

Wide Format Falquon



Falquon revolutionises the flooring industry with a bespoke approach.

Company Name

Falquon

Industry

Wide Format

Founded

1994

Location

Pritzwalk, Germany

Services

Production of flooring surfaces for commercial and domestic clients

Website

www.falquon.de

Products

Océ Arizona GT UV Flatbed Printer

Overview

Twenty years after it was founded, laminate flooring business Falquon has been revitalised by a new management team with an innovative business model, powered by an Océ Arizona UV flatbed printer from Canon.

Taking over the established Falquon flooring business three years ago, directors Martin Prager and Alexander Grafenauer saw the potential to revolutionise the commercial and domestic flooring industry by developing more niche products and taking a more bespoke approach.

Balance of quality and productivity drives search for print solution. Their first step was to focus on high gloss floor coverings, giving Falquon a clear differentiation from more commoditised laminate products, and attracting a client base of high end interior designers and architects looking for a floor with the 'wow' factor.

Having seen the positive impact of this specialisation on the business, they set themselves the goal of introducing a range of single colour laminate flooring in a groundbreaking colour palette, offering unprecedented colour choice to customers.

Anticipating growing demand for more personalised interiors, the pair also wanted to give clients - whether home owners or corporations - the option to create floors featuring individual images or logos to achieve something utterly unique.

Either way, the business plan involved stepping away from the high-volume production of a generic product, and moving towards the fulfilment of small individual orders. "Our mission was to make personalised flooring a reality for areas as small as 15 square metres, making them achievable for domestic clients", recalls Martin Prager. The question was how to realise their dream. They knew that the solution was in digital printing, but getting the process right and achieving the right blend between quality and productivity would be the challenge.

Canon chosen for combination of technology and service

Some initial trials with a mid-market roll-to-roll printer reinforced the need for a flexible machine that was better optimised for their products.

"The most critical factor was the quality", insists Prager. "The commercial clients and interior designers who make up the lion's share of our clientele are creative and very exacting where quality is concerned. The printed image needed to be spot on."

Prager and Grafenauer looked at various wide format printing solutions on the market, but selected the Océ Arizona UV flatbed printer from Canon on the strength of the output calibre, combined with the machine's high productivity and build quality for industrial production.

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Martin Prager, Director, Falquon

Canon's service proposition also influenced the decision. "We're a manufacturing business, and downtime is damaging. We have to know that when we need support, it will be there."

Océ Arizona meets Falquon's high production standards

Falquon's laminate flooring consists of individual high density fibreboard (HDF) 'panels', which click together without the need for glue, on a tongue-and-groove principle.

The image is either printed onto a special paper layer, which is then bonded to the laminate panel, or printed direct to the HDF panel, depending on the job specifications. Either way, the finished panels are then submitted to an industrial varnishing and baking process, protecting the finished floor against spills, scratches, scuffs and other wear and tear. Falquon's twin strategy of introducing singlecoloured and photo flooring presented quite different production challenges.

Where the Colorita-branded, single colour flooring was concerned, colour stability was fundamental. As Prager explains: "Our aim was that when the coloured panels are laid, the seams should be so imperceptible as to give the impression of a continuous floor covering. But that meant that there would be zero margin for inconsistencies in colour from one panel to the next. However, concerning colour management and control – an area where we would admit to some naïveté when we started – Canon has given us a great deal of support to get the most out of the ONYX workflow suite for advanced colour management. It's a crucial aspect of the workflow for us and the consistency of output from the Océ Arizona now is exceptional."

Alexander Grafenauer reinforces the company's obsession with quality. "Regardless of the design, we expect the total effect of any of our floors to be immaculate. This is particularly challenging for floors using a single photographic image across the whole area.

Because of the way the individual flooring panels are cut and joined together, we needed to develop a very sophisticated software solution that would take the original image and prepare it in such a way for printing across the component floor panels, so that the individual pieces of the image 'puzzle' join together seamlessly and without any compromise to the image. Happily, the optical quality of the photo floors we can deliver using the Océ Arizona is extremely good."

The company's exacting quality requirements have also required a completely tailored approach to the Océ Arizona installation, involving collaboration with experts in ambient control and dust extraction. "It's also not as simple as putting the machine in the corner of a regular workshop and letting it run", say Grafenauer. "While it's not a mandatory requirement to do so to achieve great print quality, we maintain the machine in what amounts to cleanroom conditions to meet our own expectations for quality and batch-to-batch consistency. The room is dust-free and temperature controlled and, again although not mandatory, we clean the machine from top to bottom once or twice a day to ensure that any sources of contamination, which might affect the quality of the flooring, are eliminated."

Company expansion powered by digital print

With the production workflow and controlled printing environment in place, Falquon could now realise its ambition to invite customers to design their own floor. An online ordering interface at www.falquon.de now allows clients – both designers and domestic clients who come to Falquon direct – to order a bespoke floor by incorporating a library image or one of their own with just a few mouse clicks. Falquon's specialist configuring tool then takes the uploaded image, together with the client's room dimensions, and calculates precisely how the flooring panels must be produced to fit together and deliver the desired effect, with allowances for cutting and material waste.

"In just a year since we launched the service, the take-up of personalised flooring products has been phenomenal," observes Prager. "Right now, private clients probably only make up one fifth of our business, but the desire to individualise home design has huge momentum. We definitely see this segment becoming far more significant as more private clients embrace the Internet as a tool for commissioning bespoke elements for their homes." With the ability to reproduce well in excess of 200 specific colours digitally on the Océ Arizona printer, Falquon's Colorita range of flooring has put the company at the forefront of the trend to coloured floors as an alternative to the more conventional wood or stone effect laminates.

"It's not only a domestic design trend," emphasises Prager. "Single colour flooring is also a hit for commercial clients, for example for showrooms or exhibition spaces, where the scope to reproduce a corporate colour across a large floor area is appealing. This product is driving notable growth in our corporate client base, and with stand builders."



The company is also using the Océ Arizona to produce its Magnus range, a clickable, laminated tile, which comes in two formats (wood and stone) and is optimised for wet areas, giving customers a customisable, printed floor that is water resistant, but warm, under foot.

From its production facility in Pritzwalk in north-east Germany, Falquon is now sending digitally printed laminate floors to customers in 28 countries across Europe, North America and Asia, balancing the specialist needs of individual clients with volume orders for household names in the DIY sector, such as Hornbach, B&Q and Saint Maclou.

Two years after its installation, the Océ Arizona is now printing 2,000 square metres (the equivalent of more than 10,000 Colorita tiles, for example) a week at peak times. Under its new management team, the Falquon workforce has expanded by 20 per cent to meet growing demand, and adding further production capacity has become a priority for the business.

"Over the last two years, digital print has helped us to achieve a unique position in the premium laminate flooring market", concludes Prager. "We're so excited about the potential of this business, and our experience with Canon and the Océ Arizona has given us the confidence that - though the learning curve may be steep - everything is possible with the right technology and the right partner."

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