

Tickets – The Thermal Printer Solution

By John Gimson, Bude Community Cinema

As a new film society, we needed to print tickets for our film evenings - for sale at two local 'box offices' in town and on the door.

Initially this was done using a PC, printing 10 up on A4 card (160 gsm) and then cutting. Serif PagePlus (Desk Top Publisher) was used for the design/layout and this software has a useful automatic numbering facility - so we could create a numbered ticket with a 'counterfoil' portion.

As our regular venue seats up to 250 seats and we show one film a month, it soon became a tiresome task - albeit that the end result was pretty professional.

We were fortunate enough to receive a grant from the National Lottery and this included a small amount to acquire a thermal printer for ticket printing.

Without a doubt, it's been a very good purchase.

For those who may not be aware, a thermal printer is the sort of thing you see in supermarkets and restaurants where till paper spews out at high speed. The only difference is that for our tickets we opted for 140/150 gsm card rather than the flimsy till slip rolls. Machines are compact and relatively maintenance free.

What we learned in the process is:

- There is a huge range of thermal printers - and those with standard roll widths of 58mm, 80mm or 105mm are the most common. We opted for 80mm.
- Most printers can print both landscape and portrait.
- As we had a budget of £300 we opted for a Star TSP700II which cost just over £260, inc VAT and delivery.
- Many have in-built customisation for layout (including a logo) - or you can get special ticketing software, or you use any suitable word processor that allows custom sized documents. We continue to use Serif PagePlus, including the numbering.
- Finding 140/150 gsm card wasn't easy - and when we did, at a price we felt was realistic, we had to order a minimum of 6 boxes of 20 rolls (each roll is 80 metres long) - so we are well stocked for years.
- If money is available, two colour printers are available, and coloured paper, and a whole range of ticket formats both plain and pre-printed. Most were too expensive for our situation.
- Probably the trickiest part is setting up both the software for paper size and format -and the printer setup to match - particularly as Windows Vista has some weird ways to stop you accessing printer properties.
- The printer also has an amazing range of options for printing and full or partial cuts.
- Print speed is a plus point - a 100 numbered tickets can be printed in a couple of minutes. We also use the printer for raffle prize vouchers and plan to use it for membership cards/vouchers in the future. The range of uses is limited only by the creativity of the user and the paper width.

Sources/References

Star Micronics - who do not sell direct but have a great technical help section - www.star-emea.com

Barcode Warehouse - who supplied our printer - www.thebarcodewarehouse.co.uk - but there are many other suppliers of Star and other machines.

Tillfood Ltd, Stockport - who supplied the paper stock - www.tillfood.co.uk - and good customer service too.

Beechman & Co, Bromley - www.beechman.co.uk/index.htm - have an amazingly helpful web site with lots of information about printers and paper options.

Bude Community Cinema - www.budecinema.org.uk or e-mail link@budecinema.org.uk