

L&L Labels & Labeling

The wider world of narrow web

Labelexpo
review edition

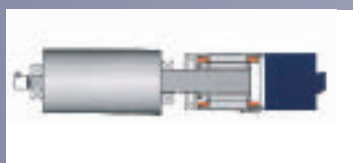
Dec/Jan 2004
Issue 6 Volume 26

Labelexpo



The latest innovations in narrow web technologies at Labelexpo Americas

Analysis



Much confusion surrounds the issue of servo drives on presses. L&L reports

Label Summit



The expanded EU will have an impact on the European label converting business



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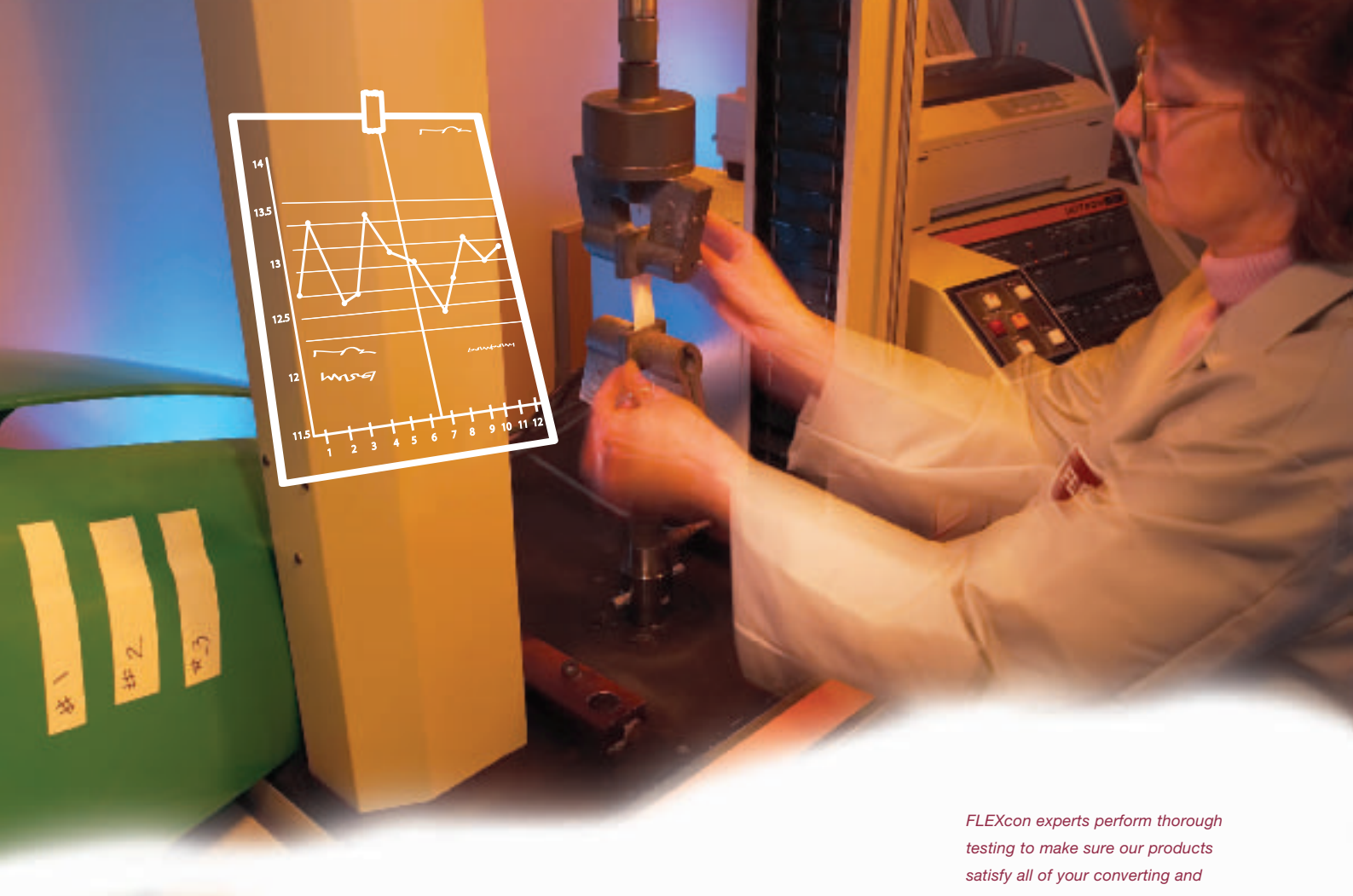
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Contents

Features

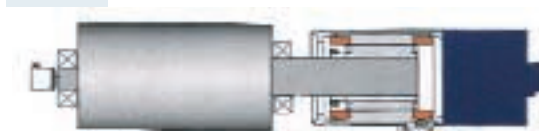


14-40 **Labelexpo Americas 2004**
Almost 13,000 visited Labelexpo Americas to see new press, pre-press and finishing technology. Part 2 of L&L's report

43-45 **Verifying pdfs**
Increasingly complex approval cycles between design agency, global end users and plate makers can create bottlenecks and expensive rework in the label workflow. Andy Thomas reports on a new solution claimed to guarantee the integrity of the PDF before printing.



46-57 **Prague summit highlights growth**
The first Labelexpo European Label Summit was held in Prague, capital of the Czech Republic, to examine the impact of an expanded European Union on the labels industry. Andy Thomas reports



58-62 **Servo drives in label presses**
With servo drives now making an appearance on an increasing number of new narrow web presses, Andy Thomas examines the hype surrounding servos and tries to offer some sensible definitions

64-71 **Are you a lean label machines?**
The 2004 TLMI annual meeting held at La Quinta Resort and Club, Palm Springs, California, addressed the issue of growth: how to achieve it and manage it. Katy Wight reports



73-74 **Gerhardt turns around**
After years of turmoil surrounding one of the best known names in die manufacture, Gerhardt is finally back on track with a major investment program, a new die system and a new management philosophy. Andy Thomas reports

76-79 **Moving in the digital direction**
Offering your customers digitally printed labels doesn't have to mean a nail-biting \$500,000 investment. Katy Wight finds out how TLF Graphics, NY, is exploiting digital in the durable market

Regulars

News	6-9
Installations	75



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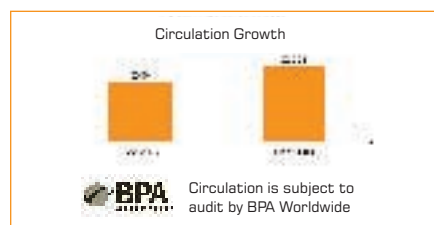
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Leader



The first Labelexpo European Label Summit held in Prague gave us an opportunity to look at the implications for the labels and packaging converting industry of the expansion of the European Union to include eight 'former Eastern Bloc' states.

Altogether ten states joined the EU on May 1st, creating the biggest internal market in the world with a population of 450 million.

The picture painted is similar in many ways to that revealed by the Latin America Label Summit L&L sponsored in Mexico City earlier this year: low penetration of pressure-sensitive and film labels but extremely high growth rates ranging up to 20 per cent. This will be driven by the increasing penetration of Western-owned retail groups and global brands exploiting a growing demand for branded consumer goods. Economic growth rates are twice as high as those in Western Europe or North America, buoyed by a thriving entrepreneurial culture.

However, all is not as rosy as first appears. The new entrant countries are growing fast, but from a low base. They are plagued still by the legacy of centralized command economies: low labor productivity, inefficient energy usage, low 'knowledge economy' base, high unemployment, an uncomfortably high level of corruption and, in many cases, political instability.

"At least three major end users in the electronics and automotive parts industry have already announced a move out of the expanded European Union"

The strategic EU plan is to raise levels of wages, living standards and social-physical infrastructure to those of Western Europe. This is what was achieved in the case of Portugal and Ireland, with both growing rapidly under the influence of 'pump priming' EU investment.

But this could persuade end users to move further East in search of lower cost economies. At least three major end users in the electronics and automotive parts industry have already announced a move out of the expanded European Union to Ukraine, to China, and even to Serbia.

Added to this, the expanded EU will open converters in the smaller entrant states to even more intense competition from label converters in Austria and Germany, as well as to more efficient converting operations in Poland's powerhouse economy.

So there will be winners and losers amongst Central and East European label converters from the expanded European Union. One thing is clear, however. They can no longer rely on lower costs of production, and like their counterparts in the West, will need to move rapidly into value added label production to survive.

Andy Thomas
 Group Managing Editor

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e No. 103



SMAG strikes HP deal

SMAG has signed an agreement with HP Indigo to develop finishing solutions for the ws4000/4050 digital offset presses.

Andy Thomas reports

In an important development, SMAG announced at its Discovery 2004 Open Days an alliance partner agreement with HP Indigo to provide a range of finishing solutions for the ws4000/4050 digital offset presses.

Discovery 2004 also marked the first appearance of a new laser die-cutting system from Dutch company Omega (see boxout) which could eventually make its way onto SMAG's screen finishing equipment.

The HP-SMAG agreement is the result of the increased demand for finishing lines for the growing number of HP Indigo ws4000 digital presses in the European label market. From January 2005, SMAG will offer three off-line finishing systems that can be used with HP Indigo industrial presses. The first system is a full rotary finishing line with web synchronization that will be offered under the Comet (roll-to-roll) and Jupiter (roll-to-sheet) brands. HP customers are already successfully using these lines at multiple sites in France and Switzerland.

SMAG will also develop its own compact semi-rotary finishing line for use with the HP Indigo presses. The final part of the deal

involves promoting the benefits of using an off-line SMAG Galaxie flat-bed screen press – complete with its special finishing systems – as an off-line addition to an HP Indigo press installation. This will offer digital label printers the opportunity to employ a combination of screen and digital printing, which will be of particular value in the production of wine and cosmetics labels that require a higher degree of ink lay-down and chemical resistance than other labels.

HP Indigo's latest ws4050 digital press was launched at Labelexpo Americas as a successor to the highly successful ws4000. The ws4050 extends the materials range of the ws4000 press into unsupported substrates such as shrink sleeves and flexible packaging.

Screen printing of labels could be carried out before or after digital printing – or both before and after, says Stéphane Rateau, sales and marketing manager at SMAG. Given the high quality of digital print on the HP Indigo ws4050 press, such a system combination could compete directly with semi-rotary letterpress and offset in wine label printing for example, Rateau points out

Beta Laser

The Omega laser die cutting system seen at the open house is expected to become an integral part of SMAG's digital print finishing system when it has been fully developed and field proven.

'The laser die cutting system can be the ideal solution in the future for digital business,' says SMAG's Stéphane Rateau. 'If you want to cut a special shape you have to wait 48 hours for the die. So laser is the best solution, and the Omega laser is the best system we have seen. We looked for a laser developer outside the label industry, and Omega develops powerful lasers for the car industry.'

Omega's technicians are discovering the complexities of developing a system for the labels market, with its different combinations of face stocks, backing liners, inks and coatings. The plan is to have a working system ready for beta testing at key customers in around six months, calibrated to key label laminates.

'At the moment the laser is too slow. It needs to cut at 12-15 linear metres/minute and at the moment is only up to 6 metres. Also the price has to come down,' says Stéphane Rateau. 'The current cost is €120-150K against €60K for a flatbed unit.'

Omega's laser demonstration rig showed good cutting characteristics on square cut labels. Cutting sharp corners is a key test for a laser cutter, requiring an effective combination of laser optic control and power adjustment to avoid cutting into the backing liner.

Stéphane Rateau said the laser unit might eventually be integrated as an option on its standard Galaxie screen press line, and even into the Iwasaki intermittent offset machine, for which it is the French agent.



that some label printers in the self-adhesive wine sector are re-registering jobs printed 4-colors on semi-rotary offset presses through a Galaxie screen press to get the softer colors now required in the Italian wine labels market. He also sees a niche in shorter run work for the flatbed Galaxie where rotary screens are less economically viable. 'Rotary screens are expensive to produce and are really best for longer runs. Flatbed screens are the way to achieve shorter runs. Color matching can also be difficult when combination printing in-line with rotary screen.'

Stéphane Rateau already has extensive knowledge of digital applications. He sold the first digital presses into France when SMAG was agent for the Nilpeter/Xeikon DO330. 'But the technology was not ready, and we lost 3-4 years,' he recalls.

As well as revealing details of the HP deal, SMAG used its Open Day to reveal an entry level version of its Galaxie roll to roll Screen press. 'The Galaxie is too expensive for some markets, especially when it's only full two days a week,' says Rateau. 'So we have adopted the same strategy as GiDue with its Quadra and developed a 260mm wide Duo which has the same print quality as the Galaxie but is a more economic solution for printing 1-2 color jobs.'

The Duo is also targeted at existing Galaxie owners who want a machine to run their 1-2 color jobs along with hot stamping and flatbed die cutting. The Duo can be supplied with automatic registration based on a hole punching unit and



sensors on the printing and die cutting units, including motorized screen length adjustment. Sensors pick up a ± 0.1 mm wide black mark and the registration with hole system is claimed accurate to ± 0.05 mm. For clear on clear applications, sensors can optionally be fitted to read clear material on each cell box. Anti-static bars can be positioned on each print head and a special clear counter on the rewinder.

The Duo can be configured as a second pass machine for registered embossing and varnishing or where a special black is required, for example. IR drying can be added to the UV curing stations.

Other products shown for the first time include the 2IG 100 per cent inspection system for which SMAG is now the European agent. At the Discovery Open Day it was demonstrated running on a newly specified SMAG Venus inspection rewinder, now incorporating a turret rewind.

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MAINTENANCE: NOT REQUIRED.

Industry showcase

SMAG's Discovery 2004 Open Days were held at the company's production plant outside Paris, attracting over 150 French label converters, 35 from across Europe and even one converter from North America.

An informative conference programme ran alongside the machinery exhibition, with presentations on digital printing from HP Indigo's Christian Menegon, while GiDue joint md Federico d'Annunzio asked whether self-adhesive printing expertise can provide a bridge to the flexible packaging market. Silkscreen ink developments were discussed by Sericol's Gerald Tiger, and 100 per cent inspection techniques by 2IG md Laurent Balducci. An interesting presentation by SMAG's Italian sales manager Luca Marvani looked at how innovative pressure sensitive technology is being used to differentiate wine labels in the Italian market.

A range of machinery was on show for which SMAG acts as the French agency, including a GiDue Combat UV flexo press, Iwasaki semi-rotative offset machine and a Newfoil foiling unit. Newfoil md Donald Lewis was also busily promoting the company's new VIP8020-driven digital printing and converting line, which was launched at Labelexpo Americas.

Also supporting the event were Screen ink supplier Marabu and Screen/Flexo ink specialist Sericol, with cylinders and

tooling technology represented by Gerhardt, Techniform and Rotometrics. AB Kelva was discussing its latest hybrid web cleaner/corona treater, while 100 per cent inspection systems were shown by 2IG, Ergeca and Flytec.

BAT Graphics demonstrated anilox technology and Codipag supplied the flexo and offset plates, which were produced by Flexo Color. Domino supplied information on its latest On-Demand in-line VIP inkjet heads.

"GiDue joint md Federico d'Annunzio asked whether self-adhesive printing expertise can provide a bridge to the flexible packaging market"

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Labelexpo Americas

Andy Thomas, Barry Hunt and Katy Wight review new technology and materials trends

Closing the loop

This year's Labelexpo Americas attracted almost 13,000 visitors. In our second report we look at the development of closed-loop proofing and inspection systems. There were also significant technology announcements across plates, inks and materials across the range from pressure-sensitive to unsupported film

Inspection, rewind and quality control

In a significant development, AVT introduced a closed loop option for its PrintVision/Helios narrow web inspection system, linking it both to the pre-press file and to control of the inspection-rewinder.

The first stage is to compare the printed image to the PDF file – or a reference image from a previous job - during makeready, with the differences automatically highlighted. This assists the press operator to verify the correct job and to quickly get the press into the right settings of register and color.

The next element is WorkFlow Link, which uses data from the on-press PrintVision camera system to place a mark on the web at pre-determined intervals. These marks can be numbers or bar codes printed in the trim area, or on the reverse of the web, or even self-adhesive labels applied to the web.

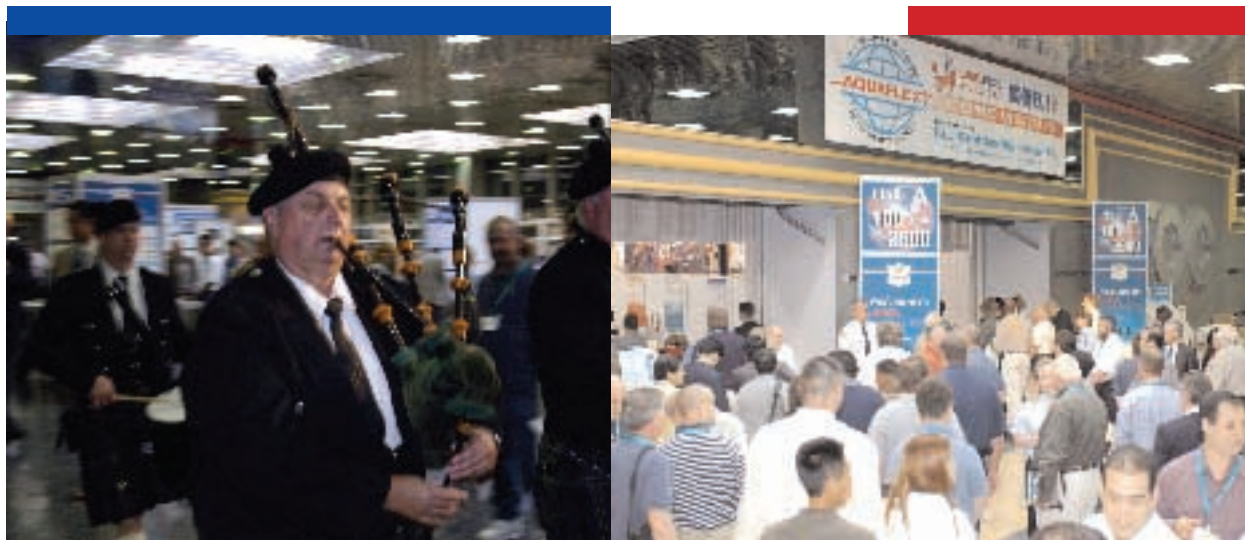
The WorkFlow Link information is sent to the rewinder, where a reader ensures that the physical web is synchronised with the defect information contained in the roll report – even if sections of the roll have been removed as a part of the Quality Assurance process.

Using the markings on the web, WorkFlow Link controls the rewinder, slowing it down and stopping the web at the beginning of the defective area on the splicing table, ready for removal.

The entire system is linked together by the new PrintFlow

Labelexpo Americas 2004

Review



For the first time this year Labelexpo Americas was held over four days, attracting almost 13,000 visitors

software package which provides detailed analysis of failure data for management analysis and statistical process control.

At the AVT press conference, Steve Riccardi, VP technical services at York Label, spoke about the importance to converters of closing the inspection loop. 'Zero defects is the cry across a wide range of applications, so I am really excited about AVT's revolutionary concept of closing the loop - we are already seeing benefits.'

York Label runs 24 presses and 30 rewinders, and several years ago started on a project to cut out defects. In 2002 the company bought its first 100 per cent linescan system, but it could not pick out small defects in heavily populated areas of text, for example. York then started working closely with AVT's R&D department, installing a black & white PrintVision/Helios system on a rewinder. 'We were very impressed with the elegant operator interface, auto masking of the matrix area, and text masking which allows greater inspection sensitivity,' says Riccardi. Next, a color PrintVision Helios was installed on a press, along with Printflow Manager. 'This is revolutionary - it has improved our productivity and makes things far easier for our operators,' said Riccardi.

At the show a PrintVision/Jupiter systems was installed on PCMC's Evolution press and a Helios system on a Rotoflex VSI330 rewinder.

Print Vision Systems and digital systems control specialist Nyquist Systems also announced a partnership geared to close the loop in inspection technology from pre-press to press to post-press. As part of this collaboration, Print Vision Systems will become the exclusive distributor of Nyquist equipment in

"Zero defects is the cry across a wide range of applications, so I am really excited about AVT's revolutionary concept of closing the loop"

North America.

Another partnership in this area was announced between the Arpeco division of Precision Automation Co., Inc. and Scantech Automation Inc, who will work together on a new family of inspection, slitting and rewinding equipment. At the show, a new 18-inch wide Printrack finishing machine, featuring unwind and rewind motor-drive technology, was exhibited on the Print Vision stand.

An interesting new entrant to the narrow web inspection sector is EyeC, whose Profiler compares the first samples from the press pixel by pixel with the customer's proof. The examination is claimed simple, fast, and reproducible.

The EyeC Profiler is based on pattern recognition technology and allows a machine operator to check labels 'within minutes'. The Profiler comes with a high resolution flat-bed scanner which acquires a representation of the proof or another reference label. The same scanner will be used to scan the



Chris Brannon, McDowell Label took the 'Labelexpo Trail' and won this superb Harley Davidson.

labels, or samples, to be inspected.

The Profiler automatically aligns samples and reference and compares them to each other. If exceeding a pre-defined acceptance range, deviations are displayed, and a second image shows their location on the print for operator verification. A full report can then be printed. As well as detecting print flaws, the system will pick up font errors resulting from mistakes in pre-press, including unwanted font substitution, undesired bolding or missing special bold fonts, changes in the stretch factor of the selected font and missing special characters or accents.

Rotoflex's Val Rimas enthused 'This has been the best show we have ever had in the US for closing business.' The company was introducing its VLI eDRIVE generation of inspection machines, incorporating an electronically synchronized motor driven system claimed to result in low maintenance, lower tension/higher speeds, and easy job set up and operation. Features include ultrasonic web guide sensor, clear-on-clear count sensor, missing label/matrix detection and auto tension control. The company also launched its Vericut converting system dedicated to digital printing systems (see article on Digital

“As well as detecting print flaws, the system will pick up font errors resulting from mistakes in pre-press, including unwanted font substitution”

Printing). This modular systems has a wide range of options including hot foil unit, UV coating station, shear slitting, web gripper/feeder, sheeter/stacker conveyor, individual label and butt cut count, label remover, underscore unit, additional die stations, die station pressure gauges and a laminating station.

KOR Engineering introduced its new SR Series Inspection Slitter Rewinder. The servo-driven SR1-350 (13.75" web width) on display was equipped with a roll lifter, waste rewind tower,



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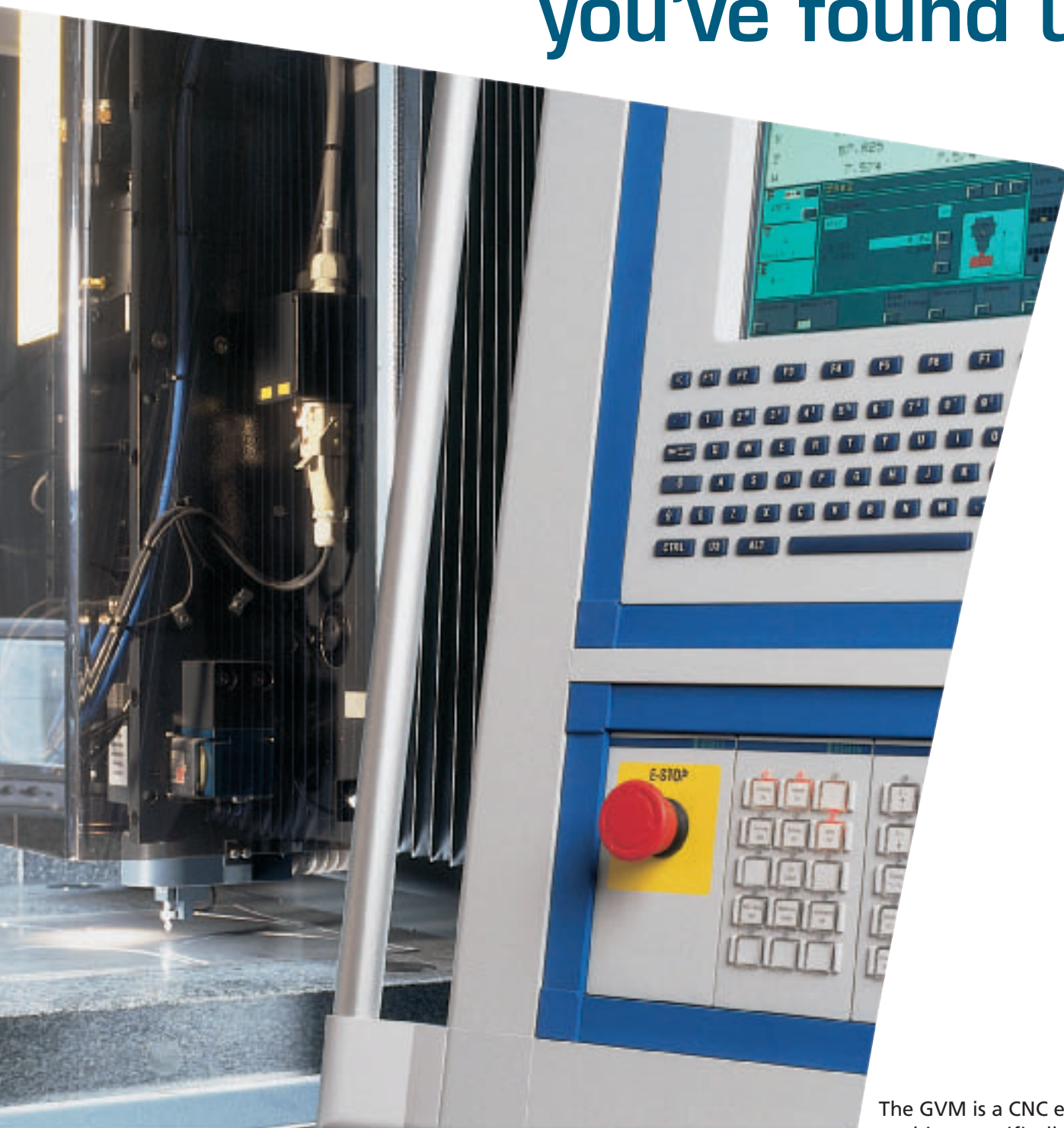
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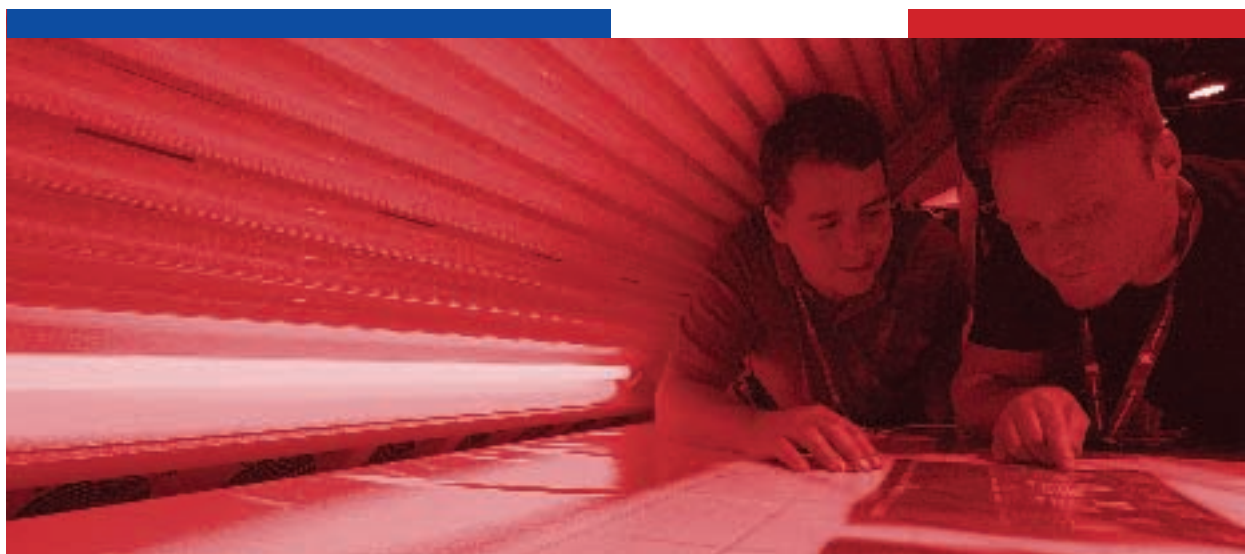
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The GVM is a CNC engraving machine, specifically developed for producing high-precision flexible dies and manufactured in Germany by Anderson Europe.

GVM 
engraving machine 

Labelexpo Americas 2004

Show Review



(Right) The Encyclopedia of Labels and Label Technology is launched by author Mike Fairley and former TLMI president John Bankson

closed loop tension control, as well as razor and score slitter cartridges. The offline finishing system has a maximum operating speed of 900 fpm, but can still slow down fast enough to catch any gross errors spotted under the stroboscope. The system only counts approved footage as editing and splicing is done upstream. The web path allows operators to view all parts of the machine, as material is processed from unwind on the left, to rewind on the right. The machine is equipped to handle a wide variety of paper and film label substrates. It has a closed-loop tensioning system and cartridge slitter, with a choice of rotary shear, score cut, razor and lineal die. Other options include rotary diecutting, back numbering and vision inspection packages.

During this Labelexpo BST Pro Mark wrote orders for 35 web inspection systems, from customers in the US, Mexico, Chile, Columbia, Canada and the Phillippines, and introduced the sixth generation of its HANDYScan 3000 vision inspection system. A key new feature is Combi Scan, which combines inspection parameters including programmed positions and split screen positions, into one comprehensive continuous inspection loop. This allows a custom inspection routine to be built for every job.

BST has also introduced two new laser barcode verification systems, the LS100 and the LS200, for use on-press and on rewinders. They perform 100 per cent inspection in real time at



full press speed, identifying bar code quality problems as they develop. When quality falls below user-defined levels, warning lights trigger an alarm or an inkjet printer to mark the bad codes. Both systems produce audit trails and conform to the ANSI X3.182 and ISO 15416 standards for barcode verification. An optional sequential database manager reports all missing, duplicate and out of sequence barcodes.

Plate and sleeve making

Jet USA Corp now offers the LaserGraver, a direct imaging platesetter made by Berlin-based Lab4you GmbH. It comes with a wide range of drum formats from 650mm x 450mm to 1,230mm x 920mm and a choice of dual or quad-beam laser options for

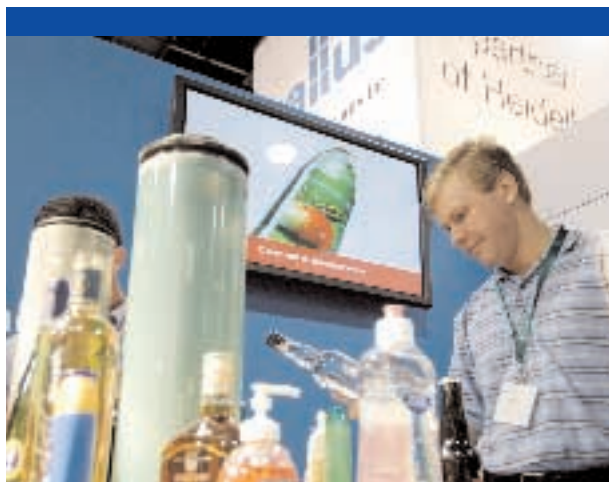


image recording on various computer to-plate ablated media for letterpress or flexo plates. It runs with either its own FlexWorks RIP software on PC and Macintosh platforms and is compatible with others, including Harlequin, Nexus, Brisque and FlexRIP.

DuPont's exhibits included its proven Cyrel FAST dry thermal plate processing system. Its latest challenger is the Lava series from MacDermid Printing Solutions. Lava 360 and Lava 4260 produce in-the-round sleeves and plates using a specially-developed photopolymer material that can also be processed in conventional solvent-based processing systems. The Lava 2530 for smaller-format flexo plates is scheduled for beta testing in spring 2005.

Agfa promoted the AquaFLASH plate, its new photopolymer plate for the flexo market in North America. The plate was launched earlier this year and has already been installed at Advanced Prepress Graphics (APG), a prepress facility located in Wood Dale, Illinois. The plate uses a water-wash system instead of solvents for processing. It achieves resolution up to 175lpi and has good ink transfer characteristics, which Agfa claims results in a wider range of ink compatibility, sharper halftones and cleaner reverses.

Stork Prints' expanding portfolio now includes direct laser engraving for both flexo plates and sleeves based on the multi-beam Agrios 413X and single beam Morpheus 611X digital systems. Shown for the first time in the USA, they can directly image polymer, rubber, EPDM and elastomer flexo formes. The Morpheus can also engrave Stork's RotaMesh rotary screens and Novascreens. Both systems are supplied with the FlexoPower software to define shoulder steepness, dot sharpness and reproducibility. The company has also introduced a range of seamless flexo photopolymer sleeves.

"The plate was launched earlier this year and has already been installed at Advanced Prepress Graphics (APG), a prepress facility located in Wood Dale, Illinois"

Stork also displayed its HQP fibre optic laser technology for engraving its latest type of anilox cylinders with enhanced ink-release. It is said to offer high line-screen anilox rolls with durable cell structures and excellent ink release characteristics. A low laser wavelength, akin to that of a YAG laser, makes screens exceeding 2,000 lines/inch possible.

Inks

At its first Labelexpo exhibiting under its new name, ANI Printing Inks announced its strategy to become a one-stop-shop for the narrow-web printer by the end of the year (see news story p.6 for information on the merger with BASF). The company introduced the following products and initiatives:

- HolographINK ink creates a holographic image which differs from conventional holographic PS and hot foil materials and thus offers a certain level of security as well as having decorative benefits. HolographINK is applied using a standard photopolymer plate and the holographic image appears after UV

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W43



W52 - W76 - W92 FL

Full Line



W52 - W76 - W92

Only Wash Out

Descrizione:

W43 - F.to mm 430x610.

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W52 - F.to mm 520x745.

Sviluppatrice automatica, processa max 4 lastre/ora.

W52FL - Linea automatica di processo. La prima lastra è pronta alla stampa in 35 minuti. Le successive ogni 5 minuti in continuo.

W76 - F.to mm 760x1020.

Sviluppatrice automatica, processa max 4 lastre/ora.

W76FL - Linea automatica di processo. La prima lastra è pronta alla stampa in 40 minuti. Le successive ogni 5 minuti, se in continuo.

W92 - F.to mm 920x1200.

Sviluppatrice automatica, processa max 4 lastre/ora.

W92FL - Linea automatica di processo. La prima lastra è pronta alla stampa in 50 minuti. Le successive ogni 5 minuti, se in continuo.

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W52 - Size mm 520x745.

Automatic processor, max 4 plates/hour.

W52FL - Automatic line to process plates in continuous, the first one in 35 minutes, others following 5 minutes/each.

W76 - Size mm 760x1020.

Automatic processor, max 4 plates/hour.

W76FL - Automatic line to process plates in continuous, the first one in 40 minutes, others following 5 minutes/each.

W92 - Size mm 920x1200.

Automatic processor, max 4 plates/hour.

W92FL - Automatic line to process plates in continuous, the first one in 50 minutes, others following 5 minutes/each.

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Labelexpo Americas 2004

Show Review



AB Kelva and Vetaphone launched a combined surface treater and web cleaner

curing. It is suitable for a wide range of substrates and has the capability to print different colors using the same holographic image.

- TriXjet is a new UV inkjet ink designed for drop on demand applications tailors and to replicate as true 4-color print.

- Investigating the printing of RFID antennae, ANI has partnered with Acheson Colloids, a company with 40 years' experience in conductive coats and inks. ANI will now distribute Acheson's polymer thick film conductive inks.

At the show, ANI announced a price increase of seven per cent resulting from a drastic shortage of acrylic acid. The company believes that the shortage results from countries like China industrializing very quickly.

Sun Chemical used the show to introduce its new brand for the narrow web inks market, Solaris.

'Sun Chemical recognizes the special requirements of narrow-web printers and the growth opportunities for this market,' said Wes Lucas, chairman, president and CEO of Sun Chemical. 'That is why we are organizing a specific product line and teams of dedicated experts who will

utilize our global resources to meet the local needs of narrow-web printers. Sun Chemical has long been active in this market, but we plan to expand our presence by offering the most complete line of inks to all types of printers, no matter their size or location, and backing it with a high level of service and availability.'

Chuck Shutty, director of narrow web products for Sun Chemical North American Inks, says: 'Solaris will offer the best inks and coatings technology from Sun Chemical's divisions around the world. Sun Chemical is now forming regional teams who will sell proven narrow-web products and will offer narrow web printers extensive experience as they consider broader markets in such areas as flexible packaging, folding carton and shrink sleeves.'

Shutty pointed out that Sun Chemical also can offer printers total solution packages through its printing consumables divisions, including Rycoline, which sells its products worldwide, as well as Boss Graphics and WebXtras, which sell in the United Kingdom and Europe.

News in brief

■ The AB Kelva stand saw the launch of a combined web cleaner, corona surface treatment and static neutralization unit (left). The CC-Plus Corona Cleaner is the best narrow web combination on the market for web cleaning. The unit is a joint development by Kelva and Vetaphone. The unit can be cantilever mounted and retains the ease of thread-up with a 'crocodile jaw' design, while reducing space requirements around the web infeed. It is set up to be easily integrated into the machine control panel, or can be controlled from its own stand alone control panel. Quick Change Cartridge. The CC-Plus is available in three models, in web widths of 300, 450 and 600mm. Although aimed primarily at OEM integration into new presses, the unit could be retrofitted onto existing machines – for example as part of a major upgrade to convert film.

■ Schober USA showed an RFID tag inserter for in-house applications with automatic register control for 13.56 Mhz or optional UHF transponders – from 10mm to 160mm wide - and printed labels. Also featured was the servo-driven RSM off-line die-cutter and stacker for various paper or film substrates in web widths up to 635mm. Embossing and product rejection features are optional. The die station has pressure control, easy web thread features, low inertia bearing applications and micrometric control for making adjustments between the die and the anvil.

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Sicpa launched a silicone-free screen white ink and was also promoting its new easy-pour ink containers, that are based on the Dutchboy paint containers. It has also developed a new high-gloss silver ink with a rainbow hologram effect. It has been developed for rotogravure printing and is manufactured with special NC-based pigments. It can be applied to highly transparent films in reverse print that are then usually laminated with self-adhesive material.

Sicpa has also been developing its next generation of UV flexo inks. The SICURA 39-6 series has been completely reformulated and will gradually replace the 39-2 series. Sicpa says that the new series has high color strength, has been optimized for odor and has good adhesion and press runnability. It is highly pigmented, free of additives and is compatible with UV screen, UV offset and UV letterpress in combination printing applications. The 39-6 series can be laminated or overlaminated with UV laminating adhesives.

Toyo introduced REXALPHA SP silver paste for printing RFID antennae. It enables formation of low-resistance circuits with a film thickness of less than 5mm based on the company's proprietary dispersion technology and curing/drying

technology. This technology has been acquired through the development of adhesives for bonding IC tags and silver pastes for membrane switches.

INX introduced its INXFlex 2000 UV flexo inks, designed to provide exceptional flow, color consistency and transfer properties on a wide range of substrates, at high speed. INX claims that the product avoids plate swell, has high dot fidelity and can boost quality, volume and efficiency. The company has also introduced INXScreen UV RS silicone-free white, which is specially formulated for combination printing with UV flexo and letterpress systems. INXFlex 2000 also has ink colors that have been pre-matched with over 1,100 Pantone formula guide colors, enabling users to duplicate the spec in minutes.

Water Ink Technologies introduced its Performa water-based inks, formulated for high density printing with low viscosity and high strength, and PharmaFlex UV, a low odor, UV ink system for high-density printing. This UV system is claimed to offer consistent color matches using Water Ink Technologies' Ink Miser batching system, as well as low viscosity with extended shelf and press stability with exceptional midtone and shadow printing. ■

■ Karlville – which is making a name for itself supplying shrink sleeve seaming machines to narrow web converters – launched a high speed, non-stop version of its 300D system incorporating a Martin Automatic roll changing system.

Martin Automatic and Karlville engineers worked together to integrate the 300D Seamer with the new Martin MBEC automatic butt splicer and the STR rewind, creating a flexible upgrade path for the 300D series.

'We added a number of new features to the STR to accommodate this specialized application and provide the performance that Karlville required,' says David Wright, vice president of Martin Automatic. 'This configuration represents an important advancement in seaming technology. The elimination of materials waste and equipment downtime associated with manual roll changes has a very positive impact on the converter's ability to be competitive while generating sustainable profit margins.'

■ Martin launched its STS automatic butt splicer along with the STR automatic roll changer at the show. Available in web widths up to 330mm (13"), the machines can be installed as original fit on new installations or retrofitted to existing plant.

The STR is designed to wind rolls without foldback at the core. This eliminates a source of wrinkling and materials waste, while a lay-on roller and integrated web guide provide greater winding control for better quality rolls. A Martin roll cart is used for loading and unloading the rolls.



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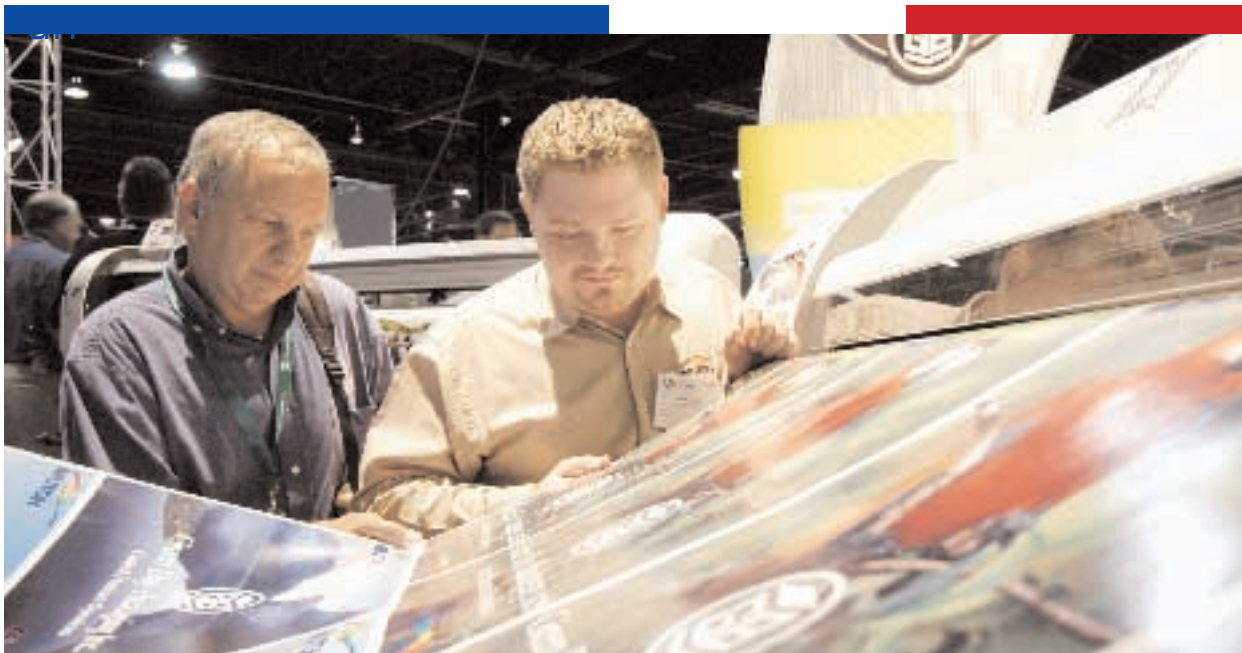
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Substrates

ExxonMobil Chemical featured new cold-glue cut-and-stack films to replace offset-printed paper in the wine and spirits, automotive and household chemical markets. Joining the existing Label-Lyte 85 LP is Label-Lyte 90 LP, which has a glossy metallized surface, and Label-Lyte 95 LP, a white film. Each is said to give a pressure-sensitive appearance at cold-glue cost. New in-mould labeling products include Label-Lyte 65 LIM 301 for injection moulding of tubs and cups for dairy products and Label-Lyte 95 LBM 301 for blow-moulded containers, such as household cleansers.

New pressure-sensitive facestocks include the conformable and top coated LLC-536, positioned as a lower cost alternative for semi-squeeze PS applications on PE or PP containers. Label-Lyte LT-447 is for thermal transfer printing applications. For roll-on-shrink-on labels (ROSO), ExxonMobil featured Label-Lyte 50-LR 210 as a single-web option for contoured PET containers.

ICI Imagedata introduced Permanent Papers, a range of coated polyester based synthetic papers to the North American market. Ranging from 75 to 200 microns caliper, they can be printed with conventional and digital printing methods luggage tags, maps, engineering manuals, loyalty cards and calendars are among the many applications. The range comprises PP Super Tough, PP Super Opaque, PP Translucent and PP Mark Resist for overprinting variable information using a laser printer or photocopier. Grades are supplied in bulk, master rolls or cut sheets.

Klöckner Pentaplast of America, Inc introduced new full-body shrink label films, including Pentaprint OT M276/41 vinyl film with a frosty matt surface. Pentaprint PETG is a 45-micron film with additional usage for tamper-evidence bands and multi-packs. Pentaprint AS8 (vinyl) and AS7 (PETG) have anti-static coatings for sleeve labels, bottle capsules, tamper-evidence bands and multi-pack applications. In a timely move,

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*SOLJET SC-540 and VersaCAMM SP-540V max. print/cut width is 53"; VersaCAMM SP-300 max. print/cut width is 29".

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UPM-Kymmene Group said it was investing an extra \$40 million in Raflatac's fast-growing North American film and paper labelstock operation, which already has over 300 employees. North American filmic consumption in particular is expected to grow two or three times faster than paper labelstocks. Already planned are a new slitting and distribution facility which is due to open in early 2005 at the Pennsylvania terminal. Similar facilities are located in Wisconsin, Toronto and Mexico City. A second coating line is due to start-up at the manufacturing headquarters in Fletcher, North Carolina, in about a

year's time.

Consequently the company is adding new filmic products, including New! Raflex Plus, a fully squeezable clear film, also a squeezable white polyethylene film and a new grade to withstand high-temperature pasteurization.

Surface Specialties UCB - currently awaiting clearance for new ownership - launched several new BOPP facestocks, including Rayoface CZPA, a high-gloss clear coated film with enhanced squeezability for labelling hair care and shower products as a 'no-label look' alternative to polyethylene. VPA 260 is a top-coated, high-yield white facestock

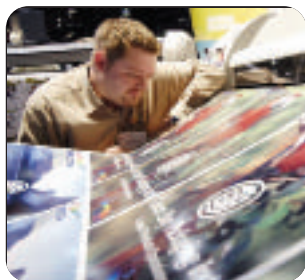
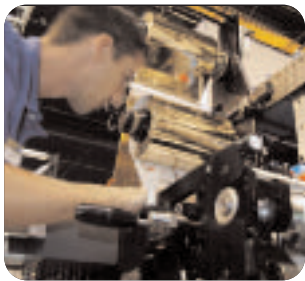
Let's be natural

Given the soaring price of oil and the impact this could have on future polymer prices, it was interesting to see the introduction of film products based on renewable resources. Both Green Bay Packaging's coated products operation and Plastic Suppliers launched films produced from Cargill Dow's NatureWorks PLA poly lactic acid (PLA) film. The 1.6 mil clear film is derived from corn starch. It has a corona-treated print surface and can be used in many applications, either plain or printed and laminated. Green Bay claims that it has high stiffness, high gloss and good clarity. The film is available in both clear and matte and does not have any special packaging or storage concerns.

■ Tailored Solutions Label Traxx MIS system now enables label printers to utilize direct machine monitoring, using devices developed by REI LLC. Printers can port job specifications – including label sizes, material types and cost, estimated times and footages – into their direct machine monitoring system. V4 also enables print sales personnel to access their jobs from remote locations using a standard web browser without any additional software or services. Privacy controls prevent data being viewed by unauthorized personnel. The existing E-traxx web portal also means that customers can log on remotely and view the status of their jobs.

Label Traxx now offers the capability to purchase Fasson products from Fasson Connect and receive order shipment details directly back into the inventory system resulting in significant time savings, with improved order and inventory accuracy. Finally, the software has also now been expanded to permit estimating and the production of screen printing in the sheet sizes critical to this type of printing.

■ GEW introduced its NUVaplus to the American market. It has been optimized for curing heavy lay-downs of both traditional and cationic inks and coatings, on thermo-sensitive substrates at high press speeds. NUVaplus has a cooling airflow system with integral filter in the lamp head that eliminates dust or ink mist contamination and disturbance from airflow to the web. Power rating is up to 600W/in and print widths of up to 59" catered for.



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Show Review



film for prime labels and booklet labels requiring high opacity. WTT is a tough UV-stabilized white film intended for labels in the industrial, chemical, logistics and transport sectors. A paper-liketop coating is printable with various variable data printing methods.

It is also available with UV stabilization for short-term shelf marking and container labelling. UCB has also introduced a clear version of Rayoface CDI for producing 'no-label look' BOPP labels on HP Indigo digital presses.

Green Bay Packaging introduced a raft of new products including a range of facestock aimed at the Indigo digital market. It is the first company to offer silver metalized paper for the digital press. The range also includes bright white semi-gloss, white gloss BOPP, rainbow hologram and clear high gloss BOPP – all with a dedicated Indigo prime coat

New Wine label grades include seven labelstocks, with a choice of either

“For printing on thin films an integrated water-cooled chill roll can be incorporated”

permanent or water-sensitive adhesive. The water-sensitive acrylic builds to a permanent adhesive over the course of an hour, but can easily be removed when soaked in water at room temperature. The Classic Crest grade – available in white and cream – has also been coated with Indigo prime coat for digital applications.

Green Bay has also introduced a range of clay-coated and kraft liners to help roll-to-sheet and sheeted laser type applications stack and lay flat.

MActac's high-tack 705 adhesive has joined the VHPfamily of adhesives. Now

■ GEW also introduced its new infra-red drying cassette that is inter-changeable with its VCP and VUVplus range of UV curing systems to permit IR-drying of water-based inks and varnishes. The system is designed to meet the needs of companies that may want to alternate printing of both UV and water-based inks and coatings without having to re-web the press.

Finally, GEW was promoting its new ultra-compact, light-weight Jetcure UV curing system for the inkjet market. It has an adjustable power up to 500W/in and its own integral fan in each lamphead.

■ NDC Infrared Engineering showed new measurement systems which can be used on a wide variety of label stock and tape applications to measure variables such as silicone coat weight, adhesive coat weight, and moisture content.

■ VTI introduced its DCR-5 lamp head, offering powers up to 200 W/cm (500 W/inch) for arc lengths from 330 up to 700 mm in a compact air-cooled housing. All electrical and pneumatic controls are grouped on the upper part of the cassette, and supplied with quick connections for cleaning and lamp substitution. For printing on thin films an integrated water-cooled chill roll can be incorporated - a solution which allows an easy upgrade of most existing printing machines.

■ JM Heaford was showing its plate mounting systems and took four orders at the show. Also on show was a narrow web sleeve mounting unit



Appleton

After Vince Reese, business development manager technology at Appleton, spoke at the standing-room-only Smart Labels 1 conference about RFID, its booth was inundated with queries about its new SmartStrate. Thermal printing over inlay components can interfere with print quality and hence readability, so Appleton's Thermal and Advanced Technical Products Group engineered inlay protection into the substrate itself to ensure a smooth print surface. SmartStrate has a pliable cushioning layer that conforms to the shape of the inlay, ensuring a smooth, well-supported printing surface on the facestock and also protecting the inlay from mechanical damage. The ESD coating dissipates electro-static energy, while a special top coating provides a suitable surface for thermal printing.

Appleton also expanded its range of security products with the launch of new film and paper-based products at the show, offering planchettes, UV logos and pen-tick authentication capabilities.

- Polypropylene Security Film features covert authentication through UV printed logos and other identifying marks. The material is 2.5 mil thick and the UV security features are part of the film stock, cannot be altered or copied, and become readily visible under UV light.

- AssurMark Pen-Tick and AssurMark Pen-Tick Plus both offer covert protection. When a special colorless felt-tip marker is swiped across any portion of the label, a corresponding color appears that instantly verifies authenticity. The AssurMark Pen-Tick product leaves a permanent mark, whereas the AssurMark Pen-Tick Plus product is reversible, with the marked area staying visible for only a few seconds before disappearing. The proprietary colorant is added during the papermaking process and therefore cannot be removed from the paper.

"A pliable cushioning layer conforms to the shape of the inlay, ensuring a smooth, well-supported printing surface on the facestock and also protecting the inlay from mechanical damage"

- TechMark Taggant-Plus intelligent papers feature machine-readable taggants that can be used in applications that call for special inks, varnishes and coatings. The new kind of covert taggants are part of the paper itself and can only be read with a special hand-held scanner, the TechMark Reader. When the reader scans the taggants it causes an indicator light on the reader to turn green, thereby verifying authenticity. The reader is also programmed to give an audible tone when authenticity is verified.

- AssurMark Planchettes are an overt, easy means of visual authentication. They feature a colored material that is part of the actual structure of the paper. They cannot be removed or altered and provide an immediate way to verify stamps, labels, tags and other types of documents. AssurMark Planchettes can also be made to be UV sensitive, and therefore provide an added level of covert security. Appleton can add planchettes to literally any of its paper grades. An array of colors and options is available.

known as PressGold 705VHP, this reformulated hot-melt product is targeted at difficult substrates such as lumber, cinder blocks, styrofoam, ABS plastic and other uneven surfaces. It offers a lower minimum application temperature of 25°F and claims to aid die-cutting speeds and press uptime. The adhesive is available on a variety of substrates. MACTac also presented products from its Graphic Products and Technical Products divisions, including a series of cast vinyls for the MACscreen range and the MACfilm family of acrylics, ideal for working with low surface energy and high-temperature bonding in marking and labeling systems.

3M acquired Emtech Emulsion Technologies two years ago and has just invested in a new solvent coater. At the show, 3M/Emtech introduced a selection of HP-Indigo optimized polyester and polypropylene facestocks featuring adhesives from 3M. These materials will be available in smaller minimums – as low as a single row – making them ideal for short run jobs. The digital materials will also be pattern coated with adhesive, leaving a dry edge. This prevents adhesive ooze and build-up on press, and provides easy handling and less clean-up.

3M was also promoting its Cushion-Mount Plus tapes, with a



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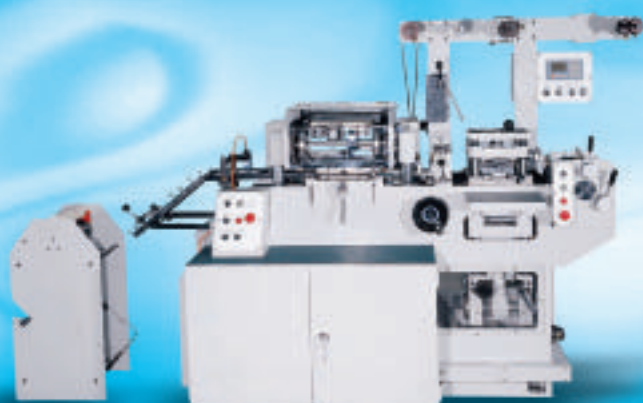
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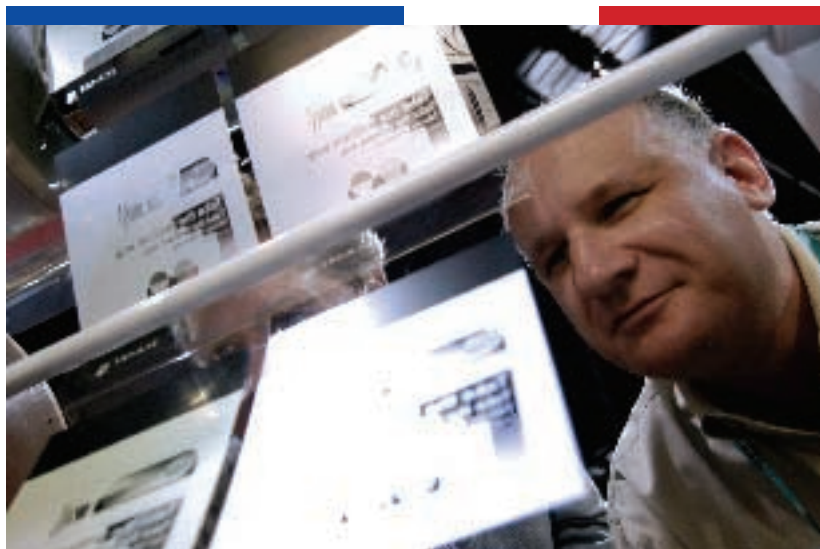
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Labelexpo Americas 2004

Show Review



special Easy Mount adhesive that it claims eliminates blistering, grips tightly to resist edge lifting and can be removed easily.

FLEXcon highlighted its new optiFLEX RESEAL polypropylenes designed for resealable pouch applications, optiFLEX EZ PP 245 polypropylenes engineered for primary/secondary labeling applications for semi-squeeze and rigid

Containers and DigiPRO line of digital offset printable films.

As we have seen, the show was not only a showcase for pressure-sensitive labels, but for the full range of labeling technologies. This was confirmed by Cham Tenero's Michael R Bethge, VP sales and marketing: 'It's been an interesting show and not just for classic pressure sensitive labels. There are now more options in wet glue, metalization, inkjet papers and product identification using the appropriate technical surface.' The company was showing new release liners and promoting its latest Adicar PS range for beverage labelling, available in both gloss and matt. The labels are wet strength and alkaline

resistant, displaying high opacity and whiteness – anti-mould treatment is available.

Yupo introduced two new IML grades at the show, to accommodate an expanded range of blow molding applications and to facilitate ease of handling during the manufacturing process. YUPO ISE105 and IUE105 feature enhanced performance characteristics, including improved anti-static properties. Yupo claims that these grades will allow blow molders to run their production lines at either lower or higher temperatures without incurring blistering or distortion defects, and the anti-static properties will result in increased 'pick and place' efficiencies and higher press speeds. IUE105 offers an especially smooth surface for improved bottle and label texture matching.

At the beginning of this year, Dow Corning warned of the impact of rising platinum costs on the pressure sensitive industry. Eighty per cent of release liners utilize coatings catalyzed by platinum but increasing demand is outstripping supply. To combat this,

■ Gerhardt launched its 5Plus rotary die technology, utilizing what the company described as a 'new production technique' claimed to result in an exceptionally hard die, running with low friction. Development has taken over a year of testing several prototypes at customers' facilities. Gerhardt also introduced a new market strategy called CECT, or Cost Efficient Cutting Tools. CECT consultancy takes account of the converting process and the material being processed prior to recommending optimal choice of tools.

■ Bunting Magnetics introduced a new type of patented sold brass cylinder construction with magnetized segments. The Gold series cylinders are used with Soft Touch dies made for rotary hot-foil stamping and embossing.

The metal-backed plates from FulFlex use an elastic rubber blend that is claimed to combine high heat transfer with zero distortion over long runs. The foil will not melt to the plate, eliminating the risk of meltdown, while the technique produces a high relief and will not hot stamp the background, says Bunting. The company can re-engineer most old or used rotary brass dies into brass magnetic hot stamping cylinders, saving up to 10-30 on cost. In some situations, converters can use the magnetic hot stamping cylinders for embossing. Bunting also introduced the X-treme series of magnetic die-cutting cylinders, intended for precision die-cutting on applications such as synthetics, 'no-look' labels, and 1-mil stock with 1-mil liner – as well as male/female embossing cylinders and 2-D and 3-D embossing dies.

What roll cleaning technology has been used by the "Best in Show" entry for the last 2 major UK print awards? Visit www.alphasonics.co.uk

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Dow Corning has introduced Syl-off Advantage Series release coatings which enable significantly lower platinum usage – 20-50ppm as opposed to the 100ppm or more that conventional systems require. Luc Dusart, Dow Corning's global pressure sensitive industry marketing manager says: 'In many high volume applications, such as the production of paper release liners, this can result in a 10-15 per cent cost savings in silicones.'

Syl-off Advantage Series silicone release coatings are suitable for a wide variety of adhesives and applications and can be used to augment or replace a coater's current product line. They have been designed to minimize the processing and performance difficulties that users sometimes encounter when changing release coats, and have viscosities similar to those found in Dow Corning's standard platinum-catalyzed,

solventless, silicone release coatings. Equipment substrate and dwell times are also similar.

Rayven introduced a new pressure-sensitive adhesive for films at the show. The clear, permanent 3629-CP acrylic adhesive has good bonding properties and is available for label and overlaminating films. 3629-CP has good starting tack level, high clarity and medium-high shear resistance. It also allows repositioning, whilst still developing a strong bond over time. Rayven introduced an improved inkjet coating for film-based label stocks. IJ-1004 is a bright white coating that is designed to accept all standard inkjet inks. The coating absorbs both pigmented and dye-based inks rapidly.

With a background in wide web, Transilwrap was exhibiting for the first time at a Labelexpo. Products new to the narrow web industry included a

■ Foiled again

AMAGIC Holographics introduced its new line of KOLDfoil HX holographic cold foil, available in standard and custom patterns (see picture left). KOLDfoil HX can be used for the wet lamination (cure-through) or dry lamination (conventional) cold foil printing process.

Cold foil printing allows a flexographic printer to apply foil without the need for expensive heated rotary dies. It uses a specially formulated UV-curable adhesive, which is applied with a standard flexographic photopolymer plate, to transfer the foil onto the substrate. With KOLDfoil HX, a printer can now apply various holographic decorative images and custom security images used for product authentication and anti-counterfeiting.

■ Kurz highlighted its cold stamping foils with an emphasis on decorating new materials like IML and shrink labels that have largely been excluded from hot stamping because of their heat-sensitivity.

Kurz was also promoting its Trustseal security system, which can be supplied as hot stamping foil, laminating foil and self-adhesive labels. By integrating security features like serial numbering, first use indicator, tamper evidence, nanotext, partial demetalization and transparent diffraction effects, the level of protection can be adjusted to the brand owner's requirements.



AMAGIC's HX holographic cold foil was converted on a Nilpeter press

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Labelexpo Americas 2004

Show Review



“Full-squeeze, plastic tubes are capturing retail shelf from other container types. Choosing the best PS material involves careful selection of a conformable laminate”

tear-resistant white polypropylene film and a specially formulated plastic with better durability and print quality than ordinary vinyls or styrenes for hard-wearing horticultural labels. Also TransPaque white opaque propylene film which feeds quickly and reliably through sheeters and presses, and Teslin Synthetic Sheet, a white opaque, single-layer microporous printing material that behaves more like paper than plastic – and which can be laminated with Trans-Kote thermal laminating film.

The big news at Avery Dennison was the launch of its dedicated RFID division, covered elsewhere in this review.

The company was launching what it claims is the first truly global film labeling product, Fasson-brand proprietary, co-extruded film labeling product. Fasson Global Co-ex will be available globally and supported by the

full range of Fasson programmes. Like the company's existing FasClear and Primax ranges, it incorporates polymer blending, co-extrusion, machine-direction orientation and cross-direction conformability in its design. This new global offering is designed to reduce inventory with a single material capable of decorating a range of end use applications, bring product to market faster by reducing label qualification time, make label specification easier to manage and increase production efficiency by converting and dispensing a single material.

But another interesting development was the introduction of PS materials for tube labeling. Full-squeeze, plastic tubes are capturing retail shelf from other container types, and choosing the best PS material involves careful selection of a conformable film facestock, an adhesive that meets the

■ Axicon launched an ANSI/ISO/CEN on-line version of its barcode verification system.

Specifically targeting the thermal printing market, the on-line system gives the user the ability to check every barcode printed, creating a full audit trail. Traceability of this type has always been a pre-requisite in the world of pharmaceuticals and is now frequently demanded by major retailers.

In order to create the audit trail, the results of each individual verification scan are saved in spreadsheet form. In addition, the unique Axicon scan file can be saved, allowing for an in depth analysis of individual scans. The software can be set to record either every scan or just those that fail.

■ Alphasonics was for the first time promoting its full range of multi-frequency variable power Alphasound roll cleaning systems that are capable of cleaning up to about 1400lpi.

David Jones, md at Alphasonics, said this was the first US show where converters were prepared to buy the company's more expensive equipment: 'At this year's show, our agent Doyle Systems, took over 300 leads, with over 70 per cent of these being for Alphasound,' says Jones.

■ Enercon promoted its Atmospheric Plasma Treatment System for RFID label printing. It can be integrated within the production process of manufacturers of passive and active RFID tags and labels operating in the UHF and microwave frequency bands. Enercon says the Plasma3's cleaning, etching and functionalizing surface treatment process enables manufacturers to optimize tag transmission levels, while significantly improving productivity and tag yield.



“Quick turnaround ‘flexible packaging’ films include primary and secondary pouches, roll-fed glue applied film labels and shrink sleeve films, where Avery believes narrow web converters can have a decisive advantage”

rigors of both production and end-use, and a release liner that will support demanding processing requirements and speed. The range of Fasson films for this sector includes metallized films that range in brilliance from high to brushed matte, films that provide a soft-touch look and tactile feel, ultra clear films/adhesive for high-clarity, high-gloss tubes, and matte films that blend into natural and matte tube materials.

The company was also focusing on its Rapid-Roll non-PS applications including short-run. Quick turnaround ‘flexible packaging’ films include primary and secondary pouches, roll-fed glue applied film labels and shrink sleeve films, where Avery believes narrow web converters can have a decisive advantage (see also comments by PCMC in this feature). Among new

Durable products announced are battery labels including a 2.3 Mil White BOPP TC facestock engineered for minimal splitting and spider webbing and a high performance acrylic adhesive engineered for PP battery casings, as well as Polyimides for PCBs, and sheeted products.

The company was promoting machine direction films (MDF) which allow cross direction conformability for roll-fed label stock available in white and clear versions and two calipers. New VIP products included S9010 acrylic emulsion permanent adhesive for bonding to a wide range of difficult substrates including HDPE, shrink films and corrugated, as well as a range of laser, direct thermal – survivable without UV varnish - and EDP products. ■

■ Tilt Lock has introduced a new automatic leveling device designed to attach to their Tip Lift roll-handling device. The leveling device acts to assure that the frame of the Tip Lift is plumb at all times and that the roll is level when the roll is tipped to the horizontal position. The leveling device may be operated in automatic or manual mode.

Tilt Lock has also launched a mounted tip lift suitable for a fork truck attachment. This unit is designed for operations where rolls need to be transported to machinery where there is no overhead crane system available.

The capacity of the tip lift is up to 900lbs and is dependent on the face width of the roll to be handled. It comes with an air compressor for operating the pneumatic tooth release mechanism. Probes are available in several sizes to accommodate most core sizes and controls for the tip lift are dashboard mounted.

■ Rogers Corporation introduced its new R/bak Cushion Mounting Tapes, with added toughness of the soft “cushion” to reduce tearing on demount, and modified adhesives for easier mounting and demounting and decreased plate lift. The R/bak Cushion Mounting Tapes are offered with different compressibility levels to accommodate the full range of printing applications.



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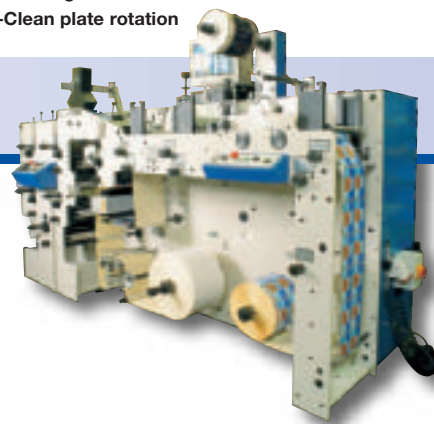


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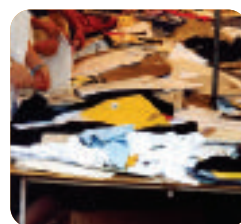
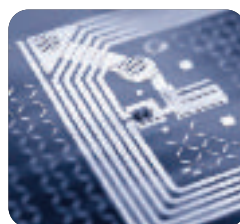
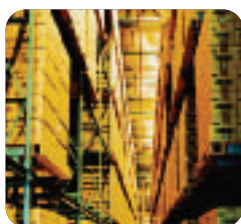
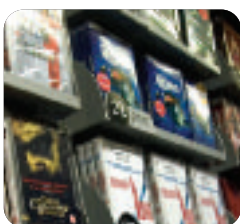
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Verifying PDFs

Increasingly complex approval cycles between design agency, global end users and plate makers can create bottlenecks and expensive rework in the label workflow. **Andy Thomas** reports on a new solution claimed to guarantee the integrity of the PDF before printing.

The pressure is on supply chains to cut cycle times on fast moving consumer goods. But all too often we see files going uselessly back and forward between design agency and platemaker/printer in an attempt to get a job that will actually print on the target press.

At the same time, retailers and global end users are faced with the complexities of approving shorter runs of multiple product variants. Legal, nutritional and usage information, often in multiple languages, needs to be correct and verified before the label reaches the print stage, often by a series of different departments.

When something goes wrong, the 'blame game' starts, an expensive, time consuming and destructive process.

At Labelexpo we saw the start of an important move by AVT towards closing the inspection loop between pre-press file, on-press camera and rewinder control. The goal is to automate the process of checking that the label delivered to the end user is completely on-specification with the master file and contract proof. But this system only works if the pre-press file is correct to begin with.

PDF is increasingly accepted as the common file format for the packaging industry now that v1.5 has resolved outstanding technical issues critical for packaging users.

The beauty of PDF is that it can be saved natively out of almost any standard layout or design application, and has thus become the key method of handling the early proofing cycles of a packaging job. PDF files are requested more frequently by brand managers for their internal approval cycles, and are used to deliver the master image to printing sites across different states or countries.

'Packaging work generally has elements of the job ready at different times, and so the text may be written before the design is finalised,' confirms Jan Ruyschaert, Artwork Systems' UK managing director. 'This means that text can be sent as a PDF for checking in order to save time later on. If relevant elements, such as fonts are embedded into the file then anyone receiving the text would be able to view it in the correct format, regardless of the fonts on their particular computer - either PC or Macintosh. This means something could be sent in, for instance, Polish or Russian, and the recipient will see exactly what they



Asset management under Nexus

should on their monitor.' Ruyschaert estimates that 90 per cent of first packaging proofs are now PDF-based.

Ruyschaert points out that PDF is now the favored vehicle for transmitting jobs to remote printing sites by centralized marketing departments of large brand owners and retailers. 'Increasingly, work is being printed in countries different to the one in which the product is packed, because even with transport costs it can still be cheaper to have packaging printed some distance away. Again, PDF comes into its own as a means of transmitting digital job data.'

But a problem arises here. How do we know the PDF has been created correctly? Or that the correct version of the file – approved by all relevant parties – is the one going to print?

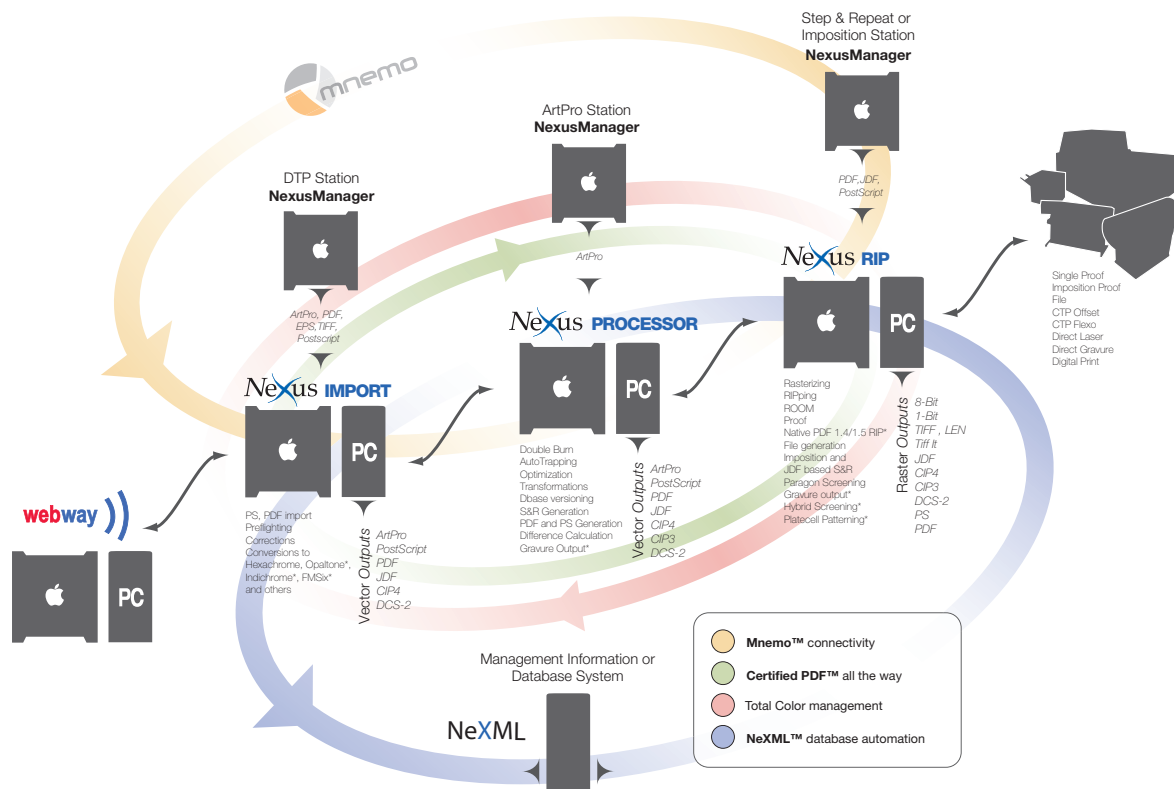
Pre-press vendors already offer their own pre-flighting systems to catch obvious problems like missing fonts or pictures supplied at the wrong resolution. But what we really need is one standard meta-format which defines the common elements of a PDF file vital to successful packaging production and which can be trusted by every player in the workflow from design to print.

In the commercial printing industry, an on-going multi-national project under the auspices of the Ghent PDF workgroup (www.ghentpdfworkgroup.org) has developed the settings and standards for the usage of the Certified PDF format in the commercial print sector.

Enfocus is owned by Artwork Systems, which has now



Artwork Systems' Certified PDF workflow guarantees the packaging file is accurate throughout the project



migrated the Certified PDF format to its packaging pre-press systems. It will also be available as an OEM product to other packaging workflow specialists, albeit without 'audit trail' functionality.

Certified PDF technology offers a range of features not available within an ordinary PDF file. The Certified PDF file will have undergone pre-flighting to a standard profile devised by the packaging sub-committee of the Ghent PDF workgroup.

As an example, a profile would check both for embedded fonts, and for the special barcode fonts which must replace a designer's dummy barcode. It would check that allowable color references for packaging have been used (RGB, LAB etc), and that the PDF was created properly. Certified PDF can also check a variant against a master file, to ensure essential legal information is retained when the design variant changes.

The profile could even include individual press fingerprinting information where the master file is the communications tool between a label converter and designer/plate maker. But the initial concept is that it should provide a universal file format which guarantees printability in any labels-packaging workflow.

'You could see a situation where the generic profile is used up to plate making stage, then the file is re-certified with individual press fingerprint information for individual converters served by a repro house for example, or to send information to a remote plate making facility, says Stan Lemmens, major account manager at Artwork Systems.

Because everyone in the label workflow can access the technical information held in the Certified PDF file at an early stage, 'surprises' can be avoided at the end of the cycle – surprises which all too often result in the plate maker/printer swallowing the cost of the re-work.

'We believe the huge benefits to everyone in the production

chain will result in Certified PDF technology being adopted by the industry very quickly,' says Jan Ruyschaert. 'With faster throughput, more direct contact between individuals, lower costs and fewer errors, everyone is a winner.'

One of the most powerful features of Certified PDF is the ability to log where amendments have been made, who approved them, and where re-work has been carried out. This functionality is only available for the ArtPro and Nexus systems, which in v.8 have been built to incorporate Certified PDF from the ground up (see box). The Certified PDF label will provide ArtPro and Nexus users with a full edit and history trail on their PDF exchange. The traceability of the incoming PDF – even though the file might have undergone serious editing – will never be broken, according to Jan Ruyschaert:

'The final PDF will not only carry the Certified PDF quality label from preflighting, but will also show a full history of the file from its origination in the design environment to the delivered production PDF.'

'Regardless of who has made what changes on which particular day, everything will be logged automatically by the system and be available for instant checking at any point in the production cycle from the actual creation of the job. The Certified PDF will include even the smallest details, down to an individual trap session made at the last minute.'

Ultimately, we could envisage a Certified PDF label file feeding control information to a closed loop inspection system like that demonstrated by AVT at Labelexpo. This would be an immensely powerful quality control system which would dramatically cut time and cost throughout the entire supply chain.

Could Certified PDF become a global standard for the labels industry? We are not yet speaking about Certified PDF as an

industry standard in the packaging world, perhaps it could become one in the near future,' says Stan Lemmens. 'At this time it is a very important added value on the industry standard PDF and we are convinced that the companies that need this full traceability will take their decision to choose for it. This of course based on the 8600 ArtPro seats and the 2300 Nexus installations we have in the Packaging world. ■

ArtPro and Nexus built for Certified PDF in version 8

Version 8.0 of Artwork Systems' ArtPro and Nexus systems not only incorporate Enfocus' Certified PDF technology, but provide editability for typical PDF transparencies and blend modes plus support for PDF 1.5 layers. Other new functions include a trapping module, flattening technology and JDF compliance for areas such as step and repeat and imposition. ArtPro and Nexus 8.0 include a new module to enable the trapping of PDF 1.4 objects. The traps generated by this module also utilise the same new PDF 1.4 object definitions so that the trapping results remain highly editable.

Flattening technology enables customers to handle transparencies and blend modes using existing equipment. The facility converts data into a format that can be understood by legacy hardware and software. Artwork Version 8.0 incorporates a PDF 1.4/1.5 RIP, which enables users to operate in a complete and native PDF working environment. 'A PDF 1.4/1.5 native RIP is very important to our customers because it provides them with the opportunity to enter a complete and native PDF workflow environment,' says UK managing director Jan Ruyschaert.

Both ArtPro and Nexus also include JDF technology for areas such as imposition and step and repeat, with operators able to generate JDF files in ArtPro that the Nexus workflow can accept and rip for plate or film output. JDF also facilitates interfacing to, for example, an MIS system, enabling audit trail reporting or the exchange of information such as how many plates were produced for a particular job and when they were made. Other features within version 8.0 include the ability to incorporate RSS-14 barcode symbologies and the Data Matrix code - a 2-dimensional barcode that holds more information - often used in the health and beauty care sectors.

Artwork Systems has increased the automation tools within NexusImport and NexusProcessor, and this includes the ability to generate 3D animations, extensive layer and selection controls. There is a new screening and calibration system for the NexusRIP that includes two additions to Artwork Systems' Paragon screening family. These are Paragon Organic, a second order FM screening technology claimed to result in better color stability on press with better dot gain behaviour and a less grainy appearance, and Paragon Radiant, which is a new hybrid FM-AM-FM screen for high screen ruling litho environments.

Also new is NeXML, which allows users to automate ArtPro and Nexus workflows using data from database systems such as MIS and job management systems. The NeXML automation is built around a system that allows XML job tickets coming from an external source to drive the Artwork Systems applications. For instance, if an operator wanted to change one flavor throughout the entire range of packaging for a food product, then he would only need to make one alteration and the rest would be handled automatically.

'The ultimate goal is to generate XML tickets from information that users already have available in databases or MIS systems, so that this information can be repurposed in the Nexus workflow,' says Jan Ruyschaert. 'This would reduce error margins and wastage and allow an even higher level of automation. Also, users who do not have production information in databases can benefit from NeXML, as this is capable of creating its own XML job tickets to build 'flexible' workflows.'

This development clearly results from frustration with the lack of practical progress by stakeholders up and down the chain in integrating JDF in the packaging workflow. Stan Lemmens, major account manager at Artwork Systems, explains that NeXML is a 'baby JDF' which opens the door to practical co-operation with MIS systems without having to wait for JDF modules to be implemented. 'Our problem is that we do not know what JDF functionalities to develop, because MIS suppliers do not know what they want,' says Lemmens.

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The European Label Summit

Prague summit highlights European opportunities

The first Labelexpo European Label Summit was held in Prague, capital of the Czech Republic, to examine the impact of an expanded European Union on the labels industry.

Andy Thomas reports

Europe's Iron Curtain – which had divided the continent since the end of World War II – collapsed at the end of the 1980s as Berliners tore down the Wall which disfigured their city. The movement spread rapidly throughout the region, culminating in the ending of communist party hegemony in the Soviet Union itself and the break-up of the USSR into its constituent republics.

The shock transition in these states from a planned, centralized economy to a market-driven capitalist economy was a painful process, and bequeathed rates of unemployment as high as 20 per cent as the over-manned command economies were dismantled.

On 1st May 2004 eight former East European states joined the European Union: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Five 'candidate' states are being considered for membership in 2007: Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia and – most controversially – Turkey.

Although the EU's population increased by 17 per cent on 1 May, its total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by only 6 per cent, giving some indication of economic gulf between the former Eastern bloc states and Western Europe.

In his keynote address to Labelexpo's first European Label Summit, Hans Martens, chief executive of the European Policy Centre, pulled no punches. 'These states are a long way behind Western Europe on labor productivity and remain



Delegates to first Labelexpo European Label Summit

weak in services, internet penetration and the knowledge economy. They deliver roughly half the productivity but at one fifth the price of Western Europe. Combined with the emphasis on industry and agriculture, these states could become the sweatshop of Europe.' Tackling the legacy of environmental devastation, endemic corruption and weak business ethics were further 'major challenges' identified by Martens.

Lower prices and taxation in the entrant states, meanwhile, threaten global brands with an increase in parallel trade, with goods and services bought cheaply in the East and sold at a profit in the West.

'Paradoxically, however, it is the very chasm between 'old' and 'new' Europe which is driving growth rates in the eight new member states double those in



1973: 13



1989: 4



1999: 2



Centralization of Lever's European toilet soap manufacturing locations

the West. The Czech Republic is already growing at a faster rate than all but two Western European states, for example.

EU membership will further boost growth by increasing investor confidence and direct foreign investment, said Martens. At the same time, EU restructuring funds will quickly boost investment in basic infrastructure.

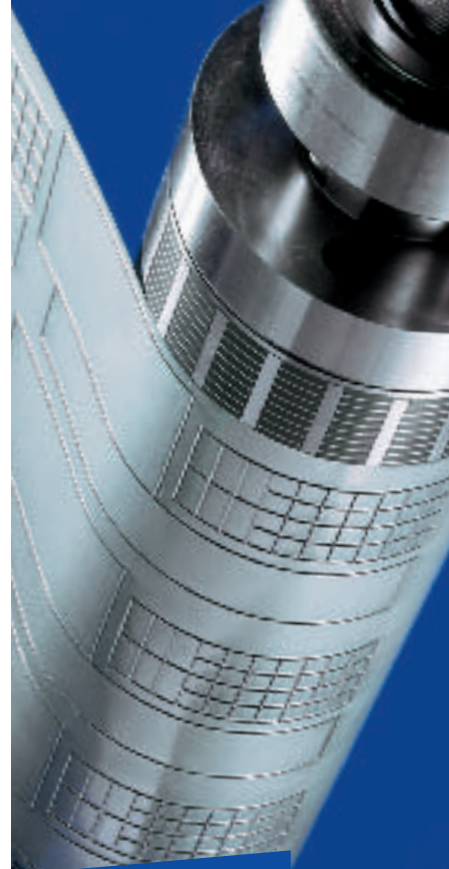
Martens believes that the benefits of EU expansion will eventually be felt across the continent. "The expanded EU has a population of 450 million, making it the world's biggest unified market for the free movement of goods and services. If the next wave of expansion goes according to plan, another 100 million citizens will be added in 2007."

An expanded Europe will speed the trend towards integrated continent-wide businesses and logistics infrastructure, realizing economies of scale in product development, production, purchasing, stock distribution and marketing. Unilever's toilet soap manufacturing locations operations provide a model, having reduced from 13 locations in 1973 to just two by 1999 following the first phase of EU growth.

"The tendency is for international firms to go global, while we can say goodbye to

"An expanded Europe will speed the trend towards integrated continent-wide businesses and logistics infrastructure, realizing economies of scale in product development, production, purchasing, stock distribution and marketing"

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only national firms,' said Martens. 'The local niche firm has opportunities, but needs constant adjustment to survive.' This was the theme later taken up by Asda-Walmart (see pg. 54).

With rising living standards predicted in the new EU states, some end users are already making the move cheaper labor zones in the Ukraine, Serbia or even China – as this writer discovered on a recent visit to Hungary. 'These end users should be aware that political, economic and social stability cannot be guaranteed in these states,' replied Martens. 'The EU offers a low inflation environment, price stability over the next 10-15 years and guaranteed access to the internal market.'

Martens conceded that Europe cannot hope to compete with China on the basis of increasing productivity or lowering labor costs – only by adding value and developing service-based industries.

The Czech Republic's deputy minister for industry and trade, Dr Miroslav Somol, confirmed the wider picture outlined by Martens. The country has almost 10 per cent unemployment alongside a GDP that has exploded from €20bn in 1990 to €70bn today.

Labor costs in the Czech Republic are just 3.9 per hour, compared to 19.01 across the EU, but Dr Somol was quite clear that the Czech Republic has no future as a 'sweatshop' economy. The Czech government will support higher value added exports, with a focus on supporting SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) – a category which takes in most Czech label converters. These companies should benefit from Dr Somol's 'national innovation strategy', which includes support for private R&D and intellectual property protection.

Dr Somol sees huge potential benefits for the Czech Republic in EU membership, particularly in access to its vast internal market, the stabilization of the environment for entrepreneurs, greater investment opportunities and simplification of product certification. 'At the same

"Converters in this region are far less likely to see themselves as 'label printers' than general packaging converters, and so anticipated the trend now seen in Western Europe"

time, the country will be subject to greater competition, and there will be pressures to improve business ethics, environmental protection, consumer protection and health and safety of employees, as well as meeting new requirements for technical regulations – all of which will ultimately have a positive impact.'

The dark clouds on the horizon remain increasing interest rates, inflation and low labor productivity, said Dr Somol.

Label growth moves East

Having set the scene with these two presentations, Edale's Bernhard Grob talked about the changes he has personally seen as a press manufacturer supplying Eastern European narrow web converters for more than 20 years.

Since the mid-1990s Edale has seen high growth in press sales for pressure-sensitive label applications. But the company has historically sold narrow web presses specified for wider 'packaging' applications – for the production of folding cartons and flexible packaging rather than, or in addition to, pressure sensitive labels.

'Converters in this region are far less likely to see themselves as 'label printers' than general packaging

The European Label Summit

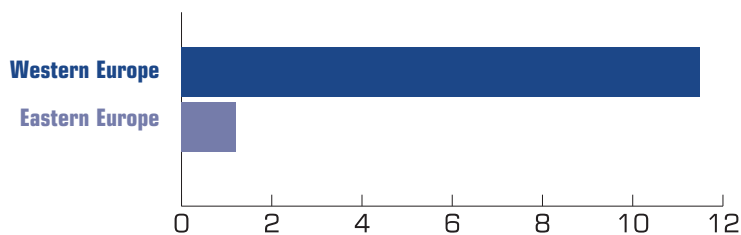


The European label summit ran an extensive conference program

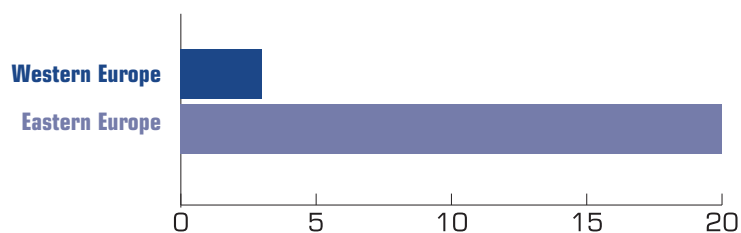
converters, and so anticipated the trend now seen in Western Europe,' said Grob. 'It is not uncommon in Eastern states to see narrow web presses converting pharma blisters, PS laminates, wrappers and tubes. It is also not unusual to see flexible packaging converters using narrow web in-line machines alongside wide web CI presses.'

With the rapid penetration of global brands and retailing multiples into the central and East European region, Grob sees a rapid move towards the same technology trends seen in the West – value added applications including

Pressure-sensitive materials consumption 2004 (M²/Person)



Growth of pressure-sensitive industry 2004 %



Source: Avery Dennison

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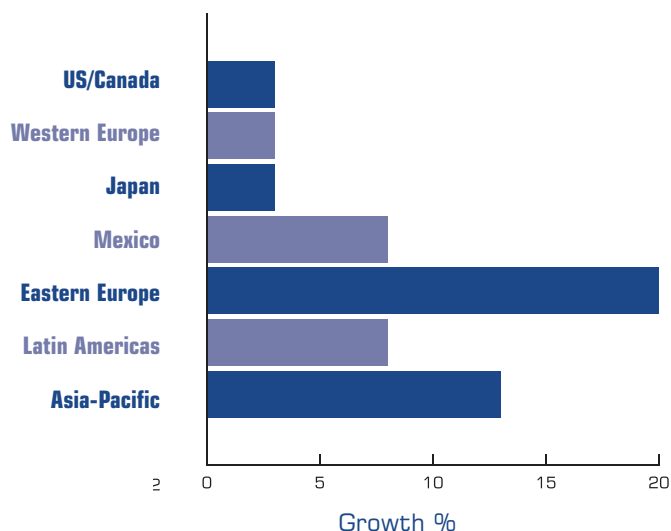
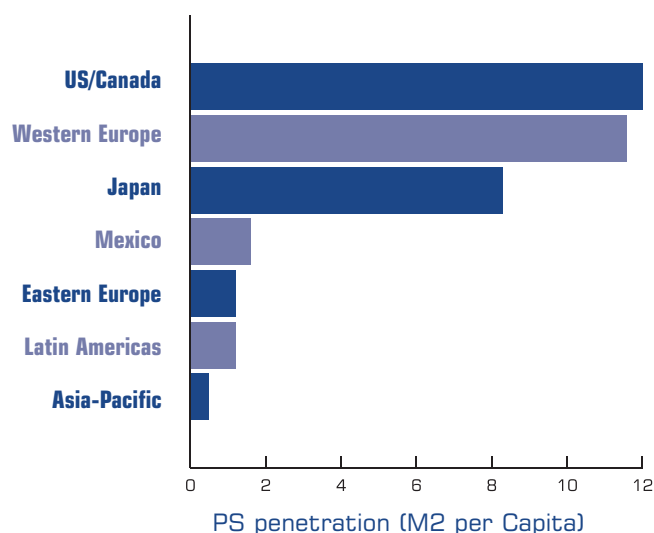
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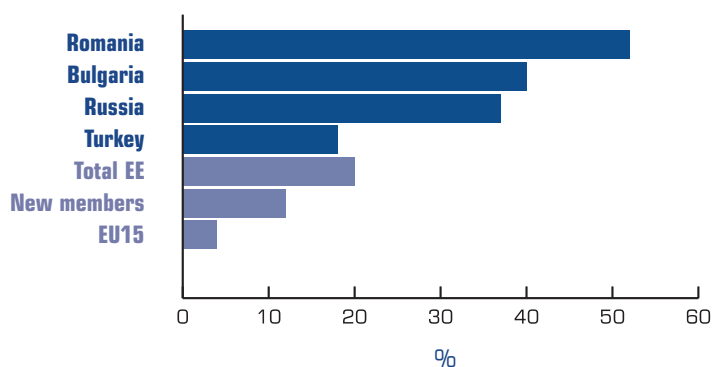
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The European Label Summit



(Above) Lower penetration and higher growth of pressure-sensitive materials characterizes developing markets such as Eastern Europe



Pressure-sensitive industry growth in Europe

Source: Avery Dennison

combination process printing, in-line coating and production of multi-layer labels, peel and read, booklet, security and RFID. He identified a move from gravure to flexo for drinks labels and from sheetfed to in-line production. The domination of sheetfed wet glue printing in the region opens up huge opportunities for the pressure-sensitive labels business, said Grob. 'Shrink sleeves will also become more important as will brand security applications. Cartons will continue to be a value add opportunity for converters in Eastern Europe, with applications including pharma and food container sleeves, both short runs and repeat jobs.'

Angelo Depietri, VP and general manager East Europe & International South at Avery Dennison's Fasson division, looked at the EU's expansion from the company's point of view. Avery Dennison Fasson already has a significant infrastructure in Eastern Europe, boosted by the acquisition of Jackstadt with its strong presence and customer base in the region.

Depietri believes it will take five to ten years for the accession of the new states to truly reshape business across Europe because of transition periods, slow legal implementation and market turmoil. For example, there will be no truly open borders until 2007-8 and no common currency until 2009-10 at the earliest.

However, it is already having an impact on global corporations like Avery. 'With a level playing field we can put a pan-European strategy in place,' said Depietri. 'Local companies can now exploit the wider EU market and protected businesses will disappear.'

Depietri said the enlarged single market forces a rethinking of European business strategies, such as the feasibility of pan-European just-in-time models and consequent improvement of the supply chain. 'Production in a unified EU will lead to some manufacturing shifting to the new member states. Central Europe could well emerge as the right place for service centres, technical competence centres and R + D.' Above all, EU enlargement marks the end of Central Europe as an 'emerging market', with political and economic risks reduced by membership.

Depietri pointed to the low penetration of PS labels in the new member economies as the driving force behind growth rates up to 20 per cent. The next wave of 'candidate' countries are showing even higher growth – over 50 per cent in Romania, 40 per cent in Bulgaria and 18 per cent in Turkey.

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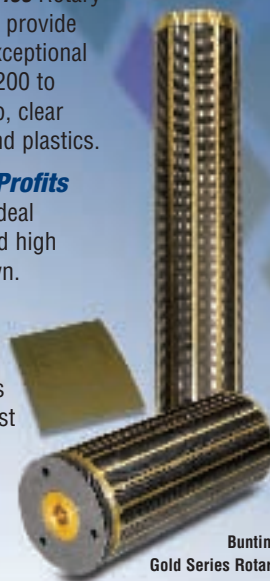
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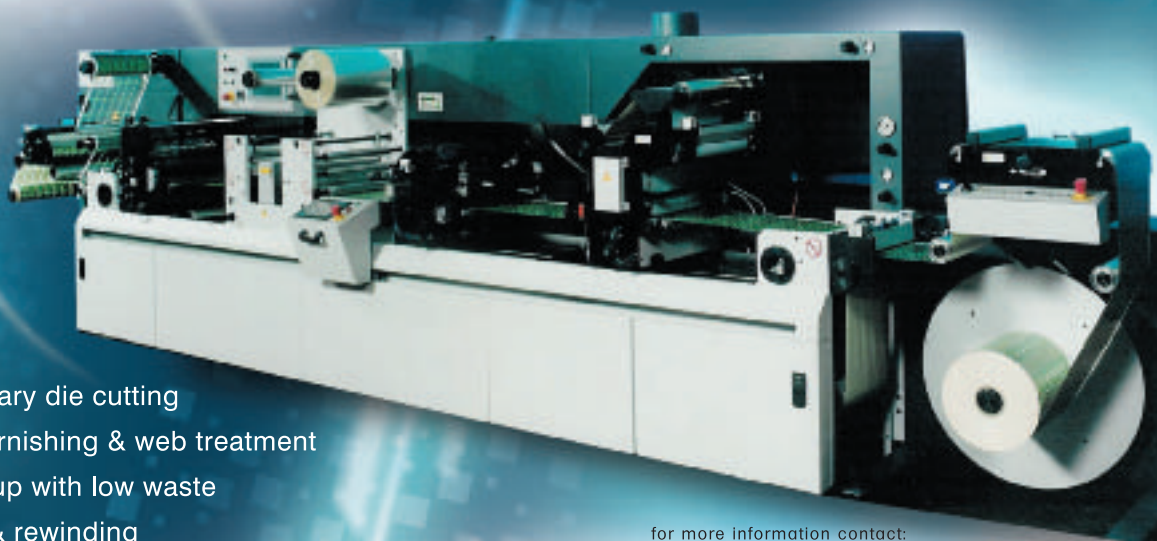
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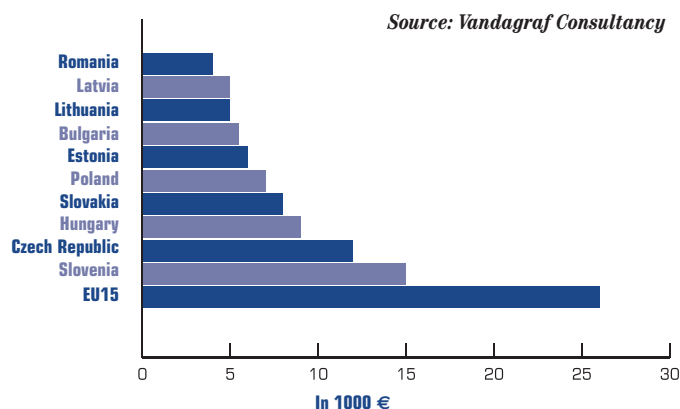
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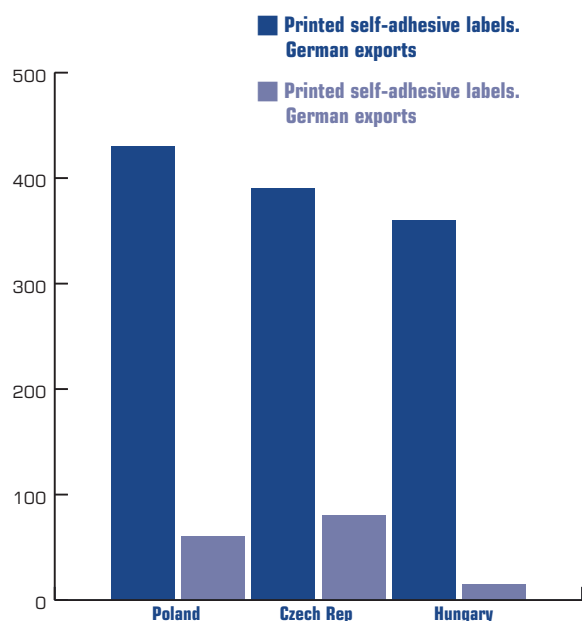


RPS 350

e No.118



GDP per head at PPP (purchasing power parity)



German printed label exports to Eastern Europe outweigh imports

‘However, there is still a need for problem solving in the new member economies, along with an initial focus on functionality and price. This differs from Western Europe, where point of sale impact by decoration and differentiation is now the dominant pressure.’

Mike Fairley, director of strategic development at the Tarsus Labels Group, put the growth of the labels industry in Eastern Europe into a global perspective. Fairley’s figures show the region accounting for 7.6 per cent of global labels production – almost as big as Japan (7.7 per cent) and bigger than South America (5.4 per cent). Fairley projected growth rates for Eastern Europe between 17-

20 per cent, which is second only to China.

Growth is strongest in non-paper PS rolls - 20 per cent in East Europe against 8.1 per cent in Europe as a whole.

Fairley pointed out that over two thirds of label production in Eastern Europe is still wet glue, compared to one third in Western Europe. PS labels account for 21 per cent of labels usage in Eastern Europe, while they are now the dominant label technology in Western Europe.

Turning to the Czech Republic as a case study, Fairley pointed to a doubling in direct foreign investment over the past three years, including Western-owned retail groups such as Arhold, Metro, Tesco, Carrefour and Lidl and global food and drinks giants Unilever, Nestle, Danone, Kraft, Pepsi and Coca Cola. These investments are fuelling packaging and labels growth of around 13 per cent.

Fairley next looked at Poland, which is the ‘big hitter’ out of the accession states with a population of 39 million – over 8 per cent of the enlarged EU. The country has made a rapid transition to a market economy, with industrial output up 24 per cent last year alone. The retail sector, again, is dominated by the major European retail groups like Carrefour, Lidl and Tesco.

Fairley predicted continued strong PS growth in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, with investment targeted to meet the quality and performance requirements of global corporations. This would lead to a reduction in imports from Germany in particular.

‘Investment will be made in new label plants to produce sleeve labels, wrap-around film labels and cut-and-stack film labels – again to meet the demands of global corporations,’ Fairley concluded.

Fairley sees opportunities for technology transfers, investment and joint ventures with West European label converters to plug the ‘skills gap’ in the fastest growing East European states.

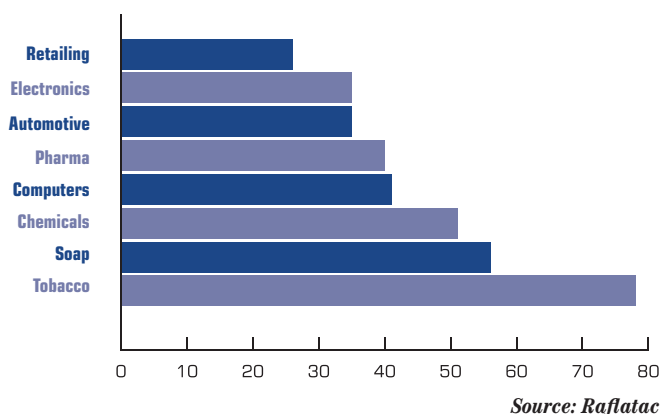
Consultant John Penhallow reviewed trade relations between the EU15 and the eight East European newcomers.

Penhallow stated that current purchasing power per capita of the new entrants is under half that of the existing EU15. As that situation changes, labels growth will continue to outstrip Western Europe, accounting for almost 1,000M sq metres of consumption out of a total European consumption of 6,000M sq metres by 2008.

Penhallow pointed to a ‘pretty much one-sided flow’ of printed labels into Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary from Germany in-particular. German exports to Poland, for example, are seven times greater than its imports. The

The European Label Summit

Level of globalization by industry foreign assets/total assets



Czech Republic imports four times more labels from Germany than it exports, and Hungary's exports to Germany are negligible, with imports almost as high as the Czech Republic.

Ilkka Ylipoti, VP Raflatac Sales Europe emphasized that pressures on Eastern European PS label converters are the same as those facing the industry worldwide: fragmentation of consumer demand, increasing supply chain power and a greater share of retailers' private label products.

Ylipoti pointed out that over half of soap and chemicals products are globalized, as are 40 per cent of computer and pharmaceutical products and one third of electronics and automotive products. Over one quarter of retailing assets are now held on a global basis. Branding and supply chain synergies will continue to drive globalization, said Ylipoti.

European label converters are under the most intense pressure as their direct costs increase and the sales price per label decreases. At the same time the industry remains highly fragmented across Europe.

'The implications are that the laminate producer-converter relationship must move from transactional to collaborative,' said Ylipoti. 'There has to be a new approach to innovation including a systematic process to filter, manage and commercialize innovations. We need to set up centers of excellence to implement customer-specific projects.'

Ylipoti pointed out that some new ventures might be considered too risky, or outside the company's core competence, in which case a spin-off or JV should be created to commercialize new concepts. This was the thinking behind UPM's Rafsec division to develop and commercialize RFID.

Impact of Globalization

David Harrison, responsible for developing European and now global accounts with pan-European label converter Skanem,

told delegates that converters are increasingly dealing with pan-European purchasing departments handling both local and cross-border deliveries.

'End users will set up their own global teams, including purchasing, development, technical, marketing and production functions and will choose label partners in all global regions,' Harrison explained. Joint meetings will then be held with all partners to reinforce teamwork and set objectives. Standard materials, inks etc will be chosen after pricing is agreed with potential suppliers. Above all, global label specifications will be consolidated.'

This global partnership will manage brand consistency, work with an open book cost model, manage the supply chain – including lead times and forecasts – report printing efficiencies, wastage and speeds, develop a common machine base, share technology improvements and innovations, support key performance improvements at the labeling site, and agree priorities and actions for major savings.

To survive, label converters must work to reduce complexity throughout the supply chain.

'This involves adopting low cost thinking about design, and rationalizing substrates,' said Harrison. 'We need to think 'out of the box' and find engineered solution partners to challenge market dominators using low overhead products.'

Color management of global brands across multiple substrates will be critical. Strategies will include standardized process, spot and pantone color targets, taking control of ink mixing in-house, press fingerprinting using actual label substrates and measuring color differences as delta E values.

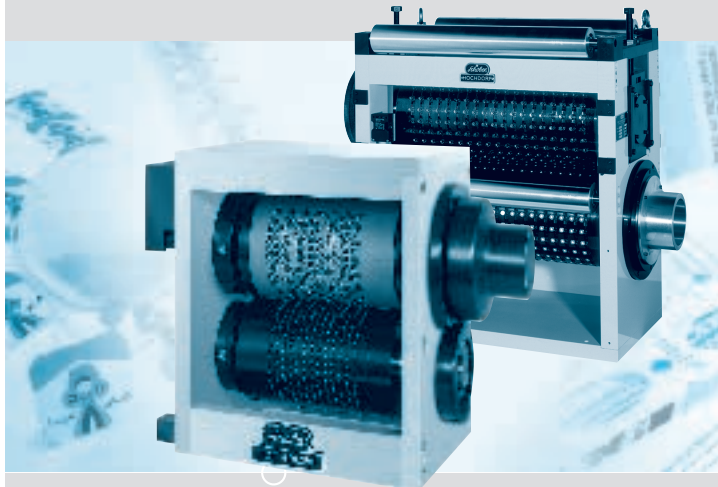
'We need to think differently about cost in this new environment,' said Harrison. 'It is the lowest applied label cost which counts, and this is a joint responsibility across the extended supply chain. This is NOT the same as the lowest cost per label!'

Harrison sees strategic alliances between printers as the most likely route to globalization, rather than big groups making acquisitions in all local regions. 'The members of the alliance will not directly compete with each other and will therefore co-operate closely in an open way.' Such a strategic partnership would also guarantee end users security of supply.

Harrison expects a new relationship to develop with global end users based around fixed contracts giving stable volumes and predictable print runs. 'This requires fewer sales people, gives more leverage on raw materials, better utilization of capacity – less peaks and troughs – and above all, supports future investment.'

Harrison called for the harmonization of raw material prices across European states, since multi-nationals are moving

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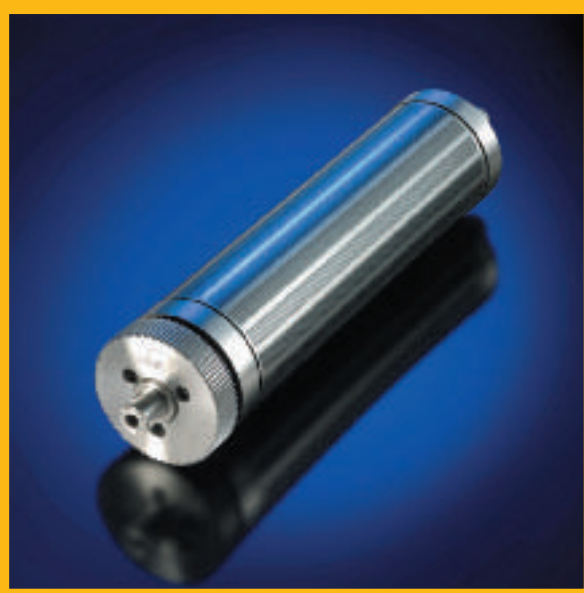
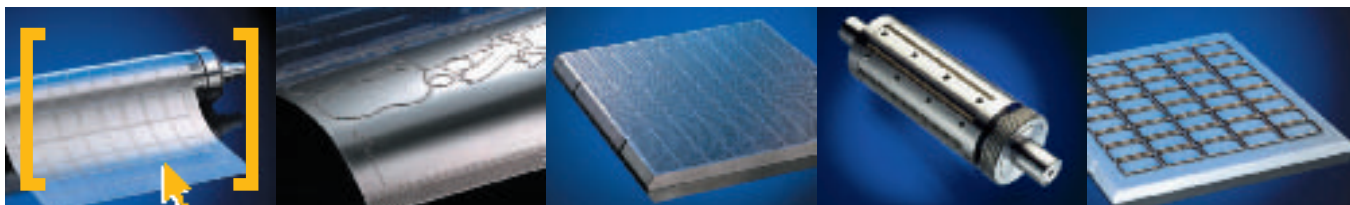
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towards global pricing policies.

The spread of advanced labeling technology round the world will inevitably lead to cheaper PS labels from other continents driving down prices in Europe and making life impossible for converters involved only in commodity labels production. 'Local printers will still survive, but in servicing niche markets, delivering to local customers.'

How is technology likely to be affected? 'Label stocks will be mainly filmic re-engineered films, recyclable with plastics containers, squeezable and flexible, performance-oriented and shrinkable to fit on uneven surfaces,' said Harrison. 'Press trends will include more UV flexo with different combination processes, more computer controls, faster set-up and higher flexibility and more digital printing.'

Harrison's observations were fully supported by Mark Hill, operations manager at Asda-Walmart's UK outsourcing partner Label Link.

Hill outlined the scale of Asda-Walmart's UK operation. Half of food sales are now Asda Own Brand, with 5,500 live labels – 5 billion labels in total - sourced for the operation.

Asda-Walmart is sourcing more and more goods such as wine

and fresh produce in emerging markets, and is developing global and local print partners to service local packing/filling operations. At the same time, Hill has identified a clear opportunity to ship labels into UK packing/filling operations from Eastern Europe. 'If it increases our overall efficiency we are prepared to hold stock, so long as we know it will be for a limited time,' said Hill.

Commodity labels – mainly in-store and distribution labels - account for over half Asda-Walmart's annual label consumption, and these will be sourced where they are cheapest.

'Global retailers are well positioned to take advantage of efficiencies in label production, particularly in commodities where cost per label is the only differentiating factor,' said Hill. Commodity carrier bags, for example, are now sourced from China, saving the company multi-million Euros per year over European suppliers.

The pressure is certainly on Asda-Walmart's UK label suppliers. 'They are the increasingly thin meat in a very thick sandwich, facing huge pressures on unit costs from us and from base materials suppliers, and this will only get worse.'

Hill said in the future Label Link would partner companies with very specific capabilities: 'they must supply from multiple sites to guarantee flexibility and disaster recovery. They will be highly professional and technically competent in the manufacture AND application of labels. They will have broad capabilities and the capacity to specialize and innovate.'

But the labels industry is currently far too fragmented, Hill said, with over 400 PS label suppliers in the UK alone, mostly small, privately owned companies.

'We welcome consolidation in the labels sector. We need fewer, larger printers, giving us broader service across national boundaries and a leaner supply chain. Local printers MUST take the threat seriously, reduce costs, and drive service and quality levels up. Anybody simply producing commodity labels is dead. Purely national printers have no future.'

Hill said Asda-Walmart is prepared to build longer term relationships with converters prepared to innovate, cut product cycle times, work with Label Link to control brand image and reduce supply chain costs.

In the future Label Link will audit Asda-Walmart's printers across a range of activities from quality control to financial stability, with performance measurements based on value and service.

Hill also called on base materials suppliers to reduce the range and complexity of their products. 'We need more multi-purpose substrates available globally.' ■

Servo Drives in Label presses

With servo drives now making an appearance on an increasing number of new narrow web presses, **Andy Thomas** examines the hype surrounding servos and tries to offer some sensible definitions

Servo drives, single drives, direct drives, gearless drives or shaftless drives. These buzz words are increasingly used to sell labels presses, and are creating great confusion in the narrow web industry.

The first labels-specific press to incorporate servo motors was the Gallus TCS 250, introduced as far back as 1992. Since then servo drive technology has forged ahead, and with the RCS330, Gallus demonstrated a press where all the machines axes are controlled by directly driven servo motors. Servo motors are now making an appearance on updated flexo presses – for example Comco's MSP Proglide and Gallus' EM260/410/510 were demonstrated with servos – driving the plate cylinders – at Labelexpo Americas in Chicago this year. Servos are also being extensively used to control web tension systems.

But when we talk about 'servo', it is important for narrow web printers to recognise what type of machine configuration is being described. Not only are there fundamental differences between 'conventional' and servo-driven presses – and various forms of hybrid machine - but there are also important differences in the construction of servo motors.

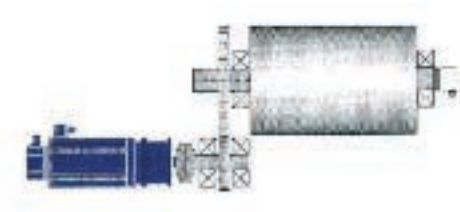
Conventional presses are generally fitted with a central main drive which transmits rotary motion to the machine via main shafts and gears. Improvements in operating economics have been achieved by using auxiliary drives.

Servo motors replace the central drive shaft and allow independent control of multiple machine elements. In addition to generating torque and a controlled rotational speed, the servo control system is required to synchronize angular rotation of two or more shafts, imaging cams and locating axes. Servo drives have the potential to enhance print quality and provide the basis for more extensive automation.

Different configurations can be chosen for assembling single servo drives:

● Standard servo motor with gearbox

Just as with drives which operate via a main shaft, the potential disadvantages of this solution include angular deviations, backlash, wear, the need for regular servicing and high noise levels



● Direct drive with a standard servo motor

In the case of a standard servo motor fitted with a coupling, there is always the risk of deviations from axial tolerance during fabrication or assembly, or deviations in radial run-out from the coupling.





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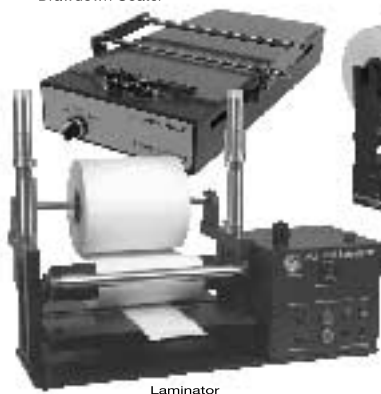
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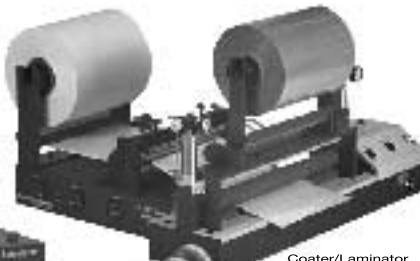
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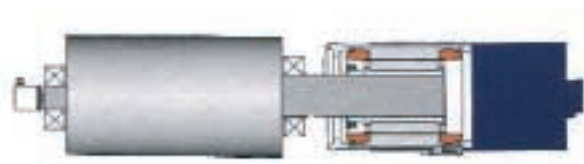
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● Integrated servo-motor

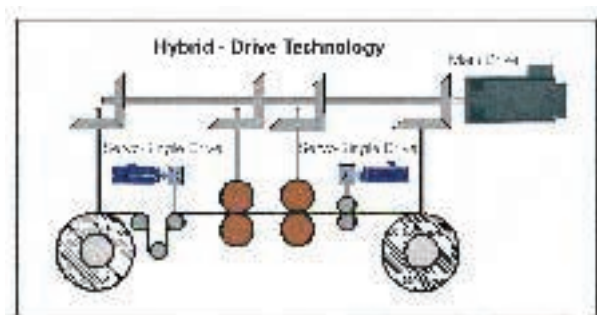
In this configuration, the motor rotation is transmitted directly to the shaft being driven. Transmission quality is maximized in terms of synchronous operation of speed and angular synchronism. Wear effects are practically eliminated and noise emission is also minimized.



There are also important differences in how servo drives are deployed in a press system

● Hybrid drive technology

The drive requirements are distributed between conventional and servo systems. Processing units such as printing units and die-cutting units are synchronized and driven using mechanical shafts as before, while the drive elements for the web-feed system such as transport or cooling rollers are powered using individual drives. This drive technology permits the processing of print materials of different thicknesses without the need to replace parts such as web-feed rollers. The disadvantages of mechanical drives remain, however: noise, wear, vibration, high servicing requirements, limited rotational flexibility, and major limitations in achieving automated functions.



● Single drives with mechanical transmission elements

This solution places mechanical intermediate elements such as gearing, gear wheels, gear belts and couplings between the servo drive and the driven shaft. This can at least partially neutralize the advantages brought by individual drives, introducing the possibility of print slurs from gear wheels and tooth transmission. Mechanical transfer elements are affected by wear and thus have a negative impact on the quality of the printed product.

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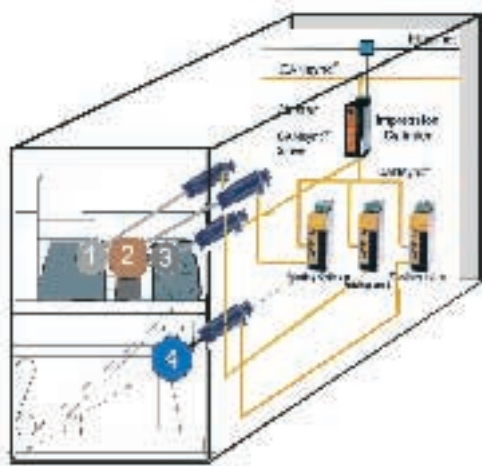


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Printing module

● Single drive technology with integrated servo-motors

This variant uses the advantages of single servo drive technology fully. All shafts which have any impact on the quality of the final product are driven directly with integrated servo-motors. Mechanical transmission elements are no longer a requirement.

Components of a servo drive

- Motor, servo inverter and transmitter are closely linked components which, together with the mechanical transmission segment, form a direct driven servo unit. With the addition of specialised software, this forms an intelligent, decentralized drive module, many of which can be built into a machine and networked together via a system bus.
- Service-free three-phase motors are being used increasingly in servo drives for narrow web machines. Maintenance and service work are no longer required because no wear parts such as commutators or brushes are used.
- The high resolution encoder integrated into the motor supplies the digital location signal necessary to control the inverter. The software in the drive controller is a significant factor in determining the quality of the servo drive because high quality software enables inaccessible parts in the machine to be balanced.
- The power supply rectifiers supply the condenser with a rectified direct current voltage. The condenser stores the electrical energy then supplies it to the motor inverter which powers the motor itself.

What functionality should you expect from a servo system. Here are some key points:

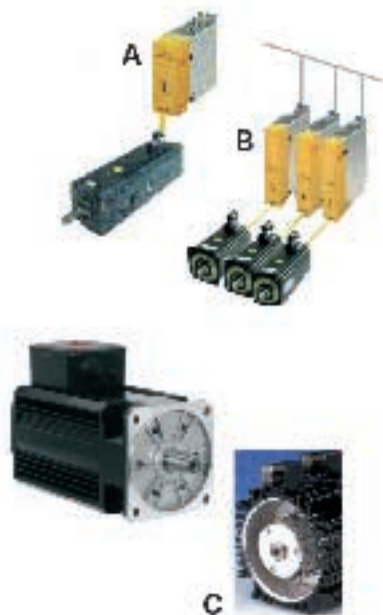
- The drive must be flexible, must perform equally consistently at low rotational speeds and should have resolution greater than 1 million steps per rotation. There should be no reduction in printing quality, for example, no gear marks.
- The control system must maintain consistent speed and angular synchronism over the entire rotational speed range for all processing units and drive elements included in the web-feed system.
- The system should apply dynamic printing pressure adjustment according to the printing speed to avoid color deviation resulting from a variation in speed.
- Precise adjustability of the format length is essential
- Because different rotational speeds can be selected in the processing and drive units for the transport train, everything from single films to light cardboard materials can be processed without having to change the impression cylinder. ■

Components of a servo drive

(A) Motor, servo inverter and transmitter together with the mechanical transmission element form a unit

(B) Multiple units can be networked via a system bus

(C) The high resolution transmitter integrated into the motor supplies the digital location signal which controls the inverter



Graphics courtesy of Gallus. The company has produced an in-depth pamphlet describing servo technology which can be obtained from gerda.gerschweiler@gallus.ch

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Are you a lean label converting machine?

The 2004 TLMI annual meeting held at La Quinta Resort and Club, Palm Springs, California, addressed the issue of growth: how to achieve it and manage it. **Katy Wight** report

Sustaining growth

'If your figures are good today, it means that you made the right decision yesterday,' says keynote speaker Oren Harari, named by the Financial Times of London as one of the top 40 business and management minds in the world. He has written six books and consulted for thousands of entrepreneurs and company executives during his career as a best-selling author, columnist and lecturer. Harari came to Palm Springs to shake up TLMI members and spell out why they shouldn't rest on their laurels. Many converters are relieved to have made it through a tough recession, but the current marketplace has no room for complacency.

'When industries are doing well you get more and more sharks in the water and you need to find a way to sustain your competitive advantage,' says Harari. 'Size isn't an issue anymore – that's no longer a predictor of competitive advantage.'

Harari drew a parallel with the demise of telephone service provider AT&T, which had the long distance monopoly in its heyday of the 1970s. Now that long distance calling is becoming a commodity, to survive in telecom you have to bundle cable and internet services with a fair price and great service – and if you can't do that you are going to go out of business. Consumers are being given more and more choices and AT&T is becoming irrelevant.

'If you have more and more competitors offering products of good quality, with the same features and services, guess what happens to margins and customer loyalty?' asks Harari. 'The result? Commoditization and imitation. We must figure out how to reverse this on a perpetual basis.'

'You may think that this doesn't apply to you,' Harari added, with a huge picture of an emu with its head in the sand looming on the projector screen behind him, 'but as an executive from Harley Davidson commented, you never fail because of your competitors, it's always because of your own complacency,

"When industries are doing well you get more and more sharks in the water and you need to find a way to sustain your competitive advantage"

arrogance or greed.'

Harari believes that a certain amount of paranoia is healthy for business owners today and in order to break through to the 'path to prosperity' your company needs talent, expertise, knowledge and a focus on what's coming up on the horizon. He quotes Thomas Friedman, saying: 'As globalization gives everyone the same information, resources, technology and markets, a society's ability to put these pieces together in the fastest and most innovative manner increasingly separates winners from losers in the global economy.'

'You must not concentrate on the generic product or the expected product,' he says. 'The real trick is to go beyond that. You need to offer a value-added partnership or is there something that you are doing which is defining and leading the agenda for the whole industry?'

'Do you have the wow factor?'

Lean issues

David Taylor, president of Radius Solutions chaired the Wednesday session, which looked at how you can grow your company by improving efficiency through lean manufacturing practices. The panel discussion included input from converter



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members Mike Falco of Topflight Inc, Mike Erwin of Tailored Label products and Art Yerecic of Yerecic Label, all of whom have implemented their own lean manufacturing systems, as well as several supplier members who have experience with lean. The panel discussed their successes and the potential pitfalls they've experienced with this increasingly popular management philosophy.

What does lean mean?

In a presentation by Raine Consulting of Illinois, lean was defined as aligning your supply chain with what your customers value. A more holistic approach than perhaps CI or TQM, it can be applied across an entire organization and must be indoctrinated into work practices. Lean manufacturing can be spread across to lean office management and lean selling. It's about optimizing efficiency and minimizing waste across your operation – transportation, inventory, movement, waiting, overproduction, over-processing and defects are all areas with an opportunity for waste.

Raine Consulting identified five principles in implementing lean manufacturing processes:

1. Specify customer values
2. Map value stream
3. Organize workflow
4. Achieve pull (more efficiency)
5. Perfect the system and make sure that it becomes part of the working culture

In a survey conducted by Raine Consulting on behalf of TLMI, certain key findings indicated that the label converting industry is well placed for lean. The survey of TLMI members found that 22 per cent of the converters using cellular manufacturing or direct machine interface (DMI) also have lean manufacturing processes. It also found that TLMI has a higher implementation rate than PIA/GATF. There is strong support from senior management for lean initiatives and label converters are lucky to have a number of customers using lean to the same extent on their side.

TLMI Converter of the Year goes to past president

Mike Dowling, president of CL&D Graphics, Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, has been awarded TLMI's 2004 Converter of the Year title. The award was given at a dedicated dinner and dance at the trade association's annual business meeting, held in La Quinta Resort and Club in Palm Springs.

The award is recognition of Dowling's contributions for TLMI, as well as an acknowledgement of his own business achievements. He has served on the association's Finance Committee, the Board of Directors and as president, to help keep it on its growth path of success.

'Mike was an absolute saviour to me in his role as finance chairman,' says Frank Sablone of TLMI. 'He has been an unbelievable sounding board; his sense of what is right for TLMI members is uncanny.'

Away from TLMI, he has guided his company to the forefront of the industry and is recognized by his peers as a progressive converter.

'Mike leads a state-of-the-art, very progressive label and flexible packaging converting company,' says John Bankson, president of TLMI and president/CEO of Label Technology, CA. 'They are on the leading edge and are leading the way for the rest of the industry.'

Dowling's father, Brian, started the family-run business in 1978 as Custom Label & Design with one Webtron 650 press. Between 1996 and 2003, Dowling and his brother and sister purchased the business. Today, the original company has evolved into two divisions – CL&D Graphics and CL&D Digital – with three facilities and 14 presses.

New TLMI president

Scott Pillsbury, president of the Rose City Label Company, based in Portland, OR, was elected 2004-2006 TLMI president. J. Andrew Beck, president of API Graphics, Inc. of High Point, NC, was voted president-elect and John Hickey, CEO of Smyth Companies, Inc., St. Paul, MN, was elected Vice President. John Bankson, President/CEO of Label Technology, Merced, CA, became Past President.

In addition, four new members were elected to the TLMI Board of Directors. They included converter representatives Art Yerecic, President of Yerecic Label, New Kensington, PA; Jeff Dunphy, President/CEO of Design Label Manufacturing Inc., East Lyme, CT; and Elisha Tropper, President of Prestige Label Co., Inc., Burgaw, NC. Pat Hague, Vice President/Sales of Water Ink Technologies, Inc., Lincolnton, NC, was elected as a supplier representative.

TLMI membership reached the 300 mark at the meeting, as the trade association has inducted 17 new converter members, 17 new supplier members and three new international members since the beginning of the year. There are now a total of 150 converter members in 65 different divisions; 136 suppliers in 50 divisions; and 14 international members in five divisions.

The 2005 TLMI budget was unanimously approved and revenues of \$1,226,205 are projected against expenses of \$1,218,197. The TLMI Scholarship Committee awarded six \$5,000 scholarships to students this year. More than \$43,000 was raised by the scholarship committee in 2004, bringing the fund's total reserves to over \$758,000.



“I wanted to bring employee involvement to the highest level, so we identified some quick hit projects where we would see a fast result and measured the outcome, this was to prove that it wasn’t all just a fad coming from the new guy”

Mike Erwin, Tailored Label

Mike Erwin joined Tailored Label a year and a half ago from a paperboard press manufacturer. Erwin noted on joining the company that it saw itself as a delivery reliability firm and lacked a focus on optimization. With experience in lean manufacturing, he devised a strategy to phase in elements of the philosophy.

‘I wanted to bring employee involvement to the highest level, so we identified some quick hit projects where we would see a fast result and measured the outcome,’ he says. ‘This was to prove that it wasn’t all just a fad coming from the new guy.’

Erwin believes that if implementation is to be a success there needs to be executive support and buy-in. There are two ways to implement lean – local and incremental or widespread and fast and Tailored Label chose the more economical version, to introduce it in stages. This involved training the whole company on the strategy and choosing suitable employees for a lean team, who were given further focused training.

‘We make a product using Tyvek and we set ourselves a number of goals so that we would have zero overproduction,’ says Erwin. ‘We focused on our processes and not the results, and as we established one process that worked, we learned about how it could be applied somewhere else.’

Support for employees was an important factor. Books and other materials were available to help the process and achievements were given the recognition and rewards they deserved.

‘I was disappointed to find out when I joined the company that it hadn’t had any significant capital investment for seven years,’ he says, ‘and lean has allowed us to invest back in the business. We’ve just bought a new inkjet system, two rotary die-cutting systems, thermal transfer and packaging equipment.’

‘Lean allows you to optimize your business. It can create clear

TLMI 27th Annual Awards Competition.

TAPP Technologies, Inc., Langley, BC, Canada, won the coveted Best of Show award in the TLMI Annual Awards Competition. The company was honored for its "Nickel & Nickel Zinfandel" label, which also won first place in the "Wine & Spirits — Offset — Color Process — Prime" category.

Two special "Innovator" awards were also presented. Corporate Express, Dallas, TX, won for its "Fingerprint Foil" entry in the "Flexography — Line — Non-prime" category, and Graphic Solutions International, LLC, Burr Ridge, IL, was honored for its "1.5 Volt Printed Battery" label in the "Tags — Industrial and/or Systems" category.

Tapp Technologies led all companies with a total of eight awards. Paragon Labels led the International Division with six awards. McDowell Label & Screen Printing also won six awards in the North American Division.

Other converters to win multiple awards were Collotype Labels Pty Ltd., Adelaide, Australia, and LSK Label Co., El Dorado Hills, CA, which both won five awards. Companies winning four awards included Dow Industries, Inc., Wilmington, MA; Impressive Labels, Inc., Safford, AZ; KimBells pack, inc., Quezon City, The Philippines; NorthStar Print Group, Watertown, WI; and Spear, Mason, OH. Three awards went to Banta Specialty Converting, Milwaukee, WI; Gemark, S.A., Barcelona, Spain; Graphic Solutions International, LLC, Burr Ridge, IL; Hub Labels, Inc., Hagerstown, MD; Labelgraphic (Glasgow) Limited, Glasgow, Scotland; LSK Label Co., El Dorado Hills, CA; National Label Co., Lafayette Hills, PA; Prestige Label Co., Burgaw, NC; and The Label Makers Ltd, Yorkshire, UK.

Companies winning two awards included Arca Etichette Spa, Marcallo Con Casone, Milano, Italy; Drukkerij Vrijdag B.V., Eindhoven, The Netherlands; Label Technology, Inc., Merced, CA; Labelad Ltd., Markham, ON, Canada; Lauterbach Group, Waukesha, WI; LogoTech, Inc., Fairfield, NJ; Multi-Color Corp., Cincinnati, OH; Novelprint Sistemas De Etiquetagem Ltda., Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Spectrum Label Corporation, Hayward, CA.

This year's competition received 250 entries in both the North American and International categories; 106 awards (79 North American, 27 International) were announced.

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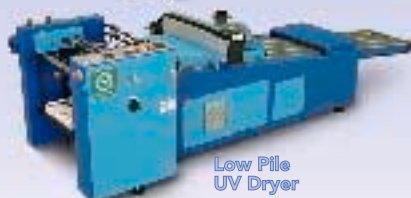
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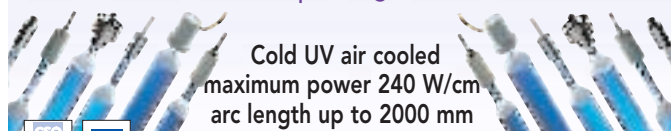
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Marabu
Competence in Colour

e No.127

'We had departmental organization and thinking. We would reward on how much our printers printed or how much our slitters slitted, and in the quiet times we would run ahead. But in the busy times, we'd reach bottlenecks – we couldn't find labels, but we knew that we had printed them.'

Yerecic found inspiration in the infamous lean books, 'The Goal' by Eli Goldratt and then 'The New Manufacturing Challenge,' by Kiyoshi Suzuki, and decided that the company needed to 'simplify, combine and eliminate'.

In a project aiming to reduce press set-up times, they realized that they needed to go cellular. A team of employees had to create and recreate a pressroom cell. They videotaped themselves setting up the press, process mapped it and then assessed it. The project was completed entirely by employees. They identified two areas: internal processes which need to be done while the press is stopped; and external processes that need to be completed before or after the press is stopped.

'We devised standardized, scripted set-ups, like race team pit crew,' explains Yerecic, 'so when we're changing inks, we're also bringing in new roll stock, for example.'

Yerecic Label introduced a cellular floorplan in its new facility. Employees have all of the tools, supplies and materials that they might need at hand and there is a kanban system to indicate when a shared tool is being used by a particular cell. Each team is united by an incentive bonus based on 'how many of their orders are turned into dollars.' The tough incentive has zero tolerance of bad quality – any defects and the whole team loses the bonus.

'The manufacturing side was so successful at reducing lead times that we moved the strategy into sales, customer service and graphics,' says Yerecic. 'We literally tore down all the walls between the departments.'

'What are the tangible results of implementing lean? We're a print to order facility now and we print exact quantities. We have virtually eliminated WIP and we have reduced our set up times by 50 per cent,' he says, 'but I think the intangible results are even more important. We now have a culture of knowledge sharing, mentoring, team behavior and ultimately, customer satisfaction.'

Mike Falco, Topflight Inc.

Topflight's approach was markedly different, but president Mike Falco believes that the principles are the same. Topflight got involved with lean four years ago and began asking its customers more than what application they required.

'We started asking our customers how they make money and generally found out more about them. Lots of our customers

"The manufacturing side was so successful at reducing lead times that we moved the strategy into sales, customer service and graphics, we literally tore down all the walls between the departments"

supply to Wal-Mart, so in turn we had to learn a lot about Wal-Mart. We considered the threat of global supply as an opportunity.

'We designed our customer-supplier relationship as an extension of the customer's manufacturing process. We needed to find out how they worked. Our aim was to eliminate inventory, purchase orders, receiving, invoices, material handling – all of these things cost time and money. When you understand your customer's value stream, you can look at your own processes.'

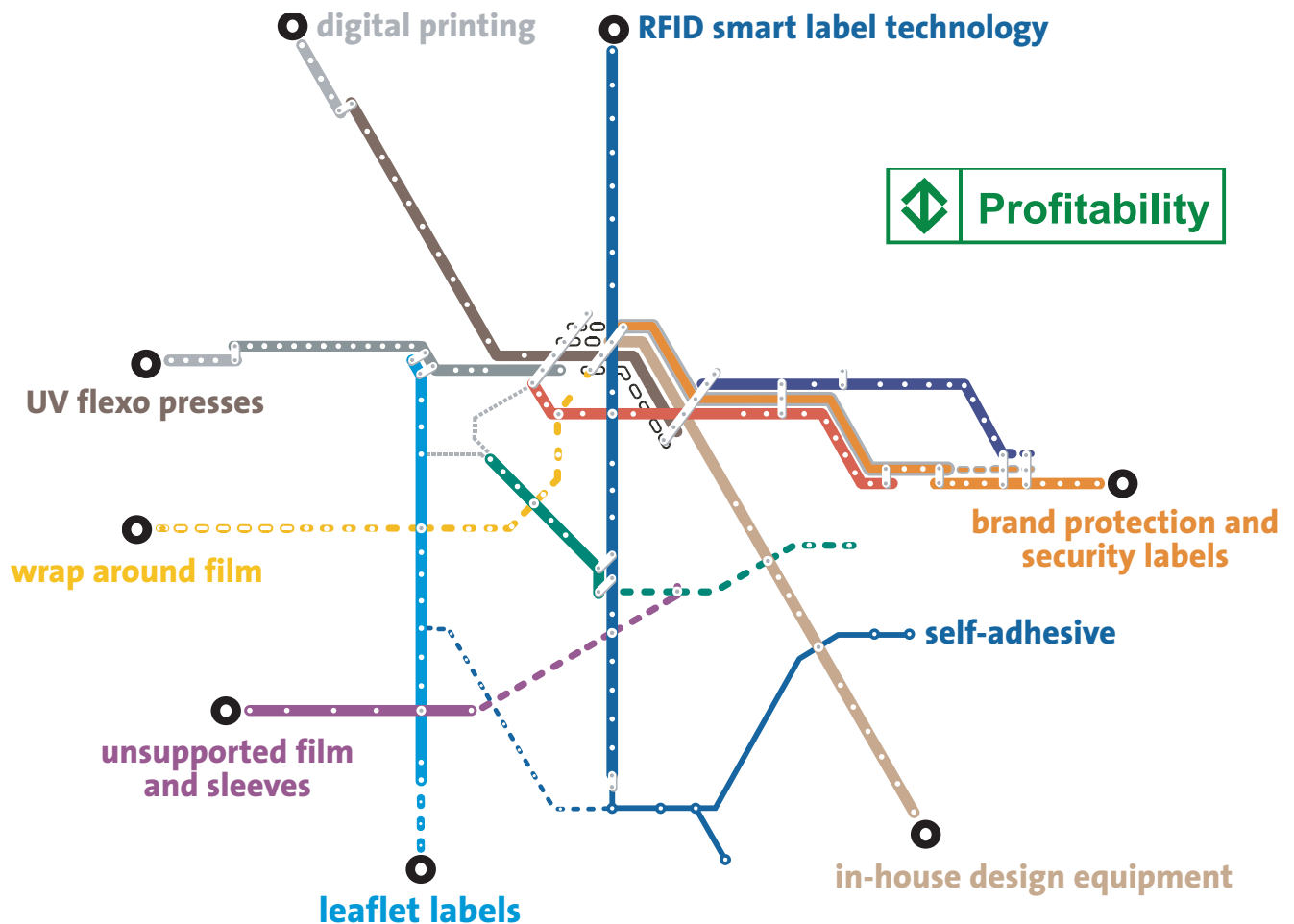
Topflight created dedicated work cells, where job specs, artwork, materials, tooling, press set-up, inspecting and finishing, packaging and labeling, all happens in one area. Implementation began in shipping and Topflight was able to transition the practices across the company. Initially employees were resistant to change and Falco stresses the importance of choosing a management consultant who can communicate with your workers.

The new procedures meant that Topflight could reduce its shipping area by 4,000 sq/ft, meaning that the company was able to house its RFID equipment in a dedicated space.

'We have changed how we measure productivity and we have produced results,' says Falco. On time delivery is over 99.5 per cent in work cells, revenue throughput has increased by 20 per cent per hour and the number of demand lines processed per hour has increased by 35 per cent. You can't just focus on the gross revenues, it's about making your fixed overhead costs less.

'It's trust critical though,' he adds, 'because you'll be sharing information with suppliers that you wouldn't normally. But if we don't adapt as a group, where will we be in 3-5 years time?' ■

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Henning Gerhardt founded the company in 1954

Gerhardt turns around

After years of turmoil surrounding one of the best known names in die manufacture, Gerhardt is finally back on track with a major investment program, a new die system and a new management philosophy. **Andy Thomas** reports

On 12th October this year, Gerhardt celebrated its 50th anniversary. The company was founded by Henning Gerhardt in Copenhagen in 1954. Henning specialized in engravings, working from his own workshop and sign making facilities. With the advent of the narrow web label converting industry in the 1970s, production changed gradually to cutting tools for tag and label printing, and from 1976 Gerhardt concentrated exclusively on sales and production of rotary tooling.

Today Gerhardt, with corporate headquarters in Kastrup, near Copenhagen, employs 360 people in production facilities and distributorships worldwide.

But three years ago the company was in deep trouble, and it was not clear if it would survive to see its half Century. 'We had an investment gap and financial problems which created severe funding issues,' recalls Gerhardt group managing director Klaus Damberg.

'We had to fill that investment gap, but above all we had to reinstate the old values of Gerhardt and go back to basics. Crisis can be healthy. It gives you the opportunity to re-think all the fundamentals. Do we face obstacles or opportunities?'

Klaus Damberg concedes that the company had lost touch with the demands of its customers and was not meeting their expectations. 'It is a sign of their great loyalty to Gerhardt that they stayed with the company through these bad times,' he remarks.

Since taking the helm in 2002, Damberg has been in charge of an extensive reorganization, developing a strategy which focuses firmly on competitiveness at a global level.

'We had three tough years of restructuring and we've had to consolidate production to cut our overheads. This had affected our performance. But it's like performing surgery – you can't have a situation where the surgery succeeded but the patient died. You have to run certain risks – the patient might feel a temperature increase, but is now out of rehabilitation and healthy.'

Flexible die production was concentrated in the UK and solid cylinder production in Denmark. Staff numbers were cut back. Jørgen Gerhardt, with his enormous experience and extensive personal contacts, was brought back into active participation in the company.

Damberg's back to basics approach was based around a mission statement which layed out his expectations in simple terms, with sections on ethical values and 'open and honest' communications within the company.

'We work in different global cultures and need to be able to operate as a team. That starts with a mission statement. Local managers can have freedom, but within this framework.'

Damberg says the restructured business is no longer making losses on an annual basis, and the new strategy has led to a surge of investment. \$6M in new money is already flowing in and another \$8M is planned next year for new production machinery in the company's global production facilities in the UK, North America, Denmark and Australia.

The investment includes extensive re-education of all Gerhardt's employees to give them an enhanced knowledge base, so they can understand their customers' technical and



Jörgen Gerhardt (left) and Klaus Damberg (right), managing director, Gerhardt

business requirements – a key requirement of Damberg's mission statement.

The end results of this process are the new 5Plus flexible die system and CECT, a customer relations strategy which arises directly from the restructuring operation.

5Plus die and CECT

The 5Plus die has been developed using what Klaus Damberg describes as a 'new high-tech process providing incomparable hardness and die life'. 5Plus utilizes a combination of new materials and surface treatment claimed to deliver a smooth surface which will cut the hardest materials while generating minimal friction.

'The new production technique ensures that 5Plus is harder than all other rotary die cutters on the market,' claims Klaus Damberg. 'Furthermore its very smooth operation causes very low friction, which again translates into a longer die life and faster production, without expensive production stops.'

The technology is targeted not just at the pressure-sensitive labels market, but also cartons, pharmaceuticals and die-cut components.

The development of 5Plus has taken over a year, including extensive testing of several prototypes at converter customers' facilities. 'It is very important to us that the new rotary die cutters satisfy the daily demands experienced in the converting industry for a reliable, quality product,

with a long life and at an affordable operational cost,' says Damberg. 'Focusing on our customers' needs had the added advantage of bringing down our own production time allowing faster delivery. Today we ship orders within three days.'

5Plus is the first product in Damberg's CECT strategy – Cost Efficient Cutting Tools. CECT is described by Damberg as a turnkey solution for the production of labels and tags. Rather than concentrating on just the technical aspects of die-cutting, CECT requires Gerhardt field operatives to analyze the whole production process, including interactively advising the customer on options in terms of cost effectiveness and quality of production. A consultancy rather than a commodity sale.

'We should not expect the print shop to be an expert in cutting dies,' says Damberg. 'CECT combines technical products with consultancy in partnership with the customer to develop a more cost-effective solution. It means the Gerhardt sales force will be required, to an increasing degree, to observe the actual converting process and the material being processed, prior to the optimal choice of tools being made. We need to stop selling drilling kits and start to sell holes and we have to learn not to say "yes" all the time.'

Damberg gives as an example cutting of sharp corners. 'We could say, if you change the angle by 2 degrees, then we can cut 50 per cent faster. The converter can then ask his customer if he can live with a 2 degrees change in shape.'

Another practical example is a program which encourages converters to look after their dies. This followed analysis of the returns of damaged cylinders which showed a lot of unnecessary handling damage.

As part of the CECT strategy, Damberg plans next year to abolish product names like 'three' or 'seven' star dies. 'It will be, you tell us what the process is and we will provide a solution. We label our tools, but what does that mean to the customer? As an example, hardening is just a process, but what does it mean in practice for a particular application? We will say, trying using this die like this, for this application.'

With his strategy in place, Damberg is optimistic about the future. 'When we started this process I heard from our people that the market is declining. But there are tremendous opportunities. Not only geographically in Asia and Eastern Europe, but because our existing customers are doing more complicated jobs and they need more advice. If we do not renew ourselves and follow the trends in the industry, then it is declining! When you simply focus on products, the market is indeed mature.' ■



Moving in the digital direction

Offering your customers digitally printed labels doesn't have to mean a nail-biting \$500,000 investment. **Katy Wight** finds out how TLF Graphics, NY, is exploiting digital in the durable market

‘We wanted digital capabilities to get small quantity, quick turn orders off our flexo and screen equipment,’ says Bob McJury, vice president, Sales, TLF Graphics, Rochester, New York. ‘We live in short to medium runs and our average order is around \$1,000.’

TLF was a traditional flexo printer back in 1980 when it became incorporated. In 1984 a screen printing division was added and in 1998, McJury and partners Ron LeBlanc and Dan Wagner, bought the company. That same year, TLF decided to dip its toe in the digital market and invested in a Gerber Edge digital press. In the last two years it has really taken the plunge and invested in a Matan Spark, a Matan Spring, a 42” HP 5000, a 54” Roland CamJet and a 54” Roland SolJet to cater to the diversifying needs of its customers.

The staple of the company remains flexo, which is expected to account for 65 per cent of this year’s \$12 million target, but the digital side is aiming to generate another half million dollars worth of brand new revenue.

‘We have had to grow within our means and install digital equipment to compliment our business best,’ says McJury. ‘Durable goods printed quickly in small quantities – that was the big draw for us. We have customers who make military phones, furnaces and fire trucks – an HP Indigo press just doesn’t fit our customer base right now and it’s an expensive press. But that’s definitely not to say that we wouldn’t invest in an HP Indigo-type press in the future.’

‘We bought the Gerber Edge to get small quantity orders off our flexo and screen presses and we were able to produce everything from durable labels to magnets and static clings. It has been a work horse, in the very small quantity area for the past six years and we continue to generate between \$30-40,000 on it per year.’

The Gerber press uses thermal transfer technology, but it is limited to four colors, each printed in a separate pass, and limited in the kind of quality it can achieve. It also needs special pin-feed materials to maintain registration. Two years ago at Labelexpo, TLF saw the Matan Spark and liked the fact that it would run on uncoated substrates from the company’s traditional sources, and that you could print all four colors in one pass. It bought a 16” press, viewing it ‘as a large version of the Gerber Edge,’ McJury comments.

‘We’ve only been running the digital side in full earnest for two years and it has been a sharp learning curve,’ says vice president, Operations, Dan Wagner. ‘It hasn’t been an easy transition. Every time that we have bought a new piece of equipment, shortly thereafter we have bought another piece, and they have all fit a certain niche.’

Achieving near-photo quality, the HP 5000 was bought to benefit TLF’s retail customers. The Roland Cam Jet offered wider formats and the ability to print and die cut in one operation – on the day that L&L visited it was printing letter-sized color box labels – and the SolJet Pro2 was acquired because the company lacked an outdoor environment capability. The six-month-old, 54” wide SolJet uses solvent inks and offers greater durability.

TLF has a very broad base of end user customers, printing applications for everyone from local wine and cheese producers, to contact lens companies and industrial manufacturers. Its digital capabilities has enabled TLF to leverage new business from these customers – beyond screen and flexo – and also enticed entirely new companies.

‘Service is what essentially drives the business,’ says McJury. ‘We’ve improved the cost of small print runs, provided an unbelievable service and ventured into new applications and



McJury, LeBlanc and Wagner with the Matan Spring

“BOC received prototypes in days rather than weeks. They got their solution straight away. BOC now has a print-on-demand solution that was exactly what it was looking for”

accounts. You can call us up and ask for your labels to be delivered the next day – customers won't wait four weeks anymore.'

It's this service element that has attracted major accounts from end users such as the BOC Group, a worldwide industrial gases, vacuum technology and distribution services company.

'BOC came to a number of converters looking for a label to go on its various gas cylinders. The cylinders required durable labels, printed on demand in very small quantities. Information on the cylinders is critical,' explains McJury. 'We have a very good relationship with FLEXcon, so we went to them for advice on what adhesive and materials to use and we chose a very durable solution including overlamination.'

'BOC received prototypes in days rather than weeks. They got their solution straight away. BOC now has a print-on-demand solution that was exactly what it was looking for.'

TLF prints roughly 115 different labels for the gas company, which are ordered through an online store created by TLF, printed on Matan Spring and Spark equipment and shipped in days. There's no need to order large quantities and maintain large inventories. BOC locations around the US can log on to a

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dedicated website, choose the artwork for the labels that they require and order via an email to TLF stating exactly the amount that they need.

TLF has held the contract since May and it was just the application that would more than justify the investment in the Matan Spring. The Spark and the Spring both use technology based on different colored thermal transfer ribbons, but the need for speed and more colors led TLF to invest in the 6-color, 12" Spring. The ribbons come in CMYK, 38 different spot colors, metallic gold and silver, white, super opaque black and a range of translucent colors. Described by Matan as 'dry inks', changeover of colors is quick and simple, with no drain or disposal necessary, plus they are safe to work with. Both of TLF's Matan presses share a digital finishing system (DFS) from Allen Datagraph, but the company hopes to invest in a further finishing system in the future so that the two presses can finish inline. The DFS can cut any label shape with its computer-guided

"We need to be strong enough to get what we're worth. We're providing a real solution to our digital customers and they need to understand that there is a premium for this kind of service"

knife, strip, slit and rewind and also over-laminate before cutting. The Spring also allows TLF to apply variable information and then over-laminate on the DFS, a capability that it didn't have previously.

The Spring prints at up to 1,600X400dpi and is perfect for safety labels, information labels, merchandizing, promotion labels and short-run durable labels, but as McJury comments, 'you can't print a Rembrandt', and that's why their prime label customers will remain firmly in their flexo and screen divisions.

'The Spring fits perfectly in some of the markets where we live,' says McJury. 'It was a good price point for us, it's easy to operate and you can use a wide variety of materials with good availability. You can change the image and materials very quickly and the margins in digital short runs are much higher.

'We need to be strong enough to get what we're worth. We're providing a real solution to our digital customers and they need to understand that there is a premium for this kind of service. If you think about a four-color job, before you've even printed a single label you've have a \$300 to \$600 cost for films, plates, & dies that's before you've taken time into consideration,' he adds.

The benefits of digital are obvious, for our customers and our company but TLF has experienced various challenges in implementation. McJury explains that the screen and flexo side of things, the suppliers are established and they have the knowledge. On the digital side, that resource is less experienced.

'It has been trial and error in terms of material qualification,' he says. 'We just printed 90 static clings for the first time.

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They were 6-color and with all of the time that we put in to getting the material right, we should have billed a lot more! It's all part of the learning experience.'

Creating a digital capability has required more than shifts in methods of workflow, the company has had to overcome its analog mindset. Per 1,000 printing and pricing is a thing of the past in the digital area and they're now buying substrates in grams and ounces, when they always bought by per thousand MSI.

'You definitely can't just take a flexo operator and move them over to digital. It takes a totally different skill set. We're lucky that we are near Rochester Institute of Technology and we've had some great recruits from local colleges.

'Press operation apart, we have also found training in customer service and sales to be a challenge. We have so many different capabilities that sales can't figure out where to send a job – is it inkjet, screen, flexo, Spark, Spring, Roland? This is an ongoing area for improvement and so far we have been relying on suppliers to come in and train.

'At the moment there are also limited materials available for digital printing. People connect 'digital' with 'fast', so it means that our suppliers need to be fast too. We're not going to inventory the materials and the support network isn't necessarily there for us at the moment. The sources of supply are limited.'

There are several other challenges that the company has had to overcome. With the technology changing and developing at such a rate, it's difficult to know when to pull the trigger on a major investment and it's near impossible to find buyers with sufficient knowledge of set-up procedures to know when they are being offered value. But TLF believes that it has a good proposition.

'We're constantly introducing new concepts to our clients,' says LeBlanc. 'They need to know that we have new processes and capabilities that could make sense to them. There is a danger in getting too diverse, but we have grown within our capabilities and geography.'

TLF has modeled itself as print solution provider, and has printed signage, cotton banners, store merchandising displays, canvases for an artist and wipe-clean wall posters for customers. Whilst diversifying, the company hasn't lost focus on its core flexo business and plans to invest in a new 8-color Nilpeter press in the first quarter of next year. The team is excited about the future.

'We're going through evolution and revolution at the same time,' says LeBlanc. 'There hasn't been a single week where we haven't had something new to think about.'

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HP-SMAG deal opens road to screen-digital combinations

HP and SMAG (SRAMAG) have signed an Alliance Partner Agreement to provide a range of finishing solutions for European converters printing on self-adhesive substrates. This agreement is the result of the increased demand for finishing lines for the growing number of HP Indigo ws4000 digital presses in the European label market.

The partnership was announced at open days, Discovery 2004, held at SMAG's facility on 21 and 22 October.

From January 2005, SMAG will offer three finishing systems that can be used with HP Indigo industrial presses. All three are off-line systems to facilitate integration and production efficiency.

The first system is a full rotary finishing line with web synchronization that is offered under the Comet (roll-to-roll) and Jupiter (roll-to-sheet) brands. HP customers are already successfully using

these lines at multiple sites in France and Switzerland.

The second, and most important development is the provision of a semi-rotary finishing line, ideal for use with the HP Indigo presses, as this ensures the most accurate die cut performance. In comparison with other similar equipment, this line is extremely compact and versatile.

The final part of the deal involves the SMAG Galaxy flat-bed screen press with finishing capabilities for special applications. This will offer digital label printers the opportunity to employ a combination of screen and digital printing. This combination is of particular value in the production of wine and cosmetics labels that require a higher degree of ink lay-down and chemical resistance than other labels.

No. 500

FINAT and Tarsus renew Labelexpo Partnership

At The European Label Summit, held in Prague, Tarsus and FINAT renewed their Labelexpo partnership agreement. The agreement, to become effective on 1 January 2005, extends the partnership till 2011, and links FINAT to all Labelexpo events in Europe and South East Asia, including another four editions of the leading label exhibition, Labelexpo Europe.

According to the agreement, Tarsus and FINAT will work together to promote Labelexpo. Initiatives will include creating a joint Labelexpo Advisory Board as a 'sounding board' to evaluate each edition of the shows and review forthcoming editions.

Douglas Emslie, managing director, Tarsus, said, 'We are delighted that our mutually beneficial partnership with FINAT has been extended for another six years. We are proud of our links with FINAT and look forward to continuing to work together.'

Fritz Beglinger of Pago AG, Switzerland, FINAT President, said,

'Labelexpo and FINAT have a common history. With strong roots in the European self-adhesive label industry, both Labelexpo and FINAT have developed a prominent international presence. Our mutual brands have been well established in the relevant labeling sectors and regions. We believe that the attributes associated with the FINAT brand such as independence, quality, professionalism, dedication and industry credibility make our association the natural partner for the leading trade show in our regions.'

No. 501



(Left-Right) Paul Jarvis, Jules Lejeune, Fritz Beglinger, Roger Pellow and Mike Fairley

Pharma RFID pilot launches

Systems integrator Aegate has launched a three-month pilot with British Telecom (BT), six leading pharmaceutical companies - including Merck Generics UK, Merck Pharmaceuticals, Schering Health Care and Solvay - and 50 dispensing outlets to test a new method of detecting fraudulent and counterfeit medicines. This is believed to be the largest pilot project of its kind to apply a mixture of RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) and bar-coding technologies to both branded and non-branded pharmaceutical products that can be found in any dispensing chemist. Aegate is the latest venture company spun out of PA Consulting Group, the management, systems and technology consulting firm.

The 'Authentication at the point of Dispensing' pilot is claimed the first of its kind to provide pharmacists and dispensing doctors with information about the authenticity of the products at the point of dispensing. Unlike other RFID applications currently being tested in the pharmaceutical industry, the pilot bypasses the complex supply chain and focuses on the authenticity of products only at the point of manufacture and at the point where they are given to patients.

This has important patient safety implications, providing a real time check for recalled, expired, and illegal products at the unit-of-use level. Recent market

developments, EU accession and changing legislation in the US have put the spotlight on the need for drug companies to authenticate their products.

Ian Rhodes, CEO, Aegate Ltd, said: 'By conducting this pilot, we aim to confirm how the scanning of products can be seamlessly incorporated into the dispensing process, whilst adding substantial benefits for the pharmacist. This is a pragmatic, single point authentication solution for the healthcare sector. We chose to work with BT because of their proven track record of providing exceptional IT and communications systems'.

Aegate is managing the pilot, providing pharmacy equipment and training as well as the database application. BT is providing the networked IT services - server hosting, a freephone helpline number and help desk support - as well as broadband connectivity to the pharmacies. Courier company DHL is distributing RFID tagged products to participating pharmacies for the duration of the pilot. An independent advisory group is overseeing the pilot, made up of pilot participants and representatives from the National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA), the Dispensing Doctors Association (DDA) and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB).

 No.503

Faster anilox from GiDue

Italian press manufacturer GiDue has announced a strategic alliance with Praxair Surface Technologies that will enable turn around of Anilox rollers for GiDue customers within one to two weeks.

States Cristina Toffolo, managing director of GiDue, 'There are many excellent Anilox printing roll suppliers that operate on an international scales as we do. However, we found that the product specifications and supporting documentation from various suppliers were not identical and sometimes confusing. This move means we can offer our customers standardisation and a quicker and better service.'

Praxair will concentrate the production of GiDue Anilox rollers at their facilities in Novara, just West of Milan, Italy, which will serve press customers on five continents. The concentration of production of Anilox rolls near GiDue's manufacturing facility will allow customers or distributors to obtain the rolls in only one or two weeks.

Denny Giugovaz, of Praxair Surface Technologies Novara, confirms, 'We maintain a sufficient stock of GiDue bases in sizes of 280, 370, 430 and 530 mm ready to be engraved as per customer specifications.'

 No.504

Lüscher Flexo appoints new distributors

Following Lüscher Flexo's recent announcement of its focus on pre-press systems for flexo, letterpress and dry offset, the company has completed the initial training of seven new distributors of the FlexPose!direct laser ablation system.

- From France: Yves Ouaki and Patrick Moretti of Drytone Digital Color Systems.
- From Russia: Dmitry Tokmantsev, Flexo Technical Advisor for Moscow-based YAM International.
- From Turkey: Rolf Köhle of Dereli Graphic. Dereli will cooperate with previous agents Kosmig Avrasya Ltd.
- From the United Kingdom: Sarah

Newell of Bradford-based Dantex Graphics Ltd. Dantex are distributors of Toray plate in Western Europe. Dantex have worked with the company for over 3 years, previously as commission agents.

- From Finland and the Baltic States: Barry Brown of KTA-Yhtiöt Oy. KTA will collaborate in Finland with previous agents Flexica OY.
- From Denmark: Anders Josephsen of Deltagraph, who will collaborate with previous agents Bie Danmark.
- From China: Simon Lo, Lüscher AG's Sales Manager for China, Taiwan and Korea. He was accompanied on the

course by Mr TM Kwong, Technical Director of Jiu Heng (HK) Graphics Co., Ltd – a prospective distributor for China.

Lüscher Flexo's Sales and Marketing Team (Andy Gotch, Doug Mawdsley, Bruce Knox and Louise Gould) with the new distributors.

Drytone, YAM International, Dereli, KTA and Deltagraph are all existing distributors for Lüscher AG's offset products.

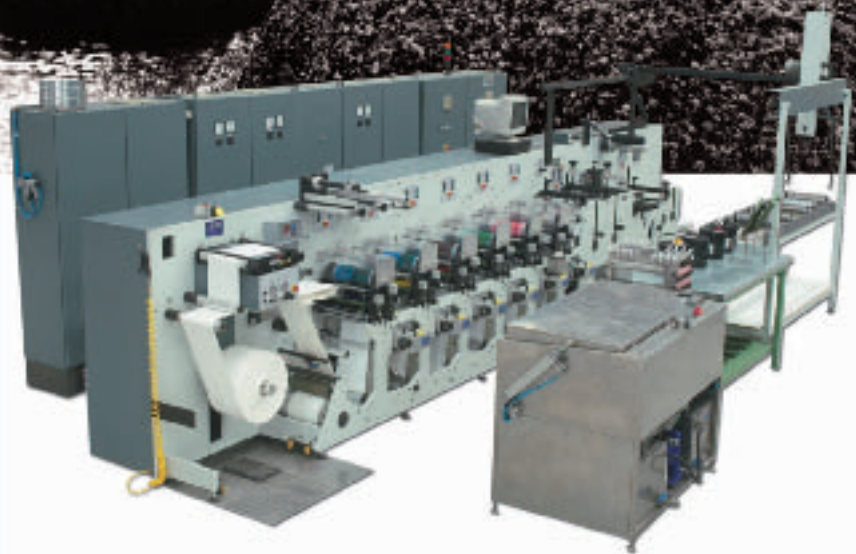
Lüscher Iberia will sell the FlexPose!direct in Spain, in collaboration with previous agents Dugopa.

 No.505

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Labeling News

Esko-Graphics and M.Y. PrinTech integrate color control systems

Esko-Graphics and M.Y. PrinTech B.V. are to integrate PrinTech's FMsix technology with Esko-Graphics InkWizard – a component of the Scope workflow – into an integrated color control system.

The InkWizard module in Scope converts jobs to any target color space. Both off the shelf color sets and custom color sets are supported. InkWizard is claimed to guarantee editability and flexibility before and after converting to the multi-color process set. InkWizard is a module within PackEdge, the application in the Esko-Graphics Scope workflow, which covers a wide range of packaging pre-production functions: job and product specification, graphic and structural design, expert pre-production operations, platemaking for printing and toolmaking for converting.

FMsix is a technology that uses a special color reproduction of spot colors

for packaging printing applications and improves color quality whilst it reduces significantly production cost. The application is built on a six color printing process for offset and it uses an algorithm, which, by applying FM Screening delivers a significantly extended color gamut.

'This cooperation will allow packaging designers and printers to also obtain a smooth integration of the FM6 conversion process in the standard workflow whilst preparing files for printing,' comments Geert De Proost, marketing manager FlexRip at Esko-Graphics. 'Our solution offers an 'error proof' system of conversion that limits the operator intervention to the absolute minimum but still allowing for manual intervention when needed. The cooperation with M.Y. PrinTech is another confirmation of our focus and commitment to the packaging market, which will involve further

development of Scope software applications in the future.'

Jan Goovaerts, marketing manager FMsix comments: 'The InkWizard tool from Esko-Graphics offers the printer a smart tool to convert any spot color used in packaging designs into the proper pre-set FMsix color combinations. We look forward to this technology cooperation, which will allow us and Esko-Graphics to offer our clients access to higher quality color output for packaging printing.'

M.Y. PrinTech BV was founded in 2003 as a spin-off of M.Y. Cartons BV, with worldwide headquarters in Hoogerheide, the Netherlands. The FMsix technology was developed in cooperation with partners including Esko-Graphics, MAN Roland, Sun Chemical, Dupont, ArtWork Systems and Creo, and has been used on an industrial scale for almost four years.

 No.506

Skanem trials digital plates

Skanem, one of Europe's largest self-adhesive label printing groups, is trialing digital-plate making at its Skurup, Sweden, plant to assess suitability for wider adoption throughout the group.

'Early indications are that the trials are a success, with digital plates assuring clean and sharper images with better detailing, improved stability during press runs and making it easier and quicker to set up on presses,' said the company in a statement.

Skanem president, Ole Rugland said: 'There are not many producers in self-adhesive labels, particularly in flexographic printing, using digital, but as Europe's largest label group we thought it worthwhile to try the techniques out at the Skurup factory. Flexo printing is getting closer to litho in terms of quality and by getting into digital plate-making and cutting out the film stage, we are getting the quality

between the two even closer.'

The group's size - it has ten printing plants in Western Europe - makes it easier for Skanem to develop the new skills required by digital plate-making on one site and then extend the practice to its other plants. Thomas Nilsson, production manager at Skanem Skurup adds: 'When we decided to move from letterpress and offset to UV flexo, digital plate technology was an important part of our strategy,' says Nilsson.

'We invested in a CTP Thermoflex from Creo, which will be producing digital plates for 80 per cent of our jobs by the end of the year.'

Skanem AS operates plants in five countries - Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and the UK. It provides label solutions for some of the world's largest companies. It employs 900 people in 10 printing plants and the turnover in 2003 was 176 million Euro.

 No.507

Time trip

Timestrip, creator of the 'smart label' that displays how long items of food have been in the fridge, has signed a distribution deal with Daymark Food Safety Systems, one of the top label printers in North America. The recently signed deal will also see Daymark UK act as one of Timestrip's distributors across the UK in the food service sector.

Daymark will launch Timestrip labels later this year in the Foodservice sector in North America, comprising chain restaurants, hotels, delicatessens, bakeries and other food outlets. Timestrip shows lapsed time using color and is expected to offer major benefits to food rotation systems used in professional kitchens.

Timestrip's co-founder, Reuben Isbitsky, said, 'We are extremely confident that Daymark are an ideal partner for Timestrip in this important market sector'.

 No.508



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India Installations

National Process, Ahmedabad Etirama Flexorama 250 CI flexo

Global Graphics has sold the first Etirama CI flexo label press in India to National Process, Ahmedabad. The Flexorama 250 is a 4-color Central Impression flexographic press designed to print and convert a wide range of substrates including self adhesive materials, papers, board, aluminum foils and flexible films. It offers a maximum printing width of 250 mm, 400 mm as the maximum length of printing, main central drum of 600 mm diameter, triple die cut station, drying system (between colours and heater), longitudinal cut with disc knife, pneumatic unwinder, pneumatic rewinder and waste rewinder. The maximum printing speed is 100 metres per minute.

There is continuous anilox rotation and pneumatic removal of plate cylinders when the machine stops. Further, the press is equipped with laminator unit, varnish applicator, UV dryer, sheeter, longitudinal slitter and digital counter meter. The varnish applicator is an independent station and can be used as a 5th color.

'With the evident shift of label printers towards flexo technology globally, National wanted to enhance its production facilities with this multi-utility CI flexographic press to cater to wide requirements of their customers ranging from pharmaceutical, cosmetics, toiletries, automobile to other general industries,' says Bakul Pandya, MD of National Process Pvt. Ltd.

'I've visited the Etirama factory in Brazil and also seen the machine in operation at many local Brazilian label printers' plants and was impressed with the high printing quality, that too at a very reasonable price. Etirama pricing is such that one can buy a good quality flexo label press almost at the cost of flat bed.'

Etirama will be participating in the forthcoming India Label Show 2004 being held at Pragati Maidan from 3-6 December 2004 jointly with their Indian agent, Global Graphics and will provide a "Live Demo" of Flexorama 250 CI Flexo Press at the show.

 No.601

Desai Group 2nd KDO flexo press

The Rs.400 Crore (USD. 85 million) Desai Group, with businesses in 'beedis' (Indian Cigar sticks), speciality chemicals and Indian ethnic food products, has installed a second KDO flexo press, a 9 unit, 20" wide machine with in-line B. Bunch Sheeter. Like the first press, this has all the standard KDO features and is capable of speeds up to 300 feet per minute. The Desai Group now use their two machines for a variety of labels, on various substrates.

Beer and liquor labels dominate the bulk of production on the 10" wide, KDO 265 Plus 3 installed at the A - Z Industrial Estate in Mumbai. This 8 unit machine – together with the 7 unit KDO 265 Plus 2 ordered earlier – prints and processes not only self-adhesive label stock but also special papers of various grammages.

 No.602

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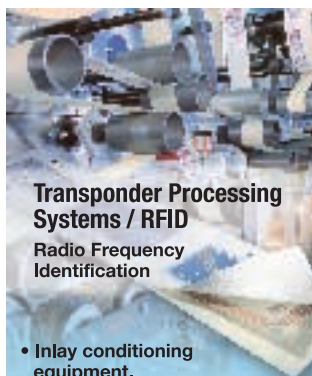
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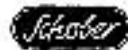
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6 colour flexo, 3 Stork rotary, screen units, UV drying, auto register control, flat and 2 rotary die stations. Good selection of tooling.

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10" web, 5 colour flexo, hot air and UV drying, 2 rotary die cutting stations, rewind. Some tooling included.

1998 MARK ANDY 4150

16" web width, 8 colour flexo, UV and hot air drying, auto register, 3 rotary die cutting stations, rewind and sheet deliveries. Large selection of tooling.

1995 NILPETER F/S 3000

6 colour flexo, 2 rotary screens, auto register control, hot air and UV drying, rotary hot foil stamping, 3 rotary die cutting stations, rewind. good selection of tooling.

1996 REMELE DECKLEMASTER 320

punching machine for the production of foil lids from pre-printed material.

For full details please contact Jon Wilkinson
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		e No.
AB GRAPHIC	52	100
AEMG	18	101
ALPHASONICS	23/24/35/36	167
AVERY DENNISON	C2	102
AVT	75/77	104
BOISE PAPER SOLUTIONS	30	105
BRUSHFOIL	69	106
BUNTING MAGNETICS	51	107
CHEMINSTRUMENTS	60	108
COMPUTER PRODUCTIVITY SERVICES	70	109
CREO	33	110
DUNMORE CORPORATION	59	111
ELECTRO OPTIC	13	112
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LABELS	66	158
ETISOFT	59	113
FLEXCON	2	114
FOCUS LABEL MACHINERY	41	115
GEW	65	116
GIDUE	8	117
GRAFICON	52	118
GREEN BAY PACKAGING	C4	119
GREENSTIK	61	120
GSB WAHL	41	121
HELGRAPH	40/44/48	177
HOLFELD TOOL & DIE	69	122
IGT TESTING SYSTEMS	69	123
INGLES	21	124
KOCHER + BECK	5/45/47/49	103
LABELEXPO EUROPE	29	157
LABELEXPO LATIN AMERICA	72	159
LABELMEN	56	125
LINK LABELS	34	126

		e No.
MARABUWERKE	70	127
MARTIN AUTOMATIC	38	128
MPS	1	129
PCMC	25	130
PISEC	42	160
POLYMAG TEK	55	131
POWERFORWARD	69	132
PRATI	12	133
PRIMERA	63	162
RAFLATAC	10	134
RAYVEN	60	135
RIPIT COMPUTER	79	164
ROLAND DIGITAL	27	136
ROTOMETRICS	C1	137
RUCO	17	138
SCHOBER	51	139
SOHN	60/65	140
SPIKER	C3	161
SUN CHEMICAL	37	166
TAILORED SOLUTIONS	51	163
TEKNEK	55	141
UVITEC	65	142
VTI	70	165
WACKER	22	143
W & D MACHINERY	65	144
WINK	56	145
XYNATECH	78	155



SPIKER

THE TOOL-MAKER

A LOT MORE...?

"... in any case our customers relate the name Spilker after **more** than 40 years of company existence with **more** than quality, short delivery times or reasonable prices. These attributes have become a standard at Spilker without which no company can exist any **more** in this marketplace over a long period of time. There is no alternative to quality in our area of high precision toolmaking. Short delivery times also to the most remote countries in the world – in our case **more** than 80 – is an indispensable prerequisite to keep up with the increasingly faster pulse of world-wide trade. Reasonable prices are **more** than mandatory in order to allow you, our customers, to work cost-effectively. A survey carried out amongst our customers and the subsequent analysis thereof showed that besides quality, short delivery times

and reasonable prices particular mention was made to our comprehensive and complete production programme. It was also often said that we are innovative and very strong in creating special solutions for difficult applications. We do not want to draw any conclusions from the aforesaid, but leave it up to you to convince yourself. One way of doing that would be to get **more** information about us by ordering a full set of product brochures, or please give us a call and fix an appointment for a visit. We would be very pleased to welcome you and show you around our company.

Still **more**? Not at first, but for the moment I remain and look forward to a successful co-operation!"

Regards,

Andreas Spilker



AND A LOT
MORE...

The no cost way to get better results.

Paul Hasemeyer, the new Senior Vice President of Coated Products Operations at Green Bay Packaging has a no cost way to get better results: hire a vendor who takes a genuine interest in your business.

No matter what your business, the relationship a vendor has with you makes a tremendous difference. The interest they take and the effort they give is the foundation for the quality of product and service you can expect to receive. And when you find a vendor who you can trust to always give you an all out effort, there's a confidence and a relationship that can't help but make business more efficient and effective.

"I think Green Bay Packaging has always differentiated itself from most of our competitors by establishing genuine relationships with our customers," explains Hasemeyer. "We work hard to get to know and understand the needs of the people who represent our customers. We want to make it easy for our customers to do business with us."

And for Green Bay Packaging, that takes many forms, but first and foremost it means service and support. Keeping promises and doing right by customers every time. But it's more than that, too.

"I think our customers and prospects are looking for us to provide them with much more than just a product line," explains Hasemeyer. "They're looking for advantages that allow them to succeed in an extremely competitive industry. Product innovation, consistent quality and of course competitive pricing have always been extremely important, but they don't mean much if service isn't a top priority." Hasemeyer's arrival has brought several key additions to Green Bay Packaging's approach and capabilities. The additions allow Green Bay Packaging to step away from the everyday group of pressure sensitive producers and really offer a tangible difference that helps our customer's business.



Paul Hasemeyer / Senior Vice President
Green Bay Packaging Coated Products Operations

"We joined forces with Esamex and became the majority owner of our newly formed corporation, GB Mexico, in September of last year. Our ownership in GB Mexico has allowed us to make a deeper penetration into the Mexican market," explains Hasemeyer.

"We now offer an expanded product line with inventories to service our Mexico based customers with the products they want when they want them."

The focus of any vendor should not just be to deliver a product, but to help a client grow their margin and their business. A smart vendor can solve problems or help you avoid them altogether.

"We recognize that it is extremely important for us to find ways to help our customers to grow their business," said Hasemeyer. "We have a number of initiatives in the works to expand our support to our customers. Some are as diverse as expanding our e-commerce capabilities and others as specific as

our bolstering product offerings to our customers."

Out there is a number of vendors wanting your business. Most trying to sell you pretty much the same stuff, and all say pretty much the same thing. Demand more from them. Demand that they don't just deliver products but ways to help you compete more effectively.

"We've invested in the people and equipment necessary to be a true asset to a customer and not just another vendor," offers Hasemeyer. "There is a renewed enthusiasm throughout our organization, an enthusiasm generated by our commitment to make changes necessary to deliver the services and products that our customers absolutely need in order to compete."

