

## Belgian roots

Asterion belongs to the Belgian Post Group. Asterion focuses exclusively on France, but also tends to the international document flow of its French customers when the need arises. The company has outlets throughout France, from Arras and Caen in the north via Paris (Fontenay, St Denis), Orléans, Dijon and Auxerre in central France to Nantes in the west and,

Carcassonne, Lyon and Aix-en-Provence in the south. Some 14 outlets in total respond to the document flow needs of a wide range of organisations. In 2003 total turnover will be close to 78 million euros. All in all, the company prints roughly 1 billion pages a year on around 82 production printers, while annually filing some 5 billion pages. Asterion's international reach and the fact that it is at its customers' disposal 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, forms part of their solution.

## Competition

As a division of the Belgian Post Group with a large branch in France, large-scale competition is to be expected. This is confirmed by Xavier Guillet: "Our major competitor in printing is Asphéria, a branch of La Poste Française et Italienne," he says, "while the commercial company Orsid and of course XBS also contribute. In direct marketing we are experiencing some competition from Diffusion Plus and

Koba. But competition keeps one sharp and on one's toes. We are making every effort to stay ahead by developing smart and efficient solutions which meet the needs of our customers. This is why we are investing so much in activities relating to printing itself. We closely monitor customer information and communication processes and tailor our solutions and services to meet new developments."



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"Everything we print is personalised."

THE DOCUMENT COMPANY  
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## One hundred percent variable printing at Asterion

## Print facilities throughout France

Asterion offers a wide range of customised services for organisations featuring document intensive information flows. This company of Belgian origin prints from locations throughout France. "Everything we print is personalised," says Marketing and Communication manager Xavier Guillet. "Asterion, together with Vicindo, its direct marketing subsidiary near Nantes (Carquefou and Orvault), print over 150 million personal documents a year."

### Personalised information

In classifying print companies, a distinction can be made between organisations which offer printing on demand in both small and large

volumes, but hardly print any variable information, and companies which have made printing documents containing personalised information in high volumes their core activity. Asterion in France clearly belongs to the second category. Its print locations are mostly situated on industrial estates, as Asterion's customers tend to be large companies with intensive document information flows, while operations at Asterion itself are highly industrialised. The company hardly has any individual customers. Asterion prints documents including invoices, bank statements and pay slips. In short, the type of document that is personal by definition. Companies such as Bouygues Telecom and Rexel are big names among Asterion's invoice printing customers. The company prints invoices and pay slips not only for the administrative sector, banks (such as Crédit Agricole, Natexis Banques Populaires..) and insurance companies (Macif, CNP...), but also for public service companies, such as EDF (the French electricity company), as well as for the manufacturing and distributing industry (Alstom, Air liquide, Loxam).



# “We closely monitor customer information and communication processes and tailor our solutions and services to meet new developments.”



“We print some 20 million pay slip pages a year,” says Xavier Guillet. “We invest heavily in keeping our IT departments up to standard. The software driving the printers is of crucial importance to us. Asterion needs to ensure that all confidential information supplied by customers is efficiently and reliably processed into a printed invoice or pay slip. The margin of error for such documents needs to be reduced to zero. Nothing’s more annoying than receiving someone else’s pay slip or invoice, as this means that your own is lying on someone else’s doormat.”

### Developments in IT

Asterion’s IT departments employ around 105 people in total, including some 60 programmers working directly on customer programmes. The company operates 60 Sun Solaris servers and runs 13 Oracle 9I databases. Although its employees work from different locations, they maintain regular contact. The IT departments monitor the entire pre-press process to ensure the data supplied to the data bases is printed on the individual documents in the required formats.

The IT department also develops software for a variety of solutions. For example, Asterion has developed

its own comprehensive system for Customer Relationship Management. This customer communications product offers a better overview of the various data and volumes pertaining to production jobs. A system for monitoring jobs (job tracking) has also been developed.

IT is one of Asterion’s core activities, ensuring optimal communications between the document intensive organisations and Asterion’s print facilities. Asterion is currently preparing its strategy for the year 2008 and after, when the French mail distribution market opens up and the legal scope for electronic documents will be widened. “Today a digital invoice is considered as a legally binding document,” Xavier Guillet explains, “Our customers aren’t really aware of this at the moment, but that will change in the near future. We have already developed with Certipost, another Belgian Post subsidiary, a product called CertiBusiness for the routing and safeguarding of invoices to be distributed via the internet, and therefore displayed on screen; however, payment still takes place in the conventional way.”



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### Solutions

Asterion maintains close contacts with its customers in order to accurately and efficiently process the data they supply. This is the main reason why the company thinks in terms of solutions. Customers have problems for Asterion to solve. To this end, a clearly-defined path is followed. Asterion’s first step is to research and analyse an organisation’s document flow. The method of processing the data supplied, the adaptation and editing this process requires, and the addition of barcodes or other coding labels may all form an integral part of this. The second step is to issue a proposal for the recommended printing route and the way to distribute the printed documents to their end users.

Asterion is constantly searching for improvements, for all its customers. Quality is monitored continuously and customers are always informed of new developments. New options in file formats such as PDF, or carriers such as CD-ROM or DVD, or alternative ways for distribution, such as via the Internet, are discussed with customers, leaving them with the rightful impression that Asterion is always one step ahead.

### Extensive services

Customers are also offered a wide range of printing services, from document scanning, full document digitalisation, re-conversion of documents into processable files with the aid of optical character reading, digital file management, document translation, preparation of digital documents for search-applications, to end user document delivery. And Asterion has also developed the e-Star system, giving customers protected and reliable access to digital document files. Documents may be traced both manually and automatically. Users gain password-authorized entry to use the system to the extent their authorisation allows. Naturally, the system permits customers to submit processing jobs via the Internet and monitor their route through the production process.