, in response to suggestions from customers

in the fashion industry. «We started out with a printer measuring 1,6 × 2 metres (64×79 in),» Gianluca Ricci recalls. A second one was added in 2015 to meet growing demand for the special effects that are possible with UV printing. However, the printing process was cumbersome and slow. «We needed a quantum leap in technology to move forward,» Gianluca Ricci explains.

Industrial leather printing

By installing the Nyala LED large format printer in September 2018, Ricci Enrico S. r. l. laid the foundation stone for industrial manufacturing of high-quality products. Gianluca and Elisa Ricci had already spent a whole year on market research as they evaluated a varied range of solutions. They eventually got to know swissQprint through the Fenix Digital Group – and were soon convinced: «Nyala LED met all our requirements for making the printing process simpler and faster while improving the visual appearance of our leather products.» Nyala LED is a UV printer that features a 3.2 × 2-metre (126×79 in)flatbed equipped with 18 print heads. A well-designed, stable roll to roll system conveys the material across the print bed and winds it up cleanly on the opposite side. The integrated control system regulates tension to constantly guarantee a perfect print image.

In addition to CMYK, the swissQprint printer at Ricci Enrico S. r. l. is equipped with light cyan and light magenta as well as white and effect varnish. Nyala LED prints with visual resolution of up to 2,160 dpi and features a diverse range of printing modes. .We make regular use of texture and varnish printing, Gianluca Ricci points out. Ink layers are printed exactly over one another to produce structures that can be felt and seen. Effect varnish enhances the look and feel of the printed products.

Simplifying complex processes

Leather is the most sought-after raw material for fashionable footwear and hand-bags. It is also gaining popularity in the garment, furnishing and decor sectors. Leather is a highly versatile material, but it is complicated to process – and that also applies to printing. «Nyala LED simplifies the processes thanks to intuitive operation – even the most inventive ideas can be realised in just a few simple steps. Gianluca comments. As one of a handful of suppliers of semifinished leather goods, Ricci Enrico S. r. l. has developed methods that combine manual craftsmanship with industrial production techniques. The in-house design department is constantly working to develop new solutions. Time after time, their experiments – such as this pattern for a woman's handbag – meet with a keen response from customers: The basis consists of white leather with pebble-grain embossing. .We placed a brightly coloured fish in the middle. Gianluca explains, .and we printed it with vibrant colours and soft gradients. The motif is printed as a layered relief, finished with varnish in places. The quality of the result

is excellent: our customers were enthusiastic about it and sent us similar orders by return of post. Gianluca is pleased to report. And this relatively simple process, he adds, has generated high added value.

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The printer grows with the company

The Nyala LED has increased productivity at Ricci Enrico S.r.l., enabling the company to expand its portfolio of premium products. The artistic phase of the work is still very time consuming. «But we make up for this time with Nyala LED,» Gianluca notes. Given that the company processes so many different orders, an operator working at Ricci Enrico S. r. l. has a permanent job on the Nyala LED that also offers plenty of variety. swissQprint offers a range of add-ons for its printers: to date, Ricci Enrico S. r. l. has only installed a few of them. Numerous options still remain open, so the company can rest assured: «In our industry, flexibility is a make-or-break factor – with Nyala, we can come up with innovations and are open to future developments.»

The UV inks play a major part in product quality. The flexibility of leather requires elastic printing inks with good adhesion. Gianluca is well aware: «The inks are stretchable and the varnish doesn't crack – we don't have any rejects.»

Gianluca Ricci expresses his satisfaction with the investment: «We've been producing with the Nyala LED since 2018. This is a robust and reliable machine of excellent quality. These advantages, combined with its low energy consumption, have helped to boost our return on investment.»

RicciEnrico

Company	Ricci Enrico S.r.l., San Mauro Pascoli, Italy
Website	www.riccienrico.it
Segment	Semi-finished leather goods
Established	1972
Employees	30
Printer	Nyala LED
References	International footwear and fashion labels