

Labels & Labeling

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Jun/Jul 2006
Issue 3 Volume 28

The wider world of narrow web

Case study



Portuguese printer Vox is integrating a digital and flatbed screen workflow

Japan Summit



Japanese label converters are developing an international perspective

Analysis



A new wave of digital ink jet printers could impact the future of digital labeling

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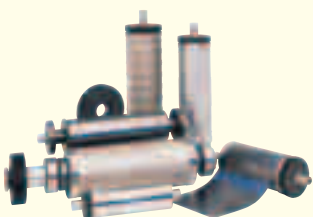
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Leader



I recently had the pleasure of visiting two label converters who exemplify the very best in working practices in our industry: the constant search for added value and process innovation, for implementing Lean working practices and for moving beyond discussions on price to managing end users' brands.

The first is Portuguese company Vox, whose story appears in this issue of L&L, and which specializes in the wine and Port wine labels business.

Joint owner Paulo Sérgio Gonçalves has moved the company rapidly from sheetfed to in-line presses in anticipation of the wine industry's move to high value added decoration technologies. He has invested in a line which combines digital with two flatbed screen presses in one pass to produce completely new products which delight his customers. He has integrated his

“If you're having a conversation about money, you are talking to the wrong customer”

management information systems with his graphics management systems so job order information is fired directly and automatically into the pre-production network. He has taken all his pre-press in house and makes his own flexo and offset plates on state-of-the-art CTP systems from common master files. He has a policy of recruiting young people from local schools then training them up with the company's workflow and ethos (the average age of the workforce is just 24).

Secondly I met with a printer from a small, family run business typical of the average reader of this magazine, to discover how the company has faced down end users over ruinous e-auctions and insisted on delivering a complete service which takes into account brand development and logistics management. 'If you're having a conversation about money, you are talking to the wrong customer' is a bold philosophy for a small/medium sized company to adopt, and takes a lot of courage and self-confidence to pull off. But it can be done, even when talking to buyers whose only interest is to pull down the cost per label, by 'flipping' the conversation to managing the brand and gaining access to the brand manager.

This interview will appear in Issue 4 and will be a must-read for any label converter still heading into the dead ground of price-based selling and keeping the presses full at any cost.

Andy Thomas

Group Managing Editor



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Labeling news

Edale launches North American division

Edale has set up a dedicated North American operation. 'It is a large venture, but a calculated one, and we believe that there is a real demand for what Edale has to offer,' explained James Boughton, CEO, 'the feedback from the last expo in America was positive with particular emphasis on the anodized cast aluminum plates and the web handling/tension controls of the Edale machines. They also noted the cognitive design and lack of "special" spare parts which forces them to purchase from us the original supplier leading to a

suppliers market and high prices. We don't believe in tying a customer in and want them to return to us because of the excellence in service, which they invariably do.'

Heading Edale America will be Karl Schmucker. Schmucker has a history in the flexography industry, working in sales for Nilpeter and IST and over eighteen years experience in all phases of graphic arts.

'The climate in America has become stagnant with three/four main companies,' said Schmucker. 'Each one

concentrates on a main market of cookie cutter style presses, none of them offering complete and extraordinary engineering to further advancement of press abilities. This has moved to the creativity of the printer, who uses press platforms as an artist would use a canvas and easel, to make the press into a unique profit center. Edale can partner with people to give them a different approach to presses. With our Alpha line, we can also bring high quality printing to the smallest of label printers, giving them a chance to compete with printers many times larger.'

Lean seminar announced

With a history of a 10:1 Return On Investment and an average of £126,000 bottom line improvement for its Lean manufacturing programs, Vision in Print will expound the benefits of this technique to UK printers at its fourth annual event.

According to Richard Gray, chief executive of Vision in Print: 'Lean is spreading, yet many senior managers admit that they don't know how best to start implementation or sustain this powerful aid to productivity and competitiveness.'

This year's event has been divided into two focused days: Introduction to Lean is a workshop aimed at delegates who wish to learn 'Lean' thinking and how it can transform their business. Sustaining Lean

is for companies that have already begun to adopt 'Lean' techniques and want to keep up the momentum.

Companies that achieve a sustainable Lean way of working have reported benefits such as: raised staff motivation, continuing cost reduction, constant innovation, and sustained competitiveness.

'If you want to raise your productivity and competitiveness, gain an overview of best practice in print and elsewhere, discover practical ideas for process improvement, raise service standards and implement better ways to manage your staff, then this is the event for you,' concluded Richard Gray, chief executive of Vision in Print.

Zebra offers RFID advice

With the deadline looming for Wal-Mart's 'next 300' suppliers to adopt radio frequency identification (RFID) labeling, representatives from these supplier companies flocked to Dallas, USA, to learn how to implement internal RFID compliance programs in order to continue selling to the world's largest retailer.

Zebra Technologies Corporation, a manufacturer of bar code and RFID smart labeling solutions, worked with key partners and a large number of 'first 300' suppliers to help them launch RFID technology in their operations. To help the 'next 300' companies with their compliance mandates, Zebra offers an article, available at www.zebra.com/rfid_top_ten outlining the top 10 best practices based on successful RFID implementations featuring Wal-Mart suppliers Pacific Cycle, the largest bicycle supplier in North America; Victory Land Group, a large furniture importer; and Beaver Street Fisheries, a distributor of fish and seafood products.

Stork appoints SA agent

Stork Prints has appointed Rototechnik Pty., of New Germany, South Africa, as its sole distributor to better serve its graphics and textile customers in southern Africa, covering South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Madagascar. Moreover, the company will be the region's first to install Stork's complete pre- and post-press equipment. This will finally provide a local RotaMesh nickel screen cylinder re-imaging service and dedicated

rotary screen printing training facilities.

The company will supply the Prints Group's complete range of RSI (Rotary Screen Integration) units, imaging and drying systems, screen cylinders and spare parts; they will also offer retrofitting project management and application expertise. Rototechnik will also supply RotaPlate, a longer-life re-usable nickel screen, for non-Stork units.

GRE announces DOD inkjet alliance with Impika

GRE Engineering has announced a strategic alliance with ink jet printing systems manufacturer IMPIKA Jetting Solutions of Aubagne, France, that will integrate the product lines of both companies. GRE has been providing tailored converting solutions to the label, business forms and packaging industries for over 16 years and the Impika Drop on Demand (DoD) range will compliment these activities with print engines capable of printing variable data in high resolution color on small and medium width substrates at high speeds.

GRE and IMPIKA joined forces at IPEX 2006 by presenting the IPS C-9000 high resolution, full color DoD printing system in combination with converting equipment from GRE for the production of high quality labels using UV curable inks. The IPS C-9000 prints text and graphics at 900dpi over widths of up to 429mm and greyscale printing technology makes it possible to sharpen the print quality by regulating the ink jet. C-9000 systems are especially suited to the label and packaging industry allowing a wide range of jobs to be printed in high resolution CMYK color.

'With our new C-9000 systems, we are once again driving innovation in this industry,' said Jean-Marc Pasturel,

director of business development, IMPIKA. 'The new systems are easy to install and easy to operate. They are already being used in characteristically demanding sectors such as identity and security printing.'

The combined offering from the two companies of the IMPIKA with GRE unwind station, laminating, new Digicut die cutter with digital stylus module, laser die cutting and matrix/finished rewind provide a cost-effective solution in the JIT market. Additional converting options from GRE include sheet delivery, foil stamping, UV coating and curing, hologram deposition, RFID insertion and rotary die cutting with either fixed solid or flexible magnetic dies.

'We view digital printing technology as a natural progression to our product range,' stated Jules Farkas of GRE Digital Solutions. 'With the growing demand for variable data printing and JIT delivery the benefits of partnering with a supplier of DoD digital print engines are obvious. The ability to offer both monochrome and four color digital print capabilities on our converting platforms will enhance our product offering. We believe the technology and products IMPIKA offer will provide us the ability to meet current and fast changing customer needs.'

News in brief

Mark Andy wins FTA award

Mark Andy has won the FTA Technical Innovation Award 2006 for its work developing RFID manufacturing solutions. 'Proven and effective RFID solutions are going to be the key for converters to be successful as they enter the RFID label marketplace,' stated Paul Brauss, president of Mark Andy, Inc. 'We are honored to be recognized as a leader in these solutions and take a lot of pride in being the first flexo machine manufacturer to achieve such success in producing RFID enabled labels.'

New section on L&L.com

Due to popular demand, we have introduced a 'New Products' section on labelsandlabeling.com. As well as being the number one source for news, now you will be able to read about all the latest innovations in the industry. Just click on the 'New Products' option on the 'News' menubar, and stay informed.

AAA Press buys S & E

AAA Press International, Inc. has announced the acquisition of S&E Engineering. S&E Engineering has been manufacturing roll lifts, add-on varnish units and pallet tilters for almost two decades.

ETI announces partnership with Degussa

At the Label Summit Latin America, in Mexico, equipment manufacturer ETI Converting Equipment and silicone supplier Degussa Goldschmidt Chemical for the first time jointly presented the benefits of in-line siliconizing and adhesive coating for label printers.

Recently, Degussa and ETI Converting Equipment, Inc. (ETI) formed a partnership to provide equipment and materials which allow label converters to

bring PSA laminate production in-house. The whole process includes producing their own release liner, coating the adhesive, printing and laminating in one operation.

'Leading Mexican label printers have recognized that the ETI patented process is able to reduce costs by allowing them to produce their own laminate, but more important are the manufacturing flexibility and new capabilities that

become possible. For example, the integrated line allows a manufacturer to reverse print film labels without the cost of liner scrap and secondary laminating steps,' stated Catherine Léveille, Marketing Manager at ETI.

'The Label Summit Mexico was an assembly of all the important Latin American printers, and the perfect event at which to introduce this type of leading edge technology.'

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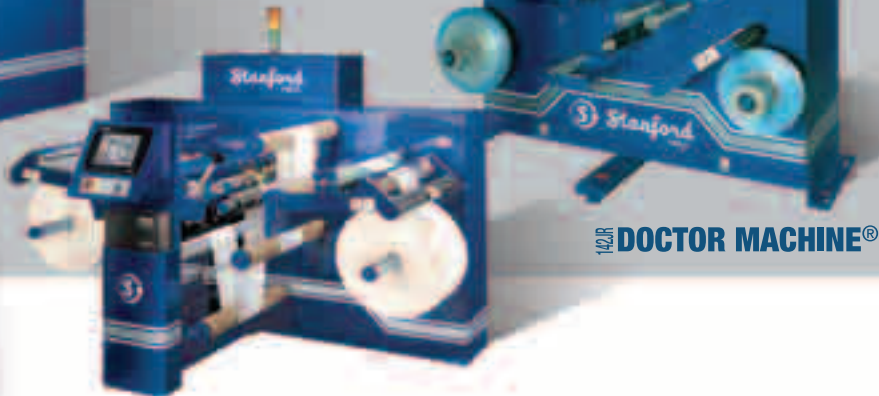


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Labeling news

Screen and Artwork Systems enter into OEM agreement

Screen has confirmed an OEM agreement with ArtWork Systems. Under the agreement Screen will integrate ArtPro, ArtWork System's specialist packaging software, within its Trueflownet prepress environment to give users powerful packaging production capabilities.

Branded PackStudio SE, the solution will be fully integrated into Trueflownet to give users a cohesive interface and universal access to the widest choice of prepress production tools available today.

Trueflownet is a range of interconnected prepress modules that can be combined to create customized and highly-automated workflows to suit the specific production needs of commercial printing, newspapers, packaging and digital printing. In addition to its own expert technology, Screen's philosophy is to integrate complementary and industry-leading third party products to add specific functionality for each sector.

ArtPro is recognized as leading software for the pre-production of packaging materials. It features many dedicated tools for the preparation of graphics for a wide array of label and packaging production techniques including: litho printing, flexo printing, gravure and silk screen.

'The packaging market has very specific requirements and, by using ArtPro pre-press, operators can turn designs into print-ready files tailored to specific output device requirements instantly. This agreement, alongside the launch of two VLF PlateRite Ultima offset platesetters and a digital flexo platesetter at IPEX, strengthens our commitment to providing a complete packaging solution,' said Eiji Kakiuchi, corporate officer, Media Technology Company, Dainippon Screen.

According to Guido van der Schueren, chairman of the board, ArtWork Systems: 'This agreement strengthens Artwork

Systems' position in Asia, and especially in Japan. It fits perfectly within our strategy to form partnerships, as we recently have done with Punch Graphix and Stork Prints.'

At IPEX 06 Screen introduced its first platesetter for the flexo market - the PlateRite FX870.

The Screen PlateRite FX870 is a thermal CTP system capable of imaging digital flexo plates up to 870 x 735mm and has been developed to support wide range of flexo applications including labels, flexible packaging, corrugated, carton and security printing.

This new platesetter incorporates Screen's thermal laser technology to image advanced digital DuPont Cyrel and Asahikasei flexo plates. Imaging at a choice of 2400 or 2540 dpi resolutions with screen rulings up to 200 lpi, the PlateRite FX870 produces consistently high quality plates.

Jet Europe relocates to new premises

Jet Europe, a Dutch supplier of water-washable polymer printing plates and processing systems, has relocated its European headquarters and production facilities to brand new, larger 3,000 m² premises in Zeewolde.

A key reason for the move was the need to expand production facilities, in order to keep up with growing demand for its plate program.

Cees Adriaanse commented: 'Quite simply, because of the need to expand production, we outgrew our old premises.

We've seen excellent sales of our water-washable plate program especially. This is increasingly preferred by narrow-web UV-flexo printers, not just because it delivers high quality, but it is seen as the most eco-friendly choice on today's market. On top of that we are benefiting from the growth of the flexo printing market in general.'

Jet Europe also stocks the complete range of Ohkaflex solvent-washable flexo plates, noted for their strong ozone-resistance and long-life, and suitable for all main printing ink formats. The

company also manufactures all equipment needed in the water and solvent plate imaging cycle, systems for washing, drying, exposure and finishing.

Besides production and stockholding facilities, the new headquarters will house an enlarged showroom. This will also be used for producing test plates, as well as showing off new equipment. Potential customers will be able to supply their own set of negatives, enabling them to run their own test runs with Jet or Ohkaflex plates.

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Labeling news

AB Graphic International acquires flytec

AB Graphic International Ltd has announced the acquisition of flytec Spezialmaschinen GmbH, Germany. The acquisition includes the assets and entire flytec product range.

Mike Burton, managing director of AB Graphic International, commented: 'The acquisition is a natural and progressive fit for us. We have worked with flytec for a number of years incorporating their optical vision inspection systems on our slitter/rewinders. The product range available from flytec enables our group of companies to greatly broaden its offerings and service support without any real product over-lap and provides a complimentary situation.'

The new company will be renamed as AB Graphic International GmbH and will maintain its manufacturing facility in Baesweiler, Germany. It will be headed by former owner, Michael Leidgschwendner, with few changes anticipated within the current organization.

The systems from flytec are composed of four product groups: pharmaceutical label inspection, label dispensers/applicators, booklet insertion machines and vision camera inspection systems. flytec has traded primarily in Germany and the Benelux countries and this customer base will be further developed through the AB Graphic International network of direct

employees and distributors.

The company's growth is also reflected in the recent addition of a new 35,000 sq. ft. (3200 sq. mt.) purpose built factory extension close to the two sites it has occupied in Bridlington, East Yorkshire, UK for the last 30 years. Burton added: 'Because of the growing demand for our products, we reached a point where we were forced to spread our operations over multiple sites. The new structure provides the space needed to bring the company's engineering and assembly departments under one roof and will house manufacturing of the companies Digicon and Omega product lines.'

One to One Print & Packaging training

4impression has launched 'One-to-One' accelerated training for senior executives and personnel new to the print and packaging industry. Courses are particularly suited to individuals entering the packaging industry and possessing limited knowledge of the processes and problems associated with packaging manufacturing.

Courses can be tailored to suite individual timescales, availability and venues with a flexibility that does not interfere with the normal working day.

John Morton, senior trainer, explains: 'With the increasing number of non packaging experienced managers entering the trade we have found that one-to-one training is proving the easiest and most efficient method of accelerating the learning curve. Our aim is to make sure that individuals have a clear understanding of the key print and repro processes so that they can make informed decisions and communicate effectively

with their colleagues, suppliers and customers. In addition, we can also ensure that there is an enhanced awareness of all the latest materials, emerging technologies and product innovations.'

4impression is presenting a Masterclass at this year's Packaging Summit Europe on July 3 in Amsterdam. Entitled 'How to achieve a consistent brand image,' it will provide a unique insight into the management, specification and control of printed packaging in a global market.

Taking an actual brand design from concept to print, the presentation will chart its progress throughout the supply chain from specification via pre-press to proofing and then to final print. This Masterclass will address all the factors that can impact on achieving the perfect and consistent reproduction of a brand image and highlight many of the problems associated with print quality and color control.

Fasson US invests in film

The Fasson Roll North America division of Avery Dennison Corporation announced that it is investing over \$20 million in additional coating and finishing capacity at its facility in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, USA. A new asset will be installed at this facility to support the company's continuous investment in the high-growth film materials market and the expanding product needs of the food, beverage and household and personal care segments.

According to John Wurzbarger, vice president and general manager, Fasson Roll North America, 'This investment builds on our success as the premier supplier to the North American films marketplace, where pressure-sensitive labels provide differentiated packaging for brand-savvy consumer goods companies. It will enable us to further expand into innovative technology platforms that support new trends and opportunities in our films business.'



Boise expands in PS

Boise Paper has announced that the company's board of directors has approved a \$72 million capital project to expand Boise's production of pressure sensitive paper to meet growing customer demand. The project involves adding new capability to the existing 250" #3 paper machine at Boise's mill in Wallula, Washington, USA, with state-of-the-art equipment that will increase the company's pressure sensitive capacity by 200,000 tons.

'Our objective is to be a global leader in the market for pressure sensitive papers,' said Boise CEO Tom Stephens. 'This project is another step forward in executing the growth strategy we have established in the specialty and premium papers businesses.'

Boise started preliminary engineering and planning for the project at the end of

2004. Since then, the company has made commitments to key suppliers and has been progressing toward the equipment installation pending final board approval of the project. Construction is expected to begin in June 2006; start-up is targeted for the first quarter of 2007.

'Investing to capture the continued growth in pressure sensitive market demand is a clear commitment to growing our specialty and premium paper businesses,' said Miles Hewitt, senior vice president and general manager of Boise Paper. 'The company has been serving the pressure sensitive market for over 30 years. The increase in capacity at Wallula and new product development will enable Boise to keep pace with growing global demand, particularly release liners used in label applications.'

Paxar buys Adhipress

Paxar Corporation has announced that it has purchased the business and assets of Adhipress S.A., headquartered in Paris, for an undisclosed sum. With facilities also in Bangladesh, Hong Kong and India, Adhipress is a supplier of price tickets and merchandising tags to French hypermarkets. In 2005, it had sales of EUR 6.8 million (\$8.2 million).

James Wrigley, president, Paxar EMEA, stated: 'This acquisition expands Paxar's market share in the French retail sector, which accounts for five of the top 15 European retailers. It gives Paxar the opportunity to rapidly grow by introducing its full product line, including RF loss prevention solutions, to Adhipress customers, among them the world's second largest retailer, Carrefour, and also the Auchan retailing group.'

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Eastman offers isoprene alternative

The current global isoprene shortage is compelling tape and label manufacturers to seek alternative ingredients for their hot-melt pressure sensitive adhesive (HMPSA) formulations for packaging tapes and labels.

Most acutely affected are end-users of SIS (styrene-isoprene-styrene) block copolymers, an essential part of most hot melt pressure sensitive adhesive formulations. To help mitigate this shortage, Eastman Chemical Company offers a new formulation strategy, which can reduce the use of isoprene by more than 50 per cent in HMPSA's. The new solution was presented in a technical paper at the Pressure Sensitive Tape Council's TECH XXIX Technical Seminar held May 4-5 in Las Vegas.

Entitled 'A New Generation of Hotmelt Tape Formulations, Using Blends of SIBS and SBS Block Copolymers and New Hydrocarbon Tackifying Resins', the paper includes performance data and sample formulation tables and is now available at www.Eastman.com/PSTC.

Eastman's technical study reports that depending on the specific performance demands of a given HMPSA application, it is now possible to provide substantial substitution of isoprene monomers in an adhesives formulation using a blend of the KRATON Polymers SIBS (styrene-isoprene-butadiene-styrene) block copolymer and SBS (styrene-butadiene-styrene) block copolymer. The study concludes that proper blending of SIBS and SBS, combined with Eastman's

Piccotac 7590-N hydrocarbon resin, allows adhesives formulators a cost-effective, viable alternative. Produced with the more readily available butadiene monomers, in some cases the new formulation can enhance the overall performance of HMPSA's.

'The research we've documented allows packaging tape and label manufacturers to meet the specific challenges presented by the current shortage without sacrificing HMPSA performance,' said the paper's author, Chrétien Donker, a product application manager for Eastman. 'Building on our past innovations and knowledge, Eastman will continue assisting tape and label manufacturers in overcoming isoprene scarcity.'



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Labeling news

Torraspapel adapts to EU Directive

Torraspapel, part of the Lecta group, has commenced the process of adapting its products to European Directive 2002/95/EC regarding the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (RoHS).

Torraspapel's Termax SF1 thermal paper has been certified according to the RoHS standard, demonstrating that its composition does not contain hazardous substances and can be used in electrical and electronic equipment.

As of 1 July 2006, the European RoHS

Directive will require manufacturers of equipment to have reduced the use of the following hazardous substances to set minimum acceptable levels: lead, hexavalent chromium, mercury, cadmium, polybrominated biphenyl (PBB) and polybrominated diphenyl ether (PBDE).

At the same time, the WEEE Directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment, which complements the RoHS Directive, establishes a series of criteria for promoting the collection, treatment, recycling and elimination of

waste electrical and electronic equipment.

Both directives affect the entire electronics sector, from manufacturers to retail outlets, and their main aim is to prevent hazardous materials from being sent for landfill.

In addition to Termax SF1 thermal paper, Torraspapel's Creator coated paper and Metalvac metallized paper already have the certificate of conformity with the European RoHS Directive.

Degradable shrink film

Plastic Suppliers has announced its EarthFirst TDO shrink film. This new addition to the EarthFirst family of sustainable films provides the converter and brand owner an alternative to currently available petroleum-based shrink films. EarthFirst TDO shrink film utilizes NatureWorks PLA resin from NatureWorks LLC.

EarthFirst TDO shrink film is specifically designed for today's uniquely shaped containers that require high shrink percentages. This new shrink film has been issued a patent pending status by the United States Patent office.

The company said in a statement: 'EarthFirst TDO shrink film is manufactured in 50 and 60 micron thicknesses. It offers a superior surface for ink adhesion with excellent shrink characteristics, superb gloss, low haze levels, excellent scratch resistance and may be stored in temperatures up to 104° F with no natural aging.'

Jetrion launches expanded operations at new facility

Jetrion LLC, the wholly-owned industrial inkjet products and services subsidiary of Flint Group, has launched operations in its new headquarters in Ypsilanti, Michigan, USA, a modern facility with more than three times the floor space of the company's previous operations site.

Located just 15 minutes from Detroit Metropolitan Airport, Jetrion's new facility provides 35,000 square feet of floor area, much of it dedicated to the company's major expansion of its inkjet ink manufacturing and system integration capacity to meet the growing demand for its products. Sales for the Jetrion 3025 UV Inkjet System for variable printing of barcodes, numbering, text and graphics on labels, tags, tickets, forms, and plastic cards are expected to triple in 2006.

Key areas within the facility include a state-of-the-art inkjet ink manufacturing

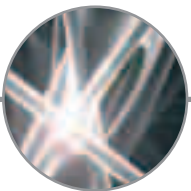
area for production of solvent, UV and water ink products, as well as ink and printer system development labs.

Jetrion's custom integrated solutions projects are also moving to the new facility. The new Jetrion Demonstration Center includes: Jetrion's 3025 UV Inkjet System mounted directly on a Mark Andy flexographic press; the new Jetrion 3025SA, a stand-alone inkjet label printer integrated into a label rewinder; and, coming soon, Jetrion's 4000 Series full color inkjet label press.

The company's sales and administration operations are also now located in the building. Jetrion's remaining R&D operations will also be relocated to the facility in the next few months. Jetrion holds an option for an additional 35,000 square feet in the same building for future expansion.



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Label Summit Japan

The first Label Summit to be held in Japan attracted over 400 label printers, and demonstrated that Japanese converters are starting to develop a more international outlook. **Andy Thomas** reports

The Japanese labels market has traditionally been seen as highly insular, servicing end users which operate exclusively within the country and supplied largely by Japanese machinery suppliers.

However, that attitude appears to be changing. At the last Labelexpo Europe in Brussels, the biggest ever delegation of Japanese label printers visited the exhibition, and another large group will visit Labelexpo Americas in Chicago. At the same time, Japanese label printers are coming under pressure to understand the global dynamics of the labels market as their end users move to source packaging in China.

The Japanese label converting sector is characterized by upwards of 1,000, mainly small companies, predominately using flatbed/semi-rotary letterpress equipment and hot foil printing machines, as well as screen process.

While the large Japanese corporations in the electronics, consumer products and automotive sectors trade with the world, the mainly small to medium-sized label converters in Japan trade almost exclusively within their own country on a predominately local basis and, to a lesser degree, nationally within Japan. Very few trade outside Asia, although there is some trade with other Asian countries.

Global brands have not yet reached Japan, and so the low cost mass produced labels have not yet impacted. The Japanese market is still predominantly for short runs, and 60 per cent of narrow web presses are semi-rotary letterpress machines.

Within the more traditional label markets, such as food/supermarket, healthcare and pharmaceutical, and cosmetics/toiletries, there is more acceptance of offset, flexo/UV flexo and combination process printing – much as in Western label markets – to meet the label demands and requirements of global branded goods.

However, China's explosive label market growth is starting to impact the Japanese label converter. Japanese

manufacturers are increasingly going to China, where the labor cost is up to 10x cheaper, to manufacture their products, while a large portion of pressure-sensitive label production for electrical appliances and office equipment is also moving to China. There has also been an increasing interest in shrink sleeve label technology in Japan, with some of the leading brands of health and beauty products moving from pressure-sensitive to sleeve labels.

Consequently, Japanese pressure-sensitive label converters, who historically have had few of the pressures on cost efficiency and performance faced by the West, are beginning to look at printing technologies new to Japan, and particularly the latest generations of flexo and UV flexo presses, narrow-web offset, digital printing, computer-to-plate systems, on-press register and control systems. However, it is a challenge for suppliers to make some of these changes happen faster when there is general lack of a flexo infrastructure in Japan.

Keynote

The Japan Label Summit keynote presentation was from Mitsuo Komiyama, president of the Japanese Federation of Label Printers, which helped organize the event along with the Japanese label industry newspaper Label Shimbun. Mr Komiyama's theme was the need for Japanese label printers to become global players and throw off their traditionally insular mentality.

The conference then heard the results of a survey of Japanese label printers carried out jointly by Labels & Labeling/Labelexpo and the Label Shimbun.

Natsuki Uchida, editor of Label Shimbun, explained that over 100 dedicated label converting companies in Japan responded to the survey questionnaire – around 10 per cent of label producer companies in the country.

Of the companies surveyed some 70 per cent employed less than 50 employees, and 22 per cent employed fewer than ten people. However, 19 per cent of respondents employed 50 to 100 people and 11 per cent employed over 100.

Reflecting the general difficulties of the Japanese economy, one

third of respondents reported less than zero growth last year, with a further third reporting sales growth of under 4 per cent. Less than 10 per cent of respondents reported sales growth of 10 per cent or more.

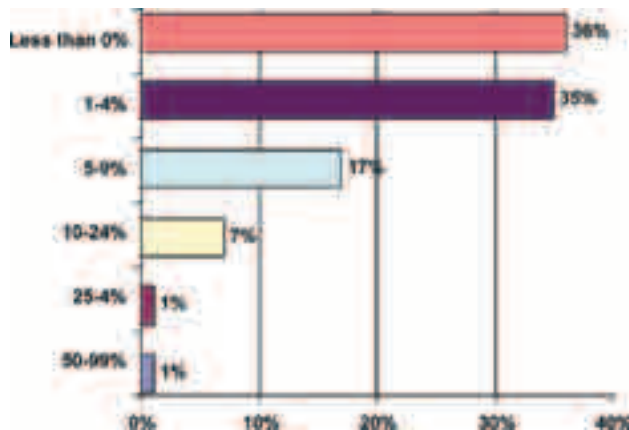


Fig 1. Companies percentage sales growth in 2005

With such a poor level of sales growth in the Japanese label converting sector it is not a surprise to find that some 32 per cent reported no profit on sales in 2005, with a further 36 per cent only having a profit on sales of less than 4 per cent. It's not all gloom of course - the best performing companies attained in excess of 20 per cent profit.

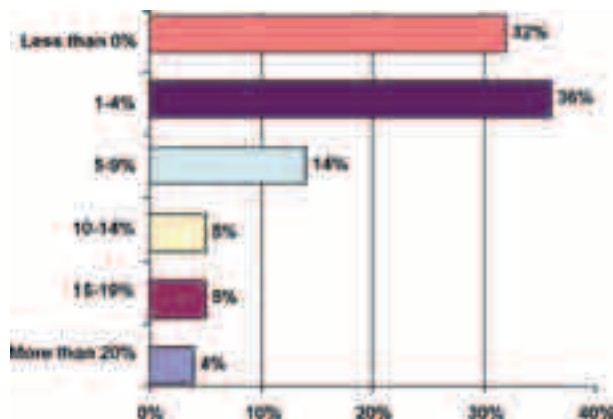


Fig 2. Percentage profit on sales in 2005

When asked to identify the types of labels produced by their companies, the overwhelming majority said self-adhesive labels. However, when asked what other printed products were

“At the last Labelexpo Europe in Brussels, the biggest ever delegation of Japanese label printers visited the exhibition”

produced by their companies there was a large variety of responses ranging from commercial printing to cartons and flexible packaging. Commercial printing was listed by some 40 companies as one of their activities. This pattern is more typical of developing economies than Western-style mature economies.

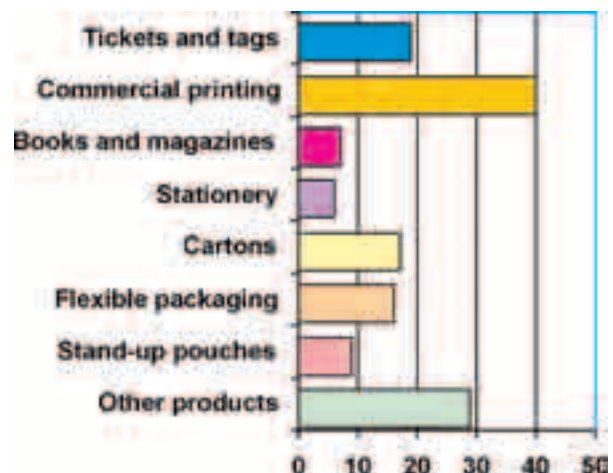


Fig 3. Other printed products produced by company (actual numbers). Companies may produce several different types of product within the one plant.

Printing technologies and process utilised

While there were companies in the survey that produced sheet-fed or wide-web printed labels or other products, the vast majority used narrow-web roll-label presses – either flatbed/semi-rotary machines or fully rotary presses, with semi-rotary/flatbed presses making up the majority.

This is not surprising. Japan has long been a letterpress country and, with many small label orders, the flatbed/semi-rotary printing and foil stamping processes are regarded as ideal in many applications in which Japanese converters still remain to be convinced of the benefits of the flexo process.

A number of both Indigo and Xeikon digital presses are now

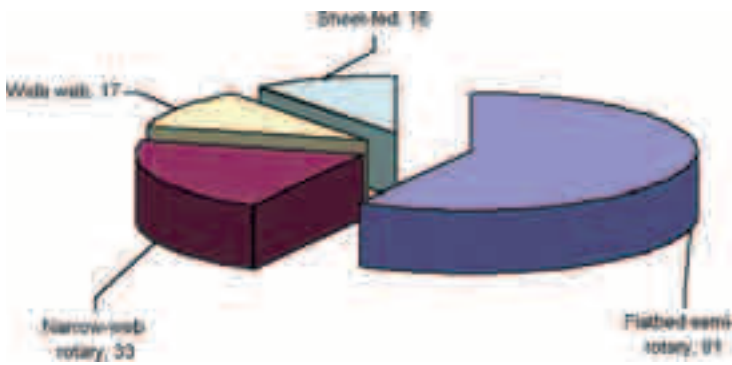


Fig 4. Printing technologies used

installed and operational in Japan.

A detailed perspective on self-adhesive materials developments in Japan was given by Tetsuyuki Utagawa, section manager, technical support group at Lintec.

Utagawa confirmed the importance of environmental issues for Lintec, including VOC emissions, Endocrine (APEO surfactants), Dioxin and RoHS compliance, as well as the need to reduce, reuse and recycle labels.

Utagawa pointed out that in 2004 some 69 per cent of all PSAs globally were emulsion, and today performance is broadly similar with solvent adhesives. 'Emulsion actually shows superior water adhesion and excellent PSA oozing resistance.'

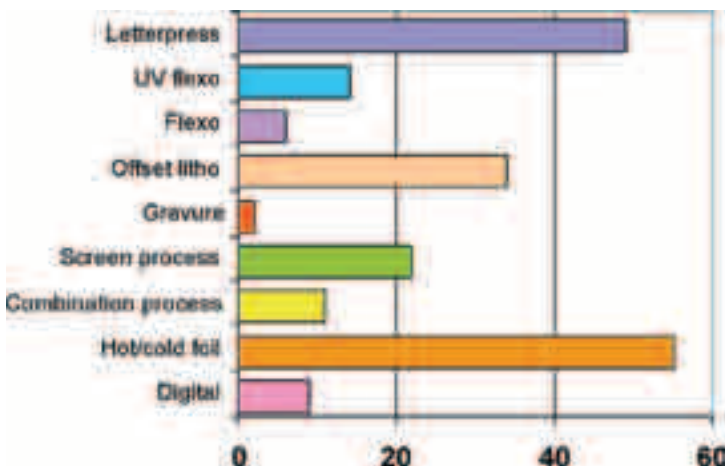


Fig 5. Printing processes used

Environmentally friendly products produced by Lintec include Kinath, a recyclable product for use in panels where ABS, PS, PP and PE are typically used, and Biola, a biomass derived Poly-lactic acid (PLA) delivered on a

Global perspective

Iwata Labels specializes in pharmaceutical labels, and has developed a range of innovative solutions for applications such as hang labels and security sleeves for ampoules. Masato Iwata, president of Iwata Label also reviewed the company's progress with RFID labeling, which is still at the prototype stage, and he is visiting hospitals to see how they might want to use the technology. Iwata said Japanese printers have to look outside their country at international developments. 'We need a global perspective, even as small entrepreneurs. We have good opportunities, because Japanese quality control is the best in the world.'

“Functions of a label will diversify into VIP imprinting, traceability, ‘Reuse and Recycle’ characteristics, and non-contact rewrite/RFID”

glassine liner, which reduces use of fossil fuels and CO2 emissions.

In the future, Utagawa said the functions of a label will diversify into a combination of functions, including VIP imprinting, traceability, 'Reuse and Recycle' characteristics, and non-contact rewrite/RFID.

Masamichi Toya, president of the Japanese Business Forms Research organization, then explained how his members are moving into the labels market as the business forms market continues to decline. They are using their expertise in security printing, peelable and dry-peelable technologies, although Mr Toya urged his members to learn more from their European and American counterparts. There are interesting crossovers between labels and business forms – particularly the incorporation of RFID into tickets and tags.



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End user

A presentation followed from a major Japanese end user representing Lion Brand, a 331 billion yen corporation which operates in the household, health & beauty and pharmaceuticals sectors.

The company uses a wide range of labels, including PS, IML, wraparound and shrink labels. Close to 20 per cent of the company's products are in shrink films, while pressure sensitive accounts for 37 per cent, and IML 41 per cent. Refill pouches are growing fast to meet the environmental concerns of Japanese consumers.

Lion is highly responsive to customer feedback, and six per cent of all complaints concern labels. Issues include faded or scratched text, wrinkles in the label, the difficulty of removing labels without leaving adhesive on the container, and labels which peel off. Other complaints include not enough, or hard to read information, and unreadable barcodes on shrink labels. Damage, particularly to shrink labels from liquid detergents, was raised as a problem.

Takeshi Satoh, assistant manager packaging engineering at Lion, outlined the steps which converters need to take to tackle these problems: 'We do find discolored UV inks, and ideally we need testing to 100 hours UV exposure without fading. We also observe peeling, and this requires better control of the amount of adhesive applied. To combat scratching, converters should consider changing the materials or production line. Applying an overcoat can aid chemical resistance and avoid problems with scratching.'

“We find discolored UV inks, and ideally we need testing to 100 hours UV exposure without fading. We also observe peeling”

Satoh said the industry should build a quality control regime with one defect per million as a target. 'But that still leaves a problem for that one customer in a million, so our mindset should be 100 per cent perfection and we want to achieve this higher target.'

Brands such as Lion are under intense pressure from more environmentally and nutritionally aware Japanese consumers.

'The market is changing drastically. The consumer now wants to know where food comes from, wants more details on ingredients. To respond, we now need smaller quantities, not just in PS but also in IML and shrink. Gravure gives us large

volumes, and half our PS labels are printed gravure, but how do you respond to our need for smaller quantities?'

The environment is of growing importance. 'Consumers do not like PVC in particular. We will be looking for plant-based packaging materials and biodegradable materials in the future.' Lion is very open to label printers bringing innovative ideas.

Lion is not likely to source its products outside Japan, 'but if we do purchase packaging outside Japan we try to source from Japanese companies to maintain a high level of quality control. We would want any overseas manufacturer to achieve the same high levels of quality control as in Japan.'

UV flexo in Japan

Despite the overwhelming dominance of letterpress and foiling, a handful of Japanese converters do use flexography – primarily Mark Andy presses sold through the American company's long time agency Lintec.

A panel discussion brought together four of Japan's leading flexo label printers: Junichi Shindo, president of Shinwa Label Printing; Masaaki Ono, president of Yukousya; Kunio Tsuda, president Takara Pac; Kimimasa Kawai, president of Kawaiseikodo. The session was chaired by Label Shimbun editor Yukiko Suzuki.

Generally, the panellists had chosen flexo for its color stability, and because it does not require the same operator skill levels as letterpress to achieve a high quality print result. Other factors include consistency of UV flexo on repeat jobs, higher productivity than letterpress on longer runs, and differentiation from competitors.

UV flexo was considered to have superior color consistency to solvent or water-based flexo, and print quality was held to be equal to letterpress. However, many end users still feel that UV flexo cannot match the quality of the best letterpress and offset. 'Japanese end users are very demanding – perhaps too demanding!' commented Yukiko Suzuki.

As an example, the panel felt that Japanese end users would not accept cold foiling. Most hot foiling is still done off-line rather than in-line for reasons of perceived quality.

The panel also discussed the difficulties in moving from flatbed die cutting – still the most common form of die cutting in Japan - to magnetic cylinders and dies.

Another issue for flexo press users is the 3-4 day lead time for ink delivery, which can be a problem if a rush job arrives.

The panel confirmed that the high initial investment cost of flexo compared to letterpress is a problem for smaller label printers.

At the same time, running costs for flexo are relatively high because the print industry's pre-press is skewed towards offset, gravure and letterpress. In Japan, gravure cylinders for narrow

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“In such a technologically advanced industrial culture, it may seem strange that digital label printing has taken so long to take off in Japan”

and mid web presses are cheaper than CTP flexo plates, for example, and standard flexo plates are more expensive than letterpress.

Another example given by the panel is the high cost of multiple sets of aniloxes compared with an offset inking system.

Despite these drawbacks, the four panellists continue to push the boundaries of flexography. Some are experimenting with endless sleeves, for example, and another had replaced screen printing of fire extinguisher plates with flexo.

There has certainly been a growing interest from European flexo press manufacturers in the potential of the Japanese market. Nilpeter announced at the Summit the appointment of Dainippon Screen as its Japanese agent, and MPS recently appointed its own dedicated distributor??

A panel session of Western UV flexo press manufacturers representing MPS, Nilpeter, Gallus/Heidelberg, and Omet – with contributions from GiDue and Mark Andy - all stressed the rapid technological revolution which UV flexo has undergone in the last five years.

Given the easy availability of letterpress pre-press in Japan, Bert Van Den Brink, co-managing director of MPS, pointed out that the company’s UV flexo presses can also use letterpress plates because of their non-driven rubber impression rolls. Several label printers in Germany are running both letterpress and flexo plates on the same MPS machine.

The panellists stressed that UV flexography is a system in which all elements must be present to a high quality in order to match the quality of the best letterpress, and David Jones, MD of Alphasonics, looked at the key importance of clean anilox rolls in achieving high quality UV flexo print.

Jones looked at competing cleaning methods, and stressed that the key to minimizing anilox damage during cleaning is control. ‘Chemical cleaning by hand is fine so long as you have operators dedicated to doing it. You also need to pick your cleaning technology according to the cell count of your aniloxes.’

This session was completed by Brian Ivens, sales and

marketing manager at Arpeco, who looked at the use of inspection systems on-press and on the rewinder to developing a quality control strategy. Ivens noted that inspection challenges have increased with the development of films, thinner material, booklets, security features, multiple print processes and a shift towards inspection on the press.

Digital

In such a technologically advanced industrial culture, it may seem strange that digital label printing has taken so long to take off in Japan. Part of the reason is that Japanese label converters had had early experiences with the first generation of digital technology.

This situation is clearly changing, as demonstrated by two very interesting presentations from Japanese digital label printers.

Impam Label installed an HP Indigo ws4000 digital press in 2005, along with a laser die cutter from Cartes. Fujio Iwata, president of Iwata said the high price of consumables limited the run lengths, but the company is now looking to roll out variable information printing for barcodes and numbering applications. The need to coat materials is another issue, and the company has invested in its own flexo coater. It UV varnishes all jobs to protect the print against scratching. The company is still experimenting with its laser die-cutting system.

Kei Matsumoto, head of the Digital Printing Revolution Institute (Depri) department of Seiko, talked about his experiences with the HP Indigo ws4050 and Cartes laser die cutter. One of his most successful applications is mock-ups and realistic marketing dummies for end users, as well as marketing promotions.

Matt Oda of Comtecs – which represents Cartes Equipment in Japan – said the company is currently working on a laser to cut sheets. The semi-sealed CO2 laser cutting system will remain the same, only the feeding system will be different, and it will be offered as an option on the standard 350mm x 350mm machine. The company is also working on a system with a working area of 700 x 1,000mm, which will be exclusively sheetfed with an improved feeding system.

Delegates then heard about the experiences of European digital label pioneer Rako, Germany, from the company’s digital printing operations manager, Thomas Mehn.

Taka Muramatsu, director of Xeikon in Japan, looked at the opportunities for digital label printing, and Yoshikazu Nakao, general manager at Esko Japan looked at how to develop a complete digital pre-press solution. Automation is a key area, for example the automatic imposition of variable information using templates and XML databases. ■

Reducing waste

Improving efficiency and profitability in roll-fed label operations is something which can no longer be ignored by label converters, argues **David Wright**, VP Sales for Martin Automatic

The materials that you process represent the largest portion of cost for most of your jobs. How much of the paper and ink that you buy do you end up billing to your customers, and how much ends up as waste?

Unfortunately, all too often an unnecessarily large percentage of your materials ends up as scrap on your factory floor. This can be one of the easiest areas in which to make improvements. Just by walking around and observing your operation you can find numerous opportunities turn waste into saleable product. Remember too, while you are producing scrap material you are also wasting valuable manpower, press time and general overhead. Here are some things to look for:

- **Waste from material handling and storage.** Materials run better when they are stored in an environment that matches that of the pressroom. Productivity and quality will increase if they are in the proper condition when put on the press. And careless handling of material inside your factory is costly. A small dent 5-mm deep in the outside of a 600-mm diameter roll will result in the loss of 70 meters of material.
- **Core waste.** Unwind systems, whether manual or automatic splicing, typically leave useable material on the core. Most manual unwinds require the operator to keep an eye on the expiring roll. If he doesn't slow down and stop in time, the web runs off the core and forces an expensive re-webbing of the press. To avoid this, then, he will err on the side of caution and stop the

roll much earlier, leaving many wraps of material on the core. Saving just a few wraps off each core can increase profits (and reduce landfill costs) by thousands of dollars each year. When running more expensive materials with higher added value, the savings can be even more dramatic. Core waste reduction systems are available to enable converters to use all but the last few centimeters of material off a roll.

- **Stripping waste.** As important as core waste, is the waste that an operator strips from the outside of a new roll. For a 1000-mm diameter roll with 88-mm outside diameter core, every wrap thrown away from the outside of the roll equals more than eleven wraps at the core. Why do operators slab so much off the outside of rolls? The operators receive the rolls damaged through bad storage or handling, and it's easier and quicker to slab off a lot rather than to examine each wrap to see if it is damaged. It may just be the routine they have learned. Ultimately, it is because the value of what they are throwing away has not been thoroughly explained to them.

- **Waste from poor tension control.** The quality of production is closely linked to the consistency of web tension. Presses without good tension control will always struggle to produce the best quality work. Good tension control also has a secondary benefit: it increases the flexibility of your production. With the increasing prevalence of lighter weight, film-based materials, the ability to run consistent, low tension is a requirement. With improved





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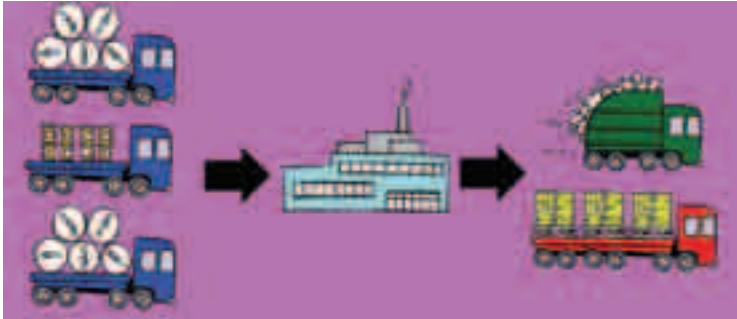
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Here is an example of one customer's waste savings calculation. This customer is running a 250 mm (10 in) wide press already equipped with a turret rewind for making small finished label rolls. Prior to automating the press with an automatic butt splicer, he calculated his annual waste due to manual roll changes at more than US\$44,000. The measured result, after installing the automatic splicer, proved his original waste calculation was low. His savings are actually higher, and his return on investment even quicker, than anticipated.

The results don't take into account all of the benefits of roll change automation that increase the value of the investment. These include the increased quality that results from running your presses continuously and the full use of butt rolls.

A by-product of automating a label press is an increase in quality. Changes in print quality occur when a press is started and stopped. When stopping and starting for manual roll changes the operator must make subjective decisions about when the output is acceptable. If he errs on the conservative side he produces more waste; if he is more liberal, then your customers receive product that is less consistent in quality. All presses perform better when run continuously. One way to avoid the waste that accompanies poor quality work is to keep your press running at a steady speed.

Good only for long runs?

One of the frequent comments that we hear is that automation is only for long run jobs. In fact printing houses that specialize in short run work can benefit from automation. How?



Many short-run specialists I've known take on occasional or regular medium to long run jobs. It may be that once a month, you produce a job that requires 10 or more roll changes. If starting and stopping for manual changes results in 250 feet of wasted stock, as few as 20 roll changes will consume the equivalent of a full 5,000-foot roll. Those same 20 roll changes, if each requires 10 minutes to complete, also result in 3 hours and 20 minutes of downtime. Automatic roll changing may give you the flexibility to take on—and make money on—medium and long run jobs.

Additionally, few short run jobs use exactly one roll of material. Often there is perfectly good material left on a partially used roll. Most of the time, these rolls are simply wasted. Sometimes they are stored for use when that job or a similar job comes up. Without an automatic roll changer, using a partial roll is often impractical and inefficient, since the press barely comes up to speed before having to stop and change rolls—with the attendant material and time wasted. An automatic roll changer makes efficient use of these partial rolls. And partial or butt rolls that would otherwise be discarded may also be used during the make ready phase of a different job.

Your competitive position hinges on your ability to convert most of the materials coming into your factory into top quality product for which your customers pay you top price. Identifying the sources of material waste in your converting process, and solving them, will have an immediate positive effect on your competitiveness—and your profit. ■

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Digital gains

Digital printing is now making serious inroads into the narrow web label converting industry, and a new wave of digital inkjet systems is about to hit the market. **Andy Thomas** reports

This year proved to be a serious landmark for digital label printing. In exclusive research conducted for L&L, Mike Fairley found that for HP Indigo, total installations of their Series 2 (ws4000/ws4050) presses since they were first introduced to the market in March 2003 have now topped 200; 100 of those in 2005 alone. Put together with the 30 ws2000 presses also installed in 2005, plus 15 installations during the year of the new Punch Xeikon digital label presses, and the total number of digital label presses installed in 2005 was, for the first time, around 10 per cent of all narrow web presses installed globally in one year.

In volumes and values for digitally printed labels, around 4.0 billion labels are calculated to have been printed digitally in 2005, between them having an estimated sales value of over a quarter of a billion dollars. The number of labels printed digitally on HP Indigo presses in 2005 alone were up some 137 per cent on 2004.

Business plans for 2006 already indicate that well in excess of 200 digital label presses (170 + HP Indigo and 30 + Xeikon) are expected to be installed during the coming year and even more in 2007, with some of the highest growth in the coming years being in the Asia Pacific region.

By the end of 2007 the comparable figures are forecast to be for more than 7.7 billion labels being printed digitally (valued at a near half a billion dollars) and for digital label press installations in 2007 to be close to 14 per cent of all new narrow web label presses installed in that year.

But these figures tell only part of the story of the increasing penetration of digital printing into the labels converting arena. Because building up fast is a new wave of inkjet technology which can be expected to complement these HP Indigo/Xeikon systems and create as yet unforeseen markets for digital printing.

At Labelexpo in Chicago this September we can expect to see some advanced examples of drop-on-demand (DoD) ink jet



Jetrion's 3025 SA stand-alone inkjet converting system

technology with specific applications for narrow web converters. Generally, these systems work either in-line with conventional print processes, or as stand-alone presses for short-run label or packaging applications.

At Ipex, Agfa Graphics demonstrated its new 630mm wide Dotrix Modular printing unsupported PE film with a line-up that included a flexo unit, web cleaner, corona treater, UV unit and chill drums. Toshiba supplied the DoD print heads and Agfa the Agorix UV-curable inks. Post-printing modules include varnishing, die cutting and finishing.

Also seen at Ipex was Screen's entry into the ink jet market with its Truepress Jet520 based on Epson's piezo print heads and running at up to 64 m/minute on a 507mm print width. Although shown producing full-color direct mailers, our reporter Barry Hunt noted that Screen may develop other web-fed applications with a wider range of in-line finishing options.

Among the various projects for Xaar's grayscale print heads is the Digital Web Press from imaging Technology international (iT) of Boulder, Colorado. The DWP prints full color, high quality images on labelstocks or film with on-the-fly image changes for



web widths from 54 to 165mm. The machine uses Xaar's OmniDot 760 GS8 print heads and offers optional UV curing, IR or hot-air drying. At Ipex the DWP ran with SunJet Crystal UOX inks.

Flint Group's Jetrion LLC introduced the 3025 SA at Ipex, described as the first stand-alone narrow web rewinder with an integrated UV ink jet module. BCL Bar Code Label in Hungary is the first European customer. The 3025 SA uses stitchable Spectra 2.4-inch print heads and includes a lamp head from Honle UV America. The rewinder from Grafisk Maskinfabrik in Denmark offers optional slitting, die cutting and inspection facilities. Mark Andy will manufacture the rewinder for the North American market.

A grayscale-enabled version, the 4040, for full-color labels and speciality packaging will be launched at Labelexpo. It will be built at Jetrion's new headquarters in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Domino Printing Science now has a prototype of a full color UV-curable technology for integration into existing presses. It is based on Domino's second-generation K-Series variable data printers, led by the K200 which prints spot colors and CMYK. It was shown at Ipex with the Editor GT, which can control up to eight K200s or 16 K100 print heads.

GRE Engineering recently announced a strategic alliance with French inkjet specialist Impika that will integrate the product lines of both companies. GRE has been providing tailored converting solutions to the label, business forms and packaging industries for over 16 years and the Impika Drop on Demand (DoD) range will complement these activities with print engines capable of printing variable data in high resolution color on small and medium width substrates at high speeds.

Both companies joined forces at Ipex to present the IPS C-9000 high resolution, full color DoD printing system in combination with converting equipment

Cutting without dies

Laser die cutting is another area where we can expect to see progress at Labelexpo. As noted above, GRE is offering laser die cutting on its Impika-led inkjet systems, and Matan can optionally incorporate the ComPack DigiBeam laser die cutter. In addition, AB Graphic will almost certainly show the latest version of its Omega Digicon HS converting line with the Sabre eXtreme laser die cutter.

Cartes has had a successful roll-out of its Dual Laser die cutter and its next development is a laser to cut sheets. The semi-sealed CO2 laser cutting system found on the Dual Laser will remain the same, only the feeding system will be different, and it will be offered as an option on the standard 350mm x 350mm machine. The company is also working on a system with a working area of 700 x 1,000mm, which will be exclusively sheetfed with an improved feeding system.

An alternative way to cut labels without dies and at a fraction of the cost of laser die cutting, is plotter cutter technology, which uses a small pivoting blade to die cut any custom shape on demand. Allen Datagraph has been pioneering these developments with its Digital Finishing System (DFS), an all-inclusive, roll-to-roll converting solution allowing users to laminate, die cut, strip and slit in one production pass.

'Digital Finishing Systems are converting materials from every digital print platform on the market today,' states Ken Pawlowski, director digital products at ADSI. 'Several of our customers are operating multiple Finishing Systems, multiple shifts per day with some even converting flexo printed labels.'

Allen Datagraph recently introduced the DLS or Digital Label System, a turn-key digital label system which includes a high resolution inkjet printer, computer, design software, RIP and the Digital Finishing System, with Allen Datagraph providing complete training, technical support and consumables. 'Converters are well aware of the market trends and focus on digital technologies, they just don't want to spend a million dollars to get into the game,' says Pawlowski.

Scheduled to be introduced at Labelexpo Americas Chicago in September is the sheet fed version of the Digital Finishing System. The new unit will accept unsupported or non-pressure sensitive sheets, combining them with an adhesive layer and an over lamination to transform the individual sheets into a continuous web.

'The sheet fed DFS expands the very popular color laser print platform into a multi-tasking system capable of producing high quality, custom pressure sensitive labels ready for automatic application,' states Pawlowski.

from GRE for the production of high quality labels using UV curable inks. The greyscale IPS C-9000 prints text and graphics at 900dpi over widths of up to 429mm in four colors.

GRE's converting solution consisted of unwind station, laminating, the new DigiCut die cutter with digital stylus module, laser die cutting and matrix/finished rewind. Additional converting options from GRE include sheet delivery, foil stamping, UV coating and curing, hologram deposition, RFID insertion and rotary die cutting with either fixed solid or flexible magnetic dies.

Another player in this market is Printing Technology Service Inc, which offers the JetFlex with both CMYK and variable data inkjet applications again using UV inks and backed by the VeriFlex print verification system. Fully-stitched 8-inch wide images, or

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Simulating Opaltone

In a development which shows the versatility of digital inkjet, New Zealand company Gimle has announced an inkjet proofing system capable of simulating Opaltone and other N-Color processes.

The Packaging industry is rapidly moving into multicolor printing processes such as Opaltone (CMYK + RGB), Hexachrome (CMYK + OG) and other ink combinations, which generate huge savings. Affordable InkJet proofing has not been available for these customers because their workflow commonly requires the use of special colors that are outside the gamut of standard ink jet printers.

Gimle's AbsoluteProof multicolor engine and EXTRACHROME ink set exponentially expand the capability of standard Epson Stylus Pro wide-format professional printers, enabling them to achieve accurate simulation of multicolor workflows, says Gimle. AbsoluteProof now offers support for up to 10 color combinations using N-Color ICC profiles.

'The practices in the packaging sector are changing rapidly world wide,' comments Hugo Kristinsson, CEO of Gimle. 'With Multicolor tools such as CREO Spotless, Esko InkWizard, Gretag Macbeth and X-Rite's support of Multicolor, and the opportunity to increase profitability, there is no wonder why this is taking place.'

two across for an 18-inch wide web, are offered with adjustable print resolution. It can be integrated into web presses, sheet-fed presses and finishing systems.

An important development for the future of the industrial market is the entry of consumer inkjet giant Minolta into the sector, with a specialist narrow web unit due to be launched at LabelExpo Americas incorporating a die cutter and matrix rewind. Epson launched a similar unit in Japan a few years ago, but this was never taken to overseas markets. It will be interesting to review the unit in Chicago and to see if this influences other consumer inkjet giants to look at opportunities to port their systems to the industrial arena.

Roland DG continues to promote its 30" VersaCAMM SP-300V as a short run proofing or label production system, with a recent price reduction taking the cost to \$12,995. The SP-300V prints and contour cuts a wide range of label substrates in one step, printing to a maximum resolution of 1440 dpi and now including the more environmentally friendly ECO-SOL ink series. The VersaWorks RIP includes color management tools and a variety of layout, edit and print functions such as nesting, tiling and auto/manual-layout.

Although thermal transfer printing is a more established technology than inkjet, there are still significant developments taking place.



Lexmark LX810 inkjet printer works at resolutions up to 4800 dpi

Matan – which really pioneered the development of 4-color TT systems into the industrial labels market – introduced at LabelExpo 2005 in Brussels its SpringPro digital press. The SpringPro offers an enhanced resolution of up to 400x1200 DPI and speed of up to 274 linear meters per hour with an extensive color gamut for label and tag printing. Other features include printing of variable data, such as numbering and bar-coding and printing on pre-printed media from other platforms. With a choice of four, five, or six-color, one-pass printing, it also empowers printers to offer spot, opaque white and a variety of metallic colors.

Matan's recently introduced SpotBoard technology further maximizes the print quality of spot colors and combinations of process colors and spots by enabling individual control over the energy levels of each printing station separately.

Optionally the SpringPro can be supplied with ComPack's DigiBeam compact laser-cutting- and engraving-system for non-impact-cutting (kiss-cutting) of fine contours and for engraving monochrome halftone-pictures on nearly any rigid substrate.

Lexmark has continued the development of its high resolution inkjet systems with the launch of the LX810 Color Label Printer. The LX810 inkjet prints full-color, photo-quality images on labels at resolutions up to 4800 dpi. Printed labels are water- and scratch-proof, and typical applications include short-run individual product and box-end labels and proofing for large presses. Substrates can include matte-finish labels as well as semi-gloss and high-gloss materials.

The LX810 ships with NiceLabel SE, label design and sells for US\$2495.00 (MSRP).

Nipson, meanwhile, continues to develop its toner-based VaryPress system. The VaryPress 400 seen at Ipex is intended for various label, security and ticket applications and is a faster version of the VaryPress 200. It can also run with a twin engine duplex configuration for producing a mix of print-on-demand products and transactional documents. Both systems can be configured with several types of in-line finishing equipment.



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“Using the digital press, we completed the job within three hours. On a conventional press, this would have taken two days, with each version requiring three passes”

Nigel Painton, founder of Commercial Label Products

Digital decision

Nigel Painton started Commercial Label Products Ltd, Congleton, Cheshire, on his own 27 years ago. Since then, it has grown into a thriving printing business, specialising in short- to medium-run-length label production with many blue chip clients.

The company runs a battery of conventional presses, the last of which was an 8-colour Lintec UV letterpress machine purchased in 1999.

‘In this time, we have gone from a mail order label printer to a busy and expanding trade label supplier. There was a growing market for short-run, high-quality labels from the larger flexo houses and the printing industry in general. They realized such work could be profitably subcontracted to a smaller and more flexible company like us, who were set up for such specialist work,’ recalls Painton.

By 2005, Commercial Label Products was prospering with a workforce of 20, but faced a common dilemma: ‘We needed to expand, but were running out of space. We wanted to open further doors which would only be possible with a migration to digital and the loss of one of the older letter press machines, to make way for the new technology. It was clear the market was moving towards digital production and if we were to remain competitive, it was the move we needed to make.’

Painton eventually decided on the purchase of an HP Indigo ws4050 digital press with an AB Graphics Digicon finishing machine, and sealed the deal at Labelexpo Brussels last year.

“The difference in technology was challenging at first,’ says Ian Bresolin, Commercial Label Products production manager. ‘However, once the training started, we soon realized that we would learn how to operate the press quickly and enjoyed

seeing the high-quality results that could be produced.’

The transition to digital printing can be a daunting decision for many traditional printers, but Nigel Painton has integrated the HP Indigo press ws4050 to work alongside his other conventional presses.

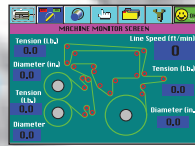
‘We have retained our UV letterpress machines, and the two processes dovetail together well. We run the simple 1,2 or 3 color mid length runs on the smaller letterpress machines, the longer run multi-color jobs on the larger 8 colour press and the short to medium-run length jobs and those requiring variable data very cost-effectively on the digital press. We are now printing a wide variety of work for blue-chip companies across the oil, automotive, chemical, food and toiletry industries, and the HP Indigo press has opened doors for many more opportunities, such as producing sachets and shrink sleeves for the packaging market.’

Painton recalls a particularly demanding job for a client who produces tracking devices for the automotive industry. The 5-color (including white) labels on silver paper comprised a series of three variable data options, in a run-length of 5,000. ‘Using the digital press, we completed the job within three hours. On a conventional press, this would have taken two days, with each version requiring three passes.’

This new capability is enabling Commercial Labels to explore avenues such as offering customers a re-issuing service where they can simply update the information on existing labels as and when the data changes. Since platemaking is not required, this is a cost-effective process and the company can also offer free printed proofs, the same day in some instances.



Machine Monitor Screen



Job Screen

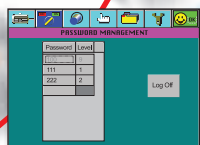
Entry Name	Value
Web Width (in.)	1.8
Printing Tension (lb.f)	1.0
Travel (in.)	0
Acquit Time (Secs)	8.0

Alarm Display Screen

Alarm	Status
P/W Upper Core Lock	OK
P/W Lower Core Lock	OK
L/W Core & Sub-Feed Clamps	OK
Safety Cover	OK
Drive Fault	OK
Nip Open	OK
Roll End Feed	OK
Web Break	OK

Limits Screen

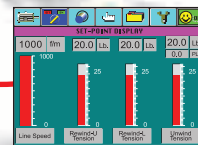
Parameter	Value
Max. Tension (lb.f)	25
Max. Speed (ft/min)	1000
Printed Core (in.)	3.0
Unwired Core (in.)	3.0
Min. Speed (ft/min)	5
Max. Speed (ft/min)	5
Travel Start (in.)	6.0
Roll End (in.)	5.0



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Rx	00000000	00000000

USS Communication Screen



Set-Point Display Screen

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multi print systems

Screen and digital – a new combination

Portuguese wine label specialist Vox has added digital printing to its multi-process operations and pioneered the integration of digital and flatbed screen printing. **Andy Thomas** reports

When L&L last visited specialist Portuguese label converter Vox Organização Industrial Gráfica SA, the company was negotiating to expand its battery of Gallus TCS250 and EM280 presses.

With those machines installed, Vox has embarked on the next stage of its investment program – a major move to digital label printing closely linked to its screen printing operation.

Vox still holds a dominant position in the Portuguese Port Wine industry, owning more than 80 per cent market share in this area of premium quality work.

Over the last few years, the company has also targeted the emerging market for pressure sensitive wine labels, and with great success as this industry transitions rapidly from sheetfed wet glue to pressure-sensitive labels. 'Almost all our customers are moving to PSA,' says Paulo Sérgio Gonçalves, joint managing director of Vox.

Where most label converters would happily sit on this business – Vox is so well known in its sector that it does not have to employ sales people – Gonçalves has ambitious plans for expansion of his company. And digital printing is at the heart of those plans.

Vox has an impressive complement of conventional presses, with seven high specification Gallus TCS 250 semi-rotary offset combination lines, and three EM 280 flexopress, all installed since 2001. The company also runs a battery of Heidelberg and MAN Roland sheetfed presses, and both SPS sheetfed and SMAG roll-fed Screen presses.

Vox was founded in 1975 by former packaging printer Manuel Ribeiro, who remains joint managing director and principal shareholder. Production began with ten employees and Heidelberg offset machines in a 200m² unit in the wine cellars. By 1991, staff numbers had risen to 30, and production relocated to a 1250m² factory in Gaia. It was the decision to move into self adhesive labels, under pressure from major customers, that brought Vox to its present site, which today employs 116 and generates a turnover of over €7.5m per annum.



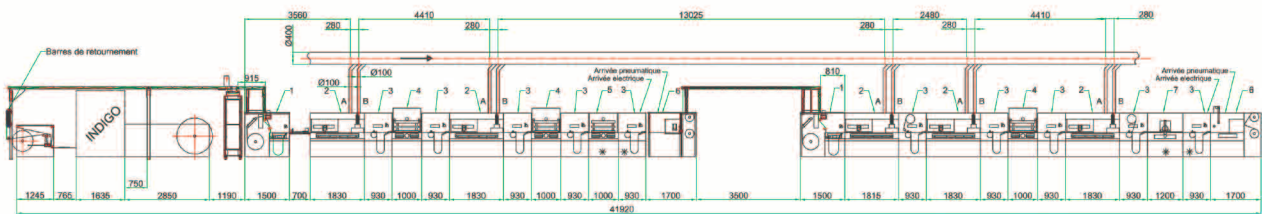
Paulo Sérgio Gonçalves, joint managing director of Vox, standing in front of his 41 meter long digital-screen combination line

Vox has seen its business shift from 35 customers buying 80 per cent of its capacity in 1998 to more than 900 different ones today.

'It shows what has happened to the market – it is now all short run and fast turnaround,' explained Gonçalves, who agonized at the potential for poor cashflow that this type of work can offer, but who overall welcomes the change for reasons of improved margins. 'Previously we were dealing solely with the major Port Wine houses – all long established companies with enviable reputations. Today, with the growth of demand for quality labels from the table wine trade, we have a more fragmented but more dynamic portfolio.'

The choice of Gallus' TCS 250 series was largely influenced by the company's customers, who had become accustomed to the superior quality offered by the offset process that they knew from sheet fed work. With average run lengths at 10,000 labels, printed 4-around, the presses often run for just 2,500 impressions.

This short run job profile suggested there was a role for digital



A schematic of the digital press-screen press configuration at Vox. The web can move through one or both screen presses after printing on the WS4050 digital press. Note the buffer

“Between the ws4050 and the Comet, SMAG has specially designed and built a buffer unit”

printing – but only if the quality matched Vox’s existing offset work, and today Vox has three HP Indigo ws4050 digital presses.

SMAG has emerged as the company’s favored partner for the development of digital finishing systems, with the installation of a Comet SR unit on Vox’s first ws4050 and two more to follow.

The Comet SR works in full rotary mode except for the semi-rotary hot stamping and die cutting modules, and incorporates laminating, spot and flood varnishing, and registered die cutting/stripping. The machine can use both semi-rotary and full rotary dies. Speed is up to 25 meters/min and maximum repeat length is 455mm. A semi-rotary hot foil stamping unit is on order.

Between the ws4050 and the Comet, SMAG has specially designed and built a buffer unit. This helps maintain the flow of work to the finishing line when the press is changing jobs. A turn bar delivers the web in the correct orientation for the finishing unit.

So far, so straight forward. But the specialist sector of the labels market dominated by Vox places a high value on screen printing for its high opacity, tactile feel and vibrant colors. Vox has many examples in its product portfolio of simple and elegant label designs which use the matt varnishes applied on the screen press followed by foiling.

Vox already had two Galaxie flatbed screen presses, and the idea emerged to combine the advantages of digital printing and screen printing in one line.

SMAG designed and built turn bars and overhead rails which allow the web to be taken from the ws4050 to a buffer, then passed through one, or both Galaxie presses in one pass, as an alternative to going through the Comet.

This ‘Digital Galaxie’ concept allows for a wide range of effects. The Galaxie machines are configured with two and three screen printing units, UV varnishing, hot stamping, embossing, and flatbed die cutting. Possible applications in combination with digital printing include mat screen varnish, tactile effects, mat black, conductive ink, security ink and thermochromic effects. Options on the Galaxie include cold foil, and sheeting.

Because of the length of time taken to set up the Digital

MIS and pre-press

Vox is one of the first label converters visited by L&L to have created links between its Management Information System (MIS) and its Esko graphics management system. Vox has written its own MIS system and the integration has been achieved without using JDF protocols.

This means that information on number of colors, Pantone references, color order, and other technical details are passed from the job ordering system direct to the graphics pre-production system, cutting out a whole layer of manual intervention and duplication.

The company uses an Esko Graphics workflow system with ten workstations connected via Esko’s Backstage server, and outputting via the FlexRIP to offset CTP or flexo CTP. Esko’s Plato ‘smart’ imposition software is used in the preparation of CTP jobs.

Flexo CTP is handled by a CDI Spark plus DuPont Spark thermal plate processor. Interestingly, Vox is also imaging toyobo digital letterpress plates – incorporating the black ablation layer – on the Spark unit.

Vox only outputs film for in-house screen production. The company is currently negotiating to purchase a computer to screen system for its flatbed screen making requirements.

Vox makes its own flatbed stamping and embossing dies, although not rule dies. Currently the company is testing rotary stamping cylinders for its EM280s, but feels the price – even if manufactured in-house – is too expensive. Vox is now looking at sleeve embossing systems.

In the quest to do everything in-house, Vox has even examined making its own magnetic dies. ‘We would like to make them here, but the environment is the problem, sending the 80 liters of chemicals a day for proper disposal,’ notes Gonçalves. He hopes to get permission from local government officials next year.

Gonçalves believes that laser die cutting will be the long term future, although there remain challenges of cost back cutting labels.

Galaxie line, and the challenges in handling a 41 meter web path, this configuration is clearly not suited to all jobs. For this reason it can be switched easily between working inline, with a buffer, or off line.

Digital future

‘For me the future is digital,’ asserts Paulo Sérgio Gonçalves. ‘Only the speed is a limitation.’

Already Gonçalves and his team are pushing the boundaries of what the digital press can achieve. As an example, SMAG had



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(Above) The buffer leading from the digital press to the screen presses

SMAG and HP

SMAG has been in partnership with HP Indigo since early 2005, and is one of HP's three preferred finishing systems partners alongside ABG and Rotoflex. 'Developing this business is a major priority in 2006 for SMAG worldwide,' affirms SMAG's Stéphane Rateau.

SMAG has three solutions for digital finishing: the fully rotary Digital Comet FR, the semi-rotary Digital Comet SR and now the Digital Galaxie.

developed for Vox an inkjet numbering system mounted on a rewinder to print sequential numbers onto tax seal labels for port wine bottles. Now Vox is trialling printing these sequentially numbered labels on its HP Indigo presses. Interestingly, this is a long run job (8 million pieces) and in just a single color, which in theory should not be suited to a digital press. But the variable information element makes it an economic proposition – added to the fact that the variable numbering looks better on the digital press and it is faster than printing inkjet.

This raises the interesting question of which jobs go on the digital press and which onto the TCS250s and UV flexo EM280s.

Answers Gonçalves: 'We take into account a wide range of factors, including run length, complexity of finishing, substrates, size and format of the label.'

There are other special factors which also influence the choice of press or finishing process, such as the inclusion of invisible inks, currently applied in register on the Comet finishing unit. However, HP Indigo is known to be working on invisible inks for the ws4050 press series.

How does UV flexo fit? Gonçalves explains, 'While I think offset still has the edge on quality, particularly on the textured stocks favoured by our customers, the advance of UV flexo offers us a cost effective alternative in some areas, and I can foresee our investment with Gallus going that way.'

The growth in demand for filmic substrates interests the company, and it is has carried out extensive trials with rotary

(Below) A bridge offers the opportunity to take the web through both screen presses



screen in combination with UV flexo.

For Gonçalves a limitation of the ws4050 concerns usage of Pantone colors. Shorter run pressure sensitive jobs incorporating Pantones will almost certainly put onto the Gallus TCS250, although Vox has started mixing its own Pantone colors for the ws4050 press.

Another concern of Gonçalves on the ws4050 is materials wastage. The HP Indigo press requires specially coated substrates, and a significant amount of material is coated by Vox then not used for printing. So SMAG's next development will be an in-line coating unit for the ws4050 press, which will sit between the unwind and the press infeed. 'Currently we waste a lot of materials because we have to coat more materials than we run for a job. With in-line coating we will only use the materials we need,' points out Gonçalves.

Future expansion

Paulo Sérgio Gonçalves is a driven man, who works extremely long hours and inspires his workers by personal example through a triple shift working day. Walking round the plant, one is instantly struck by the youth of the workforce. Gonçalves confirms that the average age of Vox employees is just 24, and he has nothing but praise for their work ethic and skill level. Vox has a policy of recruiting school leavers that it can train to its own house style of operation.

The success of the operation can be seen in Vox's plans to expand into a new 7,000 sq meter printing plant on the 20,000 m² plot it currently occupies. This will certainly mean an expansion of the company's current 116 strong workforce.

For the longer term future, Gonçalves sees a continued expansion of digital printing and a possible investment in servo-controlled UV flexo. What he certainly foresees is a continued decline in demand for sheet fed offset labels to a point where the company significantly reduces its current range of Heidelberg and Roland presses. ■

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Nilpeter pushes quality boundary

Nilpeter introduced its FB3300A press to the Americas with an exclusive press demonstration using thermally processed 200 line screen photopolymer plates. **Katy Wight** reports

Nilpeter first introduced its FB3300A press at Labelexpo Europe last fall and since the launch, over 30 orders have been placed for the press worldwide. In an exclusive Labelexpo Americas preview, Nilpeter USA recently held an open house at its Cincinnati, Ohio, headquarters to showcase the press to converters from North, South and Central America. Nilpeter engineers demonstrated the versatility of the FB3300A by printing stunning, high-quality cosmetic, food, water and spirit labels using 200 line screen photopolymer plates. Nilpeter partnered with distributor Enovation Graphic Systems and MacDermid Printing Solutions for the event – the two companies introduced the LAVA thermal plate processing system, which produced 200 line screen photopolymer plates that were then used to print labels on the 8-color 13" FB3300A.

This is the highest line screen plate that MacDermid has ever developed.

The LAVA 2530 is solvent-free and uses heat to remove the unexposed photopolymer. Processing time is between 0.75-1.25 hours, compared to 2-4 hours for conventional processing, and the maximum exposure area is 25"x30". A digital MLT plate was used for the demonstration – this is a medium durometer, uncapped plate that could be processed in either a conventional solvent processing system or the LAVA thermal plate processing system.

Colleen Twomey of MacDermid presented positive results from two beta-sites: Arkansas label of Little Rock, Arkansas, moved from analogue solvent plates to CTP thermal and were able to upgrade the quality of their graphics, reduce operator



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error and increase their turnaround. Arkansas Label operations manager Tim Procter commented: 'The operators are happier with the cleaner screens and our customers noticed the improvements in our fine line and process work. The plates are very easy to make and I wish that we had looked into thermal technology earlier – the results far-exceeded our goals.'

Pollard banknote, a lottery ticket printer from Canada, also beta-tested the LAVA system and moved away from solvent processing. The company was able to use the system for more applications than it had initially determined and increased the number of plates it was able to process without adding to the number of employees.

Ted Schaffer of Enovation Graphic Systems said: 'this is the highest line screen flexo plate that I have seen produced in the narrow web market with a thermal plate processor – and as far as I know, no one is printing at that level. Our LAVA customers have proved that the thermally processed plate has excellent resolution and durability; two key characteristics to digital photopolymer plates. The LAVA 2530 format size is well-suited for the narrow web market, and we feel that MacDermid has hit the nail on the head with the processing.'

None of the event attendees would argue that the labels produced on the FB3300A with LAVA plates weren't superb quality. Dubbed the workhorse of the Nilpeter range, the FB Line of presses is available in 10", 13" and 16" web widths and can reach speeds of up to 750 ft/min. The line is based on modular flexo technology for easy configuration and operators at the demonstration illustrated Nilpeter's drop-in technology with an interchangeable rotary screen module.

'The FB3300A was a huge success in Brussels last year and we are expecting the same response here in the US once converters have had the opportunity to see what the machine can do,' said Nilpeter USA president Andy Colletta. It allows for drop-in screen or cold foil at any station, with UV curing or hot air drying and it also gives the converter flexibility to run film to light tag on the same machine – which makes it the right press for the changing market.

'Changeovers are minimized because of the quick change drawer system and waste is reduced in set-up by instant register response (IRR). There is also little waste in roll change because of the print pacing system, which brings it back into register before all of the colors are back on. Basically, it does not cost a lot to own a Nilpeter and reap the benefits,' he said.

A number of other industry partners also demonstrated the latest end-to-end industry developments to help streamline processes, increase productivity and optimize quality, including Rotometrics, GEW, Water Ink Technologies, Tesa Tape, JM Heaford and EC Shaw. ■

FB3300A features

- Programmable unwind and infeed modules enhance precision and maintain perfect tension control
- Slide out print stations accelerate make-ready and come with removable ink pans and tool-free, quick-change print cylinders, anilox and doctor rolls
- The mid-point pacing system resets tensions between print and die-cutting stations, improving register and reducing waste
- Easy-to-lift covers and wide doors for fast access to press for maintenance
- Multi-direction lineal register adjustment without affecting web tension
- High-capacity drying system featuring individual, adjustable dryer boxes with nine air knives per station



The Nilpeter FB3300A press printing a 200 line job with digital plates produced on a MacDermid LAVA thermal plate processing system



Ditone Labels' purpose built plant at Kimbolton, Cambridgeshire

Pioneering pays off

Ditone Labels has moved into new markets in films and flexible packaging with its Gallus RCS330. **Andy Thomas** reports

Investing over £1m in a fully servo driven press is not a decision taken lightly – especially when you are one of the first label printers to take the plunge. Ditone Labels was the first UK printer to install a Gallus RCS 330 and it represented a considerable leap of faith, as operations director, Raymond Young recalls: ‘We needed a press that did something different – better or faster – than what we could already do. We looked at a lot of presses three years ago and decided to go with Gallus on this all-servo press before everybody was using servos. We wanted quality, adaptability and productivity and we believed that Gallus could deliver it in an all-servo machine.’

Today, Young is convinced the company made the right choice: ‘We won business from day one, because this press was about expanding our markets and not fighting in a shrinking market for commodity labels,’ he added.

The Gallus RCS 330 was one part of a long term investment plan by Ditone Labels, and one element of a £2.5m investment program at its plant in Kimbolton, Cambridgeshire. Established 25 years ago, Ditone is a member of the Boxes Group of companies, which forms a division of global packaging giant Clondalkin. From its purpose built plant it services a wide range of end use sectors, including pharmaceutical, toiletries, healthcare, automotive and house wares.

Ditone was the first UK company to install an Aquaflex Instaflex press in 1996 – ‘still a very good press,’ according to Young, with its seven print units and both UV and WB drying. ‘That was our point of reference ten years ago,’ he recalls, ‘today it is using the new Gallus to move into high value flexible packaging, although the RCS can quickly switch to pressure sensitive labels, and we are currently testing it with shrink labels.’

The move has been highly successful. ‘We have won business back to the UK from rotogravure in the Far East and we have won a lot of business against offset,’ he explained, adding that time to market is rapidly decreasing. ‘In cosmetics and health & beauty, six weeks has become six days from order to delivery, so shorter runs with the quality we can achieve with the Gallus across a wide range of substrates opens up whole new markets. We can almost eliminate customers’ inventory, for example, which is more difficult without a fully servo driven press.’

To maximize efficiency of the Gallus RCS, Ditone is investigating various CtP options. The Kimbolton plant was a beta test site for Dupont’s Cyrel FAST analogue system, but currently still outsources its digital plates. ‘We looked closely when we installed the Gallus but felt the volume did not justify the £150,000 investment cost – now, with changing Group needs,



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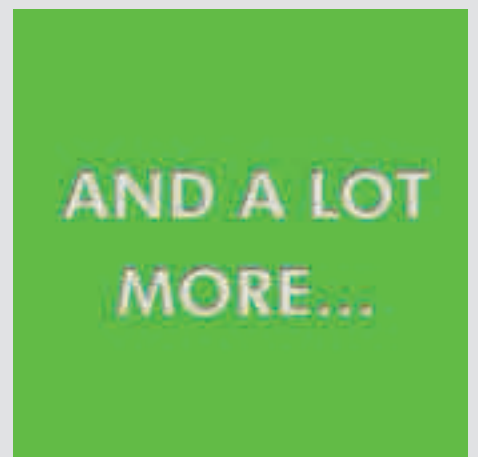
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we're looking again. After all, a flexo press is only as good as its plates,' explained Young.

Ditone's studio works closely with the Gallus press crews to get the most out of the press, and everything is documented. 'For example, the RCS 330 quickly shows up imperfections on the flexo plate which might not show on a shaft driven press, so our expectations have increased in terms of quality and productivity,' he added.

As an example, Ditone has been printing simple sachet designs on its Instaflex for years. 'Now we're taking gravure designs and improving them to achieve natural fleshtones on cosmetic packaging. It's indicative of how far flexo has improved,' said Young. The Gallus RCS has enabled Ditone to enhance its sachet laminates with under surface printing for additional security and protection.

Today, the company is enjoying a rush of new business from customers which have failed to find a company that offers short to medium runs of flexible packaging while maintaining the high standard of finish. "We have significantly reduced lead times, brought down costs, and print only the volume of material that the customer needs. Our origination costs are now 10 per cent of those quoted by gravure printers, and we can deliver the order quickly,' he explained.

All the jobs run on the Gallus use high value laminates, so that small amounts of waste produced by the press during job changeovers and make ready is critical.

'We do not need a ton of material to run a job, we can profitably run just 500 or 600 linear meters, and the speed we

“Now we're taking gravure designs and improving them to achieve natural fleshtones on cosmetic packaging”

can get jobs on and off the press has increased by one third,' explained Young. This ability to produce short runs of high value product was always the key USP of Gallus' RCS concept.

What impresses Young these days is the professional attitude of label buyers who are prepared to listen to arguments about total label costs – and are empowered to take this argument to their own marketing departments. Ditone has to work harder with buyers who are not empowered, and just have a spec sheet that they use to continue with their existing supplier.

He argued: 'It's very invigorating to hear a buyer say 'what is the value added?' because I want to say to buyers, I can reduce your inventory, challenge the quality of offset and gravure and save you fantastic amounts of money. But, for many it's easier to just knock 2.5 per cent off the price per label. Gravure per label might be cheaper, but when you wait ten weeks and there is a minimum quantity, how much is that costing your business?'

This 'total label cost' approach is illustrated by a typical Gallus RCS job which involves over-labeling pre-printed cans.



Ditone's Operations Director Raymond Young, seen here with Production Manager Richard Franklin (left) and Press Operator Bob Nicholls (right)



This allows brands to use otherwise obsolete inventory or target special promotions with a 5-10 day lead time. 'Technically, it's not an easy thing to do,' commented Young. 'The cans are never exactly round and we can't supply separate front and back labels. We have to supply full 360 degree wrap labels and have developed adhesives, inks, and material combinations especially for this application.'

With its high value, short run work profile, Ditone Labels would appear to be ideally suited for digital printing, but Young is sceptical, commenting: 'Digital is hard to justify for our markets. We have talked to our customers and it will take time for them to change the way they do business.'

The Gallus RCS 330 in practice

Ditone Labels has an 8-color UV flexo press with two moveable screen units – taking around 5-10 minutes to change – and both cold and hot foil stamping. When not using screen, the press is printing at speeds up to 140 meters/minute and is working a triple shift pattern.

Bob Nicholls has been a flexo printer for 20 years and has pioneered use of the Gallus RCS at Ditone. He explained: 'With the RCS you have to forget how you produced flexo in the past – you need a quite different mentality. You tend to revert to old habits to fix the job when you should make a modern request to Gallus in Switzerland. For example if you are not getting enough black ink down on a particular substrate, the operator can make an adjustment that adds an extra 5 per cent. This is where we get the benefits of a servo driven press. Gallus' software combined with a skilled operator makes for an unbeatable combination in production control.'

The ability to adjust web tension by minutely altering the running speed of each unit is a technique unknown outside servo presses, and allows Ditone to cope with more difficult substrates. Equally, for one customer that demands a 194mm repeat, Nicholls merely needs to adjust the speed of the print cylinder to fit – a function impossible with non servo presses.

Critical, according to Raymond Young, is the operator's confidence to challenge and experiment with the press. 'You need to ask it 'why not?' – it's no good approaching the RCS with traditional thinking and work practices – it just won't perform,' he stated.

The press stores all job settings for automated pre-setting on repeat work, including automated zeroing of the plate sleeve cylinders, which greatly reduces make-ready times. When a new substrate is used for the first time the software gets the press to the last 5 per cent, which is where the operator makes the final adjustments.

Nicholls finds servo-driven dynamic print pressure adjustment invaluable, especially for high quality process work, where he can store different impression settings for different substrates at different speeds for each print unit. 'This is just

not possible with a manual press,' he adds.

Experience shows that at least three months are needed to feel comfortable with the press because there is just so much it can do.

'For example, power down the UV and put the press into 'sleep' mode between jobs. It's more like chess – you have to be thinking two moves ahead, then learn to trust it, otherwise you can be chasing your own tail.'

Technical support on a 24/7 basis is key, according to Young, who says: 'With complex technology like this you need the comfort of online back-up. In fact the Gallus has been very reliable and we have never had a problem that could not be solved online.'

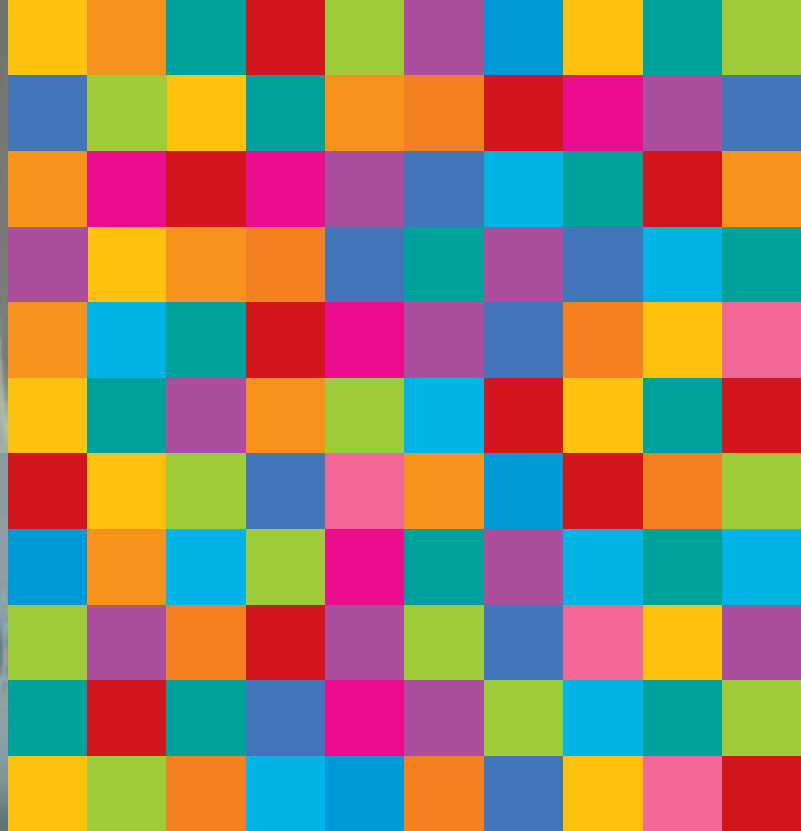
Another advantage of the modem link is what Young calls 'preventative maintenance diagnosis', which, by monitoring all press functions closely, can forewarn of servicing requirements. This not only reduces downtime on stoppages, but has made a significant saving in spare parts inventory. ■

Promotional products

Ditone Labels operates across a range of end use sectors where it can deliver value added products with its mixture of flexo, UV flexo and letterpress machines. One of the company's strengths is its ability to move promotional labeling products between end use sectors. Its Extensia multi-page leaflet labels, for example, have found applications in the food, chemicals and pharmaceutical sectors. Extensia leaflet labels incorporate a protective over laminate and Ditone's patented 'quick release' opening which means that the label can be peeled and resealed easily.

The range has now been extended with 'Stay-Dry' Extensia, which boasts a fully waterproof synthetic construction offering strength, flexibility and high print quality. It is resistant to water, tearing and a range of chemicals. Another extended text label is Multi Peel 7, a multi-page, peel and read, reclosable label offering up to four pages and seven printed sides of text and graphics, which can be printed on paper or synthetic substrates in a variety of sizes. Target industry sectors include health and beauty, drinks, food and publishing.

Another area where Ditone has moved techniques across end use sectors is Braille. Originally developed to meet impending pharmaceutical legislation, rotary screen-printed raised text has also been applied as a decorative technique to the drinks market. Most recently, Ditone has developed this technique for pharmaceutical leaflet labels, which are now undergoing customer approval testing. Braille over-labeling products have also been developed for aerosols, tubes and cartons.



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Converting quality for 72 years

La Etiqueta of Mexico City has achieved longevity by offering a diverse range of applications that can cater to any customer demand. **Katy Wight** reports

Isaac Korbman, director general of La Etiqueta in Mexico City, Mexico, is just two years away from celebrating a half-century with the company. And with a growth rate of 17 per cent in 2005, he has way too much on his plate to even think about retirement. Korbman's father Abraham started the label converting business with a partner and a Seal press in 1934 and today it is worth US\$14 million. La Etiqueta has 160 employees and has built an impressive business by offering a diverse range of application capabilities with a focus on high quality.

La Etiqueta services the health and beauty, pharmaceutical, food and promotional markets and has sheetfed offset, rotary offset, flexo and screen capabilities split over two floors in its own purpose-built facility. Customers include domestic consumer goods companies, as well as multi-nationals such as Avon and Schering-Plough. La Etiqueta is ISO 9000 certified and one of a small number of companies certified to work in the pharma industry in Mexico. The company also manufactures the Lesa brand of pressure-sensitive office

“Mexicans are not yet into 100 per cent quality and they compete mainly on price. We're not in that market”

products for the Mexican market, in competition with Avery and has started to print carton board for high-value products such as perfume and wine.

Isaac Korbman's brother Aaron joined the family business in 1952. By this time, Abraham had paid off his partner and in 1958 Isaac also joined the company. He had just graduated in civil engineering, but the prospects for growth in this industry

in Mexico at the time were poor. For a while Isaac combined his talents, printing labels and building houses, and in 1962, when the company had outgrown its facility in downtown Mexico City, he designed a new dedicated building to stand on a 25,000 square foot plot in the suburbs. The Korbman's had wanted something smaller, but the investment paid off and today, every inch is built upon.

‘We moved premises in 1962 with our five presses and really began to build up the business,’ says director general Isaac Korbman. ‘We were working predominantly in sheetfed offset, but in the 1980s we moved to flexo with an Allied Gear press and then over to Mark Andy for a flexo/silkscreen combination. We also have flatbed silkscreen equipment.’

The first floor of the La Etiqueta facility is dedicated to rotary presses – both flexo and offset – and the second floor has flatbed or sheetfed equipment. The company's latest flexo investment is a 10-color Mark Andy 2200 with silk screen, UV and hot stamping, and in the sheetfed offset department the company has also bought a high-speed Mitsubishi press for very long runs. La Etiqueta has a number of flexo presses ranging from two to ten colors including two Mark Andy 2200, and several rotary offset presses, with two 4-color roll-fed flatbed silk screen presses, plus a variety of finishing equipment. In the sheetfed offset department, the company has a battery of presses, including the Mitsubishi. The finishing equipment on the second floor includes a coater to add thermal sealant varnish to packaging.

The company has focused on technology to differentiate themselves from the bulk of the Mexican market.

‘Some Mexican companies try to do good quality labels, but there are very few that can actually make the grade,’ says Isaac Korbman. ‘Mexicans are not yet into 100 per cent quality and they compete mainly on price. We're not in that market. We believe that if you give the best quality and service to a customer, they will always come back.’

‘We are facing a number of challenges. Material prices are increasing, some of our competitors are switching their focus



Ilana Stepensky has worked with her father Isaac Korbman to build the business

“Loyalty these days is slipping. Now we also have to compete with countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile”

from quality to price and competition is growing as the forms printers are buying old flexo presses. Every year the Yellow Pages has more label printers listed and these companies can't compete, so they just drop their prices,' adds Isaac.

'We have to work hard to convince our customers to stick with us and some are very loyal, but loyalty these days is slipping. Now we also have to compete with countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Most of our customers are domestic, but some of the multi-nationals that we work with bunch together product lines for different countries and get a good price by having them all printed in one location.

'To combat this, we are focusing on innovation and trying to introduce new applications. The value-added packaging segment is an area that we are trying to grow. We are also optimizing our processes and all of the presses that we have bought recently are high-speed. We have also moved direct to plate and we are now looking at a CTP system from Kodak Creo that will enable us to image both flexo and offset plates,' he says.

Things have changed a lot since Isaac Korbman began working for his father on Saturdays as a teenager. Today, the expectation of credit is a heavy burden on any business in Mexico. Customers are keen to print long runs to get better deals, but they expect converters to hold inventory so that the financial burden is on the printer. Isaac explains that bank loans in Mexico are to be avoided, as rates are very high. On the flipside, NAFTA and 12 other free trade agreements with 40 different countries have lifted tariffs on equipment imports and more and more consumable companies are establishing plants or offices in Mexico.

So what does the future hold for La Etiqueta? Isaac is firm in the belief that, 'the company cannot stop moving,' and amongst other projects, he mentions that they have been researching the growth of shrink and wraparound in the rest of the world.

'We will continue to listen to the needs of our customers,' he says. 'Our philosophy is what makes our business a success. It's not just about management, it's about growing and building the business for the people that work for us.'

Astonishingly, some La Etiqueta employees have actually served the company longer than Isaac Korbman, so they must be doing something right. And if Isaac does ever decide to retire, his daughters Ilana Stepensky and Jessica Korbman, and his son-in-law Itzhak Levy are ready to carry the family philosophy on. ■



Mexico's market evolution

Etiquetas Rodak of Mexico City has set itself the challenge of teaching the Mexican market the value of quality – and persuading end users to pay for it. **Katy Wight** reports

There can't have been many – if any – other Mexican converters at Labelexpo Asia in China, last year. José Quinzaños, director general of Etiquetas Rodak, Mexico City, Mexico, was on a reconnaissance mission in Shanghai for his company, looking for new ways to beat the competition on his home turf. While most manufacturers in North America ponder the threat of China, Quinzaños is looking for ways to use Asia's opportunities to fight the challenges of manufacturing in Mexico.

It's this progressive approach that has led to steady growth between 8-10 per cent year-on-year over the last decade. The company's principal markets are food, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, household and hardware, and it has built a strong reputation for quality printing and innovation – both big differentiators in the Mexican market. Last year Rodak moved into a new 4,000 square meter facility and today it has 100 employees achieving US\$6 million in annual sales.

Rodak was founded in 1976 with two Mark Andy 830s and in 1984 José Quinzaños bought into the company, initially becoming its general manager. Today he owns and runs the company with a silent partner.

'The company started out printing 2-3 color labels with simple text and designs in the 1970s,' explains Quinzaños. 'As the industry made progress with better quality inks and presses, so did we. We bought two Webtrons after I joined the company that enabled us to print up to five colors and we started some process work. In 1990, we bought a 6-color 10" Mark Andy and started laminating. We were worried that we wouldn't have enough work for the press, but we were at capacity within four months. We have continued to buy a press roughly every two years and we switched to Aquaflex, which enabled us to print seven or eight colors. Now we have five Aquaflex presses, the Mark Andy and the two Webtrons. Right now we are in the process of investing in a new press and we are looking into the film market.'

The per capita consumption of pressure sensitive product in Mexico is much less than the mature markets of the US and Europe, but this represents good growth potential, explains Rodak sales manager Gabriel Bautista. Rodak has been

"Since the economic upturn in 2002 there's been many presses coming into the country and now there is more capacity than demand"

successful in winning contracts for applications that are moving from wet glue to PS, but they have also seen a shift in some cases from PS to wraparound.

'PS growth in Mexico for 2005 was around 5-6 per cent and wraparound growth was around 8-10 per cent,' says Bautista. 'In the unsupported film market, I believe that we could fit into the small and medium run specialty work. Coca-Cola would be a big job, but there are many medium-sized applications that we could capitalize on, plus we want to catch any business that is moving from PS to wraparound. Some of our customers want to source all of their labels from one supplier and we don't want to lose that business. I think that we have a great opportunity with unsupported film.'

The new press will give Rodak the capability to cater to this market and the changing face of label converting. The challenges facing the Mexican converter are the same the world over and Quinzaños points out that overcapacity, decreasing margins, material price increases and greater demands from the end user, mean that they have to think creatively.

'Since the economic upturn in 2002 there's been many presses coming into the country and now there is more capacity than demand,' says Quinzaños. 'We are all fighting for the same customers. Margins have lowered globally, but end users are still expecting better quality, better service, lower inventory and lower prices. There are many small manufacturers with one or two presses trying to get into the market and lowering prices.'

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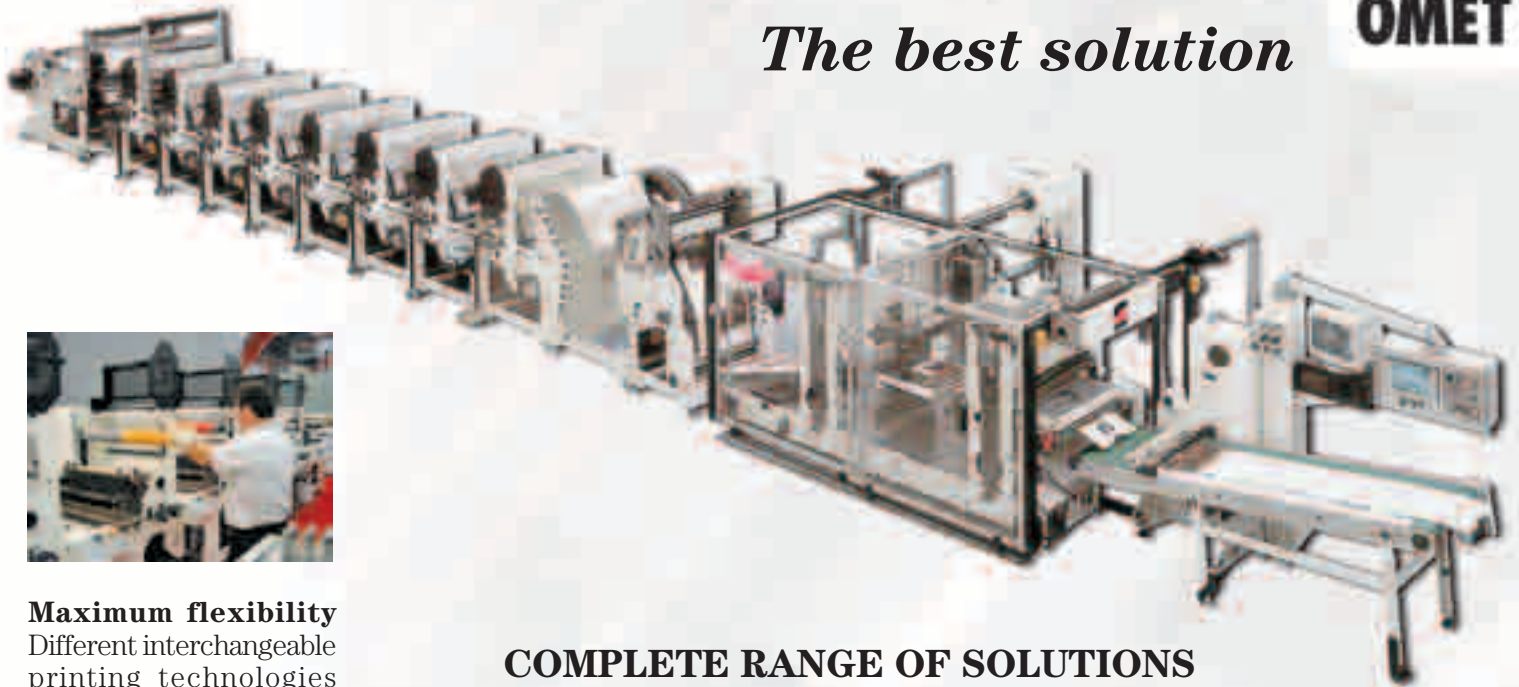
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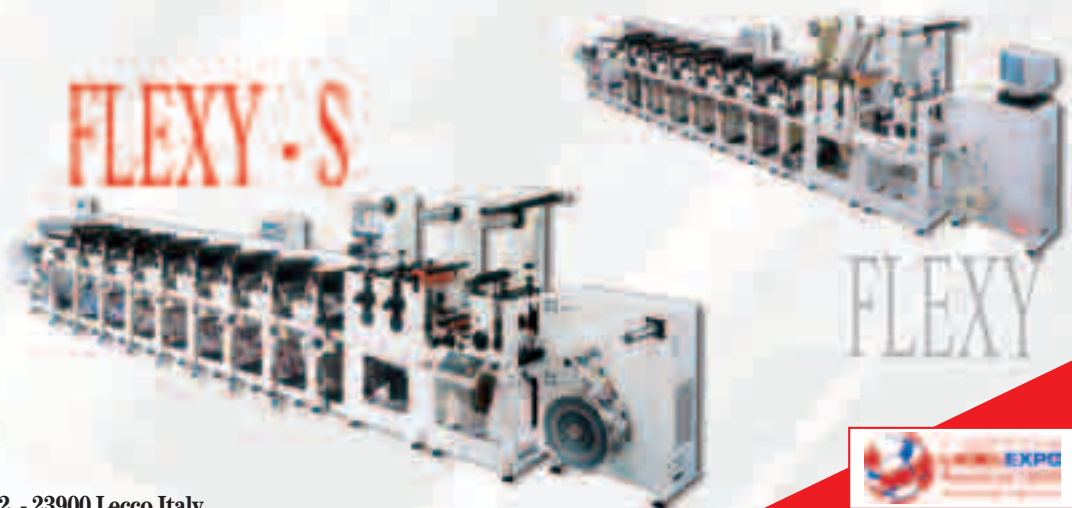
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Photo caption

Gabriel Bautista (left), sales; Miguel Martínez, operations; and José Quinzaños (right), director general

Mexico also has many unique structural issues as it strives to modernize its economy and raise living standards – price is always a big issue.

‘This market is generally low quality, low price,’ says Quinzaños. Bautista adds: ‘Mexico has multi-nationals and also some strong domestic and regional companies where the standard of printing has to be world-class, but there are only about four or five companies with these capabilities.’

Rodak counts itself as one of these businesses, and constant new product introductions from customers like Johnson & Johnson and Avon have helped growth, but Bautista says it’s difficult to get prospects to move from wet-glue to PS in the Mexican market, ‘because the buyers don’t compare quality and cost. You have to have the label on the product to make them see the difference’. Rodak’s strategy is to move beyond prime into more value-added markets.

‘You need to establish strong R&D if you want to be a leader in all of the new markets,’ adds Bautista. ‘We want to compete with other converters in prime, but principally we want to develop new applications to differentiate ourselves. We have several projects that we are working on with end users right now and we have a team of three people who spend time researching new inks and materials. We think that there is an opportunity for us from specialty work.’

Rodak works closely with all of its suppliers, particularly the pressure-sensitive substrate vendors, because labelstock represents such a large proportion of cost. In the past Avery Dennison has dominated the Mexican market and Bautista is pleased that Raflatac and Green Bay Packaging are making increasing inroads into Central America

and encouraging more competitive pricing. He also explains that corruption and crime – unfortunately still looming in the business and social environment – have dissuaded many other overseas companies from establishing plants in Mexico.

However, on 2 July 2006, the Mexican public will go to the polls to vote in the Presidential election and the Rodak team are positive that a new head of government could open the door to many changes.

‘The economy is a difficult situation, but the political change represents a big opportunity for a new president in terms of fiscal and spend, energy and the judiciary,’ says Bautista.

If the political change does have a dramatic effect on the economy, Etiquetas Rodak is well positioned for growth in its new facility. ■



New Products

Xaar's New UV ink range

Following rigorous testing, Xennia's new XenJet Vivide range of CMYK pigmented UV-cure inks have been approved by Xaar for use with its OmniDot 760 greyscale printheads. The inks offer jetting, color and mechanical properties, and when used in conjunction with Xaar's OmniDot 760 printheads 'set new standards of quality on a wide range of flexible graphics, packaging and label substrates', according to a statement.

XenJet Vivide UV cure inks are the first Xennia inks to be approved by Xaar under a new ink partnership, building on the existing preferred integrator relationship between the two companies. Further inks for Xaar printheads are planned for launch by Xennia during 2006.

Dr Jill Woods, Xaar Ink product manager, commented: 'This latest announcement is testimony to our combined expertise; the new series of UV-cure inks push the boundaries of process color inkjet performance on non-porous materials.'

XenJet Vivide inks are optimized for color gamut and vibrancy, speed of cure and low odor. The cured inks demonstrate excellent adhesion and durability on many substrates, together with high levels of chemical, abrasion, temperature resistance and UV light-fastness.

Nick Balon, chief operating officer, Xennia, added: 'We see UV

cure inkjet inks as the future for many print applications such as narrow web packaging and labels or indoor graphics, thanks to their combination of jetting reliability, image quality, instant dry time and environmental acceptability. XenJet Vivide inks, in conjunction with Xaar OmniDot printheads, move the technology another step forward.'

Complete Inspection Systems Anti-counterfeit solution

Complete Inspection Systems, Inc. (CIS) has introduced a new anti-counterfeit system for product tracking and authentication, in conjunction with Adhesives Research, Inc.

ARmark Covert Markers are a new tool to aid in supply chain control, product surety and risk mitigation for industries faced with global counterfeiting. The covert markers, which can be combined with custom-developed delivery systems, offer infinite possibilities for unique coding (shapes, numbers, patterns, text, bar codes, logos), and they are designed to be nearly impossible to replicate or reverse engineer.

Markers can be made available in food and pharmaceutical grade forms, and they can even be customized with forensic (DNA-type tagging) levels of coding. ARmark Covert Markers withstand a variety of environmental factors and they are easily integrated into existing manufacturing processes.

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The markers are tracked and verified using micro-imaging and customizable software programs. Products can be verified 'from the inside-out' (e.g. within the product, on the product, on the packaging, etc.)

GE Plastics

Opaque film aids barcode readability

Responding to customer requests for an opaque, high-performance plastic film that would eliminate the need for surface treatments to achieve satisfactory print contrast in bar code labels, GE Plastics, working in conjunction with their global customers, has developed a new white grade of its Ultem polyetherimide (PEI) film.

White Ultem WH217 film is pigmented for high opacity to ensure bar code labels can be read correctly – the film provides a print contrast ratio of 98 per cent out of 100. In addition to helping saving label manufacturers the expense and time required to apply an opaque topcoat, Ultem WH217 film provides flame retardance that is lacking in competitive PEN films, and offers higher temperature resistance and better dimensional stability than polyvinyl fluoride films. In developing this product, GE Plastics worked closely with leading global manufacturers of pressure-sensitive films and adhesives to provide feedback on the development of the product.

'To track electronic or automotive components with speed and precision, OEMs need bar code labels that can be read accurately the first time,' said Nick Abbatiello, GE Plastics' industry manager, High Performance Film. 'In the past, it was usually necessary to modify translucent films to prevent the substrate under the label from showing through and to improve print contrast. Now, with GE's opaque Ultem WH217 film, this step isn't needed – and that may save our customers time and money.'

GE's Ultem WH217 film meets UL 94 VTMO flame requirements without the use of halogenated additives, enabling the material to comply with European RoHS standards, making it an excellent candidate for electronic applications. It offers excellent tear strength to prevent label damage during processing, and high temperature resistance for demanding applications such as printed circuit boards. In addition, the smoothness of the surface of the film may improve the print quality of the label.

For label manufacturers, GE's Ultem WH217 film provides consistent thickness (+/- 10 per cent gauge control at 50 µm) that helps ensure even application of label adhesive or clear coatings that may be needed for print receptivity with certain inks.

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New Products



SeriBlade SB – a high performance squeegee that promises to significantly extend blade life

Fujifilm Sericol High performance squeegee technology

Fujifilm Sericol USA, Inc., a global manufacturer of screen, narrow web and digital inks, has introduced SeriBlade SB – a high performance squeegee that promises to significantly extend blade life, prevent dot gain, reduce scrap and generate savings on ink and other consumables.

SeriBlade SB is a technologically advanced polyurethane blade material that has shown resistance to chemicals and abrasion. SB blades are made of three to five layers which allow stability and forgiveness all in one, giving the perfect balance of flexibility and rigidity required when producing high quality images at high speeds. SeriBlade products are particularly designed for printing four-color processes, transparent colors, windows, textures & other demanding industrial printing applications.

There are three items currently available in the SeriBlade SB family of products: SB-AVB/144 Anti-Vibration Blade, SB-HPS/144 High Performance Soft Blade, and SB-HPM/144 High Performance Medium Blade, all designed to meet the demanding needs of various inks and substrates.

Amagic New cold foil in 12 shades

AMAGIC Foils, author of the 'Cold Foil For Dummies', has introduced its new KOLDfoil line of cold foils in 12 different shades of silver, gold, blue, red, green and violet.

AMAGIC's KOLDfoil formulations are available for the cure-tru or conventional cold foil printing process and are in stock for immediate delivery.

tesa New flexo plate mounting tape

tesa tape, inc., a manufacturer and supplier of pressure-sensitive adhesive tapes, has debuted a new product in its 'toolbox' of custom plate mounting tapes designed for mounting printing plates to cylinders and sleeves in flexographic and label printing applications. The new product tesa 52123 lends the company a



KOLDfoil line of cold foils in 12 different shades of silver, gold, blue, red, green and violet

robust 16-product plate and sleeve-mounting tape assortment. It is designed specifically for use in digital CTP fine-screen printing.

tesa 52123 is a product backed by a newly-designed polyethylene foam. The unique foam backing is constructed with a 'closed cell' configuration, enabling it to maintain its resilience and print quality throughout the longest of print runs. Additional benefits of tesa 52123 include: 1) mitigates dot gain (essential to fine-screen printing); 2) enables printing of the finest dots; 3) compensates for press vibrations; 4) reduces bouncing stripes; 5) allows screen printing with 48 lines per centimeter or more; and 6) results in very high print quality.

As the evolution of flexo printing spirals to complex digital fine-screen applications, tesa 52123 stands 'soft' in reproducing the hardest of digital fine-screen print jobs.

Spec Inc. RTP3000 dispensing system

SPEC, a provider of dispensing systems for liquids and powders, has announced that it is expanding its dispensing capabilities into the paste ink market with the introduction of the RTP3000 fully automated paste dispensing system.

The company said in a statement: 'Over the past year, SPEC has made significant investments and tested numerous materials in order to achieve the most efficient and reliable small batch paste dispenser available. The result is the RTP3000 paste dispensing system. It not only dispenses each ingredient accurately to provide batch-to-batch shade repeatability but also provides production and cost reporting, returned ink reformulation, and complete ink room inventory control.'

The dispensing system works in conjunction with a standard eight pound Sonoco Flow-Rite dispensing cartridge. The cartridges are loaded into the carousel through a door in the back of the system, and it is possible to load up to 20 at a time. The cartridges are rotated as needed over the dispense container. SPEC's technologically advanced patent pending dispensing mechanism uses a direct acting 'active' valve for precise control of material discharged from the cartridge. This allows the machine to handle wider variety of materials as compared to cartridges that use indirect passive valves. The RTP3000 is a gravimetric dispensing system using a scale as the basis for dispensing.



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New Products

HarperScientific

New formula for anilox cleaner

HarperScientific, the printing and coating supplies division of anilox roll supplier Harper Corporation of America, has announced a new and improved formula for one of its flagship products, CeramClean II anilox roll cleaner.

'Now our customers will get even more cleaning power out of every ounce of CeramClean II. We've re-engineered the formula for increased fluidity and slower drying, which provides more scrubbing time per application. The cleaning agents can get where they are needed with less premixing or shaking,' said Tony Donato, HarperScientific's technical sales solutions manager. 'And of course, the new formula maintains the super clinging and cleaning power CeramClean II is known for.'

CeramClean II, removes water, dried UV-based and solvent-based inks from the cells of anilox rolls without damaging the cell structure, says Harper. 'The cleaner even removes most tough stains on the roll face, and safely and thoroughly cleans gravure and chrome cylinders.'

acpo ltd

UV resistant overlaminate film

Manufacturer of self-wound PSA coated products, acpo ltd, has introduced 691V, a UV resistant overlaminate film for the label industry. The 691V was created to give label manufacturers an alternative to using expensive UV inks in their label printing processes. 691V is a clear, durable, polyester PSA film containing a polyester UV barrier coating in the formulation. This allows the overlaminate to combat harmful UV rays and protect the label inks and base material from deterioration. Label manufacturers can use the 691V in conjunction with their standard water based inks for optimum print label quality, appearance and durability.

Q-Lab, an accelerated weathering and corrosion testing facility in Homestead, Florida evaluated 691V using an X-Rite Spectrodensitometer. They reported the process yellow color retention with 691V polyester overlaminate at 98.2 per cent. Other process yellow samples, with either no overlaminate, or standard polyester overlaminate, reported color retentions of 20.9 per cent and 52.2 per cent respectively.

'The effectiveness of 691V to resist UV light, protect the label base material and maintain such a high color retention rate is impressive. With the field study confirming our overlaminate UV resistance, 691V is quickly becoming the flexo printer's best friend for manufacturing outdoor labels with standard flexo inks,' stated Tom Beatty, project engineer of acpo ltd.

Because 691V is capable of enduring harsh UV rays, it is designed for indoor and outdoor applications where UV light is present. The 691V is offered in 14 inch and 60 inch web

widths, slit to customer specifications. Standard roll lengths of 5,000' are available with orders for longer roll lengths accepted. This overlamine product is run and ready to ship same day or next day.

MDC

Roll storage system

Max Daetwyler Corporation has added a roll storage system for anilox rolls and gravure cylinders to their new product line. This new storage system reduces the possibility of damage to rolls/cylinders while providing a more safe and efficient workplace. The heavy-duty unit includes four swivel casters and a pull handle to allow for easy maneuvering between printing presses. The adjustable, coated hooks accommodate face lengths up to 26 inches and protects the steel journals and bearings.

This multi-roll rack stores up to 24 rolls and allows the printer convenient access. For added protection, MDC also offers the new Pro-Max protective roll covers. These durable roll covers protect rolls/cylinders from damage during storage and handling, which helps to reduce refurbishing costs. The vinyl covers are made to fit the cylinder length and diameter and are lined with a soft, felt padding.

AdPhos

UV curing for heat sensitive substrates

Developed specifically to overcome the problems of UV curing on plastics and other heat sensitive substrates, TwinRay from AdPhos AG, supplier of accelerated drying systems and owner of Eltosch, is a new indirect radiating UV module.

In a new concept for UV curing, a triangular rotary reflector reflects UV radiation from a dual lamp system on to the substrate. By using only indirect UV energy, TwinRay claims to eliminate practically all heat radiation, leaving only pure UV and visible light remaining.

TwinRay delivers efficient, high-power curing up to 240W/cm, whilst eliminating heat-related issues such as wavy sheets, high pile temperatures, registration problems and stacking, plus the press and its surrounding environment remain cooler than with standard UV or other drying technologies, says AdPhos.

The unique, dual-emitter design enables standard and speciality lamps to be used side-by-side in the same unit, ensuring optimum cure and extending the process potential. For example, a WhiteCure lamp can be used for depth cure of opaque white inks with a standard lamp for surface cure.

Service and maintenance of TwinRay modules is simple. The design includes replaceable 'easy change' dichroic reflector inserts and tool-free technology ensures that the plug-in lamps can be changed in as little as 30 seconds.

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New Products



Ezze-Peel, claimed the printing industry's first peelable protection for any stationary surface in the pressroom

HarperScientific Sprayable drop cloth

HarperScientific, the printing and coating supplies division of global anilox supplier Harper Corporation of America, has announced the advent of Ezze-Peel, the printing industry's first peelable protection for any stationary surface in the pressroom, including floors and ink pans. It offers fast cleaning for surfaces that are susceptible to ink splatters and normally difficult to clean.

'This is a product category that has traditionally been used in clean rooms and spray painting booths, but until now, nothing of its kind has been functional for printers,' said Tony Donato, HarperScientific technical sales solutions manager. 'We've been working with chemists to develop a formulation that can hold up to solvent, as well as water-based and UV printing inks, and take the abuse of the shop floor. Ezze-Peel is the first peelable protection product that holds up in the printing environment.'

Applied to any stationary surface before a press run, Ezze-Peel is a coating that protects the surface, then peels away easily in one or more large pieces at cleanup time. It is disposed of in the same manner as dried ink wastes.

'Aside from the convenience it offers, the cleanup time that Ezze-Peel saves will be a significant consideration. As we all know, less downtime means more press time,' said Jim Harper, vice president of HarperScientific.



GEW's new mini laboratory unit for curing UV inks, coatings or adhesives

Best applied with a spray system, water-based Ezze-Peel sets at room temperature and can be touched up with a paint brush, roller or sponge brush. It even adheres well to itself.

For most applications, Ezze-Peel offers protection once it tacks out in about 20 minutes. In ink pans and on floors, it is recommended that the product is allowed to dry completely over a few hours.

Available exclusively through HarperScientific, Ezze-Peel is available in 1-gal., 5-gal. and 55-gal. containers.

GEW Mini UV laboratory unit

GEW (EC) Ltd. has announced the development of a new mini laboratory unit for curing UV inks, coatings or adhesives that provides the ability to work away from the production line to produce or test small lots or sample preparations on a variety of substrates.

With a working width of 150mm (6Åh) the mini lab unit is a stand-alone, bench top UV curing system for laboratory or low volume production environments and features the new XC cassette 'extreme cure' focused reflector from GEW with 80W/cm (200W/in) or 120W/cm UV lamp (300W/in). Using constant UV lamp power, the curing dosage is simply controlled by varying the belt speed. An effective air cooling system keeps the whole unit cool to permit many hours of continuous operation at speeds from 5m/min up to 30m/min (16fpm up to 100fpm). No exhausts ducting is necessary since only ozone free lamps are fitted.

The 220/240 V 50/60 Hz single phase, 13 amp power supply means it can be connected in most areas of the workplace. Options include different power levels and speeds, spare UV cassettes and an inert gas, nitrogen atmosphere capsule for inert curing applications.

New Products

Wink **Flexible die coating**

Wink Stanzwerkzeuge GmbH & Co. KG has further developed and expanded its range of flexible dies by offering these with the option of a new special, non-stick coating.

This new development was finalized in Spring 2006 having proved its efficiency in extensive field studies over the past year. The new non-stick coating protects the flexible die from glue and paint residues on the cutting edges. This can substantially reduce machine downtime and improve productivity by reducing the need to clean dies leading to a trouble-free production process.

The company has for many years offered its flexible dies with the added option of its MC-coating system which prolongs die-life, making flexible dies with this coating especially suited for high production runs and abrasive materials including thermals.

There is now the interesting possibility to apply the non-stick coating in addition to the MC-coating so that flexible dies can take advantage of the benefits of both processes. Flexible dies, which are manufactured in this way, will have the combined benefit of both the glue- and paint-resisting properties of the new development as well as the higher lifespan of the well-established MC-coating.

CadicaGroup **RF Fashion System**

CadicaGroup has launched its RF Fashion System, an integrated system able to scan packaged garments from a distance, thanks to a microchip placed inside the label.

The chip is preset by CadicaGroup with all the relevant data useful to the client, then inserted into the label and distributed to the vendors. The microchip can be re-written more than 100,000 times, can last over ten years, and resists dyeing, stone washing, and all kinds of industrial and domestic washings. Most importantly, as it is passive, it doesn't need to be charged, and doesn't emit any kind of radiations.

The research and development center of CadicaGroup works close to the style department of the garment producers in order to detect the most effective placements, studying special coatings and specific protections for each single product.

The product is also effective against counterfeiting and shoplifting. Counterfeiting becomes virtually impossible, since an individual, indestructible code is placed within the garment

Northwest Coatings **UV/EB curable special effect coatings**

Northwest Coatings has introduced UV/EB curable special effects coatings including pearlescent, glitter and color changing effects to enhance the appearance of printed materials for commercial and consumer product packaging.

One color changing effects known as Phantavision produces different effects depending on the viewing angle. High contrast

color shifts appear with sharp changes in the viewing angles, while smooth changes occur with gradual curves. Phantavision coatings may be tailored to produce a variety of different colors and appearances.

Northwest's special effect coatings are designed for both web and sheet-fed applications and may be applied in-line or off-line over most inks, primers, and substrates. These coatings have a variety of end-use characteristics such as: hot stamping, scratch resistance, high flexibility, water and chemical resistance, etc.

XSYS **UV offset ink**

XSYS Print Solutions' narrow web inks division has announced the launch of Lithocure 3G – a UV offset ink for the narrow web tag and label sector. Lithocure 3G is the new generation UV offset developed from the combined experience and expertise of ANI Printing inks & BASF inks – and is the first UV offset ink introduced by XSYS Print Solutions.

Said global brand manager Niklas Olsson, 'Lithocure 3G is the result of intense development work to optimize ink and water balance on the specially developed UV offset presses for narrow web applications. Lithocure 3G has excellent printability and color strength and a fantastic robustness to perform irrespective of varying conditions possible in narrow web printing. This will result in more press time, less waste and improved profitability for the quality minded offset printer.'

Lithocure 3G allows printers to work with a very large operating window in fountain and water settings. This leads directly to increased productivity as Lithocure 3G is easy to use, requires minimum set-up time and get printers started quickly, says Olsson.

'Leading converters across the industry and across Europe have been involved in the test phase, and tell us Lithocure 3G offers excellent litho print properties, and is very stable on press, irrespective of press settings and fluctuations,' continues Olsson. 'They have commented on the printability and color strength across a variety of print substrates, from matt paper to synthetic films – a real advantage for today's multi-capability narrow-web presses.'

ADT **Closed loop die pressure system**

American Die Technology has introduced a product that addresses the biggest headaches among converters in the narrow web industry: unwanted changes in the die cutting pressure, which can lead to short die life, material waste, inconsistent cuts and broken dies.

The product is a closed loop Electronic Pressure Control System that comes with a digital control panel. It automatically maintains equal pressure across the web as conditions such as press temperature change, with adjustments are made by typing in the desired pressure.

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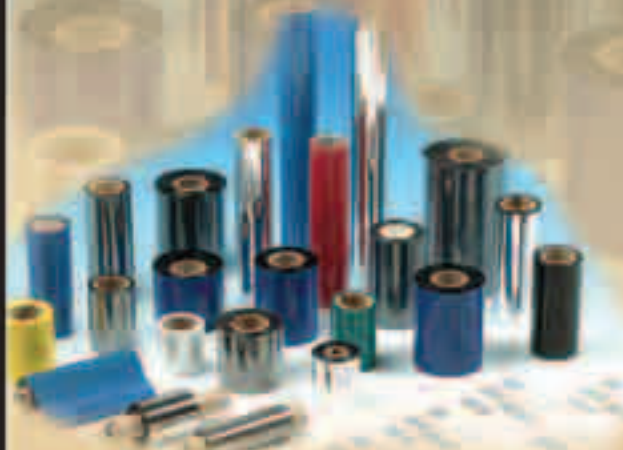
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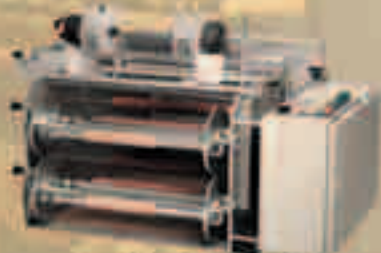
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Email : ysteo@transam.com.sg

New Products

The system has a setting for 'Maximum Pressure' to turn off die cutting pressure when this set point is reached, and this automated function is taken to the next level by offering a relay in the control that can be wired to the press Emergency Stop System. Therefore not only will the die pressure drop, the press will stop as well

In custom machines, or those with extensive guarding, the control can be placed in an accessible operating area, and die pressure can be changed safely.

Flint Group Printing plate solutions

Flint Group Printing Plates has launched a raft of new products. nyloflex ACT meets the demand for optimal results in 'combination printing', where one plate consists of both halftone and solid printing areas. The plate offers minimal dot gain in halftones whilst ensuring consistently good ink coverage and solid densities, says the company. nyloflex ACT is a medium-hard plate suitable with water and solvent based inks, also conditionally with UV inks. Intended for high quality flexographic printing applications it can be used on most substrates including film, foil and paper. nyloflex ACT is available in both conventional and digital versions (nyloflex ACT DII).

nyloflex Gold A digital is claimed the first digital 'coating plate'. 'The trend continues towards digital plate making and with the first digital solution for coating plates we want to support this development,' said Dr Eva Freudenthaler, marketing director of Flint Group Printing Plates. nyloflex Gold A digital is an aluminum-based plate with high dimensional stability for optimum register accuracy and excellent resistance properties, especially against UV inks and varnishes. Digital processing provides a wide exposure latitude and a steeper dot shoulder profile for wide open reverses, as well as eliminating many potential faults involved with film processing.

For letterpress printers, nyloprint WF blue is a new foil-based letterpress plate, claimed to feature minimal dot gain, a wide exposure latitude and an excellent plate life span. nyloprint WF blue is suitable for applications including adhesive labels, laminated tubes, film and business forms. It will be available in both a conventional and a digital version.

Avery Dennison InfoChain Express 3.3

A powerful new edition of the InfoChain Express supply chain solution that enables retailers and brand owners to direct global supply chain activities from a single point of access is now available from Avery Dennison.

The upgraded system, Avery Dennison InfoChain Express 3.3, will be of particular interest to retailers and brand owners who value supply chain visibility and seamless collaboration among trading partners.

The upgrade builds on InfoChain Express' core capabilities, which allow for the tracking of purchase orders, the prompting of ticket production and the issuance of advance ship notices to meet C-TPAT 24-hour manifest requirements, by providing an enhanced means to view and manage activities throughout the global supply chain. For example, users of InfoChain Express 3.3 can now oversee vendor

New Products



Primarc Microwave-powered bulbs

compliance, trigger automated payments and direct cut-and-sew operations at factories worldwide. The system's ability to serve as a platform for purchase order collaboration among retailers and brand owners and their suppliers is a major enhancement.

It includes capabilities and reports such as vendor performance monitoring, generation of production process updates, supplier scorecards, supplier controlled printing of compliance UCC shipping labels and UPC/EAN tickets and more.

Primarc **Microwave-powered bulbs**

Following significant investment in new plant and equipment at the company's purpose-built facility, Primarc have now released an enhanced range of electrodeless microwave-powered bulbs available for rapid delivery.

Primarc's original bulb range was designed for use with Nordson's Coolwave microwave powered ultraviolet curing systems, and shortly after, a range of equivalent versions were developed for all other commercially available microwave UV equipment.

The spectral characteristics of the electrodeless bulb can be modified, in a similar way to conventional arc lamp technology, by incorporating special metal halide materials to enhance the spectral characteristics. This enables Primarc to match the bulb to the specific needs of the curing process and supply H, H+, V, Q & D fills for 150mm & 250mm systems with power ratings from 120W/cm to 240W/cm (300W/Inch to 600W/Inch).

Imprint **e-commerce MIS module**

Management Information Systems provider Imprint Business Systems has launched its new on-line system for e-commerce.

Imprint's online system allows customers or internal staff to interrogate job, estimate, stock and customer contact

information live online. Images of previously produced jobs can be seen and PDF's passed for approval or comments left for changes. Estimates can be flagged as accepted resulting in an order being created in the Works Instruction system integrating all information from the estimate – this order is held until checked and verified as a valid order by an account exec, all at the touch of a button with no re-keying of data.

Secure Password access allows for functionality levels to be set on a per user basis – an account executive can have full details of production schedule information whilst a customer might only see proofing and delivery dates.

Imprint has also developed bespoke online ordering systems for a number of customers where a tailored approach is preferred.

Imprint can integrate with any open system. In partnership with First B2B, a communication and data-mapping specialist, Imprint has developed Global Gateway allowing it to talk directly to any electronic system and seamlessly transfer data. Incoming customer orders and outgoing delivery advices and invoices are integrated directly into the main MIS. Supplier orders can be sent direct to the suppliers' systems checking stock levels and lead times in real time and advising if the requested order cannot be met. The great benefit of this approach is in fitting in with the customers' systems without their having to repeat data entry.

GEW **Cost cutting 3.6kw UV alternative**

GEW (EC) Ltd. has added a new 3.6kW power supply to its range of UV curing systems that is designed to offer narrow web printers an alternative to its larger 9kW version.

The new e-System mini electronic UV system is specifically designed for narrow web presses up to 25cm print width and features single phase, energy saving 3.6kW power supply that is ultra-compact, lightweight and stackable. Complete with new, patented, fully focused reflector for high intensity curing and VCP lamp head the e-System mini offers narrow web printers high UV efficiency with low running and capital investment costs.

The e-system is designed for use on almost all makes of narrow web presses and optional infra-red cassettes can also be supplied to permit interchange between the UV cassettes when running conventional inks on in-line presses without having to re-web the press. Further options are available for heat sensitive substrates and unsupported films.

The UV lamp heads are based on the all-electronic e-Brick power supply from GEW that converts energy more efficiently with typical figures for a standard system showing as much as 30 per cent energy saving with 20 per cent more total UV energy. The system is fully electric with no reliance on compressed air.



(Left-right) Kraft Food's 'Gourmet Chips' from Norway won the OPPack gold award, and the 'Amandinas' confectionery pack for CEMOI in France took the bronze award

Opp label and packaging awards



Novel applications, enhanced images and improved sales opportunities characterized the 2005 OPPack Awards winners. **Mike Fairley** reports from the recent Awards ceremony in Rome

The prestigious Cavalieri Hilton Hotel in Rome was the venue for the for the official ExxonMobil Chemical Films 2005 OPPack Award ceremony and gala dinner. Held on the 16th May, the Awards recognize excellence and innovation in flexible packaging and labeling in Europe.

The winners, who had been chosen in Luxembourg by an independent jury of international experts from the European packaging industry, were selected from 11 flexible packaging and eight labeling applications, nominated throughout the year by ExxonMobil Chemical Films Business evaluation team. The jury unanimously selected gold, silver and bronze winners in both the flexible packaging and labeling and industrial packaging categories.

In-mold labeling for 'Emmi Yogurt' containers in Austria, Belgium and France won the OPPack gold award in the labeling and industrial packaging category. Surface offset-printed on 65 μ Label-Lyte speciality film, the label replaced a traditional solid white cast PP label. The film's anti-static properties

“In-mold labeling for 'Emmi Yogurt' containers in Austria, Belgium and France won the OPPack gold award in the labeling and industrial packaging category”

provided stability during printing, die cutting and molding. Converter Drukkerij Verstraete and molder Superfos produced the packaging for end user Emmi Österreich.

'Baby George Wet Wipes' from the United Kingdom won the labeling silver award for end user NicePack International. According to the jury, the surface flexo-printed 60 μ Label-Lyte



(Left-right) IML for 'Emmi Yogurt' containers won the OPPack gold award in the labeling and industrial packaging category; 'Aroma Soap' took the silver award for flexible packaging for end user Aroma AD & Studio Aroma in Bulgaria; San Pellegrino's 'Acqua Panna' from Italy took the OPPack bronze label award

pressure sensitive labeling, which replaced a competitive OPP film, was a very special application. It used new UV hotmelt instead of a conventional glue without impairing the multi-reclosability function of the label. It also allowed transparent labels to be used instead of printed ones color matched to the pack, so saving converting time, printing ink, materials origination and redundant film stock. Systems Labeling, in the UK, was the converter of the wet wipe labels.

San Pellegrino's 'Acqua Panna' from Italy took the OPPack bronze label award. The re-launched mineral water uses a new bottle with two clear OPP neck labels and a wrap-around body label, replacing traditional paper labels. A 50 μ Label-Lyte PSA film was used for the neck labels, with a one-side treated 35 μ Label-Lyte film, slip controlled on both sides, used for the body labeling. The product is filled and labelled on SIG machines at a speed of 30,000 bottles per hour. The jury stated that the two Label-Lyte labels gave the product an outstanding look with enhanced visual properties. The converter was GPS, Italy.

In the flexible packaging category, Kraft Food's 'Gourmet Chips' from Norway won the OPPack gold award. The jury selected the chips pack, a laminate of 30 μ Bicolor transparent film and 38 μ Metallite white film metallized on one side, for its excellent metallized graphics on the outside and its clean fresh grease-free white look inside. The converter was Alcan Packaging Dublin.

'Aroma Soap' took the silver award for flexible packaging for end user Aroma AD & Studio Aroma in Bulgaria. The judges commented that the pack, a double laminate of acrylic-coated 52 μ Bicolor transparent film, gave the soap packaging both

“The re-launched mineral water uses a new bottle with two clear OPP neck labels and a wrap-around body label, replacing traditional paper labels”

stiffness and rigidity. They added that the film's high transparency and gloss and easy machinability provided the product with new sales opportunities. The converter was Novaprint AD.

The 'Amandinas' confectionery pack for CEMOI in France took the bronze award. The pack was a flexo-printed double laminate of 30 μ Bicolor, acrylic-coated on both sides, which replaced a co-extruded laminate. The jury selected the pack for the film's high gloss, transparency and barrier properties, as well as for its easy machinability and stiffness on the Illapack VFFS packaging machines. The converter was SPO, France.

ExxonMobil Chemical Films Business created its annual OPPack Awards to recognize industry partnership and reward technical excellence. The awards are presented to those applications that display the highest level of distinction in creativity, performance and promotion, using one or more of the company's wide range of OPP films. ■

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Snow-throwing IML solution

Toro, a major manufacturer of snow-throwing equipment has increased efficiency and durability with in-mold labeling by Avery Dennison. **Katy Wight** reports

Customers ranging from homeowners to stadium groundskeepers and professional landscapers count on Minneapolis-based Toro for the powerful, dependable equipment that keeps outdoor spaces looking their best all year long. Toro introduced the very first engine-powered snow thrower more than fifty years ago. After a half-century of winters, Toro remains a major brand in snow removal equipment. Because Toro snow throwers perform for so many years and are typically used in some of the harshest conditions, the company sought a solution to keep its branding intact throughout the life of the machine. Toro found the answer, along with a significant cost savings, by converting to in-mold labeling.

‘Traditional pressure-sensitive labeling is fine for many of our applications,’ says Brent Quiring, injection molding process engineer at Toro’s manufacturing center in Windom, Minnesota. ‘But after a few seasons of hostile temperatures, rough handling, snow and ice, these labels tend to show a lot of wear and tear and may come off entirely. To protect our brand identity, we wanted something with more permanence and durability.’

Avery Dennison’s Accu-Place in-mold labeling (APIML) technology was selected by the company for its TORO CCR 2450 GTS and 3650 GTS single-stage snow throwers. One consideration in the decision to use APIML was its proprietary Accu-Tack coating, which provides a high level of reliability in holding the label in place as Toro’s signature red shroud is injection-molded. The labels are custom engineered for compatibility with polypropylene in this case, and can be engineered for equivalent compatibility with nylon, ABS, polycarbonate and other materials.

Making the Switch

According to Quiring, the decision to convert to in-mold labeling from traditional pressure-sensitive labels was based



In-mold labeling provided a more durable solution for the Toro snow thrower

“To protect our brand identity, we wanted something with more permanence and durability”

“The economics of in-mold technology also create distinct advantages in efficiency, which, depending on volumes, can pay for the investment relatively quickly”

on much more than aesthetics. The economics of in-mold technology also create distinct advantages in efficiency, which, depending on volumes, can pay for the investment relatively quickly. ‘It’s true that we now have a much more attractive and durable faceplate, but that is only part of the equation,’ says Quiring. ‘The automated process of in-mold has reduced our total applied label costs.’

The overall investment required for in-mold labeling can be minimal for companies already doing injection molding. Existing robotics can usually be modified to accommodate the process of picking the label from an automated dispenser and positioning it into the mold. The finished parts can then be sent directly into production instead of entering a secondary staging area to await manual application of pressure-sensitive labels. This reduces labor costs as well as work-in-process inventories.

‘Given our investment and the volumes of product we’re producing for these snow thrower models, APIML paid for itself in 10 months and is now delivering a 25 percent reduction in total applied label costs.’

Total business solution

While the aesthetic benefits of in-mold labeling are critical, Quiring engaged Avery Dennison with the total business picture in mind. ‘We knew what we wanted for the look and feel of the product, but that had to conform with our requirements for a unit cost that maintained our competitiveness.’

While Toro’s success illustrates a relatively easy transition to in-mold technology from traditional pressure-sensitive labeling, manufacturers can realize even greater savings when they consider in-mold labeling much earlier, when they’re designing new products.

‘The time to think about labeling is at the conception of a new product idea, before the manufacturing is put into place,’ says Michel Merx, general manager of Avery Dennison’s Industrial Products Division. ‘This not only eliminates the need to retrofit the line to accommodate a labeling upgrade, but it allows the manufacturer to realize the cost savings as soon as the very first part is molded.’ ■

IML Q&A

Michel Merx, general manager of Avery Dennison’s Industrial & Automotive Products Division, discusses key challenges facing industrial product manufacturers and how labeling can help enhance product safety and improve productivity.

What are some key issues affecting large appliance manufacturers?

All manufacturers are concerned with production efficiency and increasing throughput without sacrificing quality, regardless of market. In a very competitive global appliance marketplace, product manufacturers are also faced with issues such as brand aesthetics, durability and permanence. A large outdoor appliance, such as a snow-blower, needs labels that can withstand the elements throughout the life of the machine. This is vital to increasing brand recognition, and ensuring the permanent readability of important product safety information that can help prevent consumer accidents.

What solutions are available to address these issues?

Avery Dennison is trying to dispel the common misconception that labels do not have the power to affect major manufacturing issues, such as production efficiency and consumer safety. The company provides engineered labeling technologies that enhance branding while lowering total applied label costs. Our Accu-Place in-mold labeling (APIML) technology is a good example. APIML enables manufacturers to incorporate preprinted labels into the production process for brand nameplates or other areas without mold modification. The label is molded into the part, ensuring permanence, eliminating secondary decorating processes and reducing work-in-process inventories.

This goes way beyond your traditional peel-and-stick label used in the past – this is something more.

How do these solutions fit into the manufacturing process?

Unlike traditional labels that are simply applied at the end of a manufacturing process, the ideal time to consider Avery Dennison’s engineered solutions is at the point of product conception, before manufacturing processes are put into place. Our engineered solutions can help industrial manufacturers realize greater savings when they are factored in at the early stages. This eliminates the need to retrofit the line to accommodate an upgrade. However, easy retrofit options exist, as well. For example, with APIML technology, most manufacturing robotics require only minimal modification to accommodate the in-mold labeling process.



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Quality: seeing the difference

Burkhead-DeVane has streamlined its proofing process and achieved quality objectives with an offline vision inspection system by EyeC-America. **Katy Wight** reports

Burkhead-DeVane, a family business founded in 1924 in Fayetteville, North Carolina, has just won a Global Trade Award from the pharmaceutical manufacturing exhibition INTERPHEX, for its dedication to quality. Drug labeling has no room for mistakes and pharmaceutical companies and converters must work together to protect the public and ensure all printed information and instructions are 100 per cent accurate. This award represents Burkhead-DeVane's ability, not only to meet the rigorous standards of pharmaceutical manufacturing, but to exceed them.

Burkhead-DeVane's 25 employees are all committed to the company's mission for excellence and accountability. Over the past year the company has become ISO certified and is continually looking at ways to optimize quality and customer satisfaction. Part of Burkhead-DeVane's strategy to assure quality for its pharmaceutical customers, is an offline inspection system used for content verification and sample testing by EyeC-America. The company installed the EyeC Profiler in 2004.

'Before we invested in the Profiler, we would make press proofs for every job,' explains general manager Lee Parker, 'and with five up and four around you would have 20 different images to proof at any one time. We would run that proof and then give it to the quality control department and they would read and compare each of the 20 images to the customer's approved proof to make sure that all of the information was correct. This could take over an hour at a time.'

With three or four press jobs everyday, the time spent on proofing was adding up – and so was press downtime. The challenge was compounded by pharmaceutical inserts that would take a minimum of two hours to read and compare. On top of that, foreign languages such as Japanese or Chinese proved impossible for QC employees to decipher.

'You can't rush quality control,' says Parker. 'You need to make sure that your customers get what they are paying for, so

we always felt that the processes were worth our time, but we wanted to cut it down with an automated solution.

'We started researching three or four different offline solutions and the companies all brought their systems to show us. We had some really hard tests ready for them. We had a perfect label and then we compared it to a plate image of 20 or 30 labels with some minor defects. The EyeC Profiler got every single one of them and we were just left shaking out heads – some of those defects were mighty small.'

Burkhead-DeVane wanted to compare its supplier-approved samples with press proofs and catch any plate problems before going to print. The three Menzel 100% inspection systems on the company's slitter/rewinders would then catch any further inconsistencies that had occurred on-press.

'Now we send proofs to be signed-off by the customer, scan the label and compare it to a scan of the printed proof and we have eliminated all of that reading time. Inserts that used to take two hours to proof now only take three minutes.'

This offline inspection means that small content errors are detected and corrected before the job hits the press, ensuring that the press doesn't have to stop and start for corrective action and preventing wastage at the rewinder.

'Burkhead-DeVane was the first US pharmaceutical converter to adopt the Profiler concept more than two years ago when this technology was really new', explains Dr Juergen Klicker, president of EyeC-America, 'but it came with an excellent reference from RAKO, one of Germany's largest label converters. No existing equipment based on the 'Golden Image Approach' technology could solve the task: to reliably find any kind of content error down to a missing dot in a five point font, while at the same time NOT showing hundreds of pseudo-defects resulting from deviations typical to the printing process itself, such as minor distortion, dot gain or registration. The Profiler technology understands how printing actually works and what kinds of deviations are in fact permissible – even if they are

much larger than the missing dot you need to find reliably.'

Klicker explains that for the Golden Image approach, the user has to teach the system what a good label looks like and printed samples are compared to this on a pixel-by-pixel basis. This technology is unable to differentiate between true defects and typical, acceptable variations caused by the printing process itself. Once you set the sensitivity to catch all relevant content errors, it may also trigger acceptable deviations such as minor dot gain or distortion. The EyeC Profiler's software is based on image processing technology and Klicker claims that it focuses on printed features rather than pixels, thus distinguishing between acceptable process-driven deviations and actual problems.

'We knew immediately that this was the system that we needed and wanted,' says Parker of Burkhead-DeVane. 'In fact, we tried to buy the demo equipment that Juergen brought with him! Implementation was very easy and the QC manager was working with it on the first day. After the first few hours we were in full operation. The EyeC Profiler was the most user-friendly system that we saw. Ease of use is crucial, because you don't want to waste time working out how to operate the system. The monitor is all in color and the Profiler finds everything – broken type, missing type, registration errors, font changes. The system has saved us many times. For the whole experience – working with EyeC-America and the performance of the equipment – I'd rate them a ten.'

Cost savings are mainly realized through process improvement and better machine utilization: depending on the point at which you do the comparison, you either won't rip a file that has a defect in it, you won't make plates from flawed artwork files or you won't start the press with a defective plate on it. Klicker explains that this configuration is ideal for the pharmaceutical industry, but he claims that non-pharma applications such as food labels can also benefit from using the Profiler as a low-investment alternative to inline inspection systems. Inspection takes place in regular intervals, such as at the beginning and end of each roll to help monitor quality.

Improved quality is really the tip of the iceberg in terms of the benefits BD has experienced since installing the EyeC system. It has contributed to 20 per cent growth over the last two years and a much faster response to customers.



The EyeC system installed at Rako in Germany

About Burkhead-DeVane

Burkhead-DeVane was established in 1924 as a commercial printing company by Gale Burkhead and Jim DeVane, Jr. The company was purchased in the 1960's by Jim DeVane III and Burkhead-DeVane began converting pressure sensitive labels for the tire industry. Today the company specializes in converting labels for the pharmaceutical industry and is managed by DeVane's daughter Boo. Burkhead-DeVane is an ISO 9001:2000 certified company, designated by the North Carolina Department of Administration as a woman-owned, minority business and also nationally registered by the Women's Business Enterprise National Council.

'Quality product is a given,' says Jim DeVane III. 'All of our work is now on time and time is crucial. Time is basically what you are selling.'

The Profiler's capabilities

- The Profiler is able to compare practically any kind of printed items and/or artwork files against each other. Proofs can be provided as a printed proof or in various electronic formats.
- All significant deviations are brought to the operator's attention
- Minor deviations caused by the printing process itself, such as minor registration, minor dot gain or minor distortion will be disregarded without any user interaction
- It works in full color, for both graphics and text, in any language and in any alphabet
- The Profiler will automatically identify and inspect multiple ups, including nested items. A full inspection takes just minutes.
- Inspection results are fully repeatable
- The Profiler provides a full report and facilitates compliance with ISO, cGMP and CFR regulations.
- Eye-C has more than 40 installations worldwide right now ■

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Products News

RITRAMA'S NEW INDIGO RANGE

The increasing need to make short economic runs has forced the label printer to look for new solutions and digital printing is one answer to this. With their new range, Ritrama can meet the demands of the market. The range features a selection of both paper and filmic materials all with excellent printability.

WINE LABEL RANGE

Ritrama have enhanced their Wine Label Range with new interesting alternatives. The range consists of different kinds of wet strength papers (matt, glossy embossed etc.).

DURABLE PRODUCT RANGE

The Ritrama Group has rationalized the product portfolio in order to satisfy customer needs. The Durable product range is specially designed for the automotive industry and electronic or household appliances. The Durable range guarantees the same lifespan of the label as the object to which it is applied, to ensure that the printed information will be always readable.

CLEARFLEX

The Clear Solution from Ritrama is a new concept in clear labelling: Clearflex combines the squeezability of PE films with the clarity of PP films. Clearflex is a 50my gloss squeezable bioriented clear polypropylene suitable for flexible containers in the Health & Beauty care field and for "No Label Look" applications.



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 Ritrama is pleased to announce the NEW slitting, logistic and R&D centre in Caponago (Milano). The Caponago facility will also house Ritrama's corporate head quarters. This distribution hub will operate with a fully automated warehouse and robotized packaging system slitting on demand for customers across Europe ■

NEW PRODUCT LINE IN SASSOFERRATO

 To answer the increasing demand for PSA-materials, Ritrama has installed a new 2-meter wide coating line in their Sassoferrato production facility ■



NEW DISTRIBUTION CENTRE IN BARCELONA

 Ritrama announce the opening of the new distribution centre in Barcelona (Spain) ■





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Avery invests in Europe

Avery Dennison has commissioned a new high-volume coating line and automated warehousing facility at its Rodange plant in Luxembourg. **Andy Thomas** reports

Avery Dennison has commissioned a new high volume coating line and automated warehousing facility at its Rodange plant in Luxembourg. The LUX2 line is dedicated to emulsion-based coating of film and paper substrates and is claimed the fastest in the world.

The official opening ceremony was performed by Grand-Duc Henri of Luxembourg, accompanied by Jeannot Krecké, the Minister of the Economy and Foreign Trade, and US Ambassador to Luxembourg, Ms Ann Wagner.

Welcoming guests to the Grand Opening was Donald W Stoebe, vice president and general manager, Avery Dennison Roll Materials Europe. He thanked the Grand-Duc for the Duchy's proactive support, and underlined Avery Dennison Corporation's commitment to a continuing high profile for the Rodange facility. He observed: 'This plant has always been, and will continue to be, a showcase for state-of-the-art adhesive coating and lamination of Fasson-brand self-adhesive labelstock, and a key distribution hub. We chose the location because Luxembourg is strategically positioned to reach out to our customers across the whole of Europe.' The plant also supplies locations as far away as Australia with office products.

The new coater, automated warehousing and slitting equipment represent an investment of Euro 48 million – Avery's biggest ever investment in Europe. The new LUX 2 line is 2 meters wide and 120 meters long, and runs at 1,100 meters/minute – more than double the speed of the current fastest line at Rodange. Its capacity is 800 million/sq meters/year out of a total plant capacity of 1,000 million sq meters/year. Rodange's output now represents around 20 per

cent of total European demand.

To match the higher capacity of the LUX2 line, there has been a major investment in two fully automated packaging lines and an automated warehouse, where nine Automated Guide Vehicles handle over 1200 roll movements a day, 24/7. There are three new slitters, bringing the total complement to 13 machines. The factory has been extended to accommodate this equipment along with a new shipping extension, which has doubled floorspace to 40,000 sq meters.

'Automated handling means less human errors – when you request something you get it, and this increases our efficiency,' comments plant manager Michel Schuetz. 'It also makes more efficient use of storage space.' A further advantage of automated roll movement is less damage from forklift truck movements.

Some idea of the scale of the Rodange operation is that 120 trucks leave the plant a day and 110 arrive to deliver raw materials. Adhesive storage capacity is 0.5M liters, which is sufficient for two days operation.

The Rodange plant functions as the European high-volume manufacturing and distribution hub for Fasson-brand self-adhesive labelstocks. The plant specializes in VIP stocks, industrial papers and films, all of which are emulsion acrylic adhesive coated. The plant handles more than 300 combinations of papers, films, silicones and adhesives. Around half of Rodange's production is shipped in rolls for slitting at Avery warehousing operations throughout Europe, while Benelux countries are served directly from the plant.

The Roll Materials Division has 17 sites in Europe, employing around 2200 people, and Rodange is one of six coating plants. ■



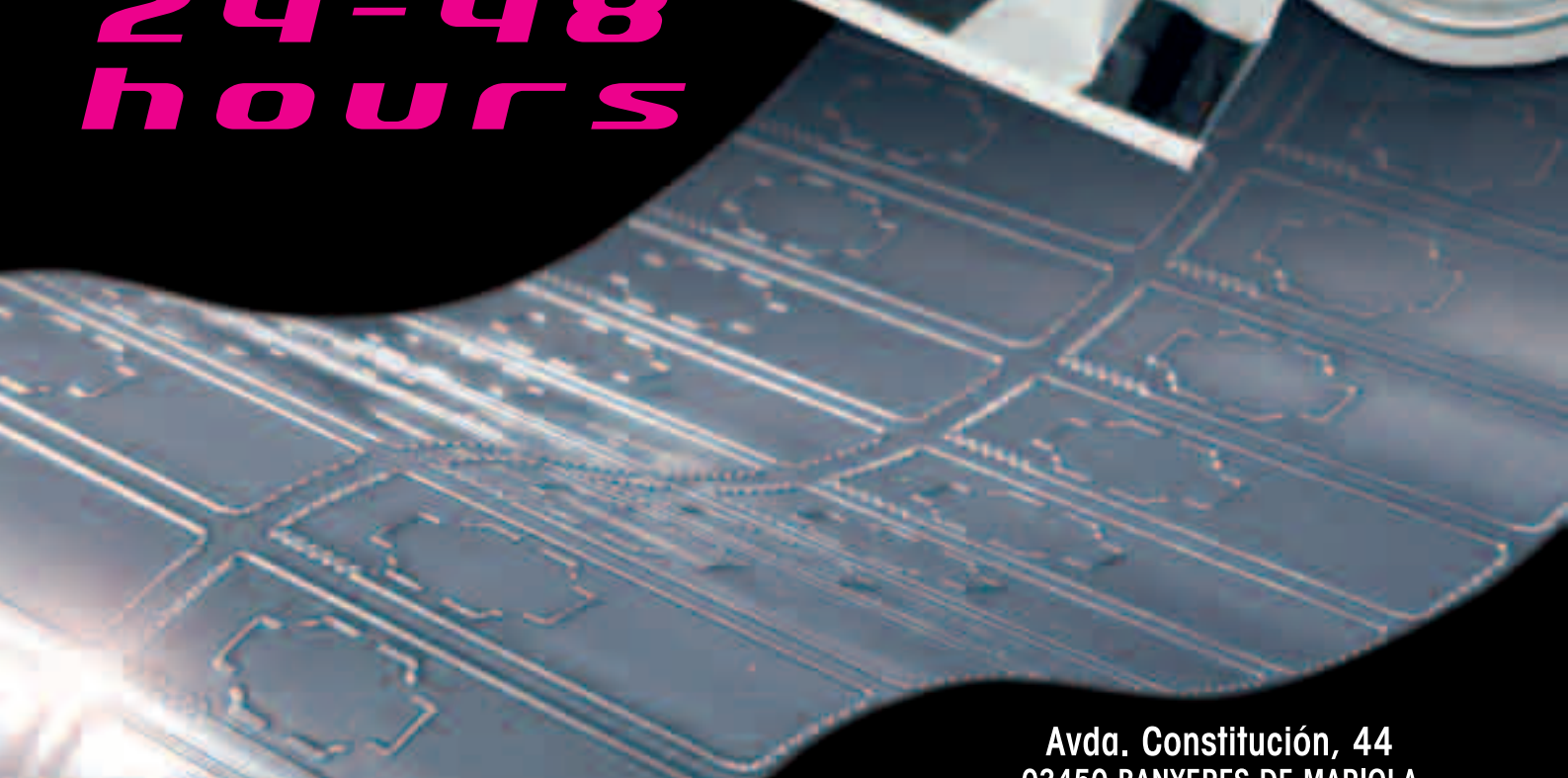
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Prime target

McDowell Label and Screen Printing is taking the prime label market by storm – and throwing sleeves and flexible packaging into the mix. **Katy Wight** reports

The t-shirt slogan warns ‘don’t mess with Texas’ and the same rule can definitely be applied to certain Texan businesses. On the outskirts of Dallas, McDowell Label and Screen Printing of Plano, Texas, is proving to be a powerhouse in the high-end prime market. Manufacturing pressure-sensitive labels, shrink sleeves and flexible packaging for customers across North America, South America and Europe, the company’s current biggest challenge is coping with its Texas-sized growth.

After ten years working as a sales representative in Texas for Avery Label, Dave McDowell founded McDowell Label and Screen Printing in a back bedroom with his wife Elaine. Dave served as a broker for 12 years, representing printers from surrounding states that focused on high-end graphics. He recognized the opportunity in Dallas for high-end work and in March 1994 Dave and Elaine took delivery of their first machine – a 7-color Rotopress that is still working hard in the plant today.

‘We were very successful as a broker and when we decided to start manufacturing, we went with state of the art equipment, explains Dave. ‘The press had quick-change features and we

were one of the few label companies with an image setter in the area. We had all of the high-end equipment of the time.

‘We have always reinforced a culture of quality and focused on the top-end of the market and I think that we have been right – that’s the way that the market is moving.’

Today, the company has a range of presses with diverse capabilities – four Rotopress’ in 7, 8 and 10-color; an 8-color Gallus em280, with another 10-color em280 on the way; a wider-web 10-color MPS ep410; and a digital HP Indigo ws4050. McDowell has 52 employees working two shifts. The MPS investment was a strategic move into the unsupported film market and McDowell was one of the first US companies to install this press.

‘We wanted to get into the high volume beverage, shrink and flexible packaging markets,’ says Dave. ‘We looked at every press out there in the US and Europe, and at the time, with everything that we wanted to achieve it was probably the best choice – but it was a very tough decision. We do a lot of rotary-screen printing and with the MPS press, there is flexo and screen at every



Founder Dave McDowell (left) and sales manager John McDowell with the MPS press

station. It's very easy. All of the other systems that used rails and slide-out stations were much more restrictive.'

MPS now has a well-established team in the US and Dave explains that the aftersales support they've received has been first class. McDowell has teamed this servo press with shrink sleeve seaming and inspection equipment from Karlville of Miami, Florida.

'The sleeve market is growing at a rapid pace and there aren't that many high quality sleeve printers out there. We've even competed with rotogravure before, because not everyone that prints rotogravure actually prints to the highest quality – plus it has an expensive tool-up and uses solvents.'

McDowell has also entered the flexible packaging market and now manufactures single-serve sachets and stand-up pouches for the food and cosmetic industries.

'That press has helped us so much. It has not only positioned us for sleeves, but for work we couldn't have competed on in the past. We did a 27-color job for a nail polish company for over a million pieces per job and it required three or four passes. The servo press made it viable and we took that job away from offset.'

With its existing presses and the imminent delivery of another Gallus em280 with 10 colors, hotstamp and another four screen units, McDowell has its medium and long run jobs all worked out. The investment in the HP Indigo ws4050 is the last piece in the puzzle, allowing the company to print short runs of high-quality labels.

'When we bought that press, we didn't have a single job for it,' says Dave. 'We wanted to capture business that we did not

“The sleeve market is growing at a rapid pace and there aren't that many high quality sleeve printers out there. We've even competed with rotogravure before”

possess yet. Digital is really starting to come into its own and that part of the business is growing – and it has all been organic growth.'

McDowell has been growing between 20-25 per cent over the past few years and part of that is down to the drive and enthusiasm of its sales manager. Dave and Elaine McDowell have three sons and in 1997, their youngest son John changed career and decided to join the company. He had been a partner in a nationwide health and fitness club, but decided to sell that business and look for another opportunity. John planned on spending a year working alongside his father before starting another business of his own.

'John came on board as a sales person, but we didn't give him any accounts,' says Dave. 'We gave him an office and a phone

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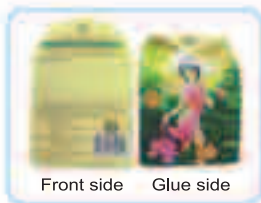
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'With our equipment capabilities and capacity there is nothing that we can't do - and we can maintain that brand value across labels, pouches and sleeves,' says John McDowell

and he had to get his own desk and find new clients. He was with the company for around six months before he realized that this was what he wanted to do. He became the company's best sales person and two and a half years ago we decided to take him out of the field and make him sales manager.'

'It was a humbling experience,' says John. 'I came from the top of one business to the bottom of another. I am a very driven, very competitive person and I knew about the culture of the company and the quality of work, so I simply attacked similar clients. At McDowell Label, we have always been successful at effectively positioning our customers' brands.'

John has been working hard to hire and train an effective sales team. He currently has five sales representatives, but is always on the lookout for more.

'One of the challenges that all companies face is people,' he says. 'There aren't many people that are qualified and are also happy to work within our culture and our mission statement. They either buy-in or they don't.'

'Finding leaders and managing growth are the biggest challenges that we face,' adds Dave, 'but this gets easier everyday. We have a very specific focus in terms of who we are and it is easier to grow if you know what you can do.'

'Everyone says that they offer quality and service, and have cutting-edge equipment, but few people can support this statement,' says John. 'We do support it. Our company is

Taking the heat...

McDowell Label and Screen Printing moved into a brand new, purpose-built facility in 2004. The architect designed the building based on workflow patterns, energy efficiency and the impact of Dallas weather: 'Our severe weather is in the summer, so we only have glass in the north or the east,' explains Dave. 'Parking is on the east side so you can get into your car in the evening and it hasn't been baking all day. It's not often that you get to start off with a clean slate like this. Our new building has also won some awards.'

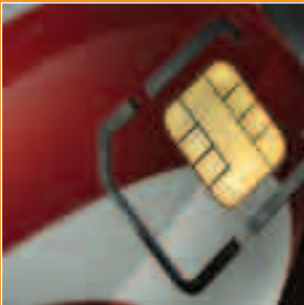
comprised of a team of leaders who foster and exercise this fundamental credo. There are more than 70 narrow web printers in the Dallas Fort Worth area, but we are unique in what we can offer.'

The company's strategy for the future is simple – to grow and continue to print top quality, high-end labels, sleeves and flexible packaging. McDowell wants to help its customers get their products off the shelf and into customers' hands.

'Brand managers today are much more sophisticated than they were even 5-10 years ago,' says John. 'The market as a whole is more sophisticated, but with our equipment capabilities and capacity there is nothing that we can't do – and we can maintain that brand value across labels, pouches and sleeves.' ■

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Latin America Summit

Over 700 converters and suppliers attended the second Label Summit Latin America to be held in Mexico City.

Andy Thomas and **James Quirk** report

A total of 734 attendees enjoyed a two-day conference and table-top exhibition at the recent Label Summit in Mexico City. Although most delegates were from Mexico, there was also a sizeable presence from across Latin America. Label Summit Latin America will be held in Sao Paulo, Brazil next year, then returns to Mexico City in 2008.

The keynote speech was given by Carlos Alcaez of Green Bay Packaging, gold sponsor of Label Summit Latin America 2006. Entitled 'Opportunities and challenges in the Latin American labels market', his presentation gave an overview of the current status of the market in Mexico and Latin America in general.

The challenges he cited that needed to be overcome included the extreme competitiveness, small margins, and limited growth of the self-adhesive market worldwide, as well as specific problems to the region – high levels of unemployment and weakness of currency.

He emphasized the need for technology innovation and diversification into different sectors of the market. 'Mexico's growth is stable but slow,' he said. 'The market is not growing

faster than GDP. However, with over 4,000 converters in Latin America, around 300 of which are in Mexico, there is a wealth of opportunity in the region.'

Alfredo Domador, VP operations division, B2Bportales Inc, presented an 'Analysis of the Latin American converting industry,' a snapshot of the industry based on a comprehensive survey across the region. The survey was jointly conducted by Tarsus and Conversión magazine, and provided an overview of the main label converting technology trends in the region.

The financial indications of the survey showed the good health of the Latin American label industry: more than 20 per cent of companies showed sales growth of over 20 per cent. Nearly 60 per cent intend to buy a new press and/or a capital equipment in the next 12 months, showing a clear awareness of the need to be technologically prepared.

Comparisons with previous surveys suggested that the self adhesive sector has grown by nearly eight per cent.

Another highlight of the conference program was a panel session entitled 'Meeting the end user requirements from a



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ETI announces partnership with Degussa

At Label Summit Latin America, equipment manufacturer ETI Converting Equipment and silicone supplier Degussa Goldschmidt Chemical announced a partnership to provide equipment and materials which allow label converters to bring PSA laminate production in-house. The whole process includes producing their own release liner, coating the adhesive, printing and laminating in one operation.

'Leading Mexican label printers have recognized that the ETI patented process is able to reduce costs by allowing them to produce their own laminate, but more important are the manufacturing flexibility and new capabilities that become possible. For example, the integrated line allows a manufacturer to reverse print film labels without the cost of liner scrap and secondary laminating steps,' stated Catherine Léveille, marketing manager at ETI.

'The Label Summit Mexico was an assembly of all the important Latin American printers, and the perfect event at which to introduce this type of leading edge technology.'

converter perspective', chaired by Mike Fairley, director of strategic development for the Tarsus Group. The panel was made up by Ben Lilienthal, general manager of CCL Mexico; Edgar Vargas, general manager of Diagraph ITW Mexico; Luis Maria Garcia, president, Multilabel Argentina; Enrique Feingold, sales director, Novelprint; and Fernando Aranguren Alvarez, general director of Flexoprint.

The need for global partnerships was a key topic in the discussion, with the local converters aware of the importance of setting up alliances abroad for continued growth. Fernando Aranguren Alvarez told how Flexoprint was actively seeking alliances with regional companies, and was already working closely with a company in Brazil. 'It is important to look for strategic partnerships with companies around the world,' he said. 'We are targeting the US, European, and Asian markets.'

Luis Maria Garcia discussed the differences between commercial and production partnerships, and told how Multilabel Argentina has set up alliances in Mexico and Chile. Enrique Feingold described Novelprint's multiple alliances in Brazil.

CCLs growth was shown to be mainly internal or through acquisitions. 'Some clients demand our presence in their markets,' said Ben Lilienthal.

The need for training and education programs was another topic highlighted by the panel session. This had been reflected in the Label Converting in Latin America survey, where 90 per cent of companies cited improved training and education courses as necessary to stimulate future growth in the market. 'Training and HR development is crucial for progress,' said Fernando Aranguren Alvarez, general director of Flexoprint.

The technical presentations were kicked off by Ian Hole, director for marketing development at Esko, who looked at how the latest pre-production workflow tools can help label converters meet these requirements.

Hole noted that it had taken ten years for digital flexo platemaking to become widely established among label converters, but now all the relevant factors are in place: particularly with converters taking pre-press in-house, which has opened their eyes to the benefits of automation and in-house quality control. In-house repro also allows converters to assist brand owners with their test marketing programs using 2D and 3D visualization software.

At the same time, digital flexo software has increased the productivity of the plate planning operation, based around drag-and-drop templates – now even bringing digital 'plate patching' into the workflow to merge separations digitally. Quality control is now completely software driven, said Hole, with tools to measure all aspects of the image and the stepped plate.

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There have also been rapid advances in speed of digital imaging: 'skip' technology where the laser moves past all non-image areas - creating average time savings of 30 per cent per plate; and in-line UV exposure, which involves the simultaneous ablation/imaging and main UV exposure to further reduce platemaking time. Hole said that new customers could be making good plates within two weeks of installation, including how to make compensation curves and now to handle plates to minimize wastage. Hole ended his presentation looking at how to choose between different flexo dot shapes.

Alexander Mercon and Carlos Domiquez from Hewlett Packard looked at the applications for digital label printing in the Mexican and Latin American markets, then printing press solutions for label and package converting were examined by a panel moderated by Mike Fairley and consisting of Federico d'Annunzio, MD of GiDue; John Mitchell, general sales and product manager at Mark Andy; Eduard Pont, sales director, Omet Iberica; and Hans-Ramon Hofmann, regional sales director Gallus.

After some excellent entertainment and networking opportunities, Seamus Lafferty, president of Stamford Products, kicked off the second day with an overview of the shrink sleeve label converting process. Lafferty said Latin America is still at an early stage in the adoption of shrink sleeves labels, but is still growing this technology at around nine per cent per year.

PVC is the material for 90 per cent of all shrink label materials used in Latin America, which contrasts with just 50 per cent in Europe, where the environmental movement has targeted the material.

Before entering the shrink sleeve label market, converters need to ask themselves some key questions, said Lafferty: Is it a good fit for my customers? Is my press capable of running shrink film? Do I have the slitting capability for film? What is my required investment in secondary converting equipment? What is going to be my investment in people/training? Is my plant capable of handling and storing shrink film?

Joe Briganti, business innovation manager at Stora Enso, considered the usage of pressure-sensitive papers, focusing on developments in the beverage industry, and the challenge of developing a paper with high wet strength, that could be printed with Multiple Technologies, is compatible with vacuum metallizing and has high opacity.

Brigante also looked at the qualification process for PS papers for HP Indigo's digital presses, and the challenges of delivering PS RFID labels. 'In some cases more than 20 per cent of the RFID labels are not working when received from the suppliers,' claimed Brigante. 'Film substrates used to make the inserts are very prone to build static charge which can destroy the

Exhibitor perspective

The Mexico Label Summit turned into a big exhibitor event, with a large area set aside for table top displays. For these companies, the event provided the perfect opportunity to consolidate and expand their presence in the region, as James Quirk discovered.

'We use the Label Summits to break into markets all over the world,' said Federico d'Annunzio, managing director of Italian press manufacturer GiDue. 'We will get a Mexican distributor off the back of this event. Mexico has an established tradition in offset – so our Xpannd press is perfect for this market.'

D'Annunzio also highlighted the difference between the Label Summits and the Labelexpo shows: 'Here you have the time to get into deep conversation with potential customers, without the distraction of machinery. The local exhibitions are very important as a follow-up to the larger expos. The bigger events are global, which are useful for branding and marketing, but here is where you execute business. You can talk about things other than the press – ideas, strategies, and the vision of the company.'

Martin Automatic has had a direct presence in Latin America for 25 years. The company sells directly from its US office, and sales engineer Michael Jelinsky estimates that 10-20 per cent of sales go into this region. 'It has been a very successful show for us,' he said. 'Mexico is the fastest growing market in Latin America.'

Dutch press manufacturer MPS is a company who used the event to create a new presence in the market. 'We are a young company,' said Erik Blomjous, international sales director. 'In 2004 we started to expand into other markets, like Japan and India. Now we have started a collaboration with Gráfica Novaro to distribute our machines in Latin America, and we have just sold our first press to Autopak in Argentina. We recently visited 25 companies in this region, and the Summit provides a great opportunity to follow up with them.'

As well as MPS, Gráfica Novaro is the Mexican distributor for companies such as HP, Dupont and Esko. 'The event has given us a great presence in the market,' said sales representative Ricardo Xoconoxtle Veloz.

The show was also a success for Kocher + Beek. 'We made lots of good leads,' said Aidé McLaughlin, customer service representative. 'We are just penetrating this market, with 15 per cent of our sales going into this region – mainly Mexico and Brazil.' Products are shipped into Latin America from the company's Kansas, USA, office.

'We are here to learn about the Latin American market,' said Daniel Meldrum, market development manager of Avery Dennison. 'We feel that it has lots of potential for us in the future. The printer and converter base is well positioned here, but we can see that the market is fractured as companies tend to supply only their local areas. To expand in this region, lots of relationships are necessary, and we have made a number of contacts with printers/converters and sleeve/shrink film manufacturers.'

The event's gold sponsor was Green Bay Packaging Mexico, which has been selling pressure sensitive materials into Mexico for the last three years. Azlan Levy Micha, general director, ran a company for 20 years before selling out to Green Bay. 'We have an interesting market here in Mexico,' he said. 'The event is an excellent way of bringing it together.'

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Roger Pellow, Labels Group managing director

sensitive electronics.' The focus for RFID PS papers is for reduced static build, cushion properties to protect the microchip and good dimensional stability.

Kari Virtanen, film development director at Raflatrac looked at different decoration options in the health & beauty and beverage labeling markets, and the opportunities for pressure-sensitive technologies compared to alternative techniques including direct decoration, IML, and sleeving.

FujiFilm Sericol's Rick Duarte gave an excellent introduction to the technology of UV flexo inks, particularly in regard to correct curing, color matching and useage as part of a combination print process.

With the growing importance of quality control globally, a panel discussion followed, chaired by this writer on the automation of inspection and control. Panelists Donald Pistilli, sales and support manager at BST Promark and Amir Dekel, labels marketing manager at AVT, looked at the different strategies of examining label rolls on-press or on the rewinder, as

well as different inspection technologies and creating data links between press and rewinder.

Latest solutions in thermal processing of digital flexo plates were examined by Mario Alberto Vazquez Alcantara, senior technical representative at MacDermid Printing Solutions, who introduced the technology of thermal plate processing, which cuts total plate processing time by up to half.

A thorough and practical introduction to the technology and selection of anilox rolls was given by Eduardo Arellano, technical service manager at Praxair.

As the converting industry grows in Latin America, so does the rotary die business. RotoMetrics regional sales representative Scott Phillips gave a presentation on the importance of choosing the correct die type, detailing the cost benefits of using flexible dies versus solid dies. He stressed the importance of taking good care of magnetic cylinders in order to optimize cutting with flexible dies. The discussion also covered the advantages of using adjustable clearance anvils and stepped anvils. Phillips concluded by pointing out ways that converters can achieve top results with proper handling and storage of their dies.

Mike Fairley gave a presentation on a subject all too rarely discussed at meetings of label converters: how to improve profitability in the face of downward pressure on prices per label and spiraling consumable costs.

Fairley pointed out that it is the joint responsibility of the finance director, operations director and sales director to come up with strategies to increase profitability under the strategic management of the managing director. Adding value and reducing costs must go hand in hand. For example, the sales director is not only keeping management control of his/her sales team. They should also be spotting new areas of the market where the company can take existing technology, or suggesting new product developments to satisfy emerging requirements of their existing end users. The strategy should be driven by definite targets and timescales, concluded Fairley.

Winding up the two day conference program, James Quirk – editor of the L&L Smart Labels newsletter and Latin America correspondent for L&L – gave a presentation on the future of RFID, smart and intelligent labels in Latin America, and the opportunities they offer to add value. ■



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Omet showcases new technology

A Chinese offset carton converter has enthusiastically embraced in-line flexography with a press which shows off new Omet technologies. **Andy Thomas** reports from Hubei Province

Omet has sold the biggest press it has yet built to offset carton converter Golden Gorges in Yichang, Hubei province in China. The VF 520 press showcases three new technologies for Omet: in-line lamination of holographic transfer foil; an automated registration control system; and a hologram insertion unit.

In-line lamination of holographic transfer foil allows short runs to be produced without having to use pre-laminated board. A water-based glue is applied at the first printing unit, then passed through an extended 48kw dryer to leave a tacky finish. This is followed by in-line lamination of the foil to the paper and rewinding of the foil, leaving the holographic image on the paper.

Omet's 'Gap Skipping Unit' stretches the film so it matches the repeat length of the plate cylinder, using three servo drives to manage the tension of the holographic film and the paper web. This means cylinders and plates do not have to be changed to match the film repeat.

Registration control is critical on a press of this length (25 meters). Omet's new registration system – seen here for the first time – maintains a tolerance of throughout the machine

In operation, a rectangular registration mark is printed at the first print station (on the next software upgrade this will be a triangular registration mark). Each subsequent unit reads that mark and uses servo motors to adjust the relative position of the printing cylinder to the impression cylinder. The longitudinal register has a movement range of +/- 10mm.

From August 2006 all new Omet presses will have this capability, along with a software upgrade which enables fully automatic cross-register adjustment.

The oil heated hologram inserting unit on the VF520 was developed specifically for Three Gorges. It applies up to five holograms across the web width to a tolerance of +/-0.15mm with each strip of holograms managed independently. This allows ten different shaped holograms to be inserted on the same web pass. Golden Gorges has two of these units, allowing the insertion of up to twelve holograms on the web in one pass. The foiling unit uses the same registration reading system as the printing units.

This customer can interchange all converting functions at



The 25 meter long Golden Gorges press is controlled by a new registration system



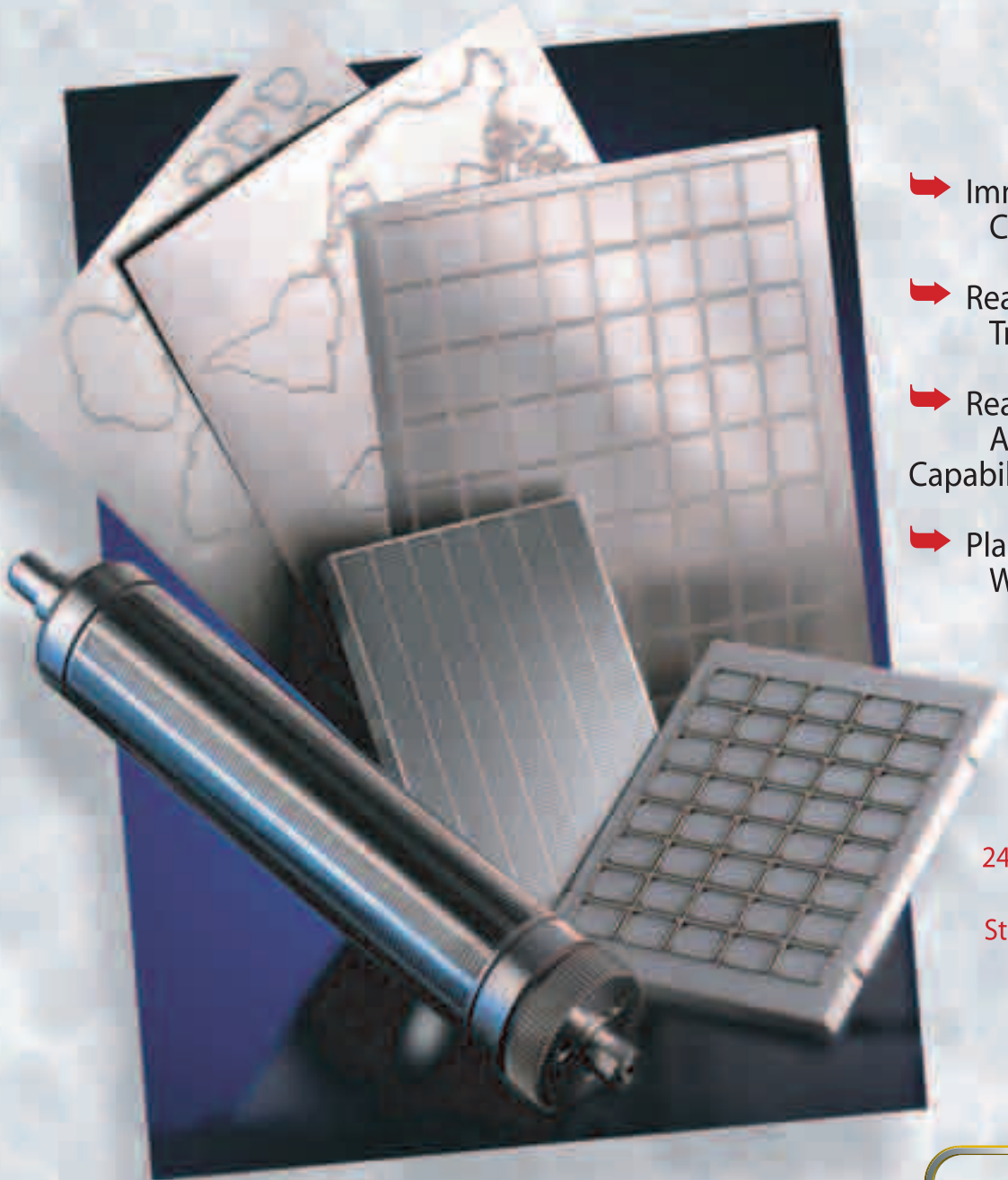
The hologram inserting unit on the VF520 press

every print position without cutting the web. For example, the holographic stamping unit can be moved to allow printing on top of the foil for anti-counterfeiting applications.

A second machine now on order will have three gravure units at the first three print stations, followed by seven flexo units which can also accept any existing silkscreen, rotogravure or hot foil units. The press will have extended 68kw dryers above the gravure units to lay down coatings. ■



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A Kinoflex press under construction

Weifang Donghang commits to flexo

Chinese printing press manufacturer Weifang Donghang has successfully expanded its machine program from offset into flexo, and with its European agent in place is looking to expand beyond China. **Andy Thomas** reports

Over the last five years, the Chinese packaging market has moved into a phase of rapid growth. This has encouraged domestic manufacturers of commercial printing machinery to move into the field of in-line flexography.

One such company is Weifang DongHang Precision Printing Machine Co. Ltd, located in Weifang City, Shandong province, in the North East of China.

Founded in 1996, the company manufactures around 2,000 offset presses and binding machines a year, mostly single or 2-color machines. Development work has just finished on a 4-color offset press. These presses are sold mainly to Chinese printers, but also exported to a number of countries including

Dubai, Egypt, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Donghang Company started manufacturing flexo presses four years ago, as the packaging market in China began to take off. The company has sold around 20 of its Kinoflex flexo presses to Chinese printers, mostly for printing labels.

Kevin Wang, vice president of the sales department at Donghang, sees big opportunities for flexo in China. 'Today just 3-5 per cent of packaging in China is produced flexo, which shows the huge opportunity. The Chinese government is encouraging printers to move away from solvent inks to cut down on harmful emissions, which gives water-based and UV flexo a big opportunity.'



Kevin Wang, vice-president sales at Weifang DongHang Precision Printing Machine Co. Ltd

“The modular press is designed to handle a wide range of substrates in a range of 20-400gsm, allowing it to convert pressure-sensitive labels, flexible packaging, foils and cartons”

The labels industry in China is still at an early stage of development. Although there are thousands of small companies printing labels in Shandong province, Wang estimates that only around 600 are big enough to buy a Kinoflex machine. However, this figure can be expected to grow over the next few years.

Donghang's Kinoflex press is built in four widths, 330mm, 420mm, 520mm, 640mm, with a maximum print repeat of 640mm and speeds up to 150 meters/minute. Up to three die cutting stations can be specified, including vertical and transverse cutting. Manual or automatic print register adjustment is available, and IR, hot air and UV drying can all be specified.

The modular press is designed to handle a wide range of substrates in a range of 20-400gsm, allowing it to convert pressure-sensitive labels, flexible packaging, foils and cartons.

Donghang has used its long experience in offset press manufacture to build the robust Kinoflex frames, and the impression and plate cylinders are manufactured by the company to a tight tolerance. The anilox rollers are manufactured by a Chinese company. The unwind is built by Donghang, but incorporates an imported magnetic powder brake system.

The company's quality control system is ISO9001:2000 accredited, and this shows in the stability of the press, which is capable of holding tight register.

Last August Donghang appointed RJM Label Converting Equipment & Supplies Ltd based in Peterborough, England, as its European agent. RJM is run by Richard McGuire, who will be known to many in the industry for his long experience of narrow web press machinery. Starting off at Norprint, McGuire moved on to set up Ko-Pack's successful European operation in 1984.

The Kinoflex press exhibited at Labelexpo Asia in Shanghai last December was the subject of considerable interest but was felt by European label printers interviewed by L&L to require faster make-ready abilities.

Following this experience, and under McGuire's technical guidance, a number of modifications were carried out by Donghang engineers to the inking unit. The anilox assembly is now mounted on a slide-out rail assembly which allows the operator easy access for roll

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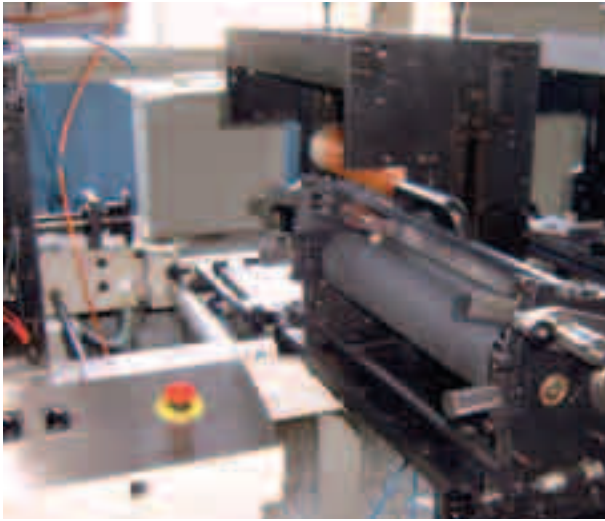
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The re-engineered inking unit on the Kinoflex press. The anilox now slides out from the print unit and can be quickly changed over

changing.

'With this latest modification the anilox assembly moves a little to the left of the print station, then the whole assembly slides out on precision ground rails to the front of the press,' comments Richard McGuire. 'The press operator can then change the anilox roller in seconds. Ergonomically for the press operator this is very easy to do without stretching and lifting in awkward positions. I must say I am very impressed with the Chinese engineers to complete this modification in such a short time.'

Donghang's confidence in the future is demonstrated by the construction of a new factory six times bigger than the existing plant and covering more than 100,000 sq meters. The land forms part of a local government project to move heavy industry from the center of the city to the outskirts. The move into the new plant is now under way. ■

Kinoflex in action

While in Shandong province, L&L took the chance to visit one of the first Kinoflex press users, labels and packaging converter Heli Paper and Printing Co. Ltd based in Qing Zhou City. The company was started five years ago by the present owner, Mr Ji Yu Lu, and today employs 80 people working 24 hours.

Before investing in its first Kinoflex press, Heli Paper manufactured its own paper packaging products, a business which continues today.

Heli Paper installed its first, 5-color Kinoflex press two years ago, followed by a second, 7-color machine installed last summer. Both presses are 650mm wide and are set up for both UV and waterbased inks. In practice most of Heli Paper's jobs use waterbased flexo inks.

Both water-based and UV inks are supplied by local Chinese manufacturers, but Kevin Wang says that if the highest quality work is required, it is necessary to use imported inks.

The presses are specified with web-guiding systems from Italian company RE, Japanese-supplied tension control systems, and a video inspection system supplied by US company TruColor.

Heli Paper produces a wide range of labels and packaging on its Kinoflex presses, including lids for noodle pots, sachets for wipes, and cartons and labels for red and white wine produced in China. As well as selling to Chinese customers, the company sells to agents who source products for Western companies.

Mr Ji says it is not easy to find skilled operators for the



Mr Ji Yu Lu founded Heli Paper and Printing Co five years ago

flexo presses, and he must train them himself. A skilled flexo press operator can expect wages of up to \$300/month, while in places like Shanghai and Guangzhou wages can go as high as \$1,000/month.

When Ji Yu Lu bought the Kinoflex machines, the operators received five days training at Qingzhou. 'Aftersales service is important and it has been good,' said Mr Ji.

Flexo plates are bought from an outside plate maker, and are good quality, according to Mr Ji.

Riding on the back of the growth in labels and packaging in China, Mr Ji is optimistic about the future: 'Business is good, and we will expand further.'



*GiDue Managing director
Federico d'Annunzio*

GiDue unveils Xpannd press in Italy

The launch of GiDue's Xpannd offset press was held alongside the company's exhibits at Converflex Milan. **James Quirk** reports

Over 200 visitors, including suppliers, end users and the media, were hosted at the GiDue showroom in Turate, Italy, where the launch and demonstrations of the new Xpannd offset press ran concurrently with the company's exhibits at Converflex Milan.

Managing director Federico d'Annunzio demonstrated the 370mm (14.5") wide, eight color version of the new servo driven Xpannd. The press, configured with two UV flexo, four UV offset and two UV flexo printing units, was complimented by a new, pneumatically operated slide-in slide-out cassette system on guides rails that makes changing the printing heads a simple operation.

The press featured the new Intelligent Register system from GiDue for automatic register of the printing units and PC press interface for interactive print management and job tracking.

Federico d'Annunzio explained: 'The press is designed for frequent job changes and short runs. With the significantly lower costs for plate origination offered by the offset process, considerable savings for printers can be realized in this area alone. Further significant savings can be achieved because the press is optimized to idle down to 12 m/min (40fpm) during job set-up to limit waste. The Xpannd makes life easy for the printer, whether skilled or unskilled, because all job and printing parameters on the press, including ink wash-up and ink/water dampening on the offset print units, are automatically controlled. We already have one press in the field printing high quality process and vignettes for the wine and olive oil industries where the press operator has no previous experience of label printing at all.'

Xpannd is also available in 430mm (17") and 530mm (21") widths with a wide range of converting options and can be specified to include any combination of flexo offset and screen printing processes. A further advantage of the Xpannd UV offset process is improved ink lay-down for high density print coverage at speeds up to 150m/min (490fpm)

At its Converflex stand, GiDue demonstrated its 430mm wide, eight color i-Combat UV flexo press, which prints on a range of substrates including flexible packaging and unsupported films. The press also featured servo technology and 'intelligent' job and print operating parameters.

'Intelligent press operation is truly the revolution in our industry,' concluded d'Annunzio. 'Servo assistance is important for consistent results, but it is an instrument. Intelligence is the drive of our new vision, which provides improved efficiencies in print, new market penetration and increased profit margins for printers.' ■

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LabelJump moves to film with Nilpeter's FA-4

Italian printer LabelJump is delighted with its new FA-4 press from Nilpeter. **James Quirk** reports from the company's open house

Since Labelexpo Brussels 2005, Nilpeter has seen a resurgence in presses sold into the Italian market. The average of 50 presses per year sold into Italy by manufacturers like Nilpeter, GiDue, and MPS was down to 35 two years ago. But since June last year Nilpeter press sales in Italy have doubled.

The FA-4 modular UV flexo machine has contributed to this increase, with 35-40 sold since its introduction in Brussels last year. Italian printer LabelJump, based just outside Milan, bought one of the presses three months after the show.

The press was first made by Nilpeter in December 2004, and underwent eight months rigorous testing before its introduction at Labelexpo. It is a 16 inch film press, capable of printing with hot foil, cold foil, screen and gravure in combination with flexo. Its software and electronics are the standard Nilpeter platform, and the FA-Line has the same controls, allowing uniformity for customers.

'We wanted to buy a press to help us enter into film production,' says Paola Toffolo, joint owner of LabelJump. 'We feel that this is the way the market is going. The press has only been with us for less than two weeks, but we are very happy with the initial results. It is easy to manage and very practical.'

LabelJump was founded in 1998 by Toffolo and Gianfranco

Scaparrotta, and started by producing fabric labels for the Italian market. They moved into self-adhesive labels six months later, but the new emphasis is now in film, with 70 per cent of the company's production in labeling detergents.

The press's compressing system is aiding this transition. Detergent labels often contain complicated die shapes, so there can be turbulence during rewinding. The FA-4 increases the usual converting speed of 40-45 meters per minute by 30-40 per cent.

Such has been the increase in sales that delivery time has increased: 'Three to four months was the normal delivery time for Nilpeter in Italy,' says Angelo Tribocco of Polipress International, the Italy-based independent agent of Nilpeter. 'But now, because we have so many more orders, it can take up to six months.'

The success of the press has delighted Tribocco. He accredits the recent increase in sales in the Italian market to a trend shift in Italian printing. 'Italy was traditionally a letterpress market. Many companies bought 7 inch letterpresses in the 1980s, but these machines are now 20-25 years old and companies are looking to purchase new machines. UV flexo is now the trend, and increasingly wider-web.' ■

Windles expands into labels

UK greeting cards printer Windles is to extend its service into the packaging and labels markets with the installation of a bespoke machine from Heidelberg

Sales and marketing director Paul Stirland says: 'We have recognized that with the new press with its enlarged impression cylinders after the perfecting unit we can handle a much wider range of stock. It runs with dedicated UV inks. That, combined with the Suprasetter thermal CtP system and ImageControl spectrophotometer which are all digitally linked up, means we have closed loop color that will give these markets the assurance they need that their work is consistently good throughout a run and from job to job. In a brand conscious market that matters.'

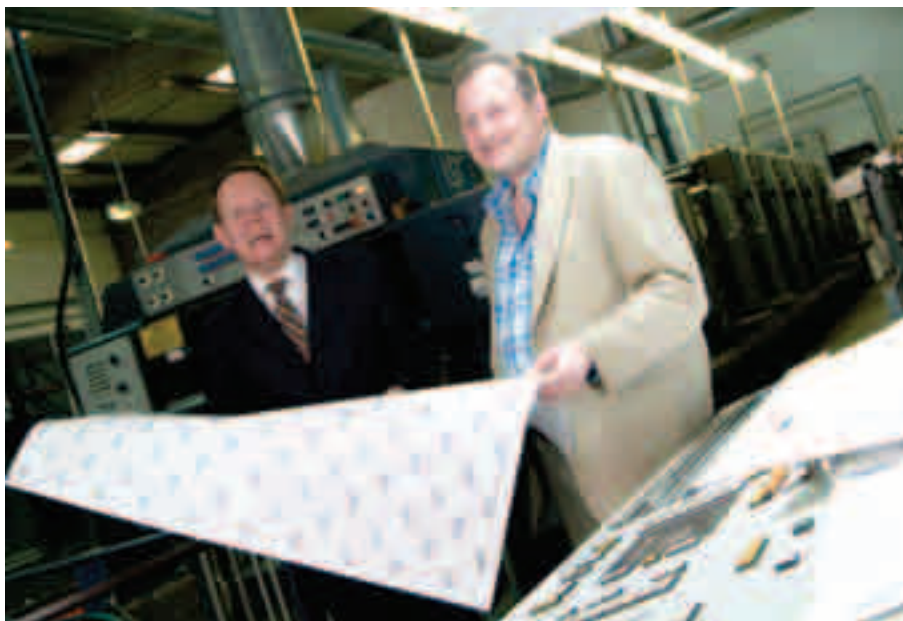
'As a greetings card producer we already handle complex sheet layouts and our finishing is extremely comprehensive with cutting, creasing, folding, die-cutting, embossing and hot foil stamping. The control and speed of turnaround we can offer the packaging and labels markets will make us an attractive option.'

The new press is in effect a combined SM102/CD102 perfecter with the machine designation Speedmaster SPC 102-7PLX.

It is a seven unit (6:1 perfecting) B1 press with a coater and extended delivery. The closed loop capability means that the company can work to pre-set colour standards and know that results will remain consistent even with operator, paper or ink changes.

Even more far-reaching, Windles has developed a hybrid press system called 'foiltone or liqui-foil' which means it can literally print silver foil both as solids and halftones and create a range of special effects with foil. Foiling can now be used in combination with litho printing to give unusual and attractive results and without the cost of dies.

Its comprehensive finishing is regarded as a major sales tool and often Windles is called upon and consulted with reference to design possibilities at concept stage. ■



(Left-right) Bruce Podmore, md, and Paul Stirland, sales and marketing director at Windles

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Kocher + Beck breaks new ground

Kocher + Beck's new facility is testament to its success in helping to convert the US market from conventional cutting cylinders to magnetic technology. **Katy Wight** reports

Kocher + Beck, one of Europe's leading die manufacturers, recently reinforced its footprint in the US market at a ground-breaking ceremony to celebrate the opening of a new facility. Kocher + Beck launched its US subsidiary in 1999, in Shawnee, near Kansas City, but has rapidly outgrown its original plant. The company's new purpose-built facility in Lenexa, Kansas, is more than double the size, with office and warehouse space of over 30,000 square feet. Built on a 3.25-acre plot, the company will have

the option to double the production area again in the future if its current growth rate persists.

Kocher + Beck manufactures flexible magnetic dies and custom cutting solutions in Lenexa and imports the rest of the Kocher + Beck product line from Germany. This purpose-built facility was designed to enhance workflow and it has the capacity to manufacture approximately 200 dies per day, with the potential to expand to 400 per day in the future. The dies are sold predominantly throughout North America, but Central

Kocher + Beck is able to provide dies to German quality standards that are not available domestically in the USA. The new plant has all of the latest manufacturing equipment and all dies are machine-sharpened”

and South America are becoming increasingly important markets.

‘The flexible business in the US has grown between 30-50 per cent year-on-year since we started out in the market,’ says Frank Hasselberg, Kocher + Beck USA. ‘We’re making this investment because we still see a huge amount of potential for flexible dies in the US market. It’s still dependent on traditional solid dies to a large extent, but that is steadily changing.

‘There are big US-based companies that are making overseas acquisitions and see the advantages of flexible dies, and also more and more European companies are establishing plants in North America and transferring the technology that they already use. In addition, the US market has traditionally not converted as many firms as in Europe, but now the market is starting to use more and more new materials and our dies are especially designed for these applications.’

International standards

Martin Stierle, global sales director, claims that Kocher + Beck is able to provide dies to German quality standards that are not available domestically in the USA. The new plant has all of the latest manufacturing equipment and all dies are machine-sharpened.

‘We have concentrated on eliminating as much manual labor as possible, which means that quality is consistent,’ says Hasselberg. ‘We combine the latest computers and software with the latest machinery. You just determine the cutting angle



The ground breaking ceremony in Lenexa, Kansas

and the equipment ensures it is maintained through the whole die with high tolerance.’

German quality and equipment isn’t the only legacy from the company’s European origins. Kocher + Beck has just recruited an international operations manager, with experience working with K+B in Germany, to ensure that the company’s organization, quality and production is standardized in all plants throughout Germany, the UK and USA. The Lenexa plant currently has 40 employees, but that total has been growing steadily since the US subsidiary opened, and employees are encouraged to experience working in other plants around the world.

‘We always have employees going back and forth between the plants,’ says Hasselberg, who moved from Germany seven years ago. ‘We are often sending people from the US to Germany for training. I believe this makes all the difference to our operations so that all of the facilities around the world are the same standard and we are all on the same page.’

Kocher + Beck is establishing another two subsidiaries this year in different regions of the world, and Kocher + Beck USA is increasingly servicing Central and South America from the states. Business in South America has been growing steadily, and has been boosted by involvement in the Latin America Label Summits in Mexico and Brazil, but Hasselberg believes they still have work to do in the US.

‘There is still so much potential for us in the US market,’ he says. ‘Our aim is to gain more market share and become one of the industry leaders here, as we are in Europe.’ ■

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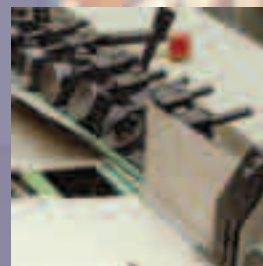
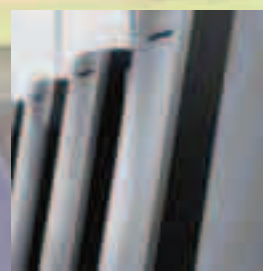
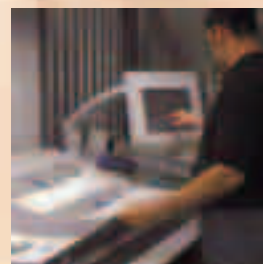
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DuPont extends Cromalin range

DuPont has extended the range of its digital proofing options with the introduction of two digital ink jet Cromalin proofers.

Barry Hunt reports

DuPont Color Communication has added two ink jet proofing systems for digitized contract proofs and imposition: the Cromalin blue and Cromalin Largo, writes Barry Hunt. They supplement the existing b-series and AQ series of proofers to give a wider permutation of investment costs, output sizes and quality standards. Both the blue and Largo proofers employ the latest drop-on-demand (DoD) ink jet printheads for fast output speeds. DuPont has also enhanced the performance of its proprietary Cromanet RIP (based on PostScript 3), as well as color management software. These allow the full integration of DuPont proofers into a digitized pre-press network - which could also support DuPont's Cyrel FAST flexo platemaking system - as increasingly adopted by label converters.

The Cromalin blue proofer comes in B3 and B2 sizes. European prices are €26,224 or £17,600 for the B3 version and €29,165 (£19,574) for the B2 version. Each model meets a demand for fast, yet affordable contract proofing in markets where repeatable quality is paramount and non negotiable.

The DoD print heads enable an optical resolution of 1,500 dpi at a speed of twelve minutes for B2 format proofs, or seven minutes for B3 size. This is about three times faster than DuPont's range of AQ proofers based on continuous flow printheads. The enhanced Cromanet color management software is supported by iCertification, DuPont's established proprietary quality control method to ensure consistent proofs remotely across multiple production sites. External drum imaging, rather than x-y plotting, is said to deliver better proof-to-proof and machine-to-machine accuracy and repeatability than standard desktop printers adapted for proofing.

Like the Cromalin b-series, the blue series boasts an integral calibration facility designed to ensure consistent output quality should a change occur in environmental operating conditions. An on-line Gretag spectrophotometer automatically measures a pre-printed color chart containing 328 color patches, including



The inkjet Cromalin Largo proofer

those that can establish an accurate grey balance, to reduce calibration time. The data is fed to the Cromanet proof server, allowing the calibration module to verify that the printer is operating at a consistent and known level of performance.

The second series of contract and imposition proofers, the Cromalin Largo, specifically meets the demand for high resolution proofing at an affordable operating cost for everyone in the graphics supply chain. Described as a 'plug-and-play' proofer, it is designed to improve approval cycles, turnaround times and proof-to-press accuracy using the latest DoD technology.

The Largo uses roll-fed proofing substrates and comes in two sizes: a 24 inch width (609mm) model for four-up proofing and a second with a 44-inch width (1,117mm) for scatter proofing a group of images, as well as eight-up signatures or wide-format graphics for posters, exhibition displays and mock-up jobs. Again, they are offered with DuPont's Cromanet RIP and color management software to allow a closed loop color calibration process for matching virtually any proofing or press conditions. ■

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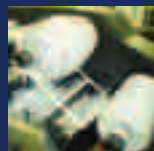
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Digital update



Mike Fairley reports from a Workshop which looked into the latest developments in digital printing and RFID

Topics at this year's Digital Label and Tag Printing Workshop – part of the 29th Global Ink Jet & Thermal Printing Conference held in Amsterdam – included an update on digital label printing, new developments in digital print media, RFID in labels and ink jet applications in the label industry.

In opening the Workshop sessions, Mike Fairley, director of strategic development for the Labels Group, Tarsus Exhibitions and Publishing, briefly reviewed the background to the digital printing of labels using monochrome printing in the 1980s up to the launch of digital color label presses in the mid 1990s.

Early success with digital color label printing was limited he explained, and had only grown to a total of 185 presses installed by the end of 2005, with both converters and end users still cautious about greater use of digital printing. However, since the launch of second generation digital color presses in early 2003 (e.g. the HP Indigo Series 2 ws4000/ws4050 machines) growth of digital label printing has escalated rapidly.

'Indeed', said Mike Fairley, '2005 proved to be a milestone year for digital label printing with some 145 new generation digital label presses being installed – more in one year than in the first five years. At this level, it means that some 10 per cent of all new narrow-web label press installations in 2005 were digital. In terms of volumes and values, this equated to over 4 billion label being printed digitally in 2005, with an estimated label sales value being in excess of \$250 million. This figure is expected to rise to over 500 million over the next couple of years.'

'Today, digital label printing has become a mainstream label printing technology accepted by thousands of end-user customers in all kinds of applications and in a wide range of run lengths. Key end-user markets now include pharmaceuticals, vitamins, wines and beverages, food, health and hygiene, paints, inks and chemicals.'

'It seems certain,' added Fairley 'that digital color label printing will play a key role in the future of the label industry,

complementing but not superseding other printing processes – and certainly not replacing them.'

The second presenter, Sander de Jong, market development & technical service manager at FLEXcon Europe, initially reviewed the key growth markets for pressure-sensitive labels that contain variable information, the leading sectors being electrical, security, pharmaceutical, industrial and automotive applications.

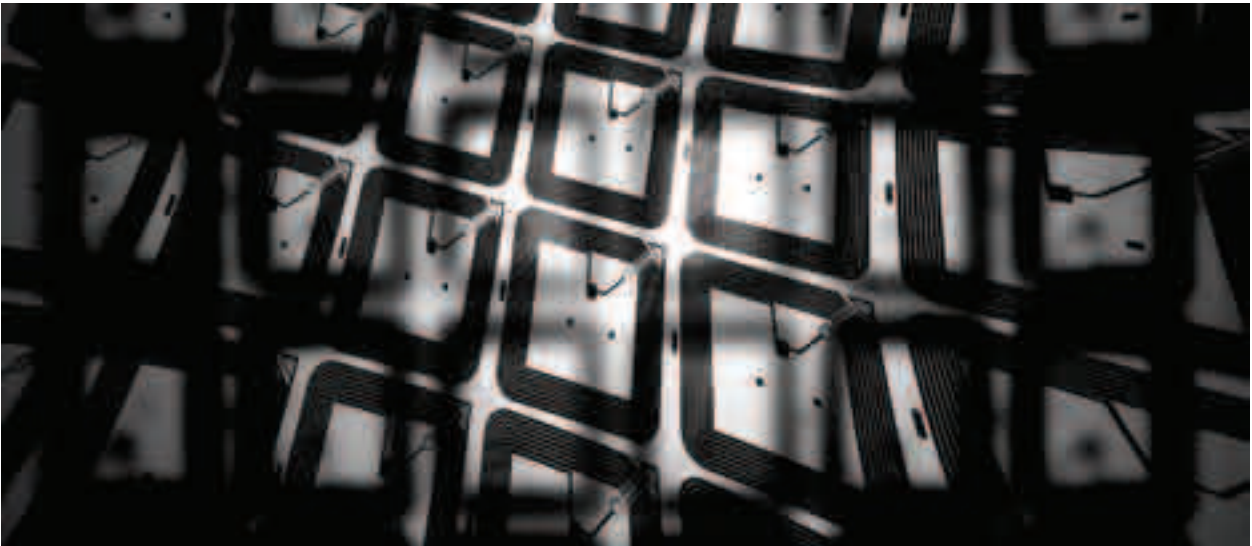
Following this introduction he looked at the requirements and specifications for each of the layers that make up a VIP performance substrate: topcoat, film, adhesive and liner. For the top coating this included ink anchorage, durability and abrasion resistance, matte and gloss finishes, coatings, corona treatment and varnishes. 'Design considerations for films' explained Mr de Jong 'were surface smoothness, thermal stability, thickness and solvent resistance, while end-user performance considerations were chemical resistance, UV and IR resistance and temperature resistance.'

'In terms of adhesives, these needed to have resistance to ooze, thermal stability and solvent resistance, with end-users looking for long-term stability, chemical and UV/IR resistance, while release liners needed moisture resistance, heat-resistance, friction and anti-static properties.'

Sander de Jong then went on to review market trends in variable information printable materials for the automotive, electronics, healthcare and security markets, as well as current developments in thermal transfer, direct thermal, laser, ink jet and digital printing.

Rather different to the other presentations, Samuli Stromberg, vice-president marketing at UPM Raflatac, RFID Business, looked at RFID in labels – and at different ways of combining visible and electronic information.

To begin his presentation he explained that RFID will 'not replace' bar codes because, in most cases, there was still a need



for visual information. RFID would provide a route to easier automation through bulk identification, usage in dirty or harsh conditions and by being able to read through RF transparent materials. RFID offered extra data security, a very simple user interface and was a dynamic information carrier. However, RFID has to enable a business case to justify the extra cost (when compared to using a bar code).

'RFID is all about variable information,' said Mr Stromberg 'with at least part of the information being visual and variable – printable by direct or thermal transfer, ink jet or digital printing – with the requirement for a total identification solution being application specific.' These applications, in each of which he reviewed the RFID technology standard, label products, business drivers, labeling technology, market potential and market maturity, were the retail supply chain, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), pharmaceutical, library, fashion/apparel and airlines.

In the pharmaceutical sector for example, there was a requirement to look at both wholesale (pallet and case) and resale (individual item) packages, with the FDA developing pedigree regulations. Both UHF and HF technologies are currently being evaluated in the pharma sector, but the sector was still immature and a standardized IT solution and data structure were required (expected in the second half of 2007). Longer term, the RFID market potential in the pharma sector offered high growth and high tag volumes.

'In the airline sector,' said Mr Stromberg 'RFID will improve customer service in terms of new security requirements and reductions in mishandled baggage. IATA had now standardized on UHF technology and this sector could expect high volume growth over the coming years, with RFID incorporated into thermal luggage tags.'

The final presentation at the Digital Label and Tag Printing Workshop was by Philipp Frommenwiler of GRE Engineering Products, who reviewed ink jet applications in the label industry in terms of its use on prime labels, secondary labels and speciality labels. 'The application of digital ink jet into the primary label market' he explained 'was only just beginning, while in the secondary label market there were many solutions already available for short, medium and long-run application. In the speciality markets penetration has started with RFID and special ink jet solutions.

“Ink jet technologies are best suited to the secondary label market where the requirements can best match digital ink jet capabilities and can provide production and cost advantages to label converters and end-users”

'Today,' said Mr Frommenwiler, 'ink jet technologies are best suited to the secondary label market where the requirements can best match digital ink jet capabilities and can provide production and cost advantages to label converters and end-users. Applications for short runs include supply chain demand for multi-site production, multi-languages, private branding, contract manufacturing and packaging, real-time order shipment and make-to-ship manufacturing.

'Color coding applications for short-run ink jet came where there was a demand for highly visible discrimination on secondary packaging, such as shoe and garment sizing, seasonal items, carton shipping destinations, work-in-process and quality control, hardware, electrical products for retail, in-store merchandising and bulk carton packaging, as well as for expiration date codes.

'Other key applications related to product pictures and brand graphics on secondary packaging where high numbers of different products were produced. This could range from electrical components, through plumbing parts and fixtures, to hardware, automotive parts, sporting goods and fashion accessories.'

To conclude Philipp Rommenwiler looked at available ink jet printing equipment that could be used as either a stand-alone machine (such as the VP2020 inkjet label printer) or incorporated as ink-jet heads mounted in-line on a narrow-web press.

The Workshop, which was well-attended, attracted some interesting question and answer sessions with the speakers and was well-received by delegates. ■

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Premium solution for in-mold labeled cups



A patent pending in-mold label technology offers prime graphics and surface quality to premium labeled EPS cups and containers. **Mike Fairley** reports

An innovative new patent pending in-mold label technology that offers prime graphics and surface quality to provide premium labeled EPS cups and containers was launched in London at the end of March. Combining unsurpassed cup insulation for hot and cold beverages, noodles and soups, ice cream and primary portion packing with photographic quality graphics, the new NOVA Innovene IMAGE technology will enable brand owners to differentiate their cup products from the traditional printed paper cups in the market today, including the possibility of 360° decoration applications.

Working with Autonational B.V., who specialize in thin wall cup production and in-mold labeling production machines – which Nova will market as part of their new patented process – small beads of already expanded polystyrene are injected under pressure into each mold (could be up to 16 at a time) which each contain a quality printed label inserted from a cassette. Steam then fuses the beads and bonds the label to the molded EPS cup. Cassettes can be quickly changed to start labeling a new product line with a new label design.

Initially the process is using polypropylene labels, but other filmic label substrates can be used, while Nova itself is developing a polystyrene label film for use with the EPS cups. It is anticipated the first EPS converter in Europe to adopt the process, which can be fully automated, will be announced shortly, so enabling them to participate in the food packaging sector. The in-mold labeled expanded polystyrene cups are also more durable than

current cup products, and are recyclable.

At the consumer level the IMAGE technology process is claimed to provide improved insulation and hence enhanced handling safety when eating or drinking hot products at optimum temperatures. The cups are more comfortable to hold

when hot – better than paper – with the label also adding strength and stiffness. Currently most existing cups on the market are in white only and not considered to have brand quality decoration.

Also launched by NOVA Innovene was DYLARK FG 2500, a high heat copolymer resin for microwavable food packaging applications and ideally suited for producing containers for restaurant takeout, food serviceware and freezer to microwave meals, together with ZYLAR EX 720 resins offering unmatched low-temperature toughness and excellent clarity for applications such as refrigerated or frozen food packaging, fresh fruit and produce containers, salad bowls and lids, cold beverage containers, deli trays and frozen dessert packages.

Nova Innovene, a 50/50 joint venture between Nova Chemicals and INEOS, is headquartered in Fribourg, Switzerland, and has an annual turnover of €1 billion. They are the European leader in styrenic polymers used as packaging materials, household appliances, cups, bowls and trays, clamshell containers and protective packaging for shipping electronics and other fragile goods and are aiming to double their turnover by 2008. Internet address is www.nova-innovene.com ■

“The process is using PP labels, but other filmic label substrates can be used, while Nova itself is developing a polystyrene label film for use with the EPS cups”



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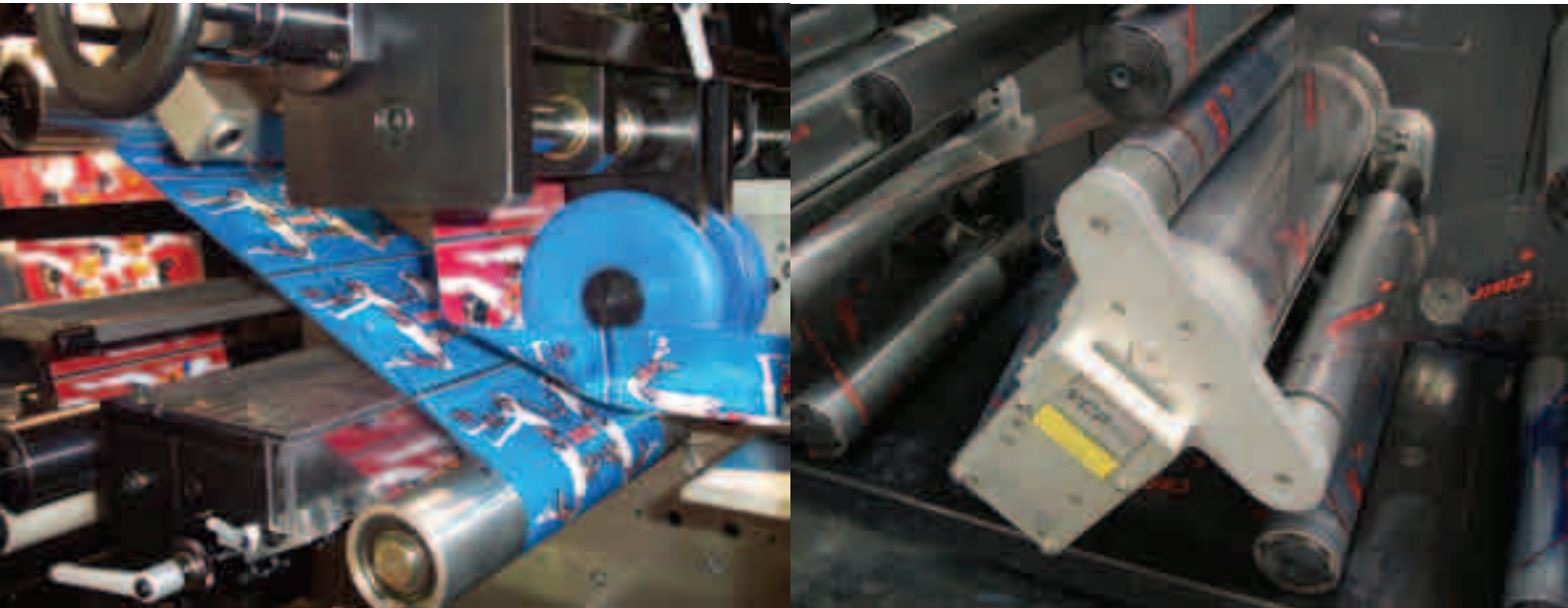
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(Left) A Ko-Pack 12-colour Euroflex 400 UV flexo press printing both sides of the web - up to 400mm in width - prior to slitting and forming the sleeves using an optional in-line forming unit. (Right) A VCP Film UV curing module from GEW, showing three chill rollers integrated into the lamp head, although it is usual to have two rollers.

Facing a film-based flexo future

Changes in the markets for film labels and flexible packaging will give more opportunities for narrow-web converters. **Barry Hunt** examines some of the key technical issues

Most narrow web press manufacturers include at least one multi-substrate press in their respective ranges. In fact, in response to changes in the packaging market, several have introduced a 'mid-web' category of around 20 to 36 inches (500 to 900mm). This adds further credibility to the highly specialized business of producing semi-rigid, film-based products. Nobody should doubt that it is a daunting business, both technically and commercially. It is one that the established wide-web flexo and gravure packaging printers will not relinquish easily, especially since the same changing market conditions have forced some to add down-sized capacity. Nevertheless, a growing trend towards shorter run lengths has opened up this market for those roll-label converters who can capitalize on their flexibility and reputation for innovation.

Most will look to serve the shrink or stretch film sleeves and reel-fed wraparound label sectors. Here, strong global growth reflects several important consumer and demographic trends that have changed the regionally-based promotional market strategies of brand owners. Sleeves are especially identified with carbonated soft drinks and mineral waters in PET bottles, but

“A growing trend towards shorter run lengths has opened up this market for those roll-label converters who can capitalize on their flexibility and reputation for innovation”

the range of applications for both sleeves and wraparounds has grown to cover a diversity of consumer products. End user benefits include scuff-free, 360-degree product decoration, high quality graphics and anti-tampering features. Other fast-growing film products include refillable or single-use pouches, tubes for dispensers, clear patch labels for glass bottles, reel-fed cut-and-stack labels and in-mold labels for injection or blow-molded plastic containers.

But while most multi-substrate presses are designed to handle all types of unsupported films and label laminates (and



carton board in some cases) with equal facility, conventional paper or filmic PS labels still make up the largest percentage of their output. Companies may have their own justifications for this, given the expense of all those extra bells and whistles, even if it is some form of future proofing. Nevertheless, it is easy to see why nobody should recklessly jump into film-based products, as this brief look at materials handling, UV curing methods and web tension control explains.

Understanding the key differences in the properties of PP, PE, PET and PVC grades of packaging films and their specific applications is a good starting point. Converters who already produce filmic labels obviously have less of a problem in this respect. In addition, all the major film manufacturers and suppliers are good sources of information and can usually offer sound technical support. Getting to grips with the complexities that surround issues like seal integrity and barrier properties, especially where food packaging is concerned, is another matter. Here, major issues include ink migration and the effectiveness or otherwise of UV curable inks based on conventional free-radical chemistry, or the more specialized chemistry of slower-curing cationic inks where odor is an issue. Some flexo-printed food packaging may still require either solvent-based or water-based printing methods using hot air dryers.

The latest type of stand-up pouches provide an example of laminate-based barrier packaging, where the end-use application, and whether it involves liquid, dry or powdered ingredients, determine the actual construction. This may involve combining varying weights of films, or coated paper in some cases, with, say, a low-density polyethylene (LDPE) to form the exterior, barrier and/or sealant layer. Combining a silver or white polyester film with an LDPE barrier film is one of many possibilities. The actual choice is down to an end-user's packaging technologist, but the converter needs to deal with such issues as printability and a material's handling characteristics.

UV curing methods

Most multi-substrate production centers around solvent-free UV curing, with UV flexo as the preferred printing process. Reduced dot gain, consistent colors and vibrant solids are among the many benefits of UV curing as a whole, but extra attention is obviously required when printing heat-sensitive films where a cool-running press is desirable. The technology involves many complex variables, including the characteristics of lamps, reflectors and the cooling of lamp housings using regulated air flows combined with recirculated chilled water. To keep stable substrate surface temperatures, some systems circulate de-ionised water through quartz, filter tubes or plates, placed under the lamp and between the substrate.

OPM's upgrade

Setting up a separate subsidiary is one approach to entering the film printing sector, as shown by the OPM Group based in Keighley, West Yorkshire. It entered the market over five years ago by creating OPM Flexible Packaging in separate premises near Bradford. Production began with a nine-unit Nilpeter FA-3300 UV flexo press. An on-line computerized ink matching and supply facility linked to its ink supplier, Intercolor in Essex, was added. In January 2005 around \$1 million was spent on installing a nine-unit FA-3300 S (the current upgraded servo-driven version). Around a year later OPM spent a further \$200,000 on re-fitting the original press (which had helped it win almost 40 international print awards). The upgrade included a new automatic register control and replacing the original UV modules with GEW's VCP Film system.

“Where film is concerned, some managers are wary of the claims made for the so-called ‘cold’ or ‘cool’ curing’ UV systems”

Where film is concerned, some managers are wary of the claims made for the so-called 'cold' or 'cool' curing' UV systems. Most use angled mirrors to reflect the UV energy to the substrate and avoid direct radiation. The unwanted IR component then passes through a curved dichroic mirror for removal by air cooling. As with the use of water-cooled quartz tubes placed in front of the lamp, such methods will reduce heat, but they may need more power to compensate for reduced curing efficiency.

'Cold' curing may be an option on certain presses when it is not feasible to fit water-cooled chill drums, rollers or plates behind the substrate. However, as Clayton Sampson, joint managing director of UV Integration, noted during a recent L & L round-table discussion (Issue 2, pp78-81): 'Heat sinks under the film or chill rollers do a better job of heat reduction. Water also filters out the UVC, which is the wavelength which "closes" a substrate and stops the ink film surface becoming greasy. So you need more UV power to close the surface, which generates more heat.'

Fitting chill rollers or plates at every print unit adds another layer of complexity and extra expense. They also lengthen the web path and make make-readies more wasteful. Nevertheless,



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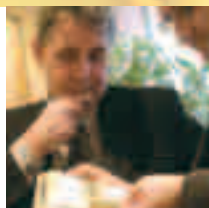


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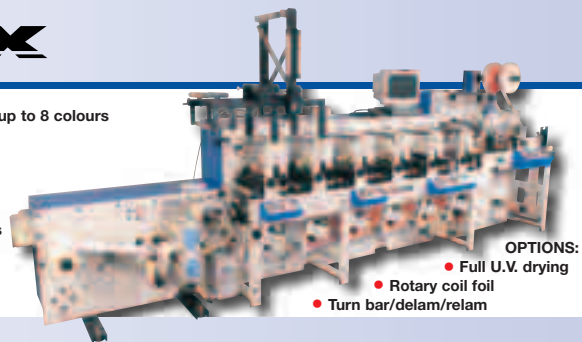
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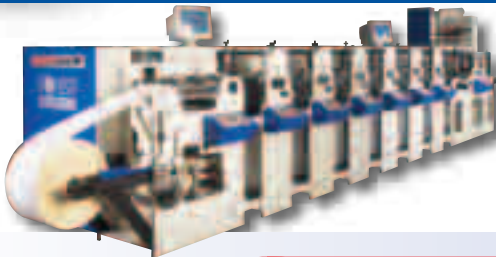
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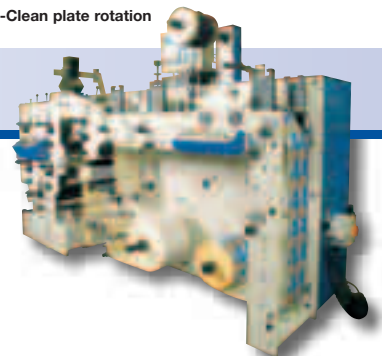
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their usefulness in converting thin films is widely recognized and many multi-substrate presses include them as standard, along with a corona treater to ensure adequate ink adhesion on the film web and a web cleaner fitted after the unwind. Ideally, chill rollers should have a low inertia to keep stretch to a minimum and as near to a stable zero-degree temperature variation as possible. This means the surface temperature remains constant - ideally with some form of temperature control - as the web passes through the press.

According to Torben Rasmussen, Nilpeter's R & D director, chill rollers offer distinct advantages to most, if not all, in-line production. 'They help keep color-to-color register constant when changing production speeds, for example when accelerating from set-up speed to production speed. Today's unsupported films require low web tensions and therefore low temperatures, which is why a chill method is essential.'

Not all multi-substrate presses are fitted with chill rollers, whether for reasons of economic expediency or the design characteristics of the press. They may not be possible at all on certain models intended for upgrading. However, a compromise is possible by fitting those UV systems that incorporate one or more chill rollers. They use water or air-cooled chill rollers in the lamp unit instead of a conventional air-cooled flat heatsink. Several user-plants are known to effectively cure thin films from 15 microns upwards under normal production conditions.

Controlling web tension

Besides heat, all unsupported films will stretch when subjected to uneven web tension. Over the years this has prompted some ingenious combinations of drive roll mechanisms and nip rolls along the length of the press. Their job is to precisely control the mechanical forces that will inherently extend, stretch or pull the web. Tension control begins with the unwinder. Most are usually

Ganket's new markets

When Ganket A/S, a Danish converter, upgraded to servo-driven technology to produce film-based products it installed the first Mark Andy XP5000 UV flexo press in Europe. It joins a LP3000 flexo press installed in 2003. Besides added production capability, the owner Per Andersen expects the servo-driven press to greatly reduce substrate waste between jobs, even when running at speeds of around 200 m/minute. The extra capacity will allow Ganket to move into new markets, including wraparounds for PET bottles using 35-micron PP or BOPP materials. Its main work includes large quantities of coupon labels and prime labels.



(Left-right) In mold labels are one area where there is the potential for narrow and mid-web converters to find a niche

fitted with pivoted sensing rollers that respond to changes in roll diameter, running speed, web acceleration and friction changes in the braking system. Instead of mechanical drives for each axis, many top-end presses now combine electronic servo drives with a suitable web tension monitor to create a tension control system. They are usually located on the unwind, infeed, mid pacing drive, outfeed nip and rewind drive. Servo drives can be digitally fine-tuned to provide precise levels of torque to the web.

A fully-fitted press would have no mechanical drive shafts, gearboxes, clutches and brakes, so creating the 'shaftless' narrow-web press. Sequentially-operated drives controlled from a single point should therefore give a smoother and faster operation compared with a mechanical approach. This, plus the increase in film-based applications and more affordable units, has given the technology wider acceptance, as Torben Rasmussen confirms: 'Beside their critical role in ensuring correct web tension control, servo drives also offer many ways to reduce job changeover times, as well as cut down on material



A selection of flexible packaging products converted at OPM: flowraps, pouches and film labels

waste. Of course, besides printing film materials, these features offer similar advantages to converters when producing conventional PS labelstocks.'

Federico d'Annunzio, managing director of GiDue, associates the servo concept with the idea of an 'intelligent' platform based on linking press operating parameters to a digital storage and operating data retrieval system. Here, every press variable is under control and not left to the choice of the operator: 'The press is intelligent to the level of helping the operator not to make mistakes and to record good performance and reproduce accepted operating parameters for following repeat orders. In this case the operator becomes a press supervisor rather than a press operator.' The operator interface, he adds, should be seen as a modular, on-press MIS that is linked to the company's own MIS.

Commercial partnerships

There is a synergy between such an approach and the lateral way of thinking required for any move into a niche market. This may include partnerships. For whatever action they may take, most flexible packaging printers will still be geared solely to handling large volume orders. With end-users undertaking more test marketing and regional promotional campaigns, many will be interested in outsourcing their shorter-run work to a competent narrow-web converter. It is already happening, based on informal, non-competitive alliances.

One publicized example is that of the Glenroy Corporation, a flexible packaging printer and film manufacturer from Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. Its Narrow Web Printer Program

“Whatever action they may take, most flexible packaging printers will still be geared solely to handling large volume orders”

seeks to identify likely subcontracting partners to handle the uneconomic shorter-run jobs. Glenroy supplies them with the necessary films and laminates. One advantage of this method is that small converters can develop and produce many different styles of packaging, which increases their opportunities and keeps Glenroy competitive. The scheme also includes the necessary ink migration and barrier testing programs as part of the company's multi-layer packaging service for clients.

In a wider sense, flexible packaging growth complements the trend towards shorter global supply chains, thereby increasing the opportunities for suitably equipped label converters. This may encourage more converters and printers to form national or international partnerships. It also offers a life-line to smaller and medium-sized companies who cannot emulate the large converting groups by acquiring label printers in other regions. Instead, they can develop niche markets, perhaps based on film, and play a part in the continuing globalization of end-users' needs. ■

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Paper passion

James Quirk reports from the 7th international conference held by Brigl & Bergmeister in Austria

The 7th international conference from paper label manufacturer Brigl & Bergmeister, entitled 'A Passion for Labels', took place in the Austrian alpine town of Bad Gastein. The conference organized by Brigl & Bergmeister is held every 2.5 years and is a forum for the promotion of paper labels.

Guest speakers included some of the most sought-after and cutting-edge thinkers in industry and packaging design. The keynote speech was made by Dr Gertrude Eder of Brigl & Bergmeister, who highlighted the importance of passion as a tool in the workplace. 'It is important to be proud of our product,' she said, 'and to do our jobs with enjoyment and passion.'

The theme of passion continued throughout the conference. Delegates were treated to Mexican food on the first night, while entertainment was provided by an opera singer and a Flamenco band.

The beverages industry was represented by Kevin Baker of Candean, who in his presentation pointed out that only one third of the incredible quantity of 4,710 billion liters of beverages consumed every year by the world's population is packaged. The necessity for paper labels to present their competitive strengths relative to plastic was emphasized in presentations by Rein Middelburg of Papierplus and Simon King of PCI. A panel discussion considered the unused potential of wet glue labels and the power of innovation.

The highlight of an excellent conference program was Dr Kjell Nordström from the Stockholm School of Economics. Chosen by Thinkers50 in 2005 as one of the 10 most influential thinkers in the field of business, he is the author of best-selling books *Karaoke Capitalism* and *Funky Business*. His presentations have been described in the past as 'Kjell in concert', and his unconventional and energetic style had delegates on their feet at the end of a superb speech. 'For most companies this new reality [of democratic market economy] means that they are both under siege by increasingly powerful customers,' he said, 'and held hostage by competent individuals who are free to know, go, do, and be.'

'To thrive,' he continued, 'organizations need to take on the simultaneous task of taming talent and creating new customers.'

The conference would not have been complete without practitioners and their contributions. Examples of how to successfully drive businesses forward with passion for labels were given by Bengt Strand of Strand Grafiska in Malmö, Sweden, and Dr Michael Wareka of Marzek Etiketten in Traiskirchen, Austria. From the consumers' side, Stefan Vanderlinden of InBev in Leuven, Belgium, the largest beer group in the world, gave a presentation of the requirements of the beverage industry.

The next conference is due to be held in autumn 2008. ■



Tackling dust and static contamination

Dust and static contamination is not a glamorous subject but one the label industry needs to take more seriously. **James Quirk** reports on one label printer's solution

Dust, static and other contaminants can severely affect label web production by increasing waste and lowering end of line yields. Ultimately, this can affect profitability, so what can be done to prevent the problem?

There are a number of causes of surface contamination, but the three key factors are machines, people and the material being processed. In-line slitters create slivers and dust particles; operators contaminate through skin flakes, hairs and clothing fibers; while web materials and sheets generate static which attracts dust particles as they are unwound or separated.

Contact cleaning solutions are certainly becoming more popular. Contact cleaners can ensure a clean processing surface which can reduce hickies/repeaters and eliminate thin line streaking to improve print quality. They can also reduce wear and premature failure to shims and embossing plates, thereby reducing line downtime.

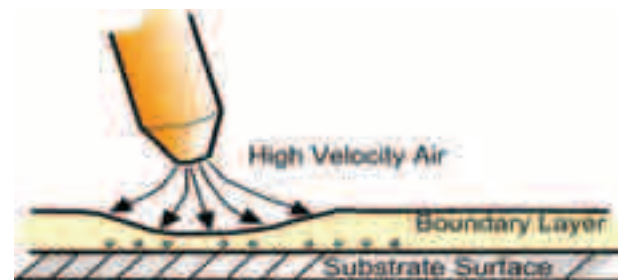
Possibly the best overall solution is a two-step contamination removal process. This uses a special elastomer roller to remove contaminants from the labels down to one micron in size. As there is direct contact with the material, it breaks through the boundary layer which is generated by the moving web (see diagram). The contaminants are transferred on to a roll of adhesive film for disposal. The second stage involves passing the labels through anti-static bars to avoid re-contamination. This equipment can easily be installed 'in-line' and the replacement of consumables is quick and easy.

Other methods, for example air jets/blowers to brushes with vacuum and anti-static bars, are sometimes used, but, according to John Penman, managing director of Microclean Technologies, they have inherent problems: 'A blower and vacuum method cannot break through the boundary layer. Brush-based solutions are low cost but will not remove all particles. There is a risk of re-contamination and there is abrasive surface contact which could damage the web surface.'

One company which made the move from a vacuum and brush system to a contact cleaning solution was New York-based TLF Graphics. The company has established a reputation for high-quality, pressure-sensitive labels, labeling systems, and screen printed products over its 25 years in business. It prints on a variety of substrates, including films, foils, papers, and adhesive and non-adhesive materials, using digital, flexography, hot stamp, screen and offset printing. Wine labels are one important market.

TLF Graphics had been using a vacuum and brush web cleaning and static control system, but it was not performing.

Dave Manley, production manager at TLF, explained: 'We were faced with the inability to get contaminants off the material.' Therefore, in 2005 the company started evaluating alternative systems. It chose a solution offered by Microclean Technologies and its US partner Static Clean International. Microclean supplied a contact cleaning unit and Static Clean anti-static bars. TLF saw an immediate improvement. 'On one particular job, we've seen a 25-30 per cent decrease in waste,' said Manley. 'We see a lot more quality instead of the customer picking through the product and rejecting it due to dust and other contaminants in the material. Overall, we have seen a reduction in the amount of waste across the board in all material we run because of this solution.' ■



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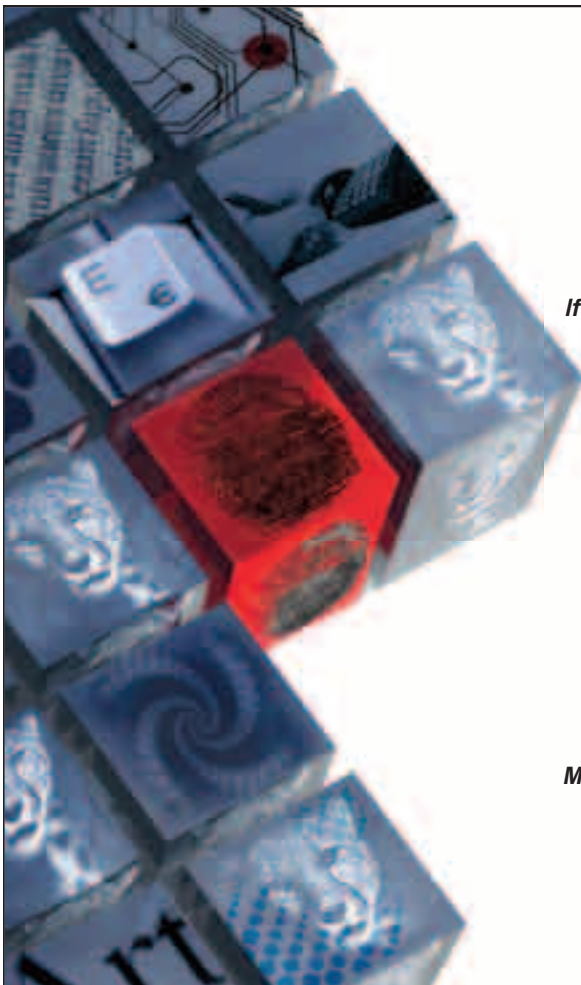
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Degraf announces R&D plans

James Quirk reports on the plans of Degraf to raise its profile as a manufacturer of flexo plate production systems

The spectacular Castelbrando, one of the largest and most ancient castles in Europe and just ten per cent smaller than St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, was the setting for the recent press conference held by Italian pre-press specialist Degraf.

Degraf is a group of multinational companies headed by the parent company Degraf S.p.A, based in Lacchiarella, just outside Milan. It has been operating in the graphic arts sector for over thirty years, especially in the design and production of equipment for the production of flexographic printing plates.

Degraf distributes its products through major plate manufacturers, such as Dupont, Flint Group, Kodak, MacDermid, Asahi and Toray. The company does not deal directly with end-users, which might explain why Degraf is not the household name you'd expect, given that it has more than 2,000 units installed worldwide (one in every country in the world).

Around 30 journalists from all over the world gathered at the castle, situated in the Venice province, to hear Degraf's representatives speak about the company and its strategies.



The emphasis was on a continuation of its distribution policy, strengthening relationships with its OEMs and focusing more on innovation and R&D.

Jean-Pierre Ferrante, member of the board of directors of Degraf, opened the conference with an introduction to flexo, describing its rapid growth in the packaging sector and how it's taking market share from offset and gravure. 'Sixty per cent of what's in your fridge is printed by flexo,' he said.

Jacques Dutard, key accounts sales manager, then presented a company profile and introduced the journalists to some of Degraf's pre-press solutions: the 'Concept' series of plate manufacturing machines; the letterpress flowline processor, and a flexo water washable unit.

Finally, CEO Riccardo de Caria talked about some of Degraf's future developments, including a new batch processor; a new sleeve line; and a completely automatic plate production unit, which includes inline exposure, processor, dryers and light finisher. The unit will be able to produce 5-6 plates per hour.

'Our aim is not just to have a company that makes money,' said de Caria. 'We want to put that money back into the technology.'

De Caria also explained Degraf's philosophy of servicing the company's machines for free. 'When we sell a machine, it is still ours,' he said. 'If something goes wrong, we will send a technician anywhere in the world to fix it. We solve 90 per cent of problems within 48 hours.'

The conference also included a visit to NuMaber, a customer of Degraf, to demonstrate the company's machines at work. A special medieval dinner rounded off the event, with a band and a fire-eating court jester providing the entertainment. ■

(Left-right) Jacques Dutard and Jean-Pierre Ferrante of Degraf, Livio Simonato of NuMaber



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Smart label news

SmartCode Corp. announces world's first 5 cent RFID tag

SmartCode Corp., manufacturer of low cost, high performance RFID hardware solutions, announced at the 2006 RFID Journal Live conference that it will offer the world's first 5 cent RFID tags. SmartCode claims to be the first ever company in the world to reach the 5 cent tag, ahead of any other company in the field. Since the formation of the EPC standard in 1999, the target tag price for a sustainable, ROI driven RFID market was greatly depended on the availability of the 5 cent RFID tags.

Avery Dennison RFID partners with OTA Training

Avery Dennison RFID, a business unit of Avery Dennison Corporation, has announced that the company is sponsoring US\$500 RFID training scholarships to help mandated end users quickly and effectively implement RFID within their supply chain.

Avery Dennison RFID has partnered with OTA Training, a leading vendor-neutral RFID industry educator, to help end-users gain the confidence and technical expertise they need to successfully implement RFID, and if desired, move toward CompTIA RFID+ certification. The training will be held at Avery Dennison RFID Atlanta Technical Center (ATC).

Timestrips to feature on Nestlé's Maggi brand packaging

Food giant Nestlé has confirmed it will be incorporating three-day Timestrip smart labels into its standard packaging for Maggi ready-to-use sauces, a major international brand. Nestlé's FoodServices UK division launched a full-scale commercial trial with the Timestrip labels at the end of last year and the technology has been extremely well-received.

Domino acquires Enterprise Information

Domino Printing Sciences plc has announced the acquisition of Enterprise Information Systems, Inc (EIS), specialists in automatic identification and data capture systems integration. Specializing in the deployment of RFID and the integration of printer and reader technologies to provide traceability solutions throughout the supply chain, US-based EIS will be incorporated into Domino's Integrated Solution Group, where it will add considerable strength to Domino's global offering and delivery of integration capabilities.

Financing and new headquarters for TAGSYS

TAGSYS, a specialist in item-level RFID infrastructure, has announced the completion of a \$35 million round of financing and will relocate its global headquarters to Cambridge, Massachusetts. The company's current headquarters is located in Marseille, France.

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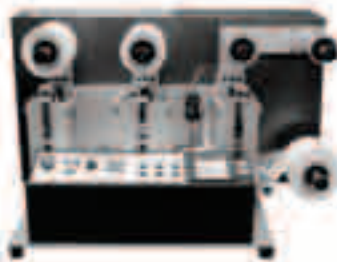


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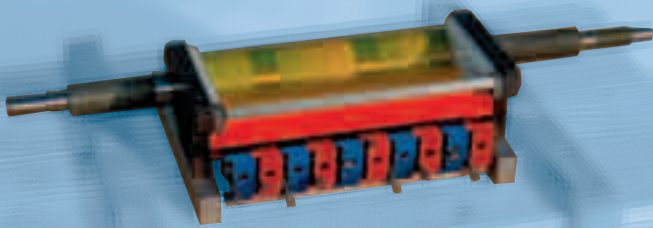
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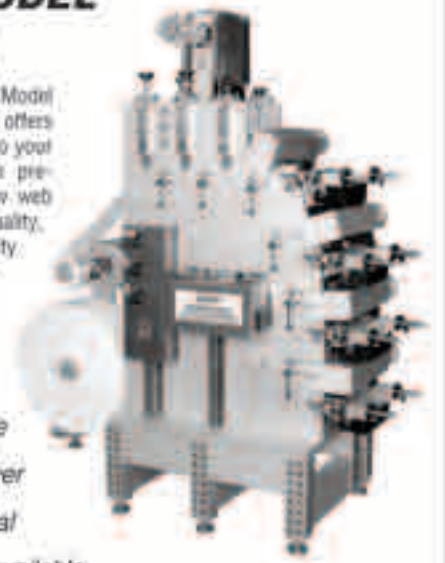


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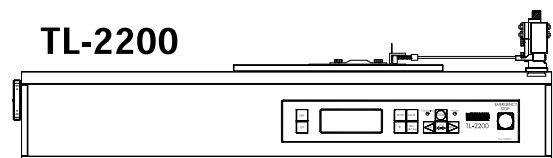
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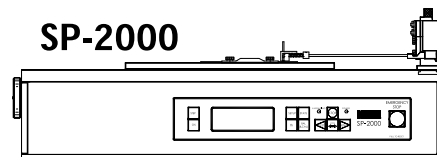
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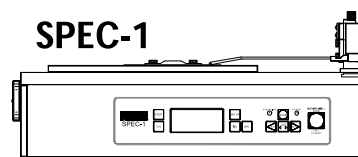
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Smartlabel News

Anti-counterfeit system from CIS

Complete Inspection Systems, Inc. (CIS) has introduced a new anti-counterfeit system for product tracking and authentication, in conjunction with Adhesives Research, Inc.

ARmark Covert Markers are a new tool to aid in supply chain control, product surety and risk mitigation for industries faced with global counterfeiting. The covert markers, which can be combined with custom-developed delivery systems, offer infinite possibilities for unique coding (shapes, numbers, patterns, text, bar codes, logos), and they are designed to be nearly impossible to replicate or reverse engineer.

Printable electronics

iTi, Xaar and Cima NanoTech are introducing a turnkey solution for silver nanoparticle printing for the electronics industry. The collaboration between the three companies has resulted in an inkjet deposition system which is ideal for the development of new production processes for products such as flat panel displays, RFID tags, PCBs, fuel cells and electronic components.

The solution combines Xaar's OmniDot piezoelectric inkjet technology with iTi's XY Materials Deposition System (XYMDS), a precision fabrication tool for digitally printed electronics, and Cima NanoTech's proprietary nanomaterial ink technologies.

The new system supports up to 4 of Xaar's OmniDot 380/40 printheads and uses a dedicated inkjet drive engine (IDE), the Delta XO/760. This includes the drive electronics, ink supply system and user interface necessary to control the printheads. Based on Xaar's piezoelectric drop-on-demand technology, the printheads deliver 40pl drops at up to 8kHz. The heads feature a lightweight alloy cover and nozzle guard to provide the durability essential for demanding production environments.

Label makes freshness visible

OnVu is a new time-temperature indicator (TTI) that has been developed by Ciba Specialty Chemicals and FreshPoint. Either as a label or printed directly on the packaging, this indicator allows producers, retailers and consumers to check at a glance whether consumable goods have been stored properly. Chilled food and beverages are most commonly spoiled due to changeable temperature conditions during storage and transit. OnVu uses a color-coded system to indicate whether the product has been stored under the proper refrigerated conditions.

As there is an immediate need for reliable time-temperature monitoring in the meat, poultry and fish packaging industry, one of the initial OnVu indicators has been formulated for such use.

Future OnVu indicators will be formulated for dairy products, fresh salads, chilled prepared dishes, juices and further, to serve the medical industry, for blood, vaccines and medication. Other OnVu indicators are formulated to cater for the different spoilage behavior of food and beverages.

As the consumable goods are packaged, an OnVu TTI is added and activated using a UV light source. A filter is then added over the label to protect it from deliberate recharging.

The indicator display consists of a heart shape contained within an apple. First, the display is activated with a UV light. Once activated, the heart turns a dark hue. This forms a striking contrast with the light color of the surrounding apple. These clearly differing colors indicate that the produce is safe to consume.

The heart becomes progressively lighter over time. Exposure to excessive temperature fluctuation accelerates the lightening process. As long as the heart is darker in color than the surrounding apple color, the product is fresh. Once the heart becomes lighter in color than the apple, the product is no longer safe to consume.

Smart label report published

A comprehensive techno-economic report has been published about the smart label industry, covering key aspects and opportunities of the RFID label market.

The report, entitled Low-Cost RFID Smart Labels: International Markets & Opportunities in Europe & North America, has been written by James Bevan of Vandergraf International, who has 25 years professional experience in the packaging/labels/logistics sector.

The report identifies several factors as holding back the widespread adoption of RFID: limitations on RFID label production output in 2005 _ demand currently outstrips supply. Unit cost has made pallet (and for some products shipping case) level RFID labelling viable in 2005 _ but still significantly too high for widespread item level roll-out (except for some high value and/or high risk product categories). Consumer privacy issues also need to be taken seriously. There are still radio frequency, power regulation and read-range constraints, and there are issues regarding data sharing across supply chains. Higher volumes of data can be captured with RFID and need to be managed effectively to prevent system overload. Near 100% read-rates are demanded by end-users (most especially in the pharmaceuticals sector) – and more work needs to be done in this area, says the report.



Are we there yet?

Label-printing and RFID: A snapshot of the technology today and how a converter and end-user collaborated to create an item-level tagging solution. By **Jennifer Dochstader**

Trade publications, technical seminars and industry market research reports have been touting the opportunities in security printing to label converters for more than a decade. Smart label technologies are amongst the highest forecasted growth areas in the North American label-printing marketplace as applications utilizing elements such as 2-D barcodes, microtaggants and thermochromic inks become increasingly sophisticated, producible, and optimized within the retail environment. No smart label technology however has received media attention to the extent RFID has, and along with it an unprecedented amount of expectations, doubts and widespread shoulder-shrugging amongst the North American label-printing community.

Some early adopter consumer packaged goods (CPG) companies of RFID label integration have had varying motives: to secure highly counterfeited and/or highly diverted products; to meet retailer-mandated requirements at chains like Wal-Mart and Albertsons; and to track environmental conditions for perishable products. As much as adoption drivers vary amongst the CPG universe, so do philosophical attitudes about the current and future advantages the technology will deliver.

The GMA (Grocery Manufacturers Association) recently commissioned a detailed survey of CPGs to ascertain how these companies view existing, and prospective, RFID integration into their supply chain practices. Survey participants in the GMA study included 32 end-users most of whom are either participating in RFID pilot models, or have carried out large roll-out programs. Survey participants included companies like Campbell Soup, Clorox, Kraft, L'Oreal, Nestle, Pfizer, Procter & Gamble, Tyson Foods and Unilever.

Some of the most revealing results from the GMA survey are those assumptions surrounding RFID's short-term value proposition. While nearly all CPGs who participated in the survey feel RFID has a long term tangible value for their respective industries, 48 per cent claim they see little or no short-term value in the technology.

Ours is a trickle-down industry. Retailer mandates, or the marketplace's darker realities like theft, counterfeiting and diversion, drive CPG tagging technology exploration and integration. This integration in turn impacts the way label

converting companies attempt to differentiate themselves - by positioning their companies as ahead-of-the-pack solution providers beyond laying ink on paper. While RFID inlays webbed through printing presses isn't a mainstream phenomenon yet, it's critical to examine present-day market success stories in an attempt to more effectively predict the technology's inevitable widespread penetration into the label-converting marketplace.

A Label Printer's Journey into RFID

George Schmitt & Company, a fourth generation label-converting operation in the northeastern United States, has been a pioneer in RFID integration. The company's process range includes rotogravure, sheet and web offset, letterpress and flexographic printing capabilities.

Three years ago one of George Schmitt's pharmaceutical customers, Purdue Pharma, was exploring RFID integration. An engineering oriented company, George Schmitt sought to provide a unique solution to Purdue - the ability to provide tested, one hundred per cent-readable RFID labels for Purdue's established OxyContin brand of prescription medications. Andrew Grace, director, RFID business unit for George Schmitt, comments, 'Because we're such an engineering oriented company, when we decide to get into something like RFID we pull the resources together to do it right. George Schmitt pulled a team together, not just printing people, but RFID experts, machine-control software experts, and then came up with some patent pending systems to attack the problem. We knew from day one that these labels weren't going to be very effective if the tags weren't a hundred per cent readable to Purdue. This was our initial objective right from the beginning.' George Schmitt currently prints more than one million RFID labels on a weekly basis.

Purdue Pharma recognized the multiple benefits of RFID early on and was the first manufacturer in the world to do item level tagging of prescription medicines. Currently, OxyContin has four SKUs and every bottle that is delivered to retailer Wal-Mart and wholesaler HD Smith is tagged. Aaron Graham, vice president and chief security officer at Purdue explains some of the drivers that led the company toward RFID exploration and adoption. 'We were looking at other technologies but RFID allows us to be

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much more efficient. RFID doesn't require line of sight so instead of scanning one bottle at a time we have a process in place where we can read 48 bottles in 3-5 seconds as they move through the process. That's pretty efficient from a manufacturing perspective, and of course transfers to the wholesalers-distributors' efficiencies for inventory, shipping and track-and-trace.'

While Purdue hasn't seen a great threat from counterfeited products to date, the company has experienced diversion in the form of pharmacy robberies. With counterfeiting on the rise with products like Viagra, Lipitor and Xanax, Purdue decided to be proactive before Oxycontin was attacked and created some deterrents in an attempt to create obstacles to force counterfeiters to go after other company's brand that might prove to be a softer target.

'We were very progressive, and we did it with support, direction and encouragement from Wal-Mart to be the first,' Graham continues. 'Some think slap-and-ship tagging is the answer but you don't know if the tag really works. You don't know anything else other than there's a tag on it, but you're not sure where it went. We were the first ones to be able to integrate the process; so by the time the tag is placed on the bottle in the manufacturing line, throughout the entire shipping process we know where that tag is. This is critical because now we can validate and authenticate back to our own vault.'

When Purdue began exploring integrating RFID, George Schmitt & Co wasn't an RFID label printer. One of Purdue's initial objectives was to find an integrator – an entity that could incorporate the inlays into the label and validate readability. As any company currently in the pilot, or full roll-out stages of RFID integration can attest to, a primary barrier to entry for some CPGs is the high non-readability rates of the tags once delivered. George Schmitt saw this as an opportunity and created a full service integrated model via which the company purchases and vets the tags, and handles all returns and credits. This stepped up George Schmitt's value proposition as an RFID label supplier tremendously, and to date Purdue has had approximately just 15 tag failures out of more than 230,000 bottles shipped.

Readability surfaced as a central concern to those CPGs participating in the GMA survey. While 62 per cent of survey participants indicated that readability rates have improved within their own operations, it's still a major concern as these companies move from pilot testing to full scale roll-outs. Andrew Grace further stresses the importance of diligent testing from a converter perspective. 'Companies assume that RFID readers are the same, and they're not. We have found that readers from the same manufacturer are not consistent and have to be calibrated. The average end-user isn't aware of that.'

When asked what advice they would give to label converters just beginning to grasp the inevitable widespread implementation of RFID, experts concur it's crucial that converters begin educating themselves now. Both Andrew Grace and Aaron Graham will be speaking at Smart Label Summit Americas to be held June 27-28 in Miami. Companies like Wal-Mart, J. Crew and Beaver Street Fisheries will present a range of topics including how to achieve a viable return on investment strategy with RFID implementation, current vendor-CPG case studies surrounding RFID, and the long-term business benefits of using the technology.

It's estimated that fewer than 20 label houses are currently converting item-level RFID applications in North America. However the differentiation opportunity RFID offers converters is clear. As Aaron Graham believes, 'In your own mind if you just print a solution on paper you're never going to break outside that mold to be one of the innovative, progressive vendors who will become a full service partner. You'll always be a vendor, and the market already has a lot of vendors. When you look at being a partner and collaborating with your customer, you raise your profile and your value, exponentially.' ■



RFID virus debate

The RFID industry was quick to refute claims that RFID tags could be infected with viruses. **James Quirk** reports

Recent claims that RFID tags could be used to spread viruses and corrupt databases have been strongly refuted by AIM Global, the trade association for automatic identification and mobility. The organization responded swiftly as news of a technical paper entitled 'Is your cat infected with a computer virus' spread around the world.

The paper, delivered at a conference in Pisa, Italy, was written by a team of scientists from Vrije University in Amsterdam, Holland, who claimed 'RFID tags have several characteristics that could be engineered to exploit vulnerabilities in middleware and back-end databases'. 'RFID malware is a Pandora's box that has been gathering dust in the corner of our "smart" warehouses and homes,' the paper stated.

Scientists Melanie Rieback, Bruno Crispo, and Andrew Tanenbaum claimed that the dangers of viruses being embedded in the tags had so far been overlooked by the industry because of its high interest in the technology.

The attacks can come in the form of an SQL injection or a buffer overflow attack, even though the tags themselves may only store a small bit of information, the paper said. For demonstration purposes, the researchers created a proof-of-concept, self-replicating RFID virus.

A master's student at the university, Patrick Simpson, took just four hours to write a virus small enough to fit onto an RFID tag. 'This is a wake-up shot,' said Andrew Tanenbaum.

The researchers created their own middleware that replicated traits of products on the market. 'It's not like we are providing a cookbook for wannabe hackers to hack real RFID systems,' said Melanie Rieback.

According to the authors of the paper, the purpose of the exercise is to encourage RFID middleware designers to be more careful when writing code. Back-end middleware can contain millions of lines of source code, and if software faults number between six and 16 per 1,000 lines of code, the programs are like to have many vulnerabilities, the paper said.

However, AIM Global's president Dan Mullen refuted the paper's claims: 'Many of the basic assumptions in the paper overlook a number of fundamental design features necessary in automatic data collection systems and good database design,' he said. 'In other words, the researchers built a system with a weakness and then proceeded to show how the weakness could be exploited. Not surprisingly, poor system design, whether

capturing RFID tag information, bar code information of keyboard-entered data, will create vulnerabilities.'

A statement from AIM Global said the company recognized the efforts of the Vrije University team in bringing the issues forward, but questioned the methodology of the research.

RFID scientists and experts from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), who met in Kyoto, Japan under the leadership of the AIM Global RFID Experts Group, emphasized there are two broad types of RFID tags: ones that have pre-encoded or fixed data, and ones that have data that can be changed. Systems with fixed data such as those used to identify pets cannot be changed and therefore are immune to infection by a virus. They identified some specific attributes in RFID systems that can protect the overall system:

- Most applications of RFID, including EPC Gen2, look for specific kinds of data. Poor reader design might allow the reading of a 'rogue' tag, but a good system will verify the data against pre-defined parameters, as do current bar code systems, and any code not in the database is typically ignored.

- Being able to insert a virus into the system implies that a tag contains executable code that is recognized by the software. This is simply not possible with many applications of RFID since they look for specific kinds of data and will either flag or reject anything that doesn't fit the data template.

- Protection is a common process in data transfer between computer systems and writeable media. Global standards and commercial products are created to ensure that there is adequate data security, much the same way that running current virus software prevents virus attacks to your home computer.

- 'Critical advancements in information processing and logistics made possible by RFID technology cannot be underestimated,' said Dan Mullen. 'Corporations, government agencies and consumers will enjoy greater confidence when they select standardized RFID technology because the associated security issues have been addressed and resolved by the world's leading experts.' ■

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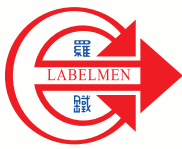
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