

ART FOR ATHLETES

Andreas Ferndrigger interviewed Fischer Sports GmbH management to find out why the Austrian winter sports company chose printing equipment and technology from SignTronic/Grünig for decorating its products



Fischer Sports skis in action. Photo: courtesy of Fischer Sports GmbH

SignTronic and Grünig offer overall solutions on a worldwide level for automatic screen making. With distribution partner Putz Drucktechnik, and in close co-operation with Fischer Sports in Austria, they were able to come up with a state-of-the-art solution to help Fischer optimise the printed designs on its skis.

ABOUT FISCHER SPORTS

Fischer Sports GmbH is the global leader in Nordic skiing and one of the world's leading brands in Alpine skiing, known for innovation and cutting-edge technology. Fischer is also one of the biggest manufacturers of high-quality ice hockey sticks. Fischer's vision is to be 'the winter athlete's brand of choice' through outstanding products, created for everlasting moments and new levels of individual performance. The privately-held company employs nearly 2,000 individuals who all share

a passion for and dedication to winter sports. Fischer Sports GmbH was founded in 1924 in Ried im Innkreis, Austria, where the global headquarters are still located. Manufacturing takes place there and in Ukraine. One Way, a world-famous brand with a special focus on cross-country skiing has likewise been part of Fischer Sports since May 2018.

As an Austrian family-run company,

"The concept of environmentally-sound working processes using water-based printing inks fits like a glove into our sustainability strategy"

Fischer focuses on social, ecological and economic sustainability. All buildings at the company's headquarters are heated from the geothermal network. Fischer relies on biomass for ski production. The company's waste management concept includes, in addition to the first step of waste avoidance,

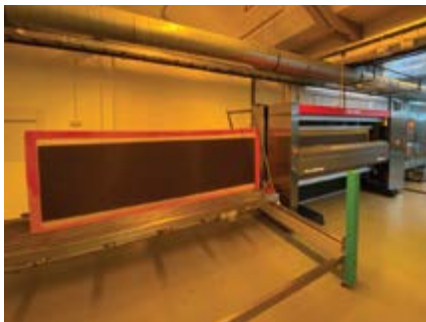
recycling (plastic and aluminium/metal waste) and the thermal recycling of the remaining waste. All water from processes is fed into a circulation system and re-used through internal cleaning. Other examples are sustainable lighting systems and speed-controlled motors in production plants.

Embracing the 'Kaizen' CIP model [Continuous Improvement Process principle

inspired by the Japanese philosophy Kaizen: 'change for the better'] ensures ongoing process improvements. In terms of social sustainability, Fischer places particular emphasis on the wellbeing, training and further education of employees and their safety.



Fischer's SKI CURV is screen-printed with water-based printing inks, in line with the company's sustainability strategy. Photo: courtesy of Fischer Sports GmbH



CTS in-line system from SignTronic and Grünig

INTERVIEW WITH FISCHER MANAGEMENT

Fischer management answered a few questions on the occasion of the inauguration of the company's new screen preparation process installed by Grünig/SignTronic.

What has motivated Fischer to focus on the high-quality decoration sector in 2021/2022?

The professional implementation of our design on the skis is of paramount importance.

The principle of sustainability influences all our decisions, regardless of the level on which they are taken. The concept of environmentally-sound working processes using water-based printing inks fits like a glove into our sustainability strategy – and screen printing offers us the perfect tool to this end.

What were Fischer's requirements and aims for this extension in the sector of high-quality decoration?

Fischer is known all over the world for its products which stand for innovation and state-of-the-art technology. Modernisation and optimisation in our screen printing department were our main objectives.

[Other considerations were]:

- Screen printing (in view of the present trend towards 'spot colour' printing) is a growing market requirement.



Professional implementation of Fischer's design on the skis is of paramount importance'. Photo: courtesy of Fischer Sports GmbH



Automatic screen cleaning and stretching process

- Cost savings for every printed film was one of the highest priorities.
- The entire screen printing process was to be dimensioned to handle smaller batch sizes.
- Reduction of the number of processes in order to speed up the preparation times for the screens.
- The register accuracy and the implementation of fine fonts were to be improved, facilitated and optimised.
- The screen printing sector was to be integrated as a 'just-in-time element' into the overall planning.
- Eco-friendlier processes – especially less energy consumption – were our topmost priority.

Nowadays, the word 'digital' is on everybody's lips. Has this option also been investigated in detail?

Digital printing technology is also applied by Fischer, which uses both printing methods.

What are the factors that in the end turned out to be decisive?

- The CTS direct exposure technology (computer-to-screen) replaces the classical film exposure and montage.
- The use of chemicals and the manual film handling including re-touching are eliminated.
- Precision is enhanced.
- The production systems are user-friendly.
- Reduced maintenance costs [and] less energy consumption for all the new production equipment.

How did you select the suppliers for this project?

The price/performance ratio was given a very high weighting. Only well-established manufacturers with many years of experience in this field were invited to submit their quotations. All the selected suppliers were asked to work out and submit an overall concept.

Did you focus on partners offering all-in-one solutions from the very beginning?

No, we started out by visiting several trade fairs, such as FESPA, in order to get a general idea of the potential suppliers.

Why did you finally opt for the team SignTronic/Grünig/Putz Drucktechnik?

Because of their all-in-one solution in co-operation with Putz Drucktechnik, from pre-print stage and print stage. SignTronic/Grünig/Putz convinced us [with] their detailed and ingenious project planning. Standard systems [have been] adapted to our particular requirements and needs. In Putz we have a reliable partner acting as a local representative of SignTronic/Grünig in Austria – and this also applies to their service performance.

"The high quality of the printing result is directly related to the quality of the printing screen"

What are the practical advantages that this new screen manufacturing method has brought to Fischer?

The high quality of the printing result is directly related to the quality of the printing screen.

The just-in-time screen making enhances the economic efficiency. This new equipment has also enabled us to improve the working conditions of our staff members, who enjoy a modern, clean and environmentally sound working ambience.

What are the practical benefits for the customers?

A perfectly implemented surface design at the highest possible level.

For the future, do you have any wishes with regard to high-quality decoration?

We aim for a continuous further perfection of the screen printing technology, in order to be able to meet any future design requirements with a maximum of economic success, and this particularly refers to our own Austrian production site.

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this article. ■

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