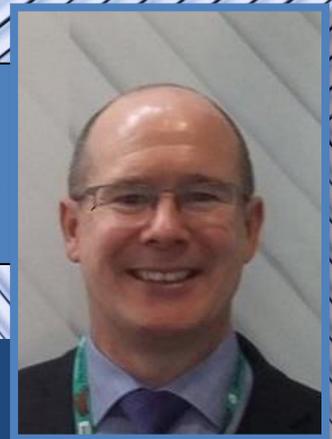


West Cheshire Business Insider

Talking Skills with TECHNOPRINT

INFORMATION LEAFLET SPECIALISTS



Alan Ryan – Managing Director

What does Technoprint do?

We are the UK's largest independent supplier of information leaflets for the Pharmaceutical industry. When you buy some paracetamol or are prescribed any medicine, you know that small folded leaflet in the box describing how to take the medicine and the possible side effects? We print and fold those. It is quite specialist and we use special lightweight paper and innovative, bespoke folding techniques to make sure the information leaflets are small enough and light enough to fit in the box and yet have text large enough to read.

How has the business got to where it is today?

It started out with me and a guy I knew at college. We were both doing BTECs and he worked at a printing business in Northwich. The business was closing and he was going to be made redundant, so we decided to take on the business. We became joint directors when we went limited. Back then we were mainly a commercial printing company used by local businesses. The commercial printing business market is very competitive, so we gradually started to move towards patient information leaflets. My co-director wasn't so sure about this direction so I bought him out of the business and am now the sole director. Now 98% of our business is pharmaceutical and we are now much more specialised than we used to be. Although it was a gamble, this is working out well for us with our turnover increasing from £800,000 to £1.3 million in the last 2 years and this year we have achieved £2 million. We expect to move into our new premises on the Winsford Industrial Estate within the next 12 months and expect turnover to reach £3 million with the next 3 years. We've found our niche!

How many staff do you have at Technoprint and what are their different job roles?

We've got 28 full-time equivalent staff at the moment and we've taken on 9 apprentices in the last 14 months. We have people working in quite a few different roles. In production we have staff operate printing machines, folding machines, guillotines and driving forklift trucks. We also have people working in the office including people with artwork abilities organising the leaflets before we print them, account managers,



business administration and a quality assurance officer.

How do you see these job roles changing going forward?

Going forward we are currently training a production manager and are training up other staff to take us where the business needs to go. With new premises we are planning to run a double shift and so will need more shift leaders and shift managers. The idea of taking on apprentices now is that in a few years they'll be fully trained and they, the fully trained workers, will be split between the shifts and we'll bring more trainees in.

I was particularly keen to take on apprentices because the machines we use are so different from



other printing machines that experienced professionals have to be retrained to use them anyway so why not train up local young people instead?! So far our apprentices have picked up the skills quite quickly. For example, we started our apprentice Becky on the black and white printing machine and after 3 months it's fair to say she's operating the machine just as well as the qualified staff, if not better! I've been trying to get more women like Becky into printing as it is generally quite male dominated.

Are there any skills you feel are lacking in the young people who come to work at Technoprint?

Some of the applicants we're attracting have very low academic skills. This isn't a major problem but is a bigger problem than we anticipated. We've got a few candidates who are struggling with very basic English and numeracy which is quite sad actually. I think I need to refine my recruitment processes and techniques to try and get candidates who have more academic potential so that they can progress to being shift managers.

How have the apprentices you've taken on moved forward in your business?

Having apprentices is still quite new to us as a company. Matty, who is on an engineering apprentice, is doing really well. He's on day release doing an NVQ and he's been with us for 18 months.

In the long term we very much want to train our apprentices not just to operate the machines but to do all the maintenance. One lad who's been with me 10 years is trained in mechanical maintenance to a high level and the next step is training him up in electrical maintenance so we can maintain and fix all our own machines. By being able to maintain and repair all our own machines we won't have to get outside companies in and it will be quicker, more efficient and save us money.

Have there been any issues with taking apprentices?

It's been a bit of a learning curve getting apprentices in and learning what to expect of them and how involved we should be in their learning and development processes. I think you have to put quite a bit in to working with schools and apprentices but that the more you put in, the more you get out. To start off with we had quite a few drop-outs but now we've changed our process to make it more appealing and a bit easier at the start.

We take them on for 3 months to begin with so they can make sure they want to stay on. We also have a great package for apprentices involving salary sacrifice for mobile phones and bonuses for good time keeping and attendance.



How have you found working with training providers?

To be honest I've found it very frustrating. I looked through the LEP list of recommended providers but only 2 got back to me and out of them only one said yes. I recruited through them but they only gave me 2 applicants for 2 places which doesn't give us much choice. Their Websites and the government all say that they will get candidates in for you but this hasn't been my experience. I'm planning on changing my training provider for the next lot of apprentices, in future I'm planning on using the British Printing Industries Federation as I know the local representative and hope that this will work better.

So has recruiting apprentices been a problem?

Yes, it's been challenging. In the end I've found doing my own recruitment, by putting banners around the town and putting leaflets in places where I think young people and their parents might see it like takeaways, chippies and all over Winsford, works better! It is very time intensive though. I tried the job centre but that didn't find the right applicants for me. We held an apprentice open day last year and this seemed to work well and is something I'm hoping to repeat. I'm also trying to connect with schools so I can raise the profile of Technoprint amongst local young people.

“The most successful way we've found of recruiting apprentices so far is having an open day”

So, have you done much work with schools and young people?

We've done some but I'd like to do more. It is a key place to recruit potential apprentices. Currently we've had some success in recruiting people who've left school for a year or two and done some type of engineering course – they join us at 17/18/19. It would be good to have some younger candidates applying too. I've done a few careers events at schools and I'm trying to build up the relationship but it takes time. We've started that in the last 6-8 months so hopefully it will lead to more applicants next time we recruit.

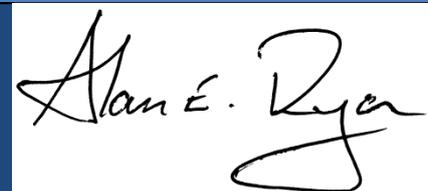
And do you run work-experience?

Actually we have someone coming in for work experience this week, she's only in for 3 days but it's better than nothing! That is part of the reason I've been starting to forge links with schools and colleges - to encourage them to send people over to do work experience here. Back in 1988 when we started we used to do loads of work experience. I stopped with the recession but I'd like to reinstate it now. In the past we've had several people who've come to work with us after doing work experience so it's a great way to get people interested in our business.

Do you do much work with graduates?

Not right now but I'm currently talking to the business growth hub about getting in a graduate for a 12 week internship as I think that would be a good thing to get into.

“The success of Technoprint is dependent upon both our current and future staff. Therefore our recruitment process and training procedures are vital to us . ”

A handwritten signature in black ink on a white background, reading "Alan E. Ryan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'R'.