

# Colour printing process revolutionises metallics

CMCS is the first media packager to utilise MetalFX, a relatively new printing process that produces an extraordinary choice of metallic-looking colours. By Debbie Galante Block



In optical disc packaging, where profit margins continue to drop and competition continues to rise, the name of the game is to be unique, but to achieve that differential on a dime. MetalFX (MFX), a printing process that can be used to produce hundreds of metallic colours in one pass of a five-colour press, can offer a solution.

MetalFX technology, from the company of the same name based in Guiseley, Leeds, UK, not only enables an extraordinary choice of colours, but it offers it without the expense of multiple spot inks, according to Phil Sheppard, MFX marketing manager.

"We worked with the ink companies Eckart and Wolstenholme International to develop silver ink with a high tack level. It's a cleaner ink and it works better with the overprinted CMYK," Sheppard explained, referring to the printing term for the four primary colours: cyan, magenta, yellow and .key (black). With

MetalFX creates a spectrum of 208 million metallic colour combinations - printed in one pass of the machine

MFX, colours can reportedly be produced very accurately because it is all done using measurable amounts of CMYK and measurable amounts of silver. With MetalFX it costs the same to produce two colours as it would to produce 200 colours on a piece of print.

While MetalFX has been around since 2002, the process has only recently made its debut into the disc packaging business on boxes done at CMCS. Notable recent CMCS projects utilising MFX technology include the Rolling Stones' *A Bigger Bang* special edition CD slipcase and Harvey Goldsmith CBE two-CD tribute case-bound booklet.

"I believe Metal FX to be one of the most exciting innovations in print for some time," commented Adam Teskey, CMCS Group

managing director. "Not only is it an extremely cost effective way of enhancing the aesthetics of any printed product it also delivers to designers a myriad of creative opportunities."

The beauty of MFX to designers lies in the fact that they can literally remove their creative shackles due to budget constraint and produce imaginative work in millions of different metallic colour hues and to the printer there are no great technical difficulties to overcome. The customer ends up with an enhance product an all for the price of just one extra printed colour."

While, the process has not been used on discs themselves, said Ainge, MFX managing director, there is no reason that it will not work on polycarbonate. In fact, plastic is the best surface for this process.

Up to now, metallics have been made in the same way paint for the house is made. "If you go to the store to buy paint, you buy white and they put toner color in and they mix the shade," explained Ainge. "Rather than mixing colourants into a silver, we developed a silver we could print on first. The very nature of the four-color process is that the inks are transparent so you can see the colors underneath. With our process, metallic colours sit on top of the silver. The transparency of the CMYK allows the silver ink to shine through creating a new spectrum of vibrant metallics. We now have a silver-based system and a gold-based system, which creates a spectrum of 208 million metallic colour combinations, which we can print in one pass of the machine," he added. The overprinted CMYK also acts as a sealer, reducing the need for a sealer varnish.

Also part of MetalFX's offering is HoloFX and LiteFX. These are printed using the same inks HoloFX uses different levels of the base metallic ink to create text or images that seem to appear and disappear as the light hits them. LiteFX means printing a metallic colour next to its four-colour equivalent, giving a colour change effect as the light hits the page or packaging.

MetalFX licences are available to printers and pre-press houses in 87 countries, according to Ainge. The MetalFX Ink Starter Pack is ideal for standard and UV offset printers (Included are 2kg of MFX Base silver ink, 1kg of MFX Original CMYK Process Inks, and MFX Test Grid CD). For all other print processes, such as Flexo, Web and Gravure, the MFX Test Grid CD is also available separately. For a one-off licence to a printer, the price is just under £3,000 (US\$5,932). That gets the user technical support, training, software, and it also allows the user to be part of various different marketing and promotional campaigns done by the company. ●