



CHINA SIGNS FLAAR EVALUATION



FLAAR Evaluation of ChinaSigns

www.Sign-in-China.com

INTRODUCTION

A decade ago FLAAR began evaluating wide-format printers. Our first evaluation was of a 36-inch Encad NovaJet Pro. Within two years we were asked to evaluate for HP and subsequently covered virtually every Designjet printer manufactured between 2001 and 2006. Today FLAAR evaluates almost every brand of printer, and every kind of ink.

But now FLAAR also evaluates the company that produces the products. A good example would be our recent evaluation of the substrate manufacturer, Obeikan. In other words, we evaluate more than a product: we evaluate a corporate structure, and management, in addition to their products.

Another expansion of the FLAAR review system is our increased coverage of inkjet inks and substrates. Just this month we added a major evaluation of PE (polyethylene) and an evaluation of the company that produces it: Yeong Jeou. So when ChinaSigns asked to have FLAAR visit and inspect their company in Beijing, it was perfect timing: here is a company that handles printer hardware, inks, and substrates (plus cutters, CNC routers and diverse other products).

Another reason why the FLAAR evaluation of ChinaSigns is initially of their corporate structure, organization, staff, and business model is because obviously no one can evaluate 8,000 individual sign-making products quickly. So our first phase of our intended long-range long-term evaluation is of the company itself. As soon as we can visit the factories and interview end-users, then we will begin to evaluate the inks, media, substrates, and printers.

First experience with ChinaSigns

At the large Chinese sign expos there are so many hundreds of booths in eight to ten giant exhibit halls that it is unrealistic to visit every booth. So it was not until my third year at APPPEXPO that I stopped at the Sign-in-China booth. And the reason was quite simple: I visit primarily manufacturers because there is barely time to visit all of them. Thus there is not time to inspect distributors.



Rissa Xia giving Dr. Hellmuth a brochure of ChinaSigns in APPPEXPO Shanghai 2009

But in 2009 a person was handing out brochures in the aisles about the Sign-in-China company. In fact I ran into her a second time either the same day or the next day. Then I walked by their booth and noticed she was there. So I was introduced through her to the CEO, Mr Liu. He knew the FLAAR Reports already, so we had a long discussion over lunch and then I was invited to their company dinner that same week.



Rissa Xia in ChinaSigns booth Shanghai 2009



ChinaSigns staff Shanghai 2009

Now, nine months later, I have returned to China to evaluate the company as a first step towards evaluating the products they offer

The company personnel

Since FLAAR is not a commercial company, we do not interact with a company, or a product, simply to make profit. This is one way of saying that if a company has sleazy people, unethical business practices, or even if they are simply unfriendly, there are so many other companies that are pleasant that we simply do not spend time evaluating a company that is not the appropriate kind. This is a long way of saying that the CEO and personnel of Sign-in-China are capable, professional, and the kind of personnel that FLAAR prefers to interact with. So we feel that the customers of this company will be content with the staff that is available to serve them.

Some of the Staff at Sign-in-China that you will interact with

Here are some of the international portion of the team you will see at APPPEXPO in Shanghai or the Beijing sign expo. Other members of the team of course stay in their offices even during trade shows since end-users around the world may not realize it is a trade show week and will request communication access every day. There are obviously many other employees but we show here the individuals you will most likely interact with yourself (so we show the international sales staff).

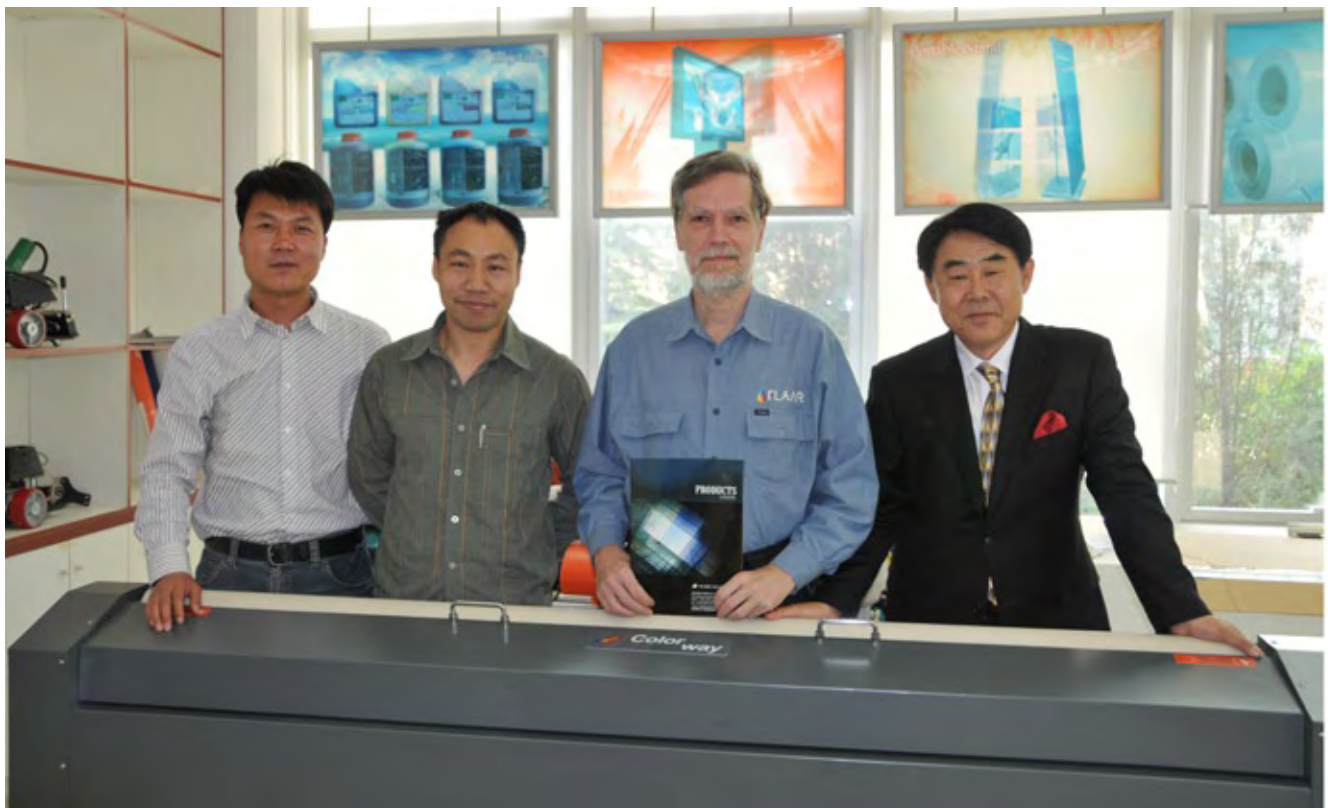


Sales department Chinasign

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|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>1. Arjen Deng</i> | <i>6. Rissa Xia</i> | <i>11. Hassan Jiang</i> |
| <i>2. Meryl Liang</i> | <i>7. Cathy Bai</i> | <i>12. Owen Zhou</i> |
| <i>3. Rita Lee</i> | <i>8. Ann An</i> | <i>13. Fany Chen</i> |
| <i>4. Jin Xu</i> | <i>9. Sophia Liang</i> | <i>14. Alex Zhan</i> |
| <i>5. Cecillia Sun</i> | <i>10. Robin Wang</i> | <i>15. Arthur Cao</i> |

The CEO is Liu Yanhang. Mr Liu has many years of experience in this industry. His business model is very clever. I can understand why his company is growing rapidly. I have had the opportunity over many days during my visit to Beijing to interview him and learn his corporate policies.

Mr. Liu and Dr. Hellmut holding buyer guides of ChinaSigns and FLAAR reports



Mr. Liu, Dr. Hellmut and Kuhmo president



Mr. Liu, Dr. Hellmuth and Rissa Xia during the FLAAR evaluation

It is traditional with most companies that a person from that company will be put in charge of negotiations with an outside company or individual. Rissa Xia is the person in charge of liaison between Hellmuth and Liu. You can meet Rissa at trade shows in Shanghai, Beijing, and sometimes in other cities outside China; I ran into her at VISCOM Italy last year.



Rissa Xia at ChinaSigns booth in VISCOM Milano Tradeshow

Timetable

It will take a while (and an increased staff) to evaluate even a fraction of the offerings of sign making products in the catalogs of Sign-in-China. FLAAR will evaluate primarily the UV printers first; then advertising material and inks. An evaluation requires knowing who the manufacturer is, and visiting this company to understand their quality-control and corporate philosophy. Since many products are sold re-branded, in such instances it is under NDA who the manufacturer is, but we will still need to have visited the manufacturer and inspected them. For the products, we obviously need to inspect end-users who are utilizing the various products.

Our first step is to evaluate the overall system: the www.Sign-in-China.com system and its catalog. The first step was to visit and inspect the company in Beijing. This evaluation was undertaken during early May 2010.

As an example, for the flatbed printer (the large ones), FLAAR has already inspected the company that manufactures these printers. However we have not yet inspected an end-user with an export model. Export models use better motors and components than the same machine made for sale within China. As soon as we can inspect an end-user in Europe or USA or Latin America, specifically with an export model, then we can comment on the UV-cured flatbed printers.

For the inks offered by Sign-in-China, I have visited the ink factory that manufactures several of these inks. But again, I would need to visit an end-user in North America or Europe and check on how these inks function in the real world.

After completing the above site-visit case studies, during 2010, my first priorities will be to

- Evaluate as many of the other inks as possible
- Start evaluation of the wide-format inkjet media
- Evaluate the workflow used by Sign-in-China for producing lenticular images.
- Evaluate the large-format printers other than those that I have already studied (the orange colored UV-cured machines).

The lenticular printing services are one of the first parts of the Sign-in-China offerings that we would like to inspect. This is because FLAAR has a long-time interest in 3D imaging.

Organization of Sign-in-China

This is a business-to-customer web site: not so much B2B. www.Sign-in-China.com is also not like other Chinese sites which are simply a giant portal of uncontrolled offerings. At ChinaSigns every product is personally vetted and selected by this company. No other company can slip some unknown product into their web site unknowingly.

But the main difference is that with other web sites (which are merely random classified ads from unknown agents), what recourse do you have if the product is defective? And more pertinent, what recourse do you have if the container load is not filled completely with the products you specifically asked for. This is the single most common complaint about ordering from China: that the shipping container that arrives at your loading dock may contain random products that have no relationship whatsoever to what you asked for. Now you understand why the first step in a FLAAR evaluation is the visit the company headquarters, and the second step is to interview end-users to see their level of satisfaction

ChinaSigns has an international presence, including offices in the USA, Russia, Brazil, France, Mexico, Thailand as well as Vietnam. Plus they have a booth at major international trade shows around the world including Dubai, ISA sign expo in USA, VISCOM Milano Italy and elsewhere.

For more FLAAR Reports: www.wide-format-printers.net