

YOUR OWN PRINTING SOCIETY? WHAT A WONDERFUL IDEA!

The advantages for a Lib Dem Local Party or Branch having its own printing society are enormous and the bigger the local party or branch gets, the greater the advantages. Here are some of them:

- ❖ Cheaper printing
- ❖ Quicker printing
- ❖ Bundling and/or folding into separate leaflet runs in separate ward or warehouse's boxes
- ❖ Single address return envelopes printed
- ❖ Available profits going back to the local party or branch

A medium sized local party delivering leaflets regularly across 10 or more wards could reasonably expect to be £3,000 a year better off and not to have to waste valuable time sitting around a table counting, folding and bundling.

How to start:

1. Meeting of members – the local party AGM is a good venue for a combined operation.
2. Sign up members – helpers/people with business/commercial experience. 10 would be enough.
3. Approve a draft constitution (specimen available on request)
4. Appoint officers:- Manager, Treasurer, Secretary
5. Authorise opening of a bank a/c with signatures of at least Manager and Treasurer
6. Appoint an auditor and friendly accountant who won't charge!
7. Choose a trading name.

It is important to remember that although the printing society will be an offshoot of the local party, it will be an independent unincorporated association (like a sports club). Its assets belong to its members (or, if it is dissolved, to the local party). It makes its own management decisions, although it should always give great weight to the wishes of the local party, for whose benefit it was set up.

The next steps

1. Inform the local Tax office, who will want a copy of the constitution. The Printing society will be liable for corporation tax, but with no tax to pay on profits up to £10,000pa and with capital allowances and depreciation on any equipment you buy, it is likely to be many years before you have to pay any tax.
2. Apply for VAT registration. This is vital. Most of the printing you will be doing will carry VAT at 0% (excluding returnable surveys and a few other items). But if registered you will be able to claim back from HM Customs & Excise all the 17.5% VAT you pay on all the equipment, paper, ink, masters you buy. You will have to satisfy the VAT people that a reasonable percentage of your work, possibly 20%, will be for non-political customers, so it would be wise to get some printing commitments from members and friends in advance. If you are not registered for VAT your profits will be considerably reduced.

Starting Equipment

Ideally you will need at a minimum:-

1. An A3 Digital Printer. Even though most of your printing will be on A4 (eg Focus) or smaller (eg A5 letters or knock-ups), you will be doing some A3 for your local party and outside customers. You will also be able to print on A3 and guillotine to A4, saving 50% printing time. The 2 main digital printers are RISO and DUPLO. They are equally good and you should be able to pick up a good second hand machine, with say no more than 2 million run on the clock for £2,000 to £2,500 plus VAT (recoverable if you are registered even if registration comes later). 2million may sound a lot but modern machines can do up to 10 million and by the time you have got that far you will be able to afford to update or increase your equipment. Check that any second hand machine has a warranty, has been completely overhauled and has a new thermal head (the expensive part).

2. A folding machine. A new one should cost about £1,100 plus VAT. Second hand ones can be dodgy.
3. A paper jogger. A second hand one might cost £300/£400.
4. A power guillotine – possibly £600 for a second hand one.
5. The usual small office supplies eg ring binders, stapler, hole punch, rubber bands, black bags etc.

The total bill may approach £5,000, which will need to be raised from interest-free loans or donations from the local party and its members. With reasonable luck you should be able to pay it back in 2 to 3 years.

Location

A ground floor room or a dry heated garage would be ideal. A large flat working surface and shelving for paper storage are needed. The paper must be stored in a dry place. Ideally the printing room should be in the middle of the constituency, to save travelling time. It should also be accessible to the helpers without the Manager having to be on site 24 hours a day.

Personnel

The Manager is the key person. Preferably he/she will have lots of time (retired?) and have some experience of running a small company. Proximity to the printing room is also strongly advised. To avoid the Manager being lumbered with doing all the printing, a rota of reliable helpers is needed. No previous experience is needed to operate a digital printer. It can be learnt in an hour and is vastly easier than mastering a computer. There is hardly any physical effort involved and it is very satisfying.

Suppliers

There are many around and the price difference of 20p a ream could mean a saving of £400 pa if you are churning out 1 million sheets of paper a year, which is not beyond the bounds of possibility if you are fighting 10 or more wards and doing outside work. Before you decide to buy any equipment or supplies, it is essential to shop around and don't be afraid to bargain!

Servicing

If you have someone reasonably practical, you should clean the rollers of the printer and the folding machine every 30,000 or so. You should have the printer serviced every 100,000 or so, and the best people will probably be the ones you bought the machine from.

Artwork

No printing machine can improve on the artwork and photographs it receives; it can only hope to reproduce it faithfully. There are certain rules about producing artwork for a digital printer, which will avoid printing problems eg sufficient margins, care with block colour, screened photographs with no black suits against black backgrounds or white dresses against white backgrounds. The latest Riso machines come with a computer interface, which when linked to a computer as well as the printer, enables artwork to be sent straight to the printer, giving better quality.

Conclusion

As usual with Lib Dem politics, forming and running a Printing Society involves a lot of hard work and dedication, but the results will be very worthwhile. Good Luck!!