

Fluid bolts the repro gate

Advertising prepress does not have to be the preserve of London suppliers – as Fluid DPS, near Manchester, is proving.

Geography still counts for something, even in today's networked world, and even in a small but perfectly formed country such as England. It has certainly worked that way for Fluid DPS – a Stockport-based prepress house with a strong hand amongst the advertising agencies in the north of England.

Established just six years ago by former JWT and McCann Erickson technical manager Steve Reilly and fellow directors Pete Jones and Dave Smalley, Fluid has done well enough to be counted as an approved advertising repro supplier to some of the UK's largest national newspaper groups, capitalising on the breakdown of the old "gatekeeper repro" system. This loosening of supply criteria was in fact where Fluid DPS saw the market opportunity.

"Agencies had to send advertising copy through the London gatekeepers – that was always just the way it was," he says. "The breakdown of the gatekeeper system allowed repro houses with the right equipment to deliver colour ads to newspapers. Not everyone wants to go through London suppliers. We are local to a lot of agencies within the North West, and we offer them a complete service, including image manipulation and creative retouching.

"We can match the big London prepress companies for price and we can produce a proof on newsprint to the right spec and deliver it around the corner in half an hour, which London suppliers can't do."

So the geographical proximity of repro company to agency has worked in many instances for Fluid DPS, but what's really important is that it can do the job. It has complemented its long-nurtured practical expertise with considerable investment in technology, to ensure that it can do so. The proof is that Fluid DPS is an approved supplier for both Guardian Newspapers and Telegraph Media Group, and can produce files and



Credits: Agency – An Agency Called England; Photographer – Guy Farrow

proofs matched to News International, Associated Newspapers, Mirror Group and Financial Times, as well as all the major magazine publishers. The company is also handling prepress on multi-page brochure work as well for some clients.

Clearly with such volumes going through, technology has a key role to play. Fluid DPS uses GMG's ColorProof and ColorServer software, alongside Epson proofing systems and an HP 1050 inkjet proofer. It has also been able to stitch together its own workflow processes through writing Applescripts

Fluid DPS has produced award-winning imagery such as these for Wakefield District Council's anti-binge drinking campaign



that can take a file dropped into a hot folder, create a PDF, preflight, apply the correct profile through GMG ColorServer, and generate a hard copy proof. In addition it also offers high end drum scanning – a service that numerous other prepress companies take advantage of.

The decision to invest in GMG came three years ago, says Reilly. The firm had a set up based around a Cyclone Colorbus proofing system. It was good, but not as adaptable to a wide range of proofing specifications as Fluid has found the GMG software to be, nor as quick and powerful, Reilly adds. There are around 30 different proofing specifications set up in the system, including newsprint, magazine, gravure and some tailored to specific press profiles. The Colorbus system is still used for all of Fluid's newsprint proofing, while GMG is used for magazine and brochure work.

"We're getting large volumes of work now – not just advertising but brochures – and we need turnaround to be as fast as possible," continues Reilly. "The Epson engines are fast and consistent and they're a perfect match for GMG."

The company prides itself on offering a "complete prepress solution", from image capture to the job going on press. It's a service that Reilly is confident will remain valuable for small to medium sized agencies around the country:

"Colour-savvy staff are scarce and they cost a lot of money, as does the technology for a repro system like ours, so it's difficult for the small and mid-size agencies to manage colour and view it in controlled conditions. We bridge that gap. We can produce files to the correct spec and change that spec at a moment's notice, from Fogra 39L to gravure if needed and get a signed off master.

"As long as we can maintain this fluidity on our clients' behalf there will be a place for us with agencies of that size."

• www.fluidprepress.com