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— EST 1978 —

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Hemp gains momentum

## INDUSTRIAL LABELING

Challenges and opportunities

VOLUME 44 | ISSUE # 1 | JAN - MAR 2022

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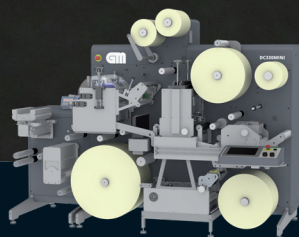
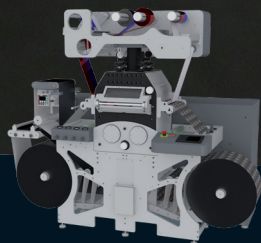
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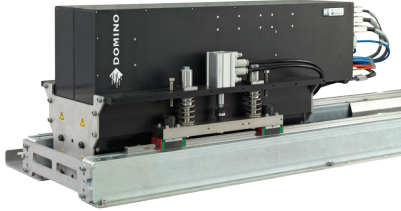


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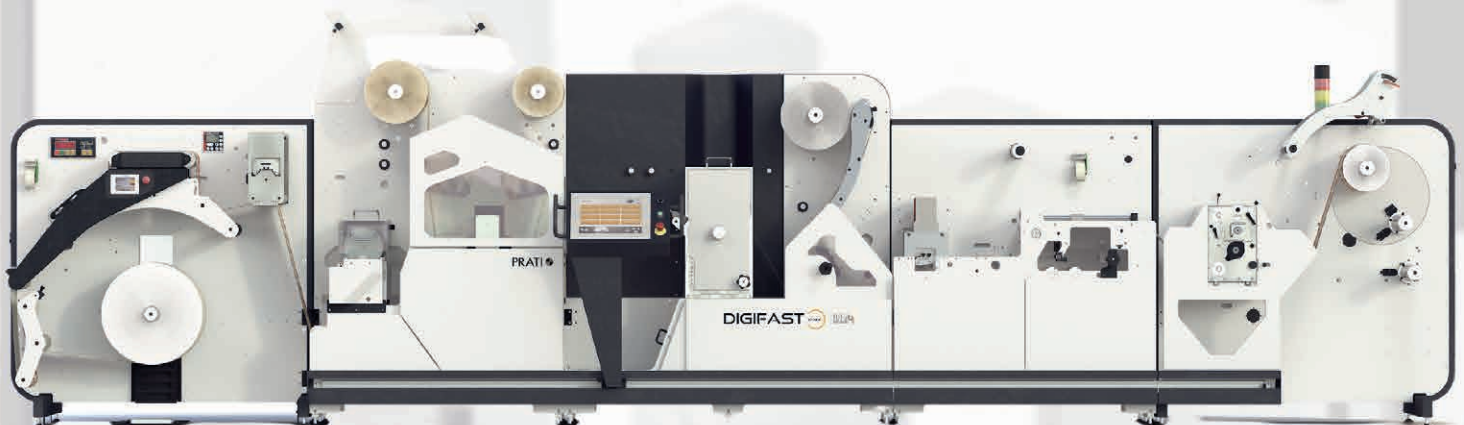


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# L&L

## — Meet the team

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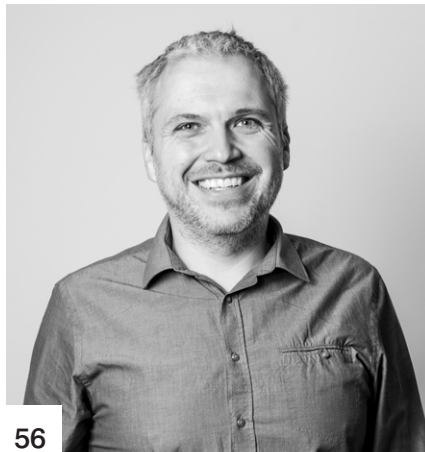
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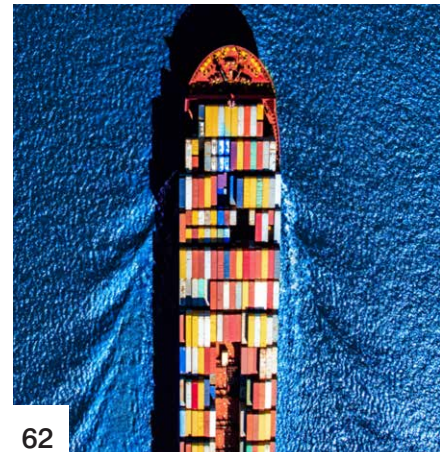
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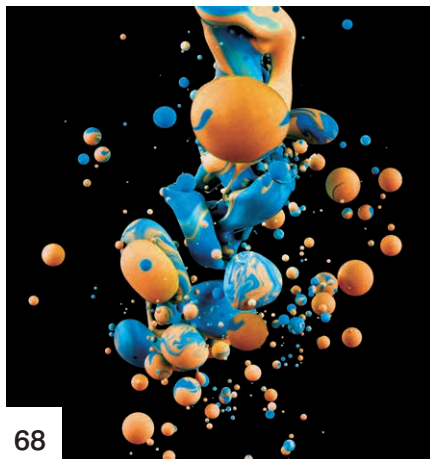
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labelsandlabeling.com



*Designing for inclusivity with braille and tactile elements (video)*

Brand strategist Vicki Strull discusses use of braille and tactile effects



*Read L&L issue 4 online (magazine)*

Previous issue of L&L is now available to read online



*Brand protection: the label converter's perspective (Label Academy)*

Dr Adrian Steele, MD of Mercian Labels, on brand protection



*All4Labels opens Center of Excellence in Italy (online exclusive)*

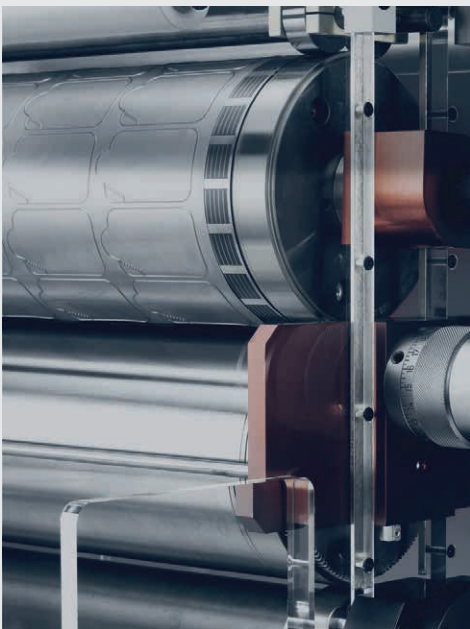
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## L&L looks back (L&L issue 4, 2009)



**P12** Andy Thomas reported on new press developments during Labelexpo Europe 2009. Gallus launched the first narrow web label press to be made on a granite platform. The digital revolution continued to advance with HP Indigo launching its mold-breaking WS6000 press, Xeikon introducing 3300/3000 range, and EFI bringing the Jetriion 4000 to the Labelexpo show floor.



**P43** James Quirk visited Spanish converters Autoadhesivos Argraf and Hermanos Bacigalupe which had installed Domino K-Series inkjet printers to meet new requirements of Spain's Regulatory Board of Rioja to print high quality sequential numbers and enhance the design of wine labels by incorporating a high-resolution images and logos.



**P55** France-based label converter 5/7 Etiquette was the first to implement an automated, JDF-driven workflow jointly developed by EskoArtwork and Cerm. The system made use of an 'intelligent' JDF connection between EskoArtwork's BackStage pre-press system and Cerm's labels-specific management information system (MIS).



**P75** UK-based converter Hine Labels, based in Rotherham, Yorkshire, held an open house event in conjunction with Punch Graphix UK, featuring the UK's first Xeikon 3000 digital label press. James Quirk attended the event, which investigated the compatibility of digital and traditional flexo printing by producing identical print samples from both processes.

## Calling time on Just-in-Time?

### Editor's note

**W**e currently have a perfect storm of multiple crises affecting the label industry. As this edition of Labels & Labeling went to press, strikes by forestry workers in Finland had been further extended, leading UPM to declare Force Majeure – allowing paper supply contracts to be cancelled. And the strikes had spread to Spain, potentially impacting Lecta's ability to fulfil its contracts.

The effect of the strikes has been exacerbated by the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, cutting off alternative sources of wood pulp for paper processing.

This comes at a time of tightening paper supply globally, with China, for example, having less export capacity due to strong growth as the country recovers from the worst effects of the Covid pandemic.

The looming shortage

**“It may well be that Just-in-Time was a product of an era of relative stability which has now passed. We need to start planning for present and future shocks”**

of paper for wet-glue and self-adhesive papers and liners threatens to halt supply of critical products across every end use sector from pharma to e-commerce, to food and drink.

The critical paper shortage comes on top of a long-running global shortage of computer chips.

This has already impacted the production of cutting-edge label printing and converting equipment, which relies increasingly on highly complex control and network systems.

Lead times for new label presses has increased and

availability of spare parts is also affected. The global shipping log-jam continues to delay the delivery of sub-components and import/exports of raw materials critical for manufacturing.

Meanwhile rapidly rising fuel prices, driven by the interruption of Russian energy supplies, is increasing the cost of energy and truck journeys.

These concurrent crises have exposed the vulnerability of a label supply chain built around Just-in-Time delivery and production.

Just-in-Time production

means brand owners no longer hold stock, pushing stock holding back to their suppliers, including label converters, who in turn push it back onto their suppliers and so on back down the chain. The end result is a lack of resilience in the face of these kinds of multiple crises.

We need to have a serious conversation – which includes brand owners – about building back buffer stocks and sharing the costs fairly.

It may well be that Just-in-Time was a product of an era of relative stability which has now passed. We need to start planning for present and future shocks.

James Quirk  
Group managing editor

# News



Limo Labels is one of the leading label converters in Scandinavia

## Limo Labels joins All4Labels Group

*Global group adds leading Danish converter*

All4Labels Global Packaging Group has acquired Danish company Limo Labels, one of the leading label converters in Scandinavia. The company, which focuses on high-value labels for the healthcare and industrial sectors, becomes a subsidiary of the All4Labels Group. The former owners will become co-shareholders of All4Labels. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

'This partnership is an important milestone for All4Labels – especially for our growth strategy in northern Europe. We are convinced that Limo Labels will enable us to respond even better to the dynamic needs of our global and local customers,' said Adrian Tuppenhauer, CEO of All4Labels.

'We are pleased to welcome the management team around the owners Asbjørn Bay-Smidt and René Tøttrup Klith as well as all employees as new members of the All4Labels Global Packaging Group. With this new partnership, we will strengthen the foundation upon which we grow as a leading international group, and we look forward to working with Limo Labels to position the combined business for future success.'

The Limo Labels owners and management team will continue to manage the business. 'Limo Labels has been looking for an international partner to be stronger not only in the Nordics, but also on an international level, and thus enabling us to grow together with our customers both locally and globally – with All4Labels, we have found a perfect match and partner to do so,' said Asbjørn Bay-Smidt, CEO of Limo Labels.

The transaction increases the size and international reach of the All4Labels Group and underlines the goal to continue growing sustainably – organically and through acquisitions. 'We at All4Labels are committed to convince more founders as well as entrepreneurs of our group's vision, so 2022 will bring further positive news of new partnerships,' said Tuppenhauer.

## Loftware purchases Prisym ID

Loftware has acquired Prisym ID to expand its enterprise labeling offering for the medical device and pharma industries while enhancing its end-to-end cloud-based platform by adding advanced clinical trial labeling and regulated content management capabilities. Building on Prisym ID's industry focus, Loftware will help customers to enable compliance through accurate, validation-ready labeling technologies and regulated product content while also growing the Loftware platform and offering more services to these strategic markets.



TexTrace's RFID products can be sewn onto or inserted into garments

## Avery Dennison acquires TexTrace

*TexTrace specializes in woven and knitted RFID products*

Avery Dennison has acquired TexTrace, a developer of custom-made woven and knitted RFID products that can be sewn onto or inserted into garments. TexTrace was formerly a subsidiary of Jakob Müller Holding and is located in Frick, Switzerland.

The acquisition includes ownership of TexTrace's portfolio of intellectual property and its employees that will continue to be based in Frick, Switzerland, enabling Avery Dennison to continue to drive adoption within the apparel sector and unlock opportunities in non-apparel segments.

The technology developed by TexTrace provides the opportunity to fully integrate RFID into garments. Brand labels with built-in RFID are an all-in-one technology for product branding, brand and theft protection, product availability, consumer interaction and enhanced convenience, such as self-checkout. In the future, it could offer unprecedented supplier and material information to enable the circular economy, providing the opportunity to gain insights into the true carbon footprint of the garment.

'This is an exciting acquisition for Avery Dennison, expanding our digital ID portfolio to offer integrated RFID solutions for the apparel industry,' said Francisco Melo, vice president and general manager of Avery Dennison Smartrac. 'The innovative woven and knitted RFID products that TexTrace has developed will add significant value to the traditional way the apparel and retail sector uses RFID, creating the opportunity for a more sustainable and intelligent future where digital IDs can live with the life of the garment.'

'This step is a great opportunity and a ground-breaking decision for the future of TexTrace AG. We are proud of what the start-up has achieved in its 10-year company history, and we are very pleased that we can now enable it to take the next step in its progression,' said Stephan Bühler, co-owner of Jakob Müller Holding and previous CEO of TexTrace.

## TLMI unveils sustainability program

TLMI has introduced its Champions for Change program, which encourages TLMI members to submit a brief overview of a current project or product, and to outline how it positively impacts any one of the following categories: Culture, Circularity, Resource Efficiency, Reduce-Reuse-Recycle, Purposeful Innovation, and Social Impact. TLMI vice president of sustainability Rosalyn Bandy said: 'TLMI's new Champions for Change program is yet another way that association members can showcase their progress in implementing sustainability initiatives.'

# News



*The Shanghai facility was inaugurated at the end of last year*

## Xeikon opens Asia Innovation Center

*Shanghai facility aims to speed up digital adoption*

Xeikon has inaugurated its Asia Innovation Center in Shanghai, China. The facility aims to accelerate the adoption of digital printing in the Asia-Pacific region. The new center in Shanghai is one of Xeikon's four innovation centers worldwide.

'This new Asia Innovation Center, which took 16 days from the beginning of preparation, site selection, decoration, equipment commissioning to the opening event, truly illustrates the "speed of digital people",' said Sean Wu, general manager for Greater China at Xeikon. 'The opening is an important step for Xeikon to provide a faster response and further optimize service for customers. In the future, we plan to host our brand events such as Xeikon Café here.'

Lina Gu, GM for China and Southeast Asia at Flint Group, added: 'Xeikon is one of the flagship brands of Flint Group. We will make full use of global advantages and provide customers with more localized and personalized technology and services.'

In 2021, Flint also set up a new accessory warehouse in China, aiming to improve delivery times and quality of after-sales service.

## Hybrid Software partners with Digimarc

Hybrid Software has partnered with Digimarc to drive sustainability and efficiency in the packaging printing market. Combined with Hybrid's software, this partnership will leverage Digimarc's expertise in digital watermarking techniques to automate brand protection and traceability. 'Our partnership with Digimarc will allow Hybrid Software to enhance our technology to address our customers' increasing needs in sustainable packaging and brand integrity solutions,' said Patrick Coussemont, managing director of Hybrid Software. 'We look forward to a long relationship with Digimarc and a shared commitment in providing scalable technology for our customers and partners.'

Digimarc digital watermarks offer covert and overt protection for physical products, packaging and digital assets, adding a layer that supports brand protection. These digital watermarks are fully compliant with industry standards yet imperceptible to the human eye. Building on the integration already available in CloudFlow, Hybrid Software also plans to add Digimarc support to its Packz PDF editing software, enabling application and detecting digital watermarks during the pre-press phase.

## Sun Chemical acquires Sapici

Sun Chemical has acquired Sapici, a global company specializing in high-performance polyurethanes for coatings, flexible packaging, industrial adhesives and more. With Sapici, Sun Chemical reinforces its integrated supply strategy in the packaging market by adding capabilities to develop and produce unique polymers for the entire portfolio of inks, coatings and lamination adhesives. Mehran Yazdani, president of global packaging and advanced materials at Sun Chemical, said: 'Sapici's core competencies in the manufacturing of ultra-low monomer isocyanates-based solutions will allow Sun Chemical to further address both current and future trends in sustainability, compliance, food contact, health and safety – reinforcing our commitment to responsible care.'

## News in Brief

### AWT acquires MacArthur Corporation

AWT Labels & Packaging has acquired Michigan-based MacArthur Corporation. AWT's acquisition of MacArthur, which will continue to operate under the MacArthur Corporation name, will broaden its end-market knowledge, engineering expertise, and manufacturing capabilities. 'We are incredibly excited to have MacArthur join the AWT family,' said Bruce Hanson, CEO of AWT. 'Christie and Tom Barrett have built an outstanding business that shares our core values of providing innovative solutions, industry-leading service, and the highest degree of quality to our customers while creating an environment for our employees to develop and thrive. MacArthur is the first acquisition made by AWT under the ownership of Morgan Stanley Capital Partners, and we are excited to continue acquiring great businesses and partnering with great teams across the labels and flexible packaging space.'

### Gallus to sell used presses and parts

Gallus has launched Gallus Classics, a division specializing in refurbished machines and spare parts service for older machine systems, offering a comprehensive portfolio for second-hand Gallus machines. The Gallus Classics team aims to help its customers ensure that they can continue operating used Gallus machines efficiently. This also includes a pool of new and used original spare parts and a network of relationships to procure urgently needed parts. The printing experts are also repairing old Gallus printing presses and carrying out upgrades so that they can be serviced again by the Gallus Service and Helpdesk team. An upgrade campaign is currently running for the TCS 250 and Gallus EM 260/340/410/510 series.

### HP India expands distribution

HP has expanded its distribution network in India with TechNova Imaging for the mono carton and label segments. Founded as an offset plate manufacturer, TechNova is now a recognized name in pre-press, pressroom chemicals and as a manufacturer of laser and inkjet digital print media.



# News



*L&L's front cover features cold foiling from Kurz*

## Cover story

*L&L's front cover embellished by Kurz*

The front cover of this edition of L&L features a graphic that has been embellished using the KPS SX+ cold transfer product from Kurz.

Stéphane Royère, head of business area Packaging and Print at Kurz, said: 'We are very happy to have the opportunity to present our strong cold transfer quality KPS SX+ on the cover of the latest issue of Labels & Labeling. With this development, we have succeeded in creating an even more reliable product for efficient cold transfer decoration. This not only enables us to guarantee stable production and process reliability for converter, but also gives designers the scope to create impressive shiny effects with partial as well as full-surface application.'

'The excellent overprintability allows a wide range of colors, designs, gradients and glossy effects to be realized, which also score highly in terms of sustainability: surfaces decorated with our cold transfer technology remain recyclable and deinkable, if they were before.'

'A very important aspect of our process is that only extremely thin layers of lacquer are transferred during the transfer process, no plastic film. The film as such only serves as a carrier material and is removed during the process and either disposed of in an industry-friendly manner or recycled in our specially developed RECOSSYS-plant, there being turned into high-quality injection-molding material.'

'Cold foiling can be an excellent alternative to hot foil stamping,' said Garth Davis, group managing director of Lexon Group, who printed the cover. 'The areas of the design that do not require a metallic finish can be reversed out on the sheet, so white opaque ink does not need to be applied in a separate station on the printing press. This cold foiling does not leave any impression in the paper, allowing for perfect printing on both sides.'

'At Lexon, we overprint metallic cold foil on our Komori IS29 UV inkjet press for exceptional results. The added advantage of the inkjet process is that the color gamut is around 30 percent wider than traditional litho printing, resulting in a much superior vibrant color rendering for the finished product.'

L&L's production manager James Wenman said: 'Labels & Labeling strives to bring new and creative solutions to our readers and the cover for issue 1 is no exception. Many of our readers will be familiar with cold foiling but on this cover we are overprinting the Kurz Lumafin foil, for what we hope will be an interesting take on what our readers will be used to. As with any specialist process where several suppliers have been involved, the cover has been challenging but rewarding nonetheless.'

## Etiket Schiller joins Optimum

Etiket Schiller, a self-adhesive label converter, has become part of Optimum Group's German platform. The current management of Etiket Schiller will remain in place within the organization. Ruud Zantman, CEO of Optimum Group, said: 'Following the acquisition of HT Labelprint and SC Etiketten, we are excited to take this further step in Germany and welcome Etiket Schiller to the group.' Optimum Group now consists of 17 members located in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Denmark.

## Arjobex and MDV become Polyart

Polyart has been confirmed as the new group name following the merger of Arjobex and MDV, specialists in label facestock, packaging and advertising signage substrates. This move is expected to further support of the global brand, strengthen its objectives and accelerate international development.

## I.D. Images expands

Sole Source Capital, a private equity firm, has made three acquisitions over the past five months through its portfolio company, I.D. Images (IDI). IDI's acquisitions of Digital Printing Concepts, Multi-Action Communications, and Valley Forge Tape & Label Company have more than doubled the size of the company and extended its reach to several new markets across the US and Canada since it became a Sole Source Capital portfolio company in August 2021.

## ePac opens Poland facility

ePac Flexible Packaging has opened a new production facility in Poland in collaboration with mFlex. ePac Poland North, near Bydgoszcz, marks the company's third manufacturing site in Europe.

## Hybrid opens in Barcelona

Hybrid Software has opened a dedicated branch in Barcelona, Spain, through the acquisition of its regional reseller. The new office will be a hub for support and sales across the Iberian region. The team will be led by industry veteran David Morales, managing director of Hybrid Software Iberia since September 2016.



Air-cooled UV Curing System



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PROCESS  
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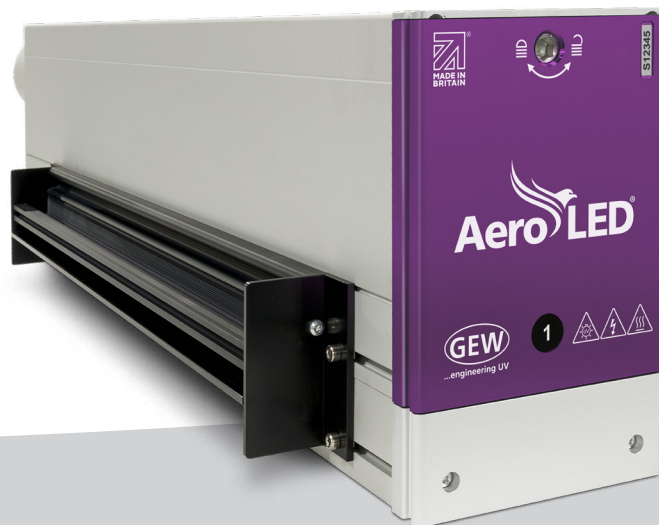


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# News



(L-R): Steffen Reimund, Triton; Fernando Gabel All4Labels; Jason Schlickmann, Flexoprint; Romeo Kreinberg, Triton; Laércio Stange Warmeling, Flexoprint; Adrian Tippenhauer, All4Labels

## Flexoprint joins All4Labels Group

All4Labels Global Packaging Group has acquired Brazilian converter Flexoprint Labels. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

The Stange Warmeling and Schlickmann families have signed an agreement to become co-shareholders in the All4Labels Global Packaging Group, making Flexoprint Labels a 100 percent subsidiary of the group. Flexoprint Labels is a packaging provider with a core focus on labels and sleeves. It has manufacturing sites in Brazil and Paraguay. The owners of Flexoprint will continue to manage their business and will additionally take on additional responsibilities for the group in the region together with Fernando Gabel, All4Labels president for Latin America, and his team.

Gabel said: 'We are extremely pleased and proud to welcome the entire Flexoprint team as new partners and member of the All4Labels family and together we will be able to offer our customers a much more complementary product and end market portfolio. We are looking forward to continuing the All4Labels success story together and welcoming the new colleagues with open arms.'

## WLE rebrands to boon-tech

Polish-Swedish Worldwide Label Equipment (WLE), a manufacturer and supplier of label finishing equipment, has changed its name to boon-tech. The company will focus on performance-enhancing auxiliary equipment for the label industry.

The newly renamed company, formerly WLE, was initially founded by the Swedish Wasberger Group. It serves customers worldwide and shares modern production facilities, service, and support infrastructure with parent company Grafotronic in Warsaw, Poland. The company offers out-of-the-box machines designed to assist and enhance all the processes surrounding label printing and finishing.

'boon-tech wants to improve efficiency by supplying cost-effective plug and play solutions and has a strong intention of becoming the easiest auxiliary equipment supplier to work with,' said Morten Toksværd, business development director. 'It's a name change but also a new strategy, which is to make it as easy as possible for customers to buy and install these products. Compared to Grafotronic, boon-tech is more of a volume business – fast delivery, easy-to-use equipment. We want to be the best at that, so the answer is to have a dedicated organization focused on that type of equipment.'

boon-tech has launched a new slitter rewinder, Exigo, and Rebel, a compact digital finishing machine. The company offers slitter rewinders, fan-folding equipment, fully and semi-automatic core cutters, spare parts and consumables.

## Meech expands UK production facilities

Meech International, a manufacturer of static control, web cleaning and compressed air technology, has expanded its UK facilities in Oxfordshire, with a new 29,000 sqft production facility at Tungsten Park – just meters from the main building. The new unit houses production, purchasing, order processing and customer service departments with approximately 40 staff. The original building retains all other aspects of the business.

## Integration Technology launches US subsidiary

UV LED specialist Integration Technology has launched its United States-based sister company, Integration Technology America (ITA).

The American arm forms a crucial component of the organization's wider growth strategy as it moves to meet demand for high-quality, high-performance UV technology in the US market.

ITA will operate from Illinois and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Integration Technology based in the UK.

## LemuGroup America established

LemuGroup, a paper converting machine manufacturer, is continuing to establish a strong presence in the United States and Canada with the creation of LemuGroup America.

According to the company, the United States and Canadian markets are growing in importance for LemuGroup, and the goal is to come closer to its customers – both on the sales and technical after-sales service sides.

## Infinity Foils opens facility in Mexico

Infinity Foils has opened a new facility in Querétaro, Mexico. It is the third converting location and the eighth distribution center since the company was founded in 2005.

Located in the central Mexican city of Querétaro, it is close to Mexico City and other large printing hubs. The new branch will primarily service the Mexico and Central America markets.

## Fix-a-Form names Mexico distributor

Fix-a-Form International has appointed Jetrix Soluciones Gráficas as its new dealer in Mexico to expand its machinery sales in the Latin American region.

Established in 2008 and based in Mexico City, Jetrix supplies its products to the label, packaging and related industries.

The company is contracted to supply and support the full range of Fix-a-Form machinery for label makers for multi-page brochures and booklet labels.



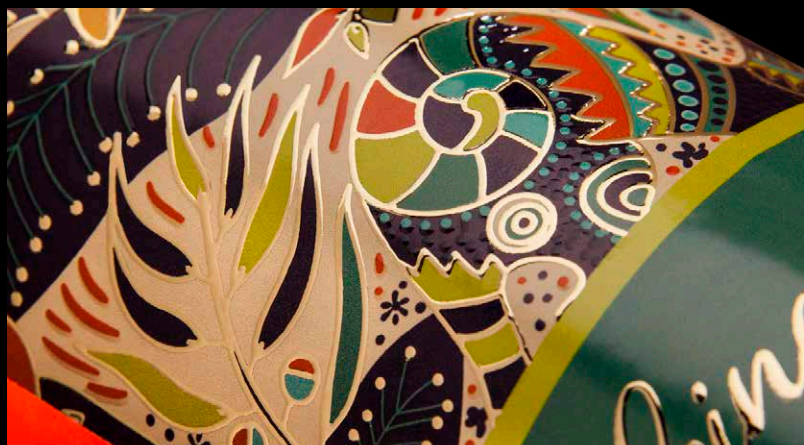
# JET D-SCREEN

## The digital embellishment

CARTES JET D-SCREEN digital unit allows you to create multi-layer effects such as:



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**Complex tactile raise effects**



**Detailed foiling**



**"Safety" Braille printing**



**GE362JJ**



**Metallic Doming**



# New products special

*With Labelexpo Europe postponed to next year, L&L highlights some of the new products which were due to be shown*

**Accraply** has launched its next-generation seaming system, Accraply Revolve, which is designed to improve output, reduce downtime and enhance productivity. The Revolve platform has an intuitive design that reduces operator dependency and enables the user to streamline and improve operations. Accraply's modular and configurable seaming system offers flexibility, customization and scalability.

**Acme Rolltech**, Indian manufacturer of ceramic anilox rolls and sleeves, has unveiled its new engraving patterns: AHDW for screen-type effect for high opacity white printing in single pass, and ATAC for screen- or embossing-type heavy varnish deposition to achieve a raised and tactile effect. Acme Rolltech supplies anilox rolls and sleeves to narrow web flexo, CI flexo, wide web flexo, offset, corrugated, coating and specialty film coating applications.

**ALE** has introduced its new Twin Track technology to the laser engraving sector. This is a new hardware and software interface for ALE engraving machines, particularly suited to engrave high-volume, flat-bottomed cell structures. The cell structures can be defined in the conventional manner, using screen count and screen angle.

**Berhalter** has unveiled the new Swiss Die-Cutter B6, delivering 500 strokes per minute and featuring individually controlled die-cutting motion, flexibly adjustable opening level of the punching tool, digitally monitored penetration depth and a new active foil guide built into the punching tool. Also on show is the new CUTcontrol IoT technology. It can link all production processes and provide the KPIs for strategic production planning including live data streams from machine, accessories and punching tools. The company offers tools for die-cutting flat packaging lids, deep-drawn lids, paper labels and IML labels.

**boon-tech**, until recently known as Worldwide Label Equipment (WLE), has launched a new slitter rewinder, Exigo, and a compact digital finishing machine, Rebel. boon-tech offers 'plug and play' auxiliary equipment such as finishing systems, fan-folding equipment and fully and semi-automatic core cutters. Read more on page 14.

**Durico** has launched direct thermal films which include a phenol-free product for safer human health and heat stability, and products resistant to harsh environments such as solvent, alcohol, hot water and blood.

**Dynic (UK)** has launched a new textile satin for pigmented color inkjet systems, various high opacity thermal transfer ribbons for printing upon dark substrate applications and a range of new sustainable and 100 percent recycled textile printing media.

**Esatec** has unveiled MFL350, its new modular feeding line developed for various applications such as printing, labeling, affixing, inspection, reject of faulty products. Several configurations allow to meet required product needs and their flexible design can be adapted to many production styles.

**FAG Graphic Systems** has launched Flex3Pro V6.x software with a QR code reading function for workflow integration. It can read QR codes 21x21 ISO-8859-1 with a target size of max 1.4mm x 1.4mm on transparent flexo plates. The QR code can be generated from different software. This allows each individual lasered/ manufactured plate to be uniquely identified and tracked. The reading of the QR code is integrated in the Fleyeplus option V6 software.

**Fix-a-Form International** has unveiled the Rotofix module of its latest multi-page leaflet label equipment. Offering machinery such as the AutoFix, FastFix and the Fold&Fix, all its systems are designed to manage the most complex products. The machinery is suited to short runs that require frequent changeovers. The equipment offers up to a 500mm web base, the option of 2 Rotofix heads on one machine, in-line and cross webbed hot or cold glue options.

**Flint Group** has launched its new Evolution Series of inks and coatings. The series aims to deliver greater recyclability and reduced CO2 emissions. The first two products in the series, both UV-flexo, assist in boosting the recyclability of PET packaging with shrink sleeves or self-adhesive labels. The first is the Evolution Deinking Primer, which causes an ink to release from crystallizable polyester shrink sleeves (cPET) in the recycling process without contamination. The second, Evolution Caustic Resistant OPV, is an overprint varnish to facilitate recycling of PET bottles utilizing pressure-sensitive labels. Read more on page 93.

**GEW** has launched AeroLED, a fully air-cooled, high-powered UV LED system for all applications up to 60cm (23in) wide, claimed to eliminate many of the operational problems in existing air-cooled systems on the market. The system features a new air-cooling process with filtered air distributed from a single centralized fan



*Accraply's next-generation seaming system, Accraply Revolve*



*Berhalter unveils the new Swiss Die-Cutter B6*



boon-tech launches Rebel, a compact digital finishing system

located away from the press and exits through the UV lampheads for quiet operation. According to GEW, the remote positioning of the fan avoids common problems caused by ink mist and dust ingress, while large air filters reduce the filter replacement cycle. There is no need for integrated fans or electronics in the individual lampheads, which eliminates the high-pitched noise and contamination issues that these bring.

**Glunz & Jensen** has launched a new family of exposure units for flexo and letterpress plates, also in multifunctional configuration (i.e., exposure, dryer, and light finisher in one unit). The equipment series, FlexiPose 360, FlexiPose 470, FlexiPose 520, expose analog and digital plates in all the standard sizes available up to 52 x 80in. The design has improved over the previous generation by introducing innovations such as full remote support for both diagnostics and future firmware updates. The units will be ready for shipment starting September 2022.

**Grafotronic** has launched six new models developed with a strong focus on automation and performance. The new Haptic Series for wine and cosmetics includes new hot stamping, embossing and flatbed screens. The new digital Edgeless Sci-Fi Laser with invisible cut and digital embellishment features is also now available. Grafotronic has unveiled the latest automation package for the DCL, running with less downtime and reaching speeds never seen before. The energy-saving HI3 inspection slitter rewinder with 100 percent inspection and high-speed slitting is in its third generation and is the first of the new environmentally optimized series of machines from Grafotronic. All devices employ the company's Connected+ technology – now available worldwide.

**The Grey Elephant** has unveiled its Brain4Tools and Scan4Tools products, developed to enhance seamless information retrieval and exchange in the workflow, saving significant amount of money and time for printers. Its tools speed up information sharing at every stage of the workflow, includes departments like ERP, graphics, press, tooling and archiving. By making accurate information available among all these departments The Grey Elephant's products increase efficiency, contribute to cost savings and upgrades the decision-making process.

**HCI** has launched its new FP-X250-2 shrink sleeve seaming machine with rewind auto splicing, ultrasonic lay-flat measuring and solvent detection technology, allowing seaming and doctoring on the same system. The machine runs at 500m/min and has turret winding stations. HCI also provides a converting equipment line of slitting, seaming, inspection and cutting for shrink sleeves.

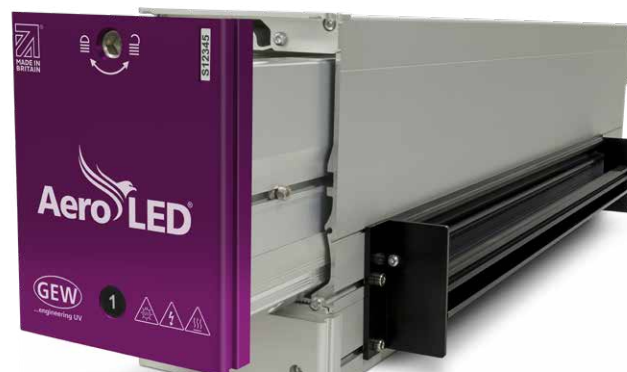
**Hoaco** has launched its multi-station rotary die-cutting (RDC) machines with up to 32 stations in a single system. The company has developed fully integrated RDC + flatbed die-cutting, laser-cutting, pick-n-place, printing and packaging machines. Hoaco rotary die-cutting machines are suitable for manufacturing of multi-layered products. The equipment enables die-cutting, converting, laminating, CCD registration and inspection in a single pass. RDC machines are used in applications such as electronics, medical and cosmetics, automobile, labels and printing industry. It can accommodate materials of different density, thickness and composition. With its multi-station movable design and customizable die-cutting stations, the finishing equipment is suitable for high volume and tight tolerance applications.

**Hoya** has introduced its latest air-cooled UV-LED system, NX series, for flexo printing. The NX series comes with digital features such as status indicators, neuron microchip network system, digital AC/DC converter and data logging. It brings added value for retrofit purpose. The NX series offers balance of a high max peak irradiance and a significant dose, works without chiller and air duct system.

**Innova Films** has launched a new high yield, matte white, 60 micron in-mold-label film with high opacity. When used on small-to-medium size, PP or PE containers, an all-polyolefin mono-material container can be produced. This enables the final pack to be fully recyclable, meeting the Plastic Recyclers Europe packaging design recommendations. QB is a cavitated, white gloss film for pressure sensitive labeling applications, which has a coating receptive surface on one side. This film is EU food contact compliant.

**IST Metz** has introduced modulux LED, a new spin-off brand focusing on modular LED systems for narrow or mid-web presses. Modulux LED curing units allow configuration of the press according to converter requirements. The curing system reduces use of LEDs at a higher peak and radiant intensity. It comes with the instant on/off function to eliminate energy use in stand-by mode.

**Ixthus Instrumentation** now offers a new version of NCTE 2300 torque sensor series for lower torque-range measurement tasks down to 0.5nm. The series now covers a torque range from 100nm down to 0.5nm. It comes with measurement bandwidth up to 1,000Hz, speeds to 10,000rpm and accuracy to 0.5 percent. These



GEW introduces AeroLED, a fully air-cooled, high-power UV LED system for full cure, printing, coating and converting applications up to 60cm wide



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Grafotronic launches its Haptic series of embellishment modules

non-contacting, long life sensors are suitable for torque, speed, shear and angle measurement in precision mechanics, test beds for smaller electric motors and engines, machine tool performance control, controlled screw fastening and capping operations and robotic manipulators.

**Kernow Coatings** has launched its new textured digitally printable synthetic self-adhesive labelstock. Printable by all established dry toner laser and water-based inkjet technologies as well as traditional screen and flexo, this new textured labelstock allows converters and end-users to produce textured labels without the need for lamination films or varnishes. Suitable for beverage cans and bottles as well as healthcare products, the substrate gives a 'grippy feel' and moisture resistance. The substrate is approved for use on the OKI Pro dry toner series and suitable for use with Epson water-based inkjet roll fed printers.

**Label Traxx** has unveiled Version 9 with a redesigned, modern user interface. It offers new primary navigation tools and increased customization options to enhance the user experience. Job Costing and Shop Floor Data Collection modules have been improved to support new roll tracking features, remote access and a new operator user experience. Label Traxx and Batched have launched the third general release of their automated planning and scheduling product. Along with performance and usability improvements, this release contains a new set of features that blend artificial intelligence and machine learning with human engagement. Siteline, Label Traxx's customer engagement module, offers new features to further simplify the product management and reordering processes. The tool now offers artwork approval capabilities with a high level of functionality.

**Laserclean** has unveiled a new version of the anilox roll cleaning system ALCS 1000 SF laser cleaning machine. The Laserclean narrow web machine ALCS 1000 SF is a compact system. Chain, wheels and bearings do not need removal and after cleaning the roller can be used immediately. The cleaning cycle is five minutes on average and consumables such as granulates, chemicals or water are not required. The system can be connected on Wi-Fi and has multiple pre-selected cleaning programs.

**Lemorau** has introduced the new finishing machine Smart-L, a semi-rotary die-cutter with upgrades and 'smarter' software. The die-cutter is servo driven, compact and has short web path.

**MagVision** has unveiled MagID, which uses patented marking technology to print unique codes onto labels that are covered up but remain readable. A MagID reader scans the label and connects to a cloud-based system that provides data for track and trace and authentication purposes. Originally developed by Inspectron, provider of secure document print technology, MagID is brought to market by spin-off MagVision. MagVision showcases how to add unique serialized codes at the set-up stage, giving every item

its own unique, trackable identity. MagID uses barcodes printed in magnetic ink. The technology sits between RFID and visual barcodes. It is suitable for digitally printed labels and the application generates unique codes for each item. Tracking, authentication and product destination data is accessed via MagVision's cloud-based management system. It is fully patented and backed by Horizon 2020 funding from the European Commission.

**Maxcess / RotoMetrics** has unveiled its new RotoMetrics flexible die portfolio and supporting tooling products. New from Fife is a preview of its next-generation web guide, giving customers Industry 4.0 connectivity and smart data to automate processes. Componex has brought award-winning RotoRepel anti-stick coating to its line of Idler Rolls to help production run faster with less adhesive and ink build-up on the rolls. Also new is an Advantage series knife holder from Tidland.

**Merobel** has introduced its new range of Redex Sensors to complete its portfolio of tension control technology. Redex WAT+ load cells introduce a modular architecture and can be mounted with pulley, roller or coupling. This flexibility offers to designers the capability to create their own accessories based on application or product specifications (shape, length, surface treatment). This concept addresses all types of materials with different widths from ribbon, narrow web and web applications.

**Miyakoshi** has unveiled its newly designed semi-rotary offset label press, MEL. It is described by the company as an entry-level machine which inherits its high-level technology and printing quality from Miyakoshi's MLP press. Included as standard are web cleaner, unit skewing, automatic ink roller washing, ink remote controller, numerical register control system, oscillating roller cooling system, die-cut with gap adjustment system and registration monitoring. The press can be customized with various process units and options for flexible usage.

**MPS** has launched its seventh generation EF flexo press. The EF



Kernow Coatings launches its new textured digitally printable synthetic self-adhesive labelstock





LabelTraxx and Batched introduce the third general release of their automated planning and scheduling product

next-generation press is now equipped with the slide-out ink drawer as standard, E-Sleeves, improved Job Memory functionality and two automation levels. New to the press is the option of a wider 580mm web width. The MPSCoconnect platform combines sensor technology with the internet (IoT), meaning real-time data collection is possible from hundreds of events per second. This unbiased information helps to identify bottlenecks, errors, and inefficiencies to optimize press performance and decrease waste.

**Pantec** has launched the Cheetah N, a new machine system for applying 3D images to shrink sleeves with rotary hot foil technology. 3D images are available as customized designs. Logos or key visuals can be perfectly integrated into the design and become eye-catchers thanks to the 3D effect. Cheetah N applies up to 20 images per second at web speeds of up to 120m/min, enabling the commercial use of this innovative embellishing technique in the shrink sleeve sector. Read more on p89.

**Polar** has unveiled what it claims to be the fastest die-cutter in the market: LabelSystem DCC-12. It is designed for highly automated in-line production

of bundled die-cut labels made of compressible plastic materials such as OPP-films for in-mold. The new control system enables a 25 percent increase in productivity, allowing the new DCC-12 to achieve an output of 10 cycles per minute. The new industrial control system enables modern alarm management, remote maintenance and diagnostics as well as integration into the digital workflow. The built-in servo technology improves process stability and increases downtime in production: the system runs more smoothly, and start and braking speeds can be set independently.

**Premier Coating & Converters** has introduced portfolios of self-adhesive materials. PremLaser covers laser printable materials and PremJet is its inkjet counterpart. Also new are sustainable, biodegradable and compostable options under the PremEco banner.

**Rotutech Hispania** has launched its new and improved Labelcut R30 coupled with the latest software LabelCutGo, optimizing workflow and enhancing job set-up. The blade finishing system based on Summa Vinyl Cutters is aimed at small and medium label production runs, allowing customization, versatility and flexibility.



MagVision unveils MagID, which uses patented marking technology to print unique codes onto labels that are covered up but remain readable

**Side Graphics** has previewed its new Graphic Box, consisting of a Graphic Box Web Printer and Graphic Box Web to Plate application. The Web Printer is an application aimed at label printers who integrate the production of their printing forms. It offers an optimized printing plate workflow with different accesses per log. It enables a graphic designer to upload the unit pose of his job and automatically produces the step and repeat followed by the ripping. A manufacturer can track the progress of all these orders on a listing and a manager can export statistics related to the drop rate and productivity. The Web to Plate application has been developed for tradeshops offering optimization of the workflow and production costs and expansion to new markets by providing a collaborative interface available online, an ERP with process progression and tracking number, an automatic step & repeat, len verification, an online approval system, and a quote before validation, delivery note and online invoice.



Miyakoshi launches its newly designed semi-rotary offset label press, MEL

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MPS has launched its seventh generation EF flexo press

**Steinbeis Papier** has introduced a new wet and alkali resistant label paper, Steinbeis Label Wet, suitable for all common labels on beverage bottles and glass jars using wet gluing, hotmelt gluing and self-adhesive applications. It is printable by flexo and offset with excellent die-cutting properties. It is made from 100 percent recycled materials and – as with all recycled paper from Steinbeis – has been awarded the Blue Angel and EU Ecolabel. The company says the product is the result of a close investigation of the label paper market, where it realized its recycled paper is also suitable for processing into label papers. The result, Steinbeis Label Wet, is now a new product segment within the company's portfolio of recycled papers.

**Synthogra** has launched a new, fully recyclable synthetic paper, Syn-Strong LD. Optimized for printability in narrow web flexo, offset and digital printing, Synthogra's synthetic papers are resistant to moisture,

can be exposed to temperatures between 40 degrees below zero to 160 degrees Celsius and have high tear strength.

**Taghleef** has introduced its first bioPP and recycled film, designed to reduce fossil fuel depletion and contribute to a circular economy. Shape360 TDS, a full coverage label shrink film, confers a striking visual appeal to its containers without compromising recyclability, thanks to its floatability and easy separation. Also new is ReDesign, a project that aims to assist customers in finding the optimal and sustainable product to fit their needs.

**TEG Technologies** has expanded its Sitexco range of laser cleaners for anilox rollers with the new Sitexco Label. The L10 is designed for the narrow web sector and benefits from all the advantages of laser cleaning at the price of traditional technologies.

**Tootech** has unveiled its new laser barcode label printer, TTE-72FK. The labels printed can't ever be erased because the printer prints on the middle layer of the material. It can print an area of up to 108mm (W) x 108mm (H) size of labels with the maximum resolution of 2,000dpi.

**Toyobo** has introduced new products to help achieve more environmentally friendly production, such as Lesire, a laser-printable film for better recyclability; PET-D, a PET film for packaging and shrink sleeves with 50 percent PCR plastic content, obtained from PET bottles mechanically recycled in Japan; Reshine, a PET film for industrial use with 50 percent PCR PET content; Crisper and Kamishine, white, recycled PET films and anti-fog and easy-peelable PET sealant film.

**Tri-Tronics** has launched its new Mini

Label-Eye, a gap/slot sensor developed to detect labels on the web. For label applying, converting, printing and splice detection, the 10mm-wide sensor features a large LED indicator, one-touch Autoset with a response time of 35 microseconds for repeatability, which can be set from an HMI, and work on low voltage 4.75-30VDC.

**VPF** has introduced a new product range for the durables sector, solid and durable adhesive materials for indoor and outdoor applications. The range consists of ten material combinations, some of which are UL-listed, seawater-resistant to BS5609, Sect. 2, and universally applicable for many technically demanding labeling tasks. Also new is a range of sustainable face materials and liners in addition to new grass papers, silphie papers, translucent papers, hemp papers or a paper made from recycled disposable coffee cups, complemented by innovative PE PP and PET films with high recycled content.

**Wacker** has unveiled new Dehesive eco products. The company replaced the methanol from fossil sources needed for manufacturing 100 percent with biomethanol from biomass such as straw and grass cuttings. It records the balance of biomethanol in its mix and mathematically allocates a portion of this to individual silicone products in proportion to the quantity of methanol used, an approach comparable to the green electricity certification system used in Germany. Dehesive eco and traditional Dehesive are chemically identical.

**Zecher** has launched an app for customers to manage their Zecher anilox roller park. Users can directly send requests for new anilox rollers, refurbishments or other Zecher products. A QR code scanner enables users to easily address claims.



For info on the digital presses that were due to be on show in Brussels, go to page 103



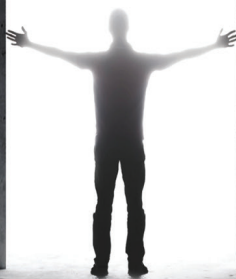
Pantec launches the Cheetah N, a new machine system for applying 3D images to shrink sleeves with rotary hot foil technology





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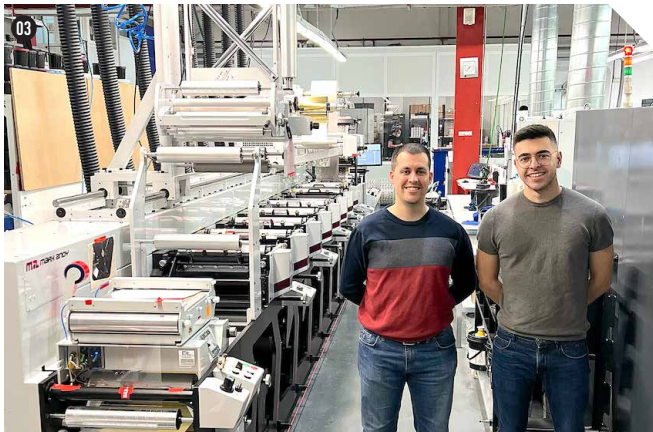


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# Installations



## 01 MPS EFA 530 flexo press Steinhauser, USA

The Kentucky-based converter purchased its second MPS press in early 2022 to replace older equipment. Tara Halpin, CEO and owner of Steinhauser, said: 'We continue to be impressed with the quality of our first MPS press as well as their service. So, when we discussed replacing an older press there was no question we would go with MPS again. We believe these presses provide us with the quality, speed and efficiencies necessary to support our customers and our company goals.'

### Nilpeter FA-Line

**ICS Group, Germany**  
Profilabel, an ICS Group company, has invested in a Nilpeter FA-Line after intensive market research and tests. The company, which has been operating since 1984, is installing the new press at its Wiehl site in the Sauerland region where it is also investing in a new building.

## 02 Canon LabelStream 4000 series Etica, Italy

Etica has installed the first LabelStream 4000 in Italy. The hybrid configuration turns the press into a fully integrated, single-pass label converting line. The Forlì-based converter decided to invest in Canon's UV inkjet label press to broaden its application offering and respond to the changing market requirements. The flexibility of the Canon LabelStream 4000 will enable Etica to meet increasingly tight deadlines and the rise in demand for short runs. Based on its UV inkjet technology, the Canon LabelStream can achieve an output speed of 1,845sqm an hour at 410mm print width and 75m/min. In its hybrid configuration, the new press includes two additional flexo units, cold foiling and automated semi-rotary die-cutting, in addition to the 5-color (CMYK+W) digital print unit.

## 03 Mark Andy Evolution press Adhesivas IBI, Spain

The Spanish family-run business has installed a new flexo press to increase its production capacity and flexibility to explore new markets. The Evolution press built for Adhesivas IBI has a 330mm (13in) web width, eight flexo printing stations and is equipped with UV curing. It incorporates Mark Andy's QCDC (quick-change die cassette), automatic registration and pre-registration functions and, with no drive shaft, servo control of unwind and rewind tension. The new E5 press joins the company's existing Mark Andy P5.

### Kodak Flexcel NX System Ambition Blocks, India

One of the leading pre-press service providers in Ahmedabad has invested in a Kodak Flexcel NX System provided by Monotech Systems, transforming its existing conventional workflow into the new digital system.

## 04 Durst Tau RSC-E Roll Flex Label Company, USA

Roll Flex Label Company, a third-generation family-owned company located in New Jersey, is a custom label producer established in 1983. 'We started with a Primera digital press, which was fine in the beginning, but as our digital business increased, we needed something faster with better quality,' said the company's Margaret Zink-Boyle. By partnering with Durst, the company added 1200dpi UV inkjet technology to its production portfolio.

### Anytron label equipment

**CJ, South Korea**  
CJ, a leading Korean food and beverage company, has installed anytron label printing and cutting equipment to control product quality by taking label production in-house. CJ exports its products to various countries worldwide. The company had been outsourcing label printing;



# Installations



however, this posed the risk of delivery delays and quality issues. Since there are already problems with the supply chain, CJ decided to increase its shipping efficiency and accuracy with on-site label printing.

**05 Screen Truepress L350 SAI S**  
**ProPrint Group, UK**  
 The Midlands-based converter has installed a Screen Truepress L350 SAI S to serve growing customer demand for premium self-adhesive digital labels and achieve greater flexibility for customers with new applications. The Screen Truepress L350 SAI S has doubled ProPrint Group's digital label printing capacity. The machine's print speed is one of the main reasons company owners and directors James Denny and Nigel Tollman chose the L350 SAI S. Denny said: 'Thanks to this machine being so compact and efficient, we doubled our production speed to up to 60 meters per minute

and reduced material waste by 30 percent. We now have the resources to meet growing customer demand for high-end products in cosmetics and drinks, with first-class lead times.'

**06 CEI BossJet 'powered by Domino' hybrid press**  
**Viking Label & Packaging, USA**  
 The Minnesota-based converter has added a CEI BossJet 'powered by Domino' hybrid press to expand its label printing capabilities. 'When Viking first entered the digital market, we had essentially an entry-level roll-to-roll digital press,' said Kim Larson, president of Viking Label & Packaging. 'When the time came for us to upgrade, we did our due diligence in testing the multiple platforms that are out there and at the end of the day, Domino rose to the top with its quality of the print, ease of use and its service, along with our familiarity of CEI and its equipment.'

**07 HP Indigo 6K Secure digital press**  
**OpSec Security, UK**  
 OpSec Security has invested in Europe's first HP Indigo 6K Secure digital press to offer its customers security and flexibility with its single-pass production. With this new technology, OpSec will allow brand owners to integrate secure authentication, personalized customer engagement, and unique digital design in labels and packaging. The company safeguards more than 13 billion products a year through its diverse portfolio of on-product identifiers and security-enabled trim components. The single-pass capability and secure variable data options of the HP Indigo 6K Secure press will increase further the options available to its customers.

**Dantex DigiWash Red032, UK**  
 Flexo reprographic studio and platemaker Red032 has installed a

Dantex DigiWash 4835 to develop its business further and provide a more sustainable workflow for its customers. The latest installation makes it the only business in the UK to use water wash digital varnish plate technology.

**08 Grafotronic HI3**  
**Juih Tay, Thailand**  
 The Thai label converter has invested in a Grafotronic HI3 slitting and rewinding machine. Founded in 1989, Juih Tay runs offset and silkscreen systems and recently added flexo capabilities. Its owner, John Liao, was searching for a high-speed slitting and rewind machine to cover finishing processes and found that the Grafotronic HI3 would meet these needs. Liao said: 'The big advantage of HI3 is its standard configuration with the latest electronic web guide with ultrasonic sensor, which provides perfect tension control, and the operator friendly area for visual inspection. This generates a perfect price-performance ratio.'



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# Installations



## 09 Gallus Labelmaster Macaran Printer Products, USA

The US label and packaging converter has installed a 17in 14-color Gallus Labelmaster combination press. It can print a variety of labels using a combination of technologies including rotary screen, flexo, cold foil, lamination and two-sided printing. Nick Van Alstine, CEO of Macaran Printed Products, said: 'Macaran is proud to call some of the top consumer brands in the world our customers, and we have always put their complete satisfaction at the top of our priority list. Our customers were demanding more, and we listened. With this significant investment in new equipment, we're able to offer them a wider range of capabilities, while also improving quality and decreasing lead time.'

## Esko hardware and software Flexolahti, Finland

The packaging repro services and flexo plate provider has

complemented its existing Esko workflow by adding a CDI Crystal 5080 XPS with PlateHandler to its platemaking facility in Lahti.

## 10 Vebex VBS-530 unwinder / rewinder Pilot Italia, Italy

Pilot Italia has installed a Vebex VBS-530 unwinder/rewinder system. Vebex, headquartered in Lucca, Italy, began to design a new series of VBS systems dedicated to the label market in spring 2020. The companies were introduced the following year, and the system was installed on a Gallus RCS 430 press at Pilot Italia at the end of last year.

## Lemorau ICR3 Etichettificio Il Nastro, Italy

The Italian label converter has installed a Lemorau ICR3 inspection slitler rewinder to increase production capacity. The machine was supplied by Erre Gi Elle, Lemorau's exclusive distributor in Italy.

## 11 Bobst Mouvent LB701-UV inkjet press

### Nordic Printing, Sweden

The family-run company, established in 1984, decided to move from flexo to digital printing to increase its flexibility and productivity. It opted for inkjet due to the high durability of the inks, as it produces labels which are often used in outdoor locations and therefore subject to the harsh Scandinavian weather. The team realized that the Bobst Mouvent LB701-UV was the perfect fit for its needs after the inks passed the rigorous testing regime of its in-house weather simulator, which subjects the print to prolonged exposure to sun, wind and rain.

## 12 Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230

### Arc Labels, UK

Yorkshire, UK-based Arc Labels has installed an AccurioLabel 230 digital toner press, manufactured by Konica Minolta

and sold through Focus Label Machinery. The new press will complement existing Focus flexo presses and Newfoil hot foil presses to allow the company to provide a broader range of labels, from low volumes to high volumes across a range of market sectors. Allan Ford, director of Arc Labels, said: 'We find the AccurioLabel 230 very simple to operate, allowing us to be in full production within one or two days after delivery.'

## Edale FL3 press

### Intalabel, UK

The British converter has invested in an Edale FL3 press to increase production capacity and diversify into new sectors. The FL3 at Intalabel boasts an array of options that help keep set-up time to a minimum and reduce operator inconsistencies.



For more installations, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/news/installations](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/news/installations)

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# Label & packaging showcase



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- 01 EnteraLoc**  
Vonco Products, USA  
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Gold Award – Sustainability  
Gold Award – Technical Innovation

### Gold Achievement Awards

- 02 Ahmad Tea – Cardamon Tea**  
Emirates Printing Press, UAE  
Gold Award – Printing
- 03 AmPrima**  
recycle-ready pouch  
Amar Flexibles, USA  
Gold Award – Expanding the use of flexible packaging

- 04 Beachbody PCR**  
Incorporated stand-up pouch  
American Packaging Corporation, USA  
Gold Award – Sustainability

- 05 Celebrate HerSHEy's Bar**  
Printpack, USA  
Gold Award – Shelf impact

- 06 KitKat Mini Moments**  
3D recyclable pouch  
Emirates Printing Press, UAE  
Gold Award – Shelf impact

- 07 Kraftika paper-based**  
packaging tube  
Uflex Packaging, India  
Gold Award – Packaging excellence



**08** Lamb Weston Alexia  
bio-based packaging

American Packaging  
Corporation, USA  
Gold Award – Sustainability

**09** Mackintosh's Quality  
Street stand-up pouch

Emirates Printing Press, UAE  
Gold Award – Printing

**10** Nestlé Smarties  
stand-up pouch

American Packaging  
Corporation, USA  
Gold Award – Packaging excellence  
Gold Award – Technical innovation

**11** Off the Eaten Path  
compostable packaging

Printpack, USA  
Gold Award – Sustainability

**12** Popcornopolis Double  
Drizzle pouch

Bryce Corporation, USA  
Gold Award – Shelf impact

**13** Repechage pouch

LPS Industries, USA  
Gold Award – Printing

**14** Volkman Seed Featherglow  
Large Parrot bag

PPC Flexible Packaging, USA  
Gold Award – Printing



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## *The Mike Fairley column*

# *The future of print quality and compliance monitoring*

*The label industry workflow of tomorrow will certainly be very different from today*

**T**he past twenty-odd years have seen the label industry undergo a number of significant developments and changes in the way that labels are produced, and in the way converters work with their brand owner customer specification and compliance guidelines covering print quality and performance, barcode readability, RFID and NFC compliance, VR and AR usage – and increasingly, as they start to look more and more at monitoring and compliance requirements in terms of sustainability, waste, recycling, CO2 and energy.

The challenge for label and packaging converters is that, while there are a lot of similarities in content between the different customer specification and compliance requirements for print quality, label performance, traceability and environmental performance, there are relatively few national or international guidelines or standards. This means that converters may often have to implement a different set of specifications, compliance and rules for each customer.

Major advances in pre-press, origination and color management – combined with the latest flexo and offset press technology in terms of precision manufacturing, servo systems, automation and even moves into artificial intelligence for automated job set-up by streamlining pre-press to pressroom connectivity, plus initial press set-up and job repeatability – have done much to take traditional label printing technology to new levels of output and printability, making it somewhat easier to meet different customer print specification and compliance requirements.

### **Automatic monitoring and correction**

Combine that precision with ever-more sophisticated on-press inspection and camera systems that can detect color print and die-cut register problems, offer in-line color measurement, provide FOGRA color certification, monitor fine print detail, misprints, missing labels, text defects, spots and splashes, as well as provide barcode, RFID and NFC compliance and variable data checking. Many things that were manually corrected by a press operator in the past are now being automatically monitored, identified and corrected in-line on the press.

Certainly, with barcode errors being the number one cause of vendor compliance violations and chargeback penalties, barcode compliance is critical. The barcode – or RFID, NFC or AR – label needs to be 100 percent readable with the right symbology and in the right placement on the label, carton or pallet. Anything less may slow down packaging line, distribution and retail operations and cost money.

**“The challenge for label and packaging converters is that there are relatively few national or international guidelines or standards”**

More recently there have been innovations in the on-press monitoring of UV output to ensure that it is within the expected defined range and that under-cured labels, sleeves or flexible packaging do not reach the customer, as well as technology for the automatic set-up of a job for in-line color measurement and the generation of color scorecard reporting on color quality performance after printing. This integration delivers better visibility into color performance based on measurable, objective results for increased color consistency.

The rapid evolution of digital printing has also had a major impact on the label printing industry and the quality and services it can provide to brand owners and retailers. Smart digital front-ends (DFEs) for digital labels and packaging have transformed the role of the digital press in a new generation of smart factories. Again, 100 percent automatic inspection systems complement what can be produced on digital toner or inkjet presses by addressing issues such as ink drips, missing nozzles or other specific challenges – all in real-time.

As label presses, whether analog or digital, continue to integrate AI learning, the future label plant will undoubtedly experience more presses with closed loop controls that not only learn about print quality, code readability or compliance problems as they occur, but are also able to provide intelligent guidance to the operator on how to correct them – or even correct or adjust any print faults or problems automatically, without any operator intervention.

### **Integration in the supply chain**

Put all this sophisticated press, inspection and monitoring technology together with current and forecast developments in AI, automation, and MIS and we can begin to envisage how the label plant of tomorrow will likely increasingly integrate its automated workflow with label and packaging designers, substrate, ink, equipment and ancillary suppliers, with shipping and distribution suppliers, and with labeling systems technology at packers,



## “COP26 sent a clear message: measure your carbon footprint and instigate a plan to move towards net zero, or risk lagging behind competitors”

co-packers and brand owners – right through to issuing delivery notes, arranging delivery and, if required, providing print quality, label performance, barcode readability, CO2 and waste compliance documents or certification.

Automation throughout the whole label supply chain will enable the delivery of consistent – documented, compliant (and certified at each stage if necessary) – error-free production, high employee efficiency and high-quality output, whether short, medium or long runs of labels and packaging. And all easily adapted to individual customer specifications, requirements and compliance documentation.

Looking forward, it's not just label and packaging print quality and performance where retailers and brand owners will be looking to work with their suppliers. Today – and increasingly over the coming years – they will also have to be looking at many aspects of environmental performance and sustainability. Indeed, retailers and brand owners are already under increasing pressure to move to a product life-cycle approach to sustainability – from consumers, environmental bodies and from governments.

Alongside the many pledges made by many governments (60 or more) at the recent COP26 in Glasgow, a central outcome was a clear shift in global momentum for businesses to move towards net zero – and provide evidence that they are reducing their carbon footprint. However, this will mean that label and packaging converters will need a formal system, data collection and measurable, specific metrics (such as ESG factors) to prove

their case.

This adoption of net zero as a core organizing principle for business will leave any label or packaging converter without a comprehensive plan to move to a lower-carbon economy somewhat exposed, not only to retailer and brand-owner customers but with regards to various government regulations coming down the line. COP26 has sent a clear message to label and packaging converters: measure your carbon footprint and instigate a plan to move towards net zero, or risk lagging behind competitors.

### Innovate for sustainable products and solutions

As more countries move to enforcing environmental legislation and extended producer responsibility policies, so retailers, brand owners and their chain of suppliers will need to innovate when it comes to sustainable products, their labeling and packaging, and to providing documentation and certification, as well as to enhancing relationships with consumers.

Retailers have also recognized that more and more consumers feel that it is important to limit the impact of climate change, with some retail groups starting to implement initiatives like social responsibility audits at their own and suppliers' factories.

Over the next five or ten years the label and packaging converter will certainly become increasingly involved in lifecycle assessments, responsibility audits and the documentation of waste management programs, in chain of custody certification, in documenting of CO2 emissions and carbon footprints, in FSC or PEFC certification, in

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energy, waste and label reduction targets, and in CO2 emissions, recycling and other on-pack labeling schemes. The requirements for MIS and workflow systems that can provide documentation or certification to prove targets are being met will undoubtedly grow.

As sustainability pressures continue to take center stage, so leading retail groups are already using or moving towards carbon labeling across key brand and own-label products in some stores, while at Unilever for example, carbon labels will include energy used in production, processing and packaging. The company plans to reduce carbon emissions from its own – and its suppliers' – operations.

These various carbon labeling schemes promote a commitment to sourcing 100 percent of key raw materials from sustainable sources, as well as factors that include production methods, labels and packaging, and carbon footprint. Such schemes for the label converter may include confirmation, documentation or compliance with FSC or other sustainable label materials.

In other developments, and faced with increasing pressures on the amount of waste generated, many governments are reviewing available policy options and seem to have concluded that placing the responsibility for the post-consumer phase of certain goods on producers could be an option. Here, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a policy approach under which producers are given a significant responsibility – financial and/or physical – for the treatment or disposal of post-consumer products. Assigning such responsibility could in principle provide incentives to prevent waste at the source, promote product design for the environment and support the achievement of public recycling and materials management goals.

Indeed, there is already an established policy approach for an

Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging that is increasingly being adopted by many countries around the world to help them meet their packaging waste recycling obligations and targets. This approach is aimed at giving packaging and label producers an incentive to make better, more sustainable decisions at the product design stage, including decisions that make it easier for products to be re-used or recycled at their end of life.

Some label industry suppliers have already expanded the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification Plus certification (ISCC) program to their production plants following significant interest in the potential of increasing their commitment to reducing CO2 emissions and adopting a circular economy model. For reference, ISCC is an independent multi-stakeholder organization providing a globally applicable certification system for the sustainability of raw materials and products.

What's becoming clear is that tomorrow's label and packaging converting plants will have increasingly complex workflow and print quality requirements, provide readability of track and trace technologies (codes, RFID, NFC), plus meet a host of environmental and sustainability requirements (lifecycle assessment, energy targets, CO2, water, documented waste management, biodegradability, recycling and re-use, chain of custody certification) and will increasingly make use of ever-more sophisticated management information systems and artificial intelligence systems as they steadily head towards the (fully) automated factory of tomorrow.



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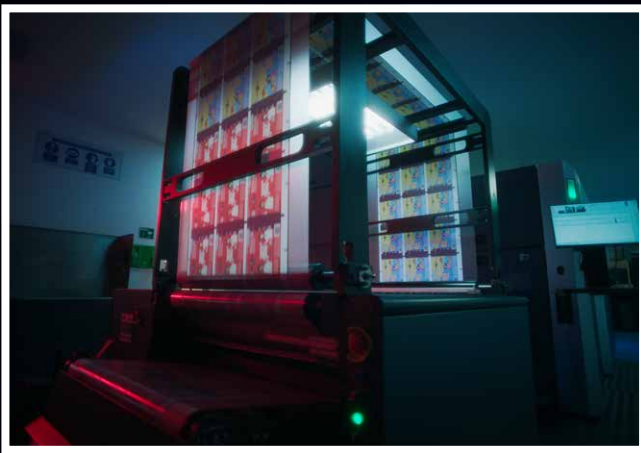
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# HP Indigo and The Hershey Company Bring Women's Stories to Life, One Chocolate Bar at a Time

*In celebration of International Women's Day, HP and Hershey unveil a new film to value female talent*



PALO ALTO, Calif, March 8th, 2022 — The Hershey Company has been leveraging the power of digital printing technology to transform its iconic chocolate bar packaging into a celebration of women. Now in its third year, and coinciding with International Women's Day, the #HerShe campaign, sees Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar packaging being used to promote and honor female talent across the world.

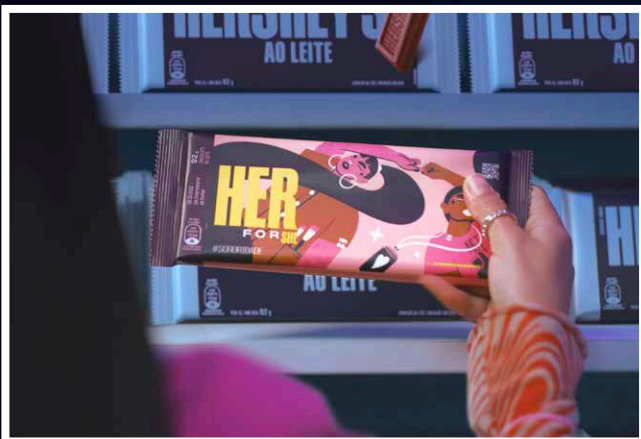
First launching the campaign in 2020, Hershey collaborated with HP Indigo and used a highly productive, cost-effective HP Indigo 20000 digital press, by Brazilian print service provider Camargo Cia de Embalagens Ltda, to develop 320,000 limited edition #HerShe chocolate bars. The campaign, which featured artwork to celebrate the talent of female musicians, illustrators, photographers and poets throughout Brazil, saw huge success. In Brazil, the parallel social media campaign reached close to 2 billion impressions.



Fast forward to 2022, the campaign is being run in collaboration with HP Indigo digitally printed packaging for a third time and will help make 'invisible women, visible by supporting gender equality through a global movement that celebrates female achievements in science, business, sports, activism, and music. This year, the Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bars will feature a QR code, also printed with an HP Indigo 20000 digital press, that will open consumers' eyes to the many contributions of women, beyond each bar. In addition, HP will be unveiling a film with Hershey, amplifying how HP Indigo's digitally printed packaging can be used, but also to elevating brand engagement through the co-creation of user generated content, to become the ultimate vehicle for cultural relevance and on-pack storytelling.

## Matching Hershey's ambitions with the right HP Indigo solution

The HP Indigo 20000 digital press was the ideal printing solution for this campaign, designed with diverse labels and packaging applications in mind. "Empowering women, and advancing diversity, equity and inclusion is a business priority for us. We invite new perspectives, ideas, and experiences in everything we do to reflect the diversity of consumers





around the world. Throughout the campaign, HP has helped us to open our eyes to the power of digitally printed packaging, allowing us to engage with our audience in a creative and unique way while celebrating women and their achievements globally," said Santhi Ramesh, CMO International, The Hershey Company.

The HP Indigo 20000 digital press 29-inch image width can capture the majority of packaging applications, including flexible packaging, shrink-sleeve, wrap-around labels, and in-mould labelling, and contains the only digital colour printing process that matches gravure printing, delivering high resolution printing and perfect registration. This enabled Hershey to meet its strict brand colour needs using 7 ink stations, whilst also bringing the female voices and stories to life.

Commenting on the campaign, Jose Gorbea, Global Head of Brands, Agencies & Sustainability, HP Indigo, said: "I've loved seeing how the #HerShe campaign has evolved over the past 3 years and I'm excited to see what other personalized storytelling opportunities HP's digital print technology can achieve in order to make tangible connections and further engagements with consumers."

Recent research carried out by WARC (Sept 2021) on the Marketing Effectiveness of Digitally Printed Packaging, in which more than 9,000 marketing campaigns were analyzed and benchmarked, highlighted that brands have the potential to double their sales and marketing ROI when they utilize personalization and most importantly, user generated content in their packaging. "This can be achieved through digital print, and it is why now 70% of digitally printed packaging campaigns, like Hershey's, are being used strategically as the lead communication touchpoint of the marketing mix to build brand equity", added Gorbea.



Credits:

Artists: Carlione Barbosa Ramos - @carli\_ayo;  
 Marcela Scheid - @marcelascheid;  
 Marië Balbinot - @mariebalbinot  
 Agency (Campaign #HerForShe) : BETC Havas (Brazil);  
 Agency (Video) : @Media.Monks  
 Raquel Soares - @rach.soban  
 Anna Carolina Lauriano - @carollinalauriano



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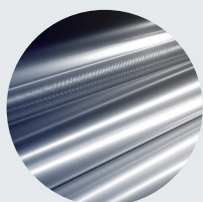
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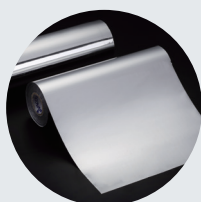
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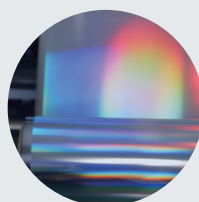
Hot Stamping  
Foil



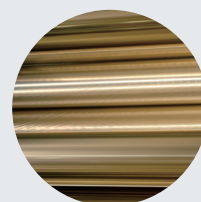
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## *The Andy Thomas-Emans column*

### *Lost in the Cloud*

*Cloud computing is set to revolutionize the label and packaging print industry across the entire supply chain*

**C**loud computing is set to revolutionize the label and packaging print industry across the entire supply chain from artwork design to delivery of a fully quality assured final product.

Let's go through a few of the key areas where this is already happening and how it might develop.

To start with color management – the most basic function of ensuring that the label design signed off by the brand manager is delivered with exactly those colors whatever the material and whatever the type of press the job is finally printed on.

The best way of achieving this is to place color standards on a common Cloud platform which can then be accessed by every partner along the chain of design, approval and printing.

In theory a label designer could download a Cloud-linked plugin which holds the profile of a target press or press model, and which gives an out of gamut warning when non-printable colors are selected. The spectrophotometric camera on the press, also referenced to that color standard, then checks the accuracy of color reproduction in-line and reports delta values in real time to a Cloud portal. The brand manager has meanwhile signed off the job on a smart mobile device accessing a secure Cloud platform using those same color values and can then be sent real-time confirmation of accurate color reproduction from the press camera.

Then there is machine data. Machines potentially generate a wealth of data – not only digital presses, but also analog equipment driven by digitally networked servo drives. The ancillary equipment mounted on those machines could also be Cloud-networked, including inspection cameras, UV lamp sensors, print/die-cutting pressure sensors and more.

Up to now, that information has been kept isolated in the machine operating system. But finishing equipment and presses are now being designed to send this data to a Cloud server, where it can be processed into critical information on machine uptime, average speed, time between changeovers, lamp power used and much more.

Flexo press manufacturers still have work to do in opening up their press operating systems, with the exception of MPS, which recently demonstrated its open architecture Talk To Me networking protocol.

Once a press can be integrated into a factory management system, we can eliminate double keying. Production data can be directly uploaded to the machine with real time production data flowing in the opposite direction.

We briefly mentioned Cloud-connected ancillary equipment, and once again there are exciting developments afoot. Cloud-connected inspection cameras, for example, will be able to 'learn' the full range of printing defects and spot and help prevent them before they become major production issues.

With the label plant comprehensively Cloud connected, a host of remote management and monitoring options become available.

Press operators, for example, are no longer tied to their machine

**“We have just scratched the surface of the potential of hooking up the label converting plant to the Cloud. But there is one potential roadblock: the lack of open standards and guaranteed interoperability between Cloud-based services”**

during production runs. The inspection system will alert them when there are issues with print quality, and other Cloud-connected sensors will alert them if there is a problem with lamp curing power, color or registration or die-cutting/waste stripping. In the case of a fully automated press, the press system can auto correct or compensate, for example by adjusting print pressure and registration.

At the same time the press is being remotely monitored over Cloud connections by OEMs looking at fault prediction and resolving service and downtime issues.

Job planning and quality monitoring will be other areas which will be positively impacted, with the ability to distribute this information in real time to any authorized person, at any location.

#### **Potential**

We have just scratched the surface of the potential of hooking up the label converting plant to the Cloud. But there is one potential roadblock: the lack of open standards and guaranteed interoperability between Cloud-based services. This could lead to a situation where different suppliers' Cloud services become effectively fenced off, frustrating attempts to promote the free flow of data.

Of course that data must be secure and of course each data stream will be describing different functions (machine production data, color management data etc), but at this early stage we should be building in open protocols which enable data to be freely shared.

We want to avoid the situation which arose in the early days of the JDF (Job Definition Format) protocol, which in theory allowed different manufacturers' software systems to talk to each other – for example pre-press with MIS. What actually happened was different manufacturers put their own 'hooks' into JDF which meant a lot of work had to be done to ensure that data could indeed be exchanged.



For more columns from Andy Thomas-Emans, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/andy-thomas](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/andy-thomas)



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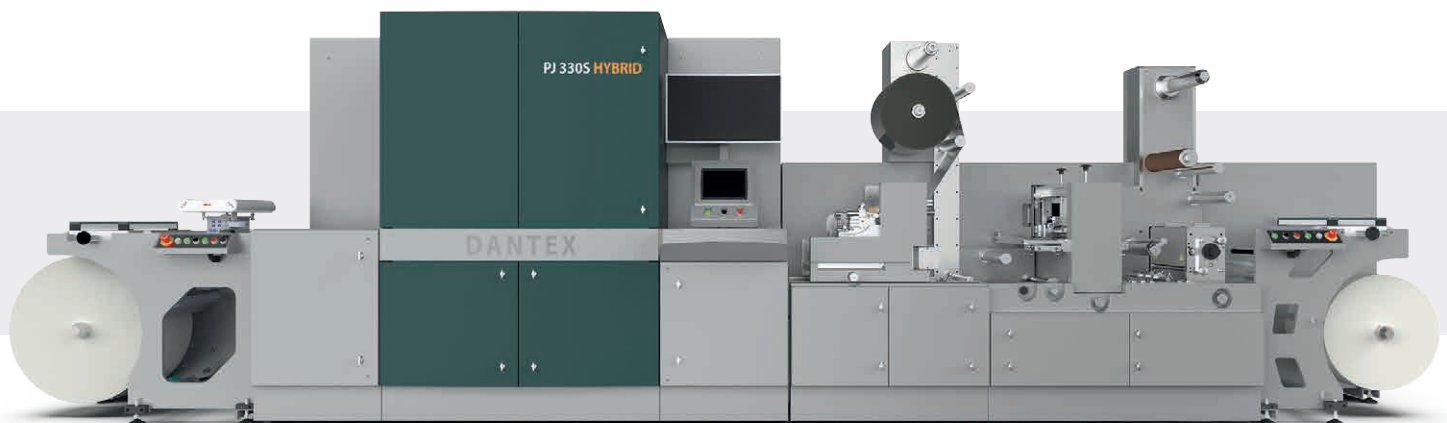
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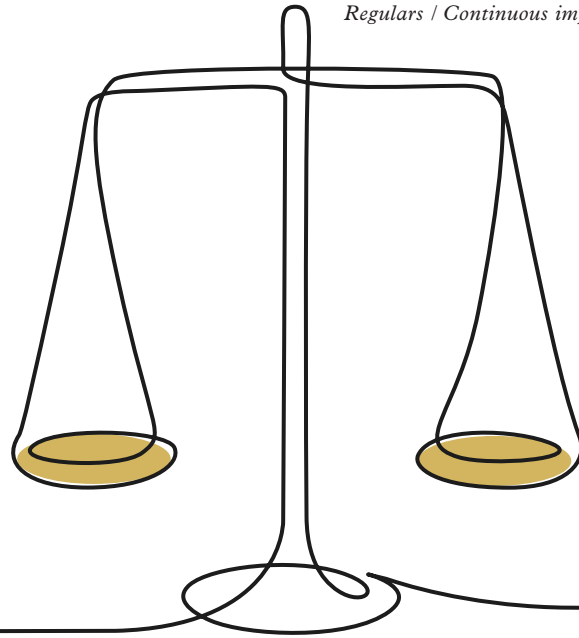
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# Continuous improvement: the great equalizer



*The cultural emphasis on improvement has never been more important for converters, writes Paul Brauss*

Converters ended last year with more market dynamics in play than I've witnessed in over 20 years in the industry. A mix of positive news about market growth and negative news about raw material availability made industry leaders' heads spin as new barriers to business success seemed to be popping up weekly. Extended supplier lead times and labor shortages added frustration. Every step of the supply chain required management attention. Sales teams' productivity was impacted as sales resources turned into logistics reporters, talking to their customers about planned deliveries instead of new opportunities. The industry also had a lot of buzz around the number of mergers occurring just before year-end and a robust beginning to the new year with seven converter acquisitions announced in January alone. While all of these supply chain issues were being discussed, the back noise in the industry included reports of 10 percent growth domestically in 2020 and 4 percent growth reported in 2021 with an outlook through 2023 that provides even more opportunity ahead.

**“The label industry has seen growth in 27 of the last 29 years and has recorded growth for 14 uninterrupted years straight”**

I heard how the large roll-up of private-equity-backed converters placed burdens on competitiveness. Small and mid-sized converters felt squeezed as material allocations hindered their response to growth opportunities. All converters continue to be put to task, and the complaints were the same whether you were large or small. The label industry has seen growth in 27 of the last 29 years and has recorded growth for 14 uninterrupted years straight. The growth phenomenon and an aging owner demographic have provided an opportunity for private equity to take advantage of the market. The availability of investment capital provides an efficient infusion that may afford a high return for their large institutional investors. Many of the acquired converters enjoyed years of prosperity. The business comfort levels went unchecked and often plateaued. Many did not stay current with their investments in technology and equipment and were ill-prepared for any competitive challenge. Without succession that included handoff to the next generation, their choice was limited to harvesting their assets, preserving value for their families.

Years ago, Peter Drucker, the father of modern business management, identified the consolidation period in a market segment by describing the buyout firms as providing a needed

function to the industry. That is not to say the private equity path does not have its problems. We know the path usually requires financial-based restructuring and capacity consolidation that can be traumatic to the employees. Industry experts do not yet know how the large mergers will impact the market overall and, in the end, if the impact is positive or negative.

We know from our learning with Peter Drucker, the most important path to a company's success, regardless of ownership, includes a culture that is managed for the long run. A company's governance needs to focus on long-term performance rather than short-term value fluctuations. Flipping a company for the short-term gain adds no value to the market or to that company's future. Organizations that delight customers today and into the future will flourish in the long term. Companies that engage their employees and build a culture of sustained improvement focus will outperform the short-term thinking companies that lack the commitment to enhance the culture.

## Culture

Leaders that have developed their company's culture based on continuous improvement have harvested tremendous opportunity regardless of their current revenue size today. For the last 15 years, there have been 25 to 35 converter acquisitions per year and several supplier acquisitions as well. Not all of these acquisitions have been smooth. Issues within recently acquired companies, or in any other hesitant company, generally start with a lack of understanding about sustained improvement focus as a company's cultural building block. Most intellectual acquisition firms believe they have the expertise to implement rapid improvement by camouflaging it as 'autocratic lean' to push financial-based objectives quickly. When I heard this term the first time and saw how it was forcing wrong organizational behavior, I recognized that the cultural emphasis on improvement for converters has never been more important.

Just as illogical is the individual or corporate-owned converter that hesitates to accept cultural development as part of their primary strategic investment. I find today that the end customers are always willing to speak to the needs they value with their converters, but it is up to the converters to take the information and act. To do this effectively, the converter has to develop a capacity to listen and then translate what they learn into actionable strategic imperatives. As more owners (private equity, corporate or individual) recognize this opportunity and build their organizations to respond, they will find their old equipment with a new focus on continuous improvement will help them earn enough to invest in new equipment and help them build back their competitive strength.



In a recent flash poll of converters, 58 percent report they will turn to continuous improvement as a path to gain competitiveness. Another 24 percent are looking to simplify and reduce waste in their organizations. The question I get asked the most is how to get started with the cultural transition process. My first suggestion is to learn from your customers. Pair an operation-minded individual with a sales-minded individual and go and see. My best industry meetings were traveling with the sales team, talking to business leaders about their needs from their suppliers and what they value from converters as a supplier. This information needs to come back to the company and be digested so that strategic thrusts of activity can be planned and executed. Don't think this is a salesperson assignment. This has to involve operations, engineering, graphics and finance.

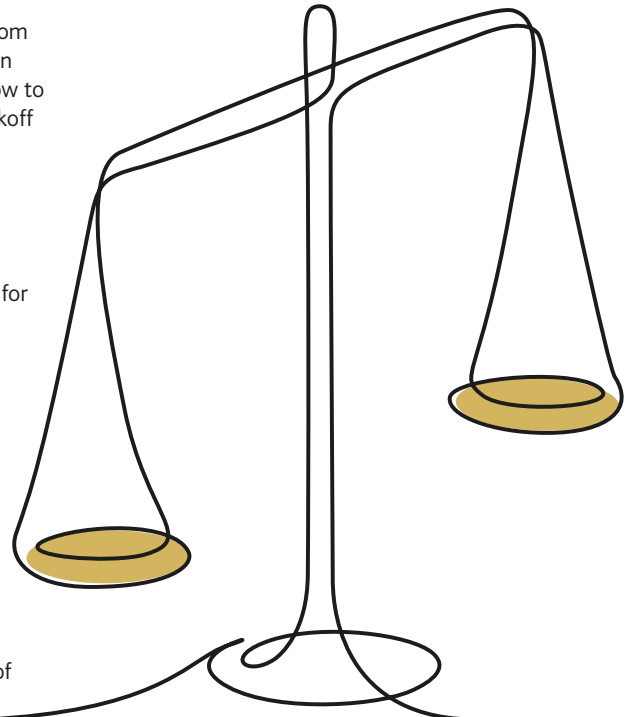
Finding the most impactful areas requiring attention can come from the customer learnings, value stream mapping, and reviewing waste in the process. Organizations that have travel restrictions due to the current pandemic or because of the cost, have another way to discover the most troubling of performance barriers.

## “The growth phenomenon and an aging owner demographic have provided an opportunity for private equity to take advantage of the market”

The information will come directly from your employees. A great investment in learning includes a crash course in how to hold a meaningful and short shift kickoff meeting highlighting SQDIP (Safety, Quality, Delivery, Inventory of interruptions, Productivity).

### Communicate

I have been involved with converters for 20 years and with manufacturing my entire career. A common gap is the inability to use 5-10 minutes at the beginning of the shift to communicate what is important to the customers and what improvement results are benefiting customer relationships. The next step is to ask a shop floor operator about interruptions that were experienced the shift before. An interruption is defined as anything that prevents the progress of



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processing an order because of material, tooling, information error or outage. The issues identified will become a great revelation to the starting point for an improvement initiative. Any organization can build a Pareto of problems from these conversations within a week. To effectively build an action plan the next best tool is using 5 Why. This root cause detection method helps pinpoint areas that can reduce waste, reduce time and improve the quality of process all designed to benefit customer response. The 5 Why method will effectively lead to the root of the process problems, potentially back to the beginning when an order is received. This is more common than most organizations recognize, because it requires a company's self-reflection with a tool that eliminates preconceived notions of performance. I recommend that executives attend a shift kick-off meeting and then walk GEMBA with the shop floor managers and cell leaders weekly. Being visual helps demonstrate a commitment to improvement.

The habit of a meaningful shift kick-off meeting not only stimulates conversation but also quickly identifies the most sensitive improvement areas needed. It

is easy enough to prioritize Kaizen blitz areas. The execution of the improvement plans, sometimes called barrier removal, requires Kaizen and the best Kaizen team participants are generally people that helped identify the problem. Kaizen is a short burst of improvement initiatives focused on changing for the good. As a primary tool for the 'House of Lean', Kaizen drives improvement with employee involvement in a continuous way. Fixing the barrier and reporting on actions taken to fix the barrier provides instant feedback opportunity to the group that management is listening, a key ingredient to cultural evolution. The benefit of the Kaizen approach is that companies rally resources for a short period – usually 3-5 days – and go to work understanding the problem and designing fixes to that problem. These problems generally are the result of poor handoffs from upstream processes. Improving the quality of the handoff reduces time and frustration among individuals. My experience is that nearly 85 percent of personnel issues are the result of process quality and process inconsistency. Solving these issues leads to a happier workforce, engaged employees, and a culture that begins to embrace

change for the good.

This is no small task for managers and business leaders because they have to learn the approach as well. This is not something that occurs for an organization overnight or in a few short months. It requires breaking old habits, less tolerance for process inconsistencies, and a willingness to invest time to train and encourage people. This commitment comes from the top of the organization. Owners have to be patient and impatient at the same time. Leaders and managers have to be trained and this takes time and a commitment as well. Perhaps the real question is whether or not you are interested in the long game, where continuous improvement keeps you in the competitive game, or in the short game where customer loyalty is not part of the strategy.



*Paul Brauss, former CEO of Mark Andy and a past board member of TLMI, is a consultant and executive coach. See [Braussconsulting.com](http://Braussconsulting.com), and buy his book at [amzn.to/2NFzXkB](http://amzn.to/2NFzXkB)*



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# Bringing ideas to life

*Prototyping is a crucial stage of the packaging design process, writes Vicki Strull*

**L**ike many roles in the business world, I do a lot of my 'pen to paper' work alone. At my desk. With two giant monitors displaying my designs-in-progress. Yes, I meet extensively with clients, conceptualize with creative teams, review research with marketing, collaborate with CEOs, CMOs, brand managers, creative directors, production managers and converters. But much of my design work happens when no one is around. Because of this, most of my clients think that when I finish designing the graphics for a package, the design process is complete.

They would be wrong.

There is an indispensable next phase of successful packaging design: prototyping. Anyone who is versed in 'design thinking' recognizes that prototyping is an essential step of an agile, iterative design process. 'In prototyping, you give your concepts detail, form and nuance – you bring them to life,' says Jeanne Liedtka, professor of business administration at University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business, in her book *Designing for Growth*.

When brands prototype, they are often exploring several design concepts, forms, substrates, and/or finishing techniques. It's an eye-opening way for us to test the concepts and even break through some of the safer options and try more unique approaches.

## A case in point

This type of design thinking was evident in a recent re-branding I did for Wildfare, a specialty food brand. I partnered with Cog LLC, a highly-regarded package development and prototyping studio that specializes in secondary packaging. We quickly realized how crucial prototyping would be for Wildfare's new labels and packaging. Why? First, Wildfare's print supply chain is dispersed throughout the world. Prototyping their new labels became the benchmark for printers and converters throughout their supply chain.

'Our prototyped labels are the standard-bearer for the quality we expect from our suppliers stateside and abroad,' says Melissa Clemente, marketing director for Wildfare.

Second, because Wildfare is a premium brand of food products derived 'from the Mediterranean Soil & Sun', it requires premium packaging to connect with its consumers and brand story. We opted for metallics to enhance the luxury nature of the new packaging.

Even with a strong onscreen or PDF mock-up, metallic options are difficult to envision in a design. In order for us to know exactly how the packaging would look in real life – in three dimensions – we knew we needed the power of prototyping. We wanted to ensure that the final design would look and feel the way we imagined, while leveraging our budget and engaging shoppers. After all, successful packaging must have shelf appeal to attract and engage shoppers and create confidence and trust once they get the product home.

I worked closely on the Wildfare prototyping with Lindsey Frimming, partner and chief innovation officer at Cog, who put it this way: 'Whether it's fragrance or food, if the packaging doesn't stand out on the shelf, the consumer is going to just keep moving.'

## Experiencing design in the physical world

After much consideration, I've compiled the top three advantages of package prototyping: touch, experience and sight. Let's start with touch. Holding a packaging design in the physical world, rather than just seeing it onscreen, feels very different. We can turn it in every direction, test it in different lighting, and trust it because it is a physical object.

People are often surprised at their response to touching a



**"In prototyping, you give your concepts detail, form and nuance – you bring them to life"**

prototype; they don't foresee how powerful the real-world, physical piece will be, especially because they have every confidence in our onscreen design. The prototype takes it to the next level.

When I prototype with Cog, we often do it in two stages – first for structure, shape and substrate; second for exploring different finishes. 'All you have to do is look on store shelves to see how important touch is,' says Lindsey. And we know from research that once a shopper picks up a product from the shelf, they are more likely to put it in their cart and purchase it.

Having a product design to experience in the third dimension is important for the purchasing manager and/or for a consumer test panel, too. Elements that drive touch will usually add cost to the packaging. Brands need to make sure that their investment will pay off.

## The 'wow' factor

With social media influencers and brand fans 'unboxing' their purchases on various platforms, the most successful packaging today needs to provide a unique consumer experience. Is there printing on the inside of the box? Is there a hidden drawer? Does the packaging align with expectations that the shopper had when they ordered online? Or is it simply beautiful packaging that makes the viewer think, 'Wow, I want to experience that product'. It's nearly impossible to know if your customer experience will create a 'wow' sensation without prototyping it as part of the design

process. Prototyping is a brand's secret weapon, especially with tens of thousands (or hundreds of thousands) of dollars invested.

While brands are typically very confident when reviewing packaging mock-ups online or in PDFs, nothing compares to seeing-is-believing.

'Let's say you're going to use a foil that's represented on the PDF by a colorized gradient,' says Lindsey. 'The simulating software will do a great job, but you still won't know if the type will be readable in all different light sources. Or what if the foil flashes too dark? A lot of variables can't be replicated onscreen. If it's worth the extra budget for a premium finish, it's worth the more modest cost of prototyping to make sure you get the shelf impact and success that you're looking for.'

### The magic of 'what-if'

When it comes to prototyping, it's not just about 'what is'; it's also about 'what if'. Without prototyping, so many things can go wrong. The print quality may not come out as the designer and brand envisioned; the dieline might fail; the unboxing experience may be flawed. But the actual risk, says Lindsey, is that 'brands risk not having the opportunity to truly engage the consumer's senses and ultimately win on the shelf'.

Recalling another prototyping win, Lindsey talks about a recent

**"We wanted to ensure that the final design would look and feel the way we imagined"**

project for a leading personal care brand. The original parameters were to prototype different ways to highlight the brand logo and new imagery, using the same elements across the entire product line. But the brand gave Lindsey and her team the freedom to explore. With that freedom, Cog was able to show the brand a unique tactile varnish effect for each of the seven SKUs – something the brand's design team might never have had a chance to consider.

Lindsey adds that she also worked with the printer to ensure that the finishing being proposed accurately represented the printer's capabilities. 'Once you know what the printer can do, that's when the 'what-ifs' start to form beautiful packaging and you get a consistently elevated shelf presence and consumer response.'

In other words, that's when the magic of prototyping happens, bringing together the elements of design, imagination, exploration, touch, sight, experience, and ultimately the ability to confidently select the winning packaging.

### A prototype project in pictures

In the accompanying article, I mentioned one of my recent projects: the new labels and packaging design for the rebranding of Wildfare, a line of specialty food items.

The rebranding was a two-phase project. During the first phase, we had to move quickly and account for a lot of logistics. Between olive, apricot, tomato and other harvesting schedules, container space and daily price increases overseas, we designed and prototyped phase one in record time. Since the new identity and packaging designs demanded a luxury look befitting the brand's quality ingredients and new identity, we quickly decided on metallized substrates for their incontrovertible ability to create a premium look.

We also chose these substrates because metallized labels and film were available to all Wildfare's print suppliers, in the US and abroad. Due to the tight timeline, phase one prototyping became a confirmation process rather than an exploration of possibilities. Now, about a year after the rebranding launch, we are evolving the labels and packaging to explore options that will align more closely with Wildfare's sustainability and recyclability goals. Any exploration of substrates, embellishments and tactile effects demands prototyping to truly assess whether or not the packaging meets specific

brand goals. For phase two, we are again partnering with Cog, a development and prototyping studio that specializes in secondary packaging.

Our first step is to eliminate metallized substrates and instead explore coated and uncoated substrates. This broad change will ensure the packaging meets its goal of greater recyclability. To maintain the luxe of the brand, we are experimenting with various foil stamping and embossing techniques. It's important to note that we're prototyping our top design choices, not all of our concepts. To that end, check out the new concepts and options in the following images and captions. Notice the variations in design and materials, along with our thoughts on how each version meets Wildfare's recyclable and luxury-look goals. I wish you could lift them off the page and touch them like the Wildfare team can! That's the key benefit to prototyping. You get to hold each one; feel each label's distinctive qualities, and compare them to each other. And finally, you can determine which concept has the exact look and feel that the brand warrants.

Successful prototyping is an exercise in understanding what's possible, as well as weeding out what doesn't meet the brand objectives.



#### Option 1

Of all the new concepts, this label is the most similar to Wildfare's existing label. It is printed CMYK on a coated adhesive label stock, with foil stamping on Wildfare's iconic brand logo – the mosaic flower. While far more recyclable than the existing label, which uses a metallized substrate, this option still has the most metallic coverage of any of the new concepts and will therefore produce more industrial waste than any of the other options. So, while it meets the objective of being more environmentally considerate, it's not the most considerate of all the design options.

Prototyping: Cog, LLC; Photography: Guy Welch

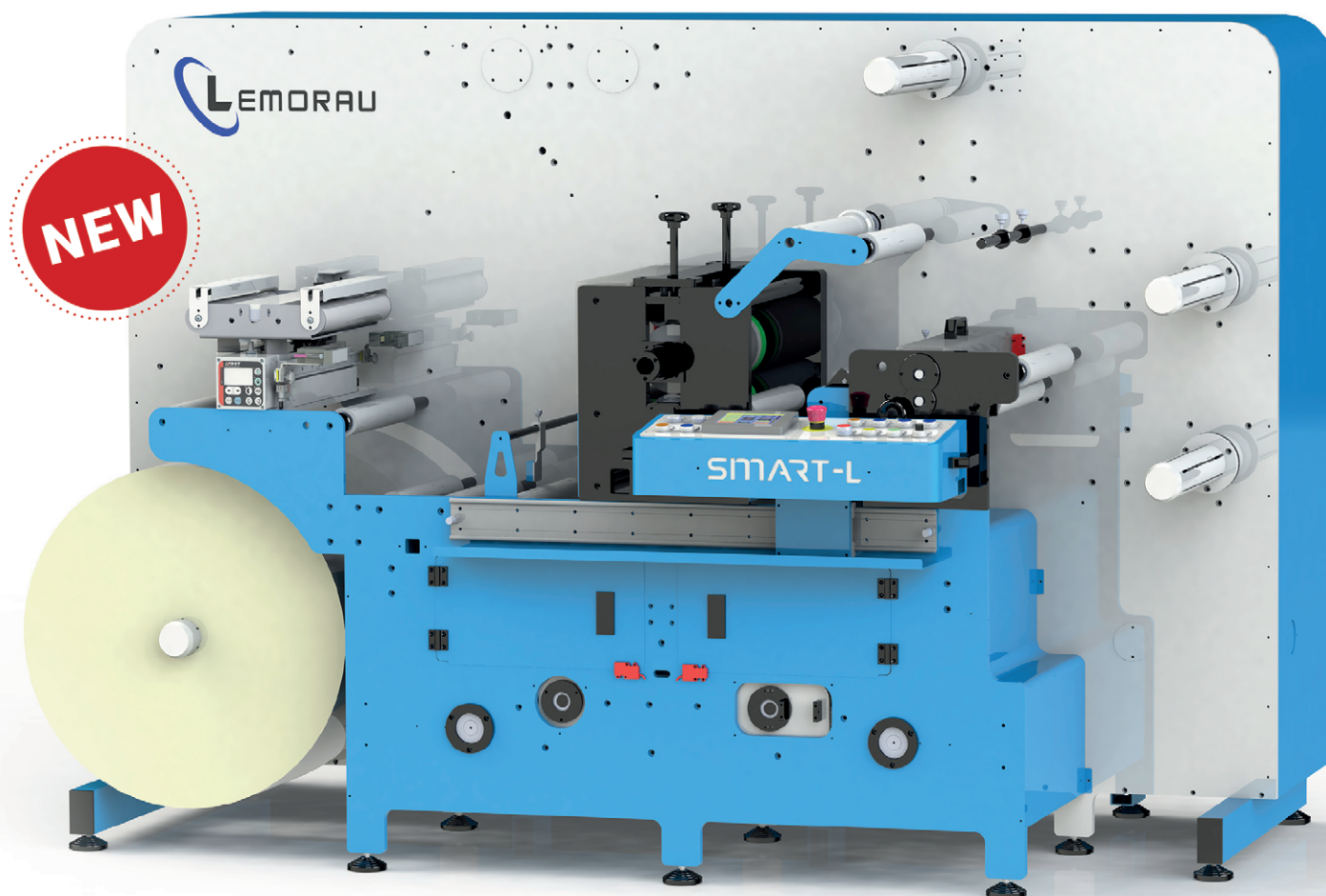




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### Option 2

This label uses an accent of silver with the CMYK printing on a coated label stock. To add a sense of luxe, this prototype uses a sculptured embossing, which also creates tactility and a multi-sensory consumer experience. When considering the label on the actual bottle on a retail shelf, that small amount of silver can be very impactful in capturing a shopper's attention in just a few seconds. As for the sustainability goals, using just this very small amount of foil makes the label much more recyclable.

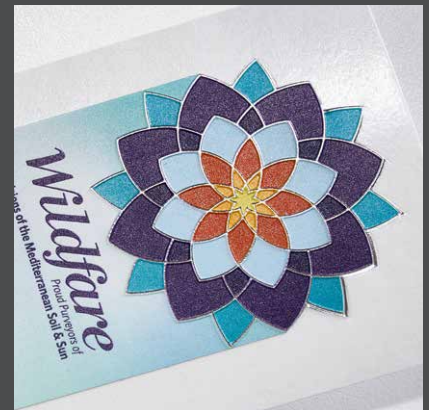
Prototyping: Cog, LLC; Photography: Guy Welch



### Option 3

This label is printed CMYK on a coated adhesive label and creates an authentic mosaic of the iconic Wildfare flower by embossing and foil-stamping the 'grout' – the space in between the petals of the flower. This prototype is the truest embodiment of the brand vision, paying homage to the ever-present mosaics throughout Mediterranean culture and architecture. Again this option is much more environmentally-friendly than the phase one labels

Prototyping: Cog, LLC; Photography: Guy Welch



### Option 4

This label creates luxury and a premium quality without using metallic enhancements. Instead, the label uses a sculptured emboss on the petals of the mosaic flower and on the logotype to create a haptic experience. While certainly tactile and memorable, this prototype has no 'bling'. So while it is high in recyclability, it has a less luxe feel than the others.

Prototyping: Cog, LLC; Photography: Guy Welch



### Option 5

Sometimes prototyping is about testing the minimum: how luxe can we make the label without any enhancements or embellishments? Prototyping on this textured, uncoated adhesive label is a sophisticated and elegant solution that could be viable with a very limited budget. While this option is fully recyclable, we must consider if it is premium enough for the brand vision.

Prototyping: Cog, LLC; Photography: Guy Welch



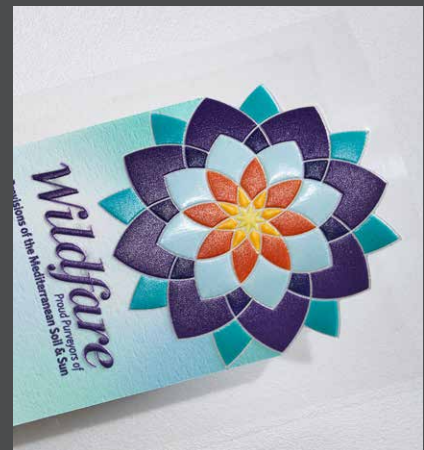




### Option 6

Comparing design solutions is a crucial component during the prototyping process. For the Wildfare project, we compared coated vs uncoated; metallics vs no metallics; embossed vs not embossed; glossy vs matte; smooth vs soft touch. This option uses the exact same production techniques as Option 4, but is produced on an uncoated label rather than a coated one. Our considerations include: how does the stock affect the imagery of the olives? The readability of the small typography? The logotype? The vivid color palette? Is it strong enough to support the gradient background representing a rising sun over the Mediterranean Sea? Because this option eliminates all metallics, it certainly aligns with Wildfare's sustainability goals.

Prototyping: Cog, LLC; Photography: Guy Welch



Photography: Brook Road Photography

### Current Wildfare packaging

The current Wildfare label is produced on a metallized adhesive label. The design leverages opaque white to control the metallic effect on the label and to create contrast between graphic elements.

Wildfare's iconic mosaic flower and logotype are fully metallic, which creates a sense of luxe, while the background has 50 percent white behind the CMYK to give the gradient just enough sparkle.

To ensure accuracy and contrast with metallic elements, the olive imagery and product name have 100 percent white behind the CMYK.

Additionally, Wildfare's mosaic flower, logotype, and olive imagery are followed up with UV spot gloss. The new prototyping exploration uses coated and uncoated white labels to improve the packaging's recyclability, and the prototypes employ various foil stamping and embossing techniques to maintain their premium-ness.

### Inside our minds and our process

While the enhancements in each option are focused on Wildfare's iconic mosaic flower, prototyping also allows us to consider every element of the design: the vivid color palette, the logotype, the readability of small typography, the smoothness of the gradient, and the CMYK process of the imagery.

The next step for this prototyping process is to apply these labels to the actual, filled olive oil bottles and see what they look like on the shelves in various retail environments. Which catches a shopper's eye the best? How do they look next to their competition? What happens to their look in various lighting conditions? What makes someone reach out and pick up our beautiful bottle of olive oil over another?

That is really the determining factor: ensuring that the printing and finishing not only make the vision of the package design come alive, but maximize its impact on the shelf and in the hands of the consumer.



Thank you to both Guy Welch Photography, [guywelch.com](http://guywelch.com) and Brook Road Photography, [brookroadphotography.myportfolio.com](http://brookroadphotography.myportfolio.com).

Vicki Strull is a packaging designer and strategist who advises top-tier and emerging brands on how to leverage the power of print and packaging within their omnichannel marketing strategies. Through MarketWise Academy Vicki teaches master classes on next-gen print + digital marketing strategies and techniques for designers, marketers and brand leaders. Join fellow trendsetters at [vickistrull.com](http://vickistrull.com) or follow Vicki on LinkedIn @vickistrull.

Cog is a development and prototyping company that specializes in secondary packaging. Cog partners with both global and start-up brands to bring their vision to life through prototyping and pilot programs – an essential 'cog' in the design process prior to manufacturing. To learn more about Cog's work and services, visit [cogdriven.com](http://cogdriven.com).

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# Where do we go from here?

*The rewards for taking a focused direction are greatest when others cannot commit to move, writes Bob Cronin of The Open Approach*

**T**he fallout from Covid-19 continues to deliver one new blow after the other. Just when we think things are getting better, we encounter another hurdle. Rather than striving to increase sales and clients, our great label and packaging industry is just striving. Striving for normalcy. Striving for opportunity. And striving for things to calm down long enough for owners to figure out the next best move to grow their business.

The energy surrounding our industry has historically been one of vibrance and positivity. But we're now feeling that we'll face Covid issues forever. We're focusing on shortages of substrates, suppliers, customers and employees. Yet the biggest shortage is our confidence.

As advisors, we hear the frustration: 'We can't do this anymore', 'We can't last through this', and 'I give up'. These comments are no longer just quips. They're gasps trying to catch fresh air. Attitudes do many times end up representing our future, and many owners know they aren't

well-positioned to move forward under the concerns over massive inflation, continually changing health and safety expectations, labor quality and availability, and market flux. The multiple issues we see are real, and the only way to get over them is to do something, regardless of how helpless we may feel.

We've waited too long following the path that Covid has taken us. It's our turn to take control back. Sit down with the individuals who've helped build your great company and decide what you want for your future. You've weathered many storms before, and this is just another one of them. Here are your options.

**Invest and grow.** Most label and packaging owners have had their eyes on a specific piece of equipment or technology for a while. If you've done your ROI analysis, this might be the ideal time to dive in. Many of your competitors have stalled, waiting for the post-Covid influence to get better – and ultimately missing out on potential present opportunities. Assess this purchase in light of today's landscape. How does it provide for your customers now? Can you manage it with current personnel? Can it solve any of the issues brought about by the pandemic? Talk to your customers and get a commitment, then make the move.

**Acquire.** One of the fastest ways to grow is through acquisition. However, buying another company is a big commitment, and an acquisition should always be approached with caution. More businesses than ever are open to a sale, which means that while you have more options, you also have more potential pitfalls.

Rather than just buying your flailing neighbor, make sure you have a strategic plan for an add-on. Determine where your biggest gaps and needs are, as well as what you might benefit from most (specific customers, products, supply chain/logistics, territories).

Then conduct your due diligence to make sure you know what you're getting into and that its structure, people, and capabilities can be integrated cohesively into your operation. Seek a professional advisor for support.

**Sell (or divest).** Entrepreneurs in all positions sell. It's not a matter of selling at a high point or out of desperation. It's about whether you can still make your company thrive or whether someone else will do better with it. An exit can bring a lot of

## "Sitting and waiting on what might happen is a 'going out of business' strategy"

opportunity, and you have plenty of options if you're in a position of strength. There are a lot of potential suitors out there – local competitor, larger strategic, private equity, etc. After building your business for so long, you'll want to find the very best match. Decide where you want to be (full exit, advisory position, sell only a business unit, etc), and what you can count on among your top leadership, so you can make the best and most profitable decision.

**Form a strategic partnership or alliance.** If none of the first three sound enticing, it's still important to build. Times of challenge are times of opportunity. What's your biggest weakness? What capabilities do you need to become the leader in your market segment? What are your clients struggling with, and what can you add to ease their pain? Some alliances can be simple, like adding a storage partner to improve material access or benefit from purchasing economies of scale. Others may be more expansive, such as bringing on a digital partner or having abilities on different substrates. If you have an existing relationship, make sure to formalize it and lock in lower prices now.

Two years ago, we didn't know what the future would bring. And we don't know how Covid and other dynamics will come into play two years from now.

The rewards for taking a powerful, focused direction are greatest when others cannot commit to move. It's time to buy the press, create a solution, resolve supply chain issues, acquire, partner, or exit. Sitting and waiting on what might happen is a 'going out of business' strategy. Set your sights high and commit to making it happen.



*Bob Cronin is managing partner of The Open Approach, an M&A firm focused exclusively on the world of print. To learn more, visit [www.theopenapproach.net](http://www.theopenapproach.net), email [bobcronin@aol.com](mailto:bobcronin@aol.com), or call (+1) 630 323 9700*





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# Young managers – Jessica Hung, Maxcess International

*Jessica Hung, global marketing manager at Maxcess International, discusses her career in print and the expansion of RotoMetrics' flexible die production with the opening of a new plant. Interview by Jordan Hart*

**F**or Maxcess and all its brands, which include RotoMetrics, Fife, Tidland, and more, I focus on the digital communications and initiatives that help our marketing team support everything from sales to customer service to our educational programs. It is common to hear that someone didn't specifically look for a job in labels. However, I got into the industry because good career opportunities were presented to me. I was able to learn what this industry is about and how important it is to end consumers. That is what drew me in.

**"I joined in the middle of 2020; chaotic times are a great moment to join a company"**

I joined RotoMetrics around the time it was merging with Maxcess. I was able to see so much opportunity for the company on the horizon that it was of huge interest to me. I started as a global marketing project manager. I was relatively new to the industry compared to plenty of seasoned associates and experts when I joined Maxcess. I had the opportunity to learn while coordinating everything from the different tradeshow we were participating in, to the advertisements we had in different industry publications and social media. There was a bit of managing everything, from the product and customer communications side, as well as looking at what RotoMetrics and Maxcess can offer customers as a combined company.

It has been a journey. When I joined, we were in the baby steps of creating MyMaxcess, which is the Maxcess side e-commerce. We had MyRoto as reference, which is the RotoMetrics side e-commerce, so I've been able to see those projects and manage the growth and improve them for customers. I joined in the middle of 2020; chaotic times are a great moment to join a company. They had great plans in mind for where the company was going; they just needed resources and a really focused mind on being able to carry them out. For example, in labels RotoMetrics is a well-known name, but how do we bring in the other brands that we now represent together?

Joining RotoMetrics and Maxcess right after their merger and during Covid, I've been able to see a lot of growth opportunities and take those and run with them, which has been an amazing experience. For example, around the time that I joined, Maxcess had been doing plenty of tradeshow but not too many webinars. Since we were realizing that we couldn't meet customers in person at the time, we were missing some of that interaction where our customers can stay educated or ask questions about their own applications. I was able to start a webinar schedule and cadence so that customers could choose when to interact with us. This rolled out globally so we could stay in touch with everyone during the pandemic. Being able to find these new ways to connect with customers has been my favorite part of the job.

There are a few trends to keep an eye on, all revolving around customers. We have been hearing that customers want to know



*Jessica Hung, global marketing manager at Maxcess International*

more about the manufacturing process and they want to know that things are green and creating less waste. They want to know that manufacturers are taking steps toward having greener and less wasteful production. I would also say that converters themselves also want to know more about their processes so that they can improve for themselves and for their customers. This means learning more about how exactly the material is interacting with everything else at every point along the printing press. People just want more and more information.

## RotoMetrics expansion

We are expanding our RotoMetrics facility in Eureka, Missouri. I've been able to visit that facility a few times. They made solid dies and accessories and we are expanding a whole new section just for flexible dies. This was in the works because we heard feedback from customers about the popularity of flexible dies in the Midwest region, the west coast, and the southwest, and we wanted to service those customers better.

With the growth that RotoMetrics and Maxcess have seen, we wanted to build a plant where we start with the best of our brands around the world and combine that with the best technologies and strategies to create the best product for the customer. That plant just opened, and we are now producing flexible dies there that will ship to customers even faster with shorter lead times. We are on track to start producing and shipping out more than 200 flexible dies a day just from that facility. That product will service the Midwest, southwest, and west coast customers.



Watch the full interview here: [youtu.be/bmVTTpXQbBk](https://youtu.be/bmVTTpXQbBk)





# Q&A

Philippe Voet is CEO of Belgium-based label printer Etivoet, a third-generation family-run business founded in 1954. He began a two-year term as president of self-adhesive label association Finat in June 2021. Interview by James Quirk



# **L&L: Tell us about your career to date.**

**Philippe Voet:** I qualified as an industrial pharmacist and spent 12 years working as a production manager and then a supply chain manager in the pharmaceutical industry before joining Etivoet – my family's business – in 2011. So I worked for a potential customer of Etivoet – I know how products are developed, what is important for production and what is important for the supply chain. It means I understand the questions that Etivoet's customers ask and what they are looking for.

Etivoet is a family business. It was founded by my grandfather in 1954 and my father, Marc, still works there two half-days a week. My brother, Frederik, also works with us, so we are the third generation. When I joined in 2011, I was involved in many different areas of the company. Over time I picked up more responsibilities. I hate job titles and don't even have one on my LinkedIn profile – what matters is what you are doing. We are all in the same boat.

# **L&L: How has Etivoet evolved over the years?**

**Philippe Voet:** Etivoet started printing gummed paper labels when it was founded in 1954. The move to self-adhesive label printing took place around 1973-1974 when my father joined the business.

Back then, there were not a lot of label printers. Everyone was doing similar things and had plenty of work. But things became more difficult in the mid-1990s, more

competitive. My father began to make some changes, to adapt the business. He started the process, and I helped to continue it when I joined in 2011. My brother joined in 2016, further speeding up the necessary changes. Since then, we run the company together, focusing on product development and innovation.

Before, you just made labels. Now, you need a story. We are trying to create a story: we do the difficult labels. Our niche is how we make a difference. Brands come to us when the labels they want are too complicated for a standard label converter.

Our main driver is the multi-layer label. Standard label printers might go up to two or three layers; we have a seven-layer label on the market – a 13-page multi-layer label with a fully PP construction, which can compete with the old-school booklet labels.

We use flexo presses from MPS, letterpress from Gallus and digital from HP Indigo and Mouvent. The machines we use are specifically customized for our complex production. Our biggest market is chemicals – industrial and household – which makes up around 35 percent of our production. The food and beverage market accounts for around 25 percent; pharmaceutical labels another 20 percent. The rest is divided into other areas.

These are sectors that currently use a lot of multi-layer labels. But everything always comes in waves. When a different sector begins to pay attention to our products and wants to use multi-layer labels, things

change. The key is that we are a partner for our customers – we help them find the correct label for their application, even if this requires development or innovation.

# **L&L: How did the company adapt during the pandemic?**

**Philippe Voet:** Our first concern was to protect our team. So staff worked from home where possible and we set up a bubble system in production, meaning only small groups of people had contact with each other, to protect the rest of the company. There was full separation of shifts and units.

We had more orders – automotive was down, but hygiene products and household chemicals were up, as was food – but our efficiency was hit because we were protecting staff and the company. Luckily, this was made up for by the increase in work.

# **L&L: What has been the impact of the supply chain disruption?**

**Philippe Voet:** Everyone has been hit by the supply chain issues. Orders that we are placing now might not arrive for five or six months. Some of our customers would usually order all their labels for the year at the same time. We have to tell them that we can only deliver part of their orders each month, so that we can give something to everyone, otherwise we would run out of stock.

We have to keep getting materials in so that if there is urgency we can react, particularly for the pharma and food sectors.

**“Before, you just made labels. Now, you need a story. We are trying to create a story: we do the difficult labels. Brands come to us when the labels they want are too complicated for a standard label converter”**



Etivoet began printing self-adhesive labels around 20 years after its foundation in 1954



Etivoet specializes in multi-layer labels



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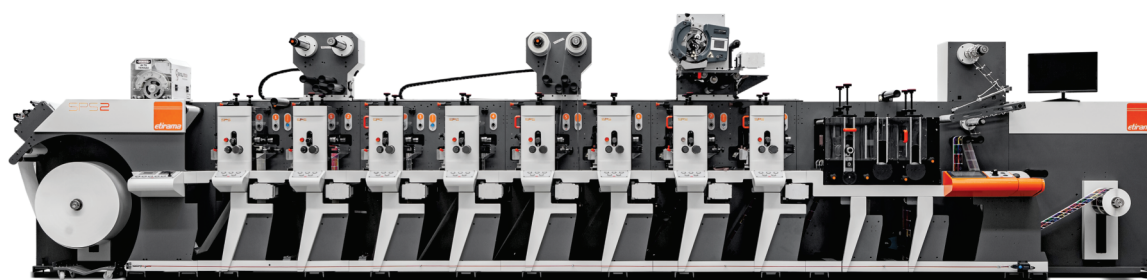
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Etivoeet uses flexo technology from MPS, letterpress from Gallus, digital from HP Indigo and inkjet from Mouvent



Labels printed by Etivoeet

## “I hate job titles and don’t even have one on my LinkedIn profile – what matters is what you are doing. We are all in the same boat”

But everyone gets a bit less than they want. It is not a fun period for us nor for our customers. It requires creativity, but we are managing the situation.

But as I said before: everything comes in waves. The current problems will push label converters and our customers to keep more stock in their warehouses, but then people will get comfortable again and will reduce their stock again. These things happen in cycles.

### **L&L: What area of technology are you likely to invest in next?**

**Philippe Voet:** Our next press will be another flexo press. We are not looking to invest in any new area of technology in particular, but we always look to build on our expertise. Investment happens wherever we need new capacity or new capabilities. Investment in technology always follows the needs of the market. We continuously invest so as to guarantee that we can and will be able to answer the needs of our customers today and tomorrow.

**L&L: When Finat announced you as its new president last year, you cited sustainability and talent recruitment as the industry’s two major challenges. Regarding sustainability, do you think enough progress is being made and how can it be accelerated?**

**Philippe Voet:** I am convinced that labels are the future for sustainability. This is because

with the alternatives – such as direct print, for example – you cannot easily separate the ink or the material from the product. A self-adhesive label can be removed. In Belgium, beer is a huge market and we reuse the bottles – this is only possible because you can remove the label, which allows better recyclability. So labels are the future.

But everything happens slowly because change takes time. Until around three years ago, it was rare for a customer to pay more for a more sustainable solution – recycled materials, for example. But now it is happening more often. It is a trend that will only speed up. The market will lead us.

At Finat, we can help to educate people about how to become carbon neutral or to reduce CO2 emissions. This is one area of our work. Another is to help run sustainability projects, as in the work we do for Celab, for example.

### **L&L: What can the industry do to recruit and retain young talent?**

**Philippe Voet:** We should be more positive. We are working in a fantastic industry. In every shop and home we enter, we see a label that we printed. We are creative and innovative. We need to communicate positively. We are an essential industry. Eighty percent of purchasing decisions are made at the shelf, thanks to the branding and the packaging.

Because of this, I am not negative about attracting new talent to the sector. We are



tech-driven. We are on the cutting-edge of sustainability. We just need to communicate differently. The Labelicious competition launched by Finat in 2019 is a perfect example – a positive initiative which shows the possibilities of our industry.

**L&L: How do you think the label industry will evolve over the next decade?**

**Philippe Voet:** I could give a standard answer: more digital, and more sustainable. But in the end, I have to say: it depends. Our industry will go where the market takes us. Our challenge is to be ready for the demands of today and tomorrow. We are not the drivers of the market in that respect. We have influence, of course, which is a nice position to be in, but in the end

the market decides.

The shift towards sustainability is happening. It's still a minority, but more and more big companies are coming to us to discuss the possibilities around more sustainable materials, even if it increases their costs. Young consumers will be a driver, because they are more willing to pay extra for sustainable products.



Multi-layer label printed by Etivoeet for Chevron



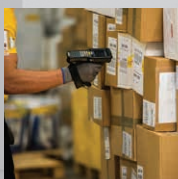
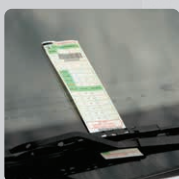
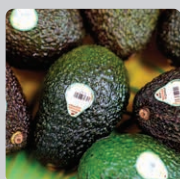
**“I am convinced that labels are the future for sustainability. This is because with the alternatives, you cannot easily separate the ink or the material from the product. A self-adhesive label can be removed”**

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## New wash-off labels

One of Etivoet's newest innovations is the introduction of wash-off labels to its portfolio. The tested and patented technology ensures that the labels come off easily during bottle washing, while they remain firmly in place in other circumstances. They are particularly suited to Belgium's large beer market, where locals are accustomed to returning and reusing glass beer bottles.

We gained one big customer recently because we have committed to reducing our carbon footprint by 50 percent in the next ten years. At least, the commitment is 50 percent, but in reality our target is much higher, more like 90 percent of Scope 1 and Scope 2 sustainable development performance indicators – SDPIs – which are the ones we can control. These include initiatives such as switching to LED lighting, LED curing, installing solar panels, using electric cars, for example. In the end, it is the sum of small things that can help to make a difference. Switching to LED lighting, for example, has a return on investment of three years, so it is an easy decision. We all should be doing it.

But our suppliers must also reduce their emissions, and the end users as well. How the product is transported and used, and

what happens to it afterwards – every step must be considered.

**L&L: You were planning to attend Labelexpo Europe, before it was postponed to next year. What will you miss now the show isn't happening?**

**Philippe Voet:** I will always attend Labelexpo Europe – it is easy for me because I live just 10km from the exhibition halls in Brussels. It's the go-to exhibition for our industry. For me it has a dual role: seeing equipment and meeting people. I like to be able to get the look and feel of the machinery. It serves as a great filter to narrow down the options: I can see many machines and then decide which ones to further explore. And it is so important to be able to meet the people behind the companies.

**“We are creative and innovative. We need to communicate positively. We are an essential industry”**

**L&L: What are your main hobbies outside work?**

**Philippe Voet:** I like running – and by that I mean running a lot. I have completed more than 70 marathons and ultramarathons, including some of the toughest races on earth such as the 2016 Marathon des Sables and the 2018 Fire & Ice Ultra. In a similar vein, I also enjoy long-distance hiking. It's a combination of being good for the health, being outside and interacting with nature, in places that are not easy to get to. It gives me time to think and to organize my thoughts.



Go to [www.etivoet.be/en](http://www.etivoet.be/en) for more information about Etivoet. Finat's European Label Forum takes place on June 1-3 in Baveno, Italy. See [www.europeanlabelforum.com](http://www.europeanlabelforum.com) for more information

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*Sustainability, personalization and digital printing, which dominated the list of top industrial labeling trends for the past few years, lost their significance as market players focused on supply chain issues. Piotr Wnuk reports*

Industrial labels might lack the glamour and design efforts that go into customer-focused, attention-grabbing primary labels. However, they are an essential ingredient in keeping the wheels of global industry turning. In most cases, industrial labels must be machine-readable and be adapted to industrial processes. Industrial labels are also a vital component of a track-and-trace system, ensuring traceability and combating the counterfeiter.

The market was valued by Mordor Intelligence at USD 49.25 billion in 2020 and is forecast to reach USD 69.8 billion by 2026, growing at a CAGR of 6 percent between 2021 and 2026.

The global e-commerce sector continues to grow rapidly, a trend accelerated by the Covid pandemic. According to a report by PayPal, 27 percent of US citizens have accessed domestic and cross-border e-commerce. The need for high-quality shipping labels grows proportionally.

These shipping labels are also smarter, incorporating tracing and tracking technologies to prevent items from getting lost or delayed during transport. There is also a push for greener options as the industrial label segment catches up with similar trends in the wider packaging market.

It sounds like the industrial labeling space is a profitable and safe market, but the increasing cost and lack of availability of raw materials now threatens that growth.

### Confronting reality

'It is obvious, but the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak has been the biggest challenge many businesses have ever faced, let alone in recent times,' says Colin Le Gresley, managing director of UK-based converter Aztec Label. 'The impact on industrial labels was as immediate as it was severe – manufacture of machinery, equipment and even vehicles were all deeply affected by the various lockdowns and restrictions, effectively grinding to a halt overnight. There were serious repercussions in the logistics sector too; first due to the stock management problems arising from the initial lockdown, and more recently with a lack of haulage driver availability and pent-up demand accelerating shortages.'

Matthew Palinkas, product manager for durables at Avery Dennison Labels and Packaging Materials, says the industry has shown a high level of resilience. 'The industrial segment has continued to grow despite the challenges over the past two



*Industrial labels must be machine-readable and adapted to the industrial processes*

## “THE INDUSTRIAL SEGMENT HAS CONTINUED TO GROW DESPITE THE CHALLENGES OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS”

years. Overall, we faced challenges with strong demand growth, supply chain disruptions in raw material availability, capacity restrictions and freight, as well as double-digit inflationary pressure. We are expanding our supplier base to ensure a wider variety of sourcing options while continuing to intensify collaboration and joint supply chain planning with our existing strategic suppliers.'

Jason Hellman, senior manager of business, pharma and industrial markets at UPM Raflatac, Americas, agrees that the most significant challenge is the ongoing global supply chain issue, and the company has responded by identifying new sources of supply.

FLEXcon is a pressure-sensitive material manufacturer that focuses strongly on the industrial market. 'The major challenge is with the current supply chain problems,' explains product manager Ross Hodnett. 'Converters and customers in this space need material so that end users' factory lines won't have to be shut down. Discussions about backup materials and alternate materials are dominating the conversation. This is a particular challenge in this segment because the label materials are often precisely specified and require a lengthy qualification process to be approved. Suppliers who can give converters a steady supply by using a multitude of suitable options are winning the most right now.'

As Hodnett points out, industrial sector specifications and regulatory standards are rigid and lock converters into specific products without much flexibility. This has led industry stakeholders to rethink how

different standards can be harmonized to offer more flexibility to converters and end users.

### Turning to digital

'The challenge now remains to maintain the speed and standard of service being demanded by customers facing their own increasing and growing pressures,' remarks Aztec Label's Colin Le Gresley. 'With our investment in planning and production technology, this is a challenge we feel well equipped to meet.'

The latest Finat Radar report demonstrates the growing popularity of digital print in the industrial labeling sector. Brands and label buyers forecast that their label volumes will witness robust growth in 2022. The report estimates 6.4 percent overall growth and a healthy 5.4 percent for labels printed digitally. For digital labels, the data suggests that one of the highest spikes will be seen in the industrial segment.

Palinkas confirms that brands demanding more customization drives smaller SKU counts. This requires converters to produce shorter runs, pushing them to digital technologies. 'We continue to see this, especially in the chemical drum industry,' he adds.

'One of the major trends is the use of digital print technologies in industrial and durable labeling,' confirms FLEXcon's Ross Hodnett. 'Particularly, UV inkjet printing is growing in this segment more and more each year. Materials that can be printed digitally, as well as some of the older conventional methods such as flexographic or thermal transfer, are becoming more and more important.'

Andreas Hoffmann, managing director of DTM Print, says the transition to digital is already well under way. 'That means the challenge now is to stay in the market by the numerous competitors because digital printing is much easier and can be offered almost by anyone. The challenge and opportunity are to be better by offering outstanding, specialized digital print technologies.'

### Greener supply chain

'We are hearing requests about sustainable solutions and addressing them where possible,' confirms Avery Dennison's Matthew Palinkas. 'When it comes to durable labels, performance is critical. So, the biggest challenge is ensuring that a sustainable technology doesn't sacrifice the required levels of performance for a specific application. That said, there are areas where sustainable components are being used,



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areas like liners, for example with rPET.'

DTM Print's Andreas Hoffman goes one step further, stating that becoming green is not only an option – it is a necessity to stay in the market. 'With digital printing, there is no need to produce waste; substrates are now available from paper to plastics. DTM Print has recently introduced Permateg, which is compostable and offers various paper-based products and even food-approved ink.'

'It is important to define individual sustainability goals regarding industrial labels,' says UPM Raflatac's Jason Hellman. 'We can produce more sustainable facestocks and get the same performance as virgin products. The market needs to define the way we go.'

One could argue that durable labels, by nature and definition, are sustainable as they are designed to perform over a long time with minimal material resource use, therefore naturally have a low carbon footprint and align directly with waste hierarchy principles. That being said, manufacturers are looking at using recycled content when possible, to achieve their wider sustainability goals without sacrificing performance.

'We need to look at the complete life cycle analysis of the product, including the bulk product inside. If the chemical inside damages the container or ingresses into it, which would lead to poor quality PCR, then we should be investing in the best quality raw materials, which have little impact on the environment (carbon trust papers or biofilms),' says Paul Jones, sales and technical director at Skanem UK and the company's sustainability leader. 'If bulk is not so aggressive and the container can be recycled, then we should be designing for recyclability, ensuring high-quality PCR at the end and using PCR labels.'

Jones points out the challenges posed by the sheer range of applications for industrial labels and the different specifications for each sector. For instance, a screen wash for cars can be classed as industrial, but the plastic container it is sold in can be easily cleaned and recycled. On the other hand, motor oil ingresses into the HDPE containers and contaminates them; therefore, incineration is the only way to dispose of them. There are, of course, facilities that can clean the HDPE containers for full recycling. Still, the challenge remains how to guarantee that these containers are adequately segregated from household recycling centers or sent to special facilities.

'How do we ensure that these (contaminated) containers do not mix with high-quality PCR to enable the PCR to be used in food / cosmetics / beverage?' asks Jones. 'Do we choose the best, most



*Label materials in this segment are often precisely specified and require a lengthy qualification process to be approved*



*Industrial labels often lack the glamorous designs that go with attention-grabbing primary labels*

## "ONE OF THE MAJOR TRENDS IS THE USE OF DIGITAL PRINT TECHNOLOGIES IN INDUSTRIAL AND DURABLE LABELING"

sustainable raw material for the label and incur plastic tax or do we invest in higher-cost PCR and avoid the plastic tax – Holy Grail project 2.0 will really help solve these issues.'

FLEXcon's Ross Hodnett acknowledges these issues, and says sustainability efforts need to be better targeted. 'For example, liners with post-consumer waste content are a step in the right direction. Liners are a throwaway piece, so any opportunity to make them more sustainable goes a long way. Since the liner rarely ends up in the end-use application, post-consumer waste options can work well in various applications so long as they can still convert well.'

Katsu Araki, Mactac's businesses development manager, mentions that although durable products are usually tightly specified and not an easy item to switch, the product construction can still go thinner, or could use recycled content or biomass materials to reduce the environmental impact.

Ross Hodnett adds that finding ways to use greener plastics is another step in the right direction. Vinyl is typically seen as one of the least sustainable or least green plastics, and FLEXcon now offers a durable polypropylene film that can be used as a replacement for vinyl in many durable labeling applications. 'There is definitely interest for sustainable options if they

actually can meet the performance needs of the application,' he says.

'Concerning the level of interest in such products, as with all areas of the industry, sustainability and the environment have been hot topics in the labels sector for a long time,' states Aztec Label's Le Gresley. 'While some label manufacturers are happy to wax lyrical on the subject without acting, I'm proud that at Aztec Label, we have invested first and foremost in sustainable operations and remain focused on delivering an environmentally sustainable business.'

Aztec Label is an early adopter of the BPIF Zero Labels 2 Landfill scheme, which seeks to divert label waste from landfills to replace fossil fuels in blast furnaces. 'With that initiative working well, we're also looking to extend our current solar power energy system to the roof of the new extension to help us meet our long-term goal of becoming completely self-sustaining in terms of electricity use,' adds Le Gresley.

### Smart anchor

Smart and interactive technologies are starting to have a major impact on the industrial label segment. This year, Avery Dennison Smartrac launched AD Maxdura, which embeds UHF RFID tags directly into tires, providing detailed lifecycle information and enabling a range of environmental and safety features.



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Industrial labels carry a range of messages including warnings about dangers or compatibility

## “INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY WILL PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN CERTAIN PARTS OF INDUSTRIAL LABELING, INCLUDING ASSET TRACKING AND IDENTIFICATION LABELS THAT DISPLAY CRITICAL INFORMATION FOR A PART OR PRODUCT”

Some 3 billion tires are manufactured globally every year, and RFID is increasingly being adopted by all leading manufacturers. Michelin, for instance, has announced it will fit RFID sensor tags to all its tires by 2023, and countries such as China are looking to make its use mandatory.

The tag is attached to the tires directly during vulcanization, enabling track and trace through the logistic chain to identify tires at warehouses and dealerships. Stock counts can be performed almost instantly, tire assembly and fitting errors can be reduced, and it becomes a powerful defense against counterfeiting. The AD Maxdura tag will also detail the exact materials used in the manufacturing process, making it easier to reuse and providing details needed by recycling centers.

‘The automotive industry is in the biggest upheaval in its more than 130-year history,’ says Lauri Hyytinen, market development manager, automotive at Avery Dennison Smartrac. ‘Avery Dennison is working with all the leading tire manufacturers as they turn to RFID. The benefits are clear, not least in terms of safety and the ability to fully track the life cycle of the 3 billion manufactured each year. However, we have designed the AD Maxdura tire tag to be future proof for a wide range of future uses, which Avery Dennison Smartrac is already working on with OEM partners in the automotive industry, including logistics solutions and brand protection applications.’

Interactive technology will play an essential role in certain parts of industrial labeling, including asset tracking and identification labels that display critical information for a part or product. As labels become smarter, they will become more interactive in some ways. It may not be as exciting as some potential opportunities for interacting with graphics in the outdoor advertising space, like augmented reality. However, there is still much to explore with interactive labels, such as displaying safety information to a machine user in real-time.

States Avery Dennison’s Matthew Palinkas, ‘There are two reasons why I believe this will become an integral part of industrial labeling.

Firstly, the supply chain challenges we are seeing today mean it is crucial for a manufacturer or brand owner to really understand their inventories of finished goods, WHIP, and raw materials. We see solutions become more prevalent to help automate track and trace.

‘Secondly, interactive technology can help brands better communicate and bring value to their customers. One example would be adding a digital component to a durable label for applications like appliances. A technician can scan the label and log a service record digitally, for example. That way, should there be an issue in the future with that appliance, it becomes very easy for a technician to quickly scan and see what has been done in the past to a specific unit.’

DTM Print’s Andreas Hoffman also thinks interactive labels will become an integral part of the industrial labeling segment. ‘Engineers are already going further with new label technologies by printing electronics onto the label,’ he adds. ‘Where the RFID chip in the label was the beginning, they can now produce labels which send a message, light up, or sensor the environment to display a flexible best-before date depending on the outside temperature.’

‘Smart labels will also help massively with the sustainability angle,’ adds Skanem UK’s Paul Jones. ‘When Holy Grail is implemented, it will identify the makeup of the container and the product inside. Therefore, it should segregate the packaging into recyclable and non-recyclable ensuring only high-grade PCR is made and non-recyclable packaging disposed of correctly. For the track and trace side, RFID will really help this process.’

### Stay ahead of the game

Industrial labels can remove complexity from the supply chain, minimize worker input – and therefore the risk of an error – and enable complete connectivity and traceability across supply chains, minimizing costs and maximizing efficiency.

‘With more and more businesses depending on the traceability of products, people, and assets, the quality and accuracy of labels is increasingly vital, ensuring everything from stock management accuracy and real-time delivery tracking through to avoiding customer penalties and potentially costly compliance-related fines,’ says Aztec Label’s Colin Le Gresley. ‘As the demand for “more and faster” continues to increase, the future success of label converters hinges on their ability to meet the challenges of their customers – something which we do through our continued investment in technology across our business.’

Avery Dennison’s Matthew Palinkas sees a lot of opportunities in new industrial sectors such as the growing infrastructure around electric vehicle battery production. ‘This continued investment opens new opportunities for labels, and we are working closely to understand the needs of these materials.’

Guy Boxhall, UK sales manager at DTM Print, thinks that despite the relatively slow take-up of NFC and RFID in the label sector, these technologies will gain considerable importance in the next five to ten years in areas like biometrics in banking security.

As the requirements of industrial end users continue to change, there will always be a need for labels to follow that innovation process. Whether it is smarter labels or new chemical resistance challenges, there is no doubt label suppliers will have to adapt quickly.

‘It is hard to say specifically what the future will hold for such a broad segment, but one thing is clear: the demand for high performance and high-quality labels for this space is not slowing down,’ concludes FLEXcon’s Ross Hodnett.



More info about industrial labels, including a detailed breakdown of substrates and end-user market applications, read our *Label Academy* article: [www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy/article/focus-label-markets-industrial-labels](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy/article/focus-label-markets-industrial-labels)





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Giving Shape to Ideas



# M&A in the North American label market

*The label industry is no stranger to M&A, but in recent years there has been a surge of activity that is changing the face of the sector.*  
*Luis Rodriguez reports*

**T**he North American label industry has historically been a very fragmented space, with a large number of converters operating on a local-to-regional level for decades. However, after an influx of M&A activity over the past few years, it's clear that this dynamic is shifting.

'The US industry is absolutely going through a consolidation. Some of which are significant, where most of the larger players are getting much larger,' says Bob Cronin, L&L columnist and managing partner at The Open Approach, an M&A consultancy focused on the world of print.

**“Private equity is looking at the label industry and seeing that it's a safe place to invest money”**

In the North American market, with thousands of independent converters operating across the continent, the fragmentation has created opportunities for many of the larger converting groups to make major plays, expanding their reach and what they can offer to current and potential customers.

Take, for example, Fortis Solutions Group, a converter

headquartered in Virginia Beach, Virginia, providing pressure-sensitive labels, multi-ply coupon and booklets, flexible packaging printing, shrink sleeves, folding cartons, and label applicators.

'We have a particularly fragmented industry of over 2,000 converters. That fragmentation has led Fortis and others to pursue M&A as we see the benefits of scale for our customers,' says John Wynne, president and CEO at Fortis Solutions Group. 'As we think about our acquisition strategy, the four pillars that have guided us have been geographic expansion, product diversification, end-market diversification, and intellectual capital.'

Over the last decade, Fortis has expanded its operations from just a single manufacturing plant to 15 facilities with over 1,000 employees across the United States. It was recently acquired by private equity firm, Harvest Partners.

The strategy that Wynne describes is common among other converting groups across North America.

Larger converters such as I.D. Images, Resource Label Group and Brook & Whittle have also been making strategic acquisitions to enhance their service and to have a leg up over others in an industry where being in the backyard of a potential customer is still an advantage.

And outside the larger converting groups, other players are placing a stake in the label sector. Private equity firms such as Sole Source Capital, Wynnchurch Capital, Warburg Pincus, Clayton, and Dubilier & Rice see the label industry as a safe and profitable place

to invest.

'Right now, private equity is looking at the label industry and seeing that it's a safe place to invest money,' says Cronin, 'because of the growth, upside momentum, technology advances and other items that are going to make it important in the future and make them comfortable about where their money is going.'

Growth, over the past few years, is not a word one has heard in most other industries. But as the Covid-19 pandemic proved, the label industry is resilient and has shown itself to be not only a necessary business, but wholly essential to the global supply chain. This has made the decision much easier for private equity firms to invest in the label space.

'The printed packaging industry has long been of interest to private equity groups given the industry's steady growth and, in the case of the label industry, consistently performing above GDP gains,' says Jennifer Dochstader of LPC, a marketing communications and industry research company. 'However, we've witnessed increased interest in the past two years given growth rates for printed packaging companies due to factors associated with the pandemic. Our industry has decidedly proven itself not only 'essential', but one that also happens to witness higher growth rates during lasting global pandemics.'

With the proven resilience and growing interest of the label industry from outside investors, many private equity firms and converters are vying for the limited amount of label manufacturers within the 50-to-100 million USD in sales-per-year range, leading to different strategies when making deals and acquiring said manufacturers.

'There are a couple of us that have been acquisitive over the past couple of years but over the past 18 months or so, we've certainly

## **“The ethos of the label printing industry is changing rapidly. The largest multinational converting groups are only getting bigger, acquisition by acquisition”**

seen a lot of new entrants into the space. We're all chasing a lot of the same, good companies that are out there,' says Wynne. 'So, that has led to valuations going up which is why you're seeing a lot of activity recently. We bring a differentiated approach to sellers focused on employee and customer growth opportunities.'

As Wynne mentioned, the last few years have seen more companies take an interest in the label industry. Though there have been many private equity firms with long-standing interest and ongoing investments in the sector, and mergers and acquisitions between converters are not at all uncommon, it's hard to disagree that the last few years have been decidedly different.

### **Recent M&A activity**

Over the last 24 months, barely two weeks go by without another acquisition taking place. Because of this, it can be confusing at



## **“The economic resilience of the sector is a major factor in our interest. Labels are low-cost, mission-critical products. The industry will do well in both bad and good economic times”**

times to make sense of all the activity the industry is seeing, leaving some to ask why certain companies are being acquired.

There are several factors that have drawn the interest of those investing or making acquisitions. One of which is the label industry's durability and proven potential to push through most economic downturns.

'The economic resilience of the sector is a major factor in our interest in the label industry,' says Scott Sussman, chief investment officer at Sole Source Capital, an industrial-focused private equity firm. 'Labels are low-cost, mission-critical products and we're targeting businesses with end markets in food and health care. The label industry will do well in both bad and good economic times.'

Through economic crashes and an ongoing pandemic, many label converters continued to experience high profit margins and growth. Some, during the Covid-19 pandemic, reported higher profits than ever before. And though this is important when it comes to valuations, it is not the sole reason in the added interest of the industry.

Sussman adds: 'Sole Source Capital is interested in the label industry for several reasons: the economic resilience of the sector; the low cost, mission critical nature of the products; and the high barriers to entry. We're seeing significant growth in the secondary label industry because of warehouse automation which is being driven by the customer's desire for efficiency and due to the labor shortages.'

Dochstader echoes a similar sentiment: 'There really isn't a distinctive preference – investor groups are looking for sustained growth. We have been working extensively with private equity groups, doing all aspects of commercial due diligence for more than a decade, and our experience has shown us that these firms are almost always seeking the same set of factors: consistent EBITDA [earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization] growth over the past half decade, production floors with state-of-the-art equipment, an impressive track record in customer care, and some type of specialization.'

When it comes to purchasing strategy, every private equity firm and converting

group will obviously have its own way of going about an acquisition or merger. But what happens after the acquisition is complete is also dependent on the purchasing company.

### **Effects of an acquisition**

In many other industries, being acquired can be scary for current staff as the worrying sense that one may lose their job because a position has become redundant is not uncommon. However, the label industry is different.

Currently going through a workforce shortage, and with jobs like press operators and quality assurance technicians being highly skilled positions, it has been a difficult process across the industry to find and maintain staff.

After an acquisition, at least for Fortis Solutions Group, the plan is simple: keep the employees.

'We love keeping the teams in place and are just looking to accelerate the respective opportunity sets. We look to be good stewards of acquired businesses and embrace finding talent that then can enhance management leadership at Fortis,' says Wynne.

'The acquired company's employees are the ones that developed the processes, they're the ones with the internal knowledge, they're the ones that have created what's special and unique about the company we're acquiring. We're not acquiring turnaround companies; we're acquiring good businesses and are looking to further scale and grow them. Foundational to that approach is having good people in place.'

The people who work on these presses, whether digital or conventional, have been doing so for years. They know how to do their job and they do it well. However, passing on that knowledge to people who may not be on the same skill level can prove difficult. This leads to institutional knowledge, which has been a historical for manufacturing across industries.

At Fortis, a label manufacturer that has experienced consistent growth over the past decade with a large handful of facilities under its belt, spreading this knowledge

across the organization is of the utmost importance, according to Wynne: 'We want employees at Fortis to feel like they're part of something bigger. We want to make sure that they're not feeling on an island or operating as a fiefdom but part of the broader Fortis organization.'

This mentality is also how Fortis handles company culture and how it operates from a strategic standpoint. 'We have a cohesive internal culture and strategy and that informs a singular, go-to-market external strategy because we want our customers to really benefit from all our locations and the breadth and depth of our people,' says Wynne. 'The Fortis culture just looks to be additive rather than overtaking what was historically in place. We embrace the legacy cultures and look to build upon them.'

Extending to the ownership, Wynne says: '100 percent of the owners that want to stay with us, stay with us. If they're actively involved and engaged in the business, then we absolutely want to continue that trajectory. It's the local employees that have made these companies so successful and we want to continue building upon that success with them.'

At I.D. Images, like Fortis Solutions Group, it's important for the company to ensure that all the assets – the reasons why these companies were acquired in the first place – are maintained well after the acquisition is closed.

Regarding the ownership, the company likes to provide options. It wants to ensure that the owners can run each

### **North America vs the world**

'Dry powder', in an investment context, is the cash reserves kept on hand by companies, private equity firms, or an individual to cover future obligations, purchase assets, or make acquisitions.

In the United States, the amount of committed or raised dry powder that has not been invested is vast when compared to the rest of the world.

According to Nicholas Mockett, partner at Moorgate Capital, a corporate finance and M&A advisory firm, there is an estimated 300 billion USD of dry powder available in Europe. But that figure pales in comparison to the United States.

There is an estimated 1.9 trillion USD available dry powder in the United States alone. Which, for the sake of comparison, is equivalent to the gross domestic product of Norway, Singapore, Switzerland, and the United Arab Emirates combined.

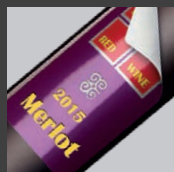


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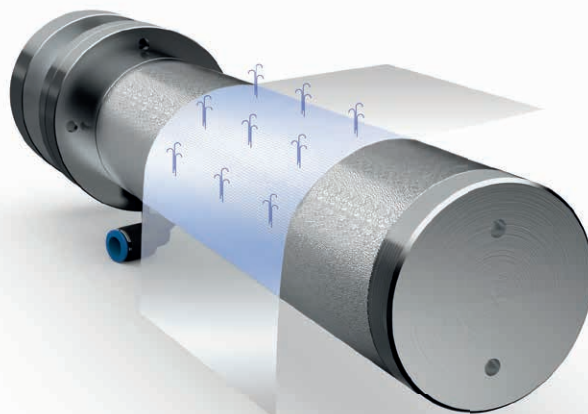
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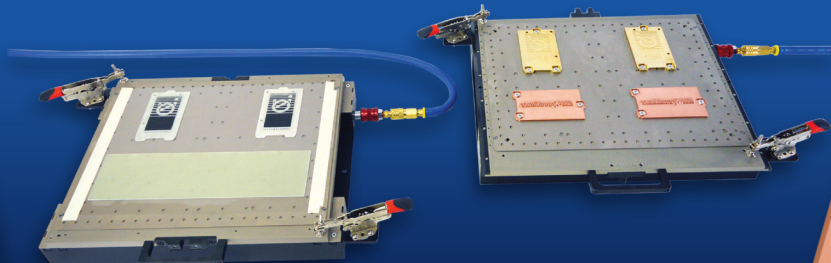
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## “Over the past 18 months or so, we’ve certainly seen a lot of new entrants into the space. We’re all chasing a lot of the same companies”

facility how they like, giving them the options provided by the parent company to remove the sometimes-difficult daily operations to focus on aspects of the job where they feel they would be more beneficial to the company as a whole.

‘When you think about running a business, there are so many obstacles in the day-to-day operations. You see owners who are in this business and very passionate about what they do but are distracted by the mundane tasks that are necessary to run a business,’ says Sussman. ‘One of the main pitches for I.D. Images is that we can help the owners of these businesses with all those day-to-day tasks and allow them to focus on what they’re passionate about and where they can create value.’

A company acquired by I.D. Images is not just thrown into the fold, according to Jeff Fielkow, CEO at I.D. Images. The company considers each of the acquired companies as partners, not looking to change the way it operates but to standardize its procedures to provide a higher quality product to its customers.

‘Each site is unique and, therefore, it is unlikely that two sites will be set up the same way. However, it is possible to standardize processes across all facilities in order to ensure that the same standards of safety, quality and sustainability are being maintained,’ says Fielkow. ‘As a result, labels produced at any of our facilities will meet the high standards we have pledged to deliver. Additionally, we can cross-sell the unique portfolio capabilities of each facility to our customers that may not be fully aware of all our service offerings. This will ultimately help optimize capacity utilization.’

The uniqueness of each facility is much more important than it may seem. And for the most part, it isn’t possible to standardize machinery across facilities; it may not even be advantageous to do so as being having a wide range of capabilities and specializations under a company’s umbrella may be more appealing to customers.

‘This specialization can be a wide range of things. For example, it might be a converter that has extreme technical prowess in multi-web extended text/extended content applications. Or perhaps it’s a converter that excels at producing highest-definition film beverage labels for sectors like craft spirits and wines,’ says Dochstader. ‘Or maybe it’s a label converting company that is really good at printing extremely resilient applications for the durables and chemicals sectors. Equity groups want the target to be good at something.’

These companies were acquired for a reason. The large converting groups and private equity firms aren’t putting in the work to acquire companies for fun. These acquisitions are purely strategic, made to leverage the capabilities of the newly acquired company to enhance the capabilities of the group.

### For there were no more worlds to conquer

Like the packaging industry before it, at some point the consolidation of the label industry will be complete. It may never get to the point where only a handful of companies exist, but a large portion of the roughly 2,000 converters that are operating now will eventually be acquired.

Where the industry will be at that point and when it will happen isn’t exactly written on the wall, but, according to Dochstader, the pace at which the label industry is changing is a clue to what the future will hold.

‘The ethos of the label printing industry is changing rapidly. The largest multinational converting groups are only getting bigger, acquisition by acquisition. At the same time, the mid-sized

converters know that they have to acquire to stay relevant and competitive, so they are looking to buy smaller companies to grow and to fill in potential gaps in their own expertise and application offerings,’ says Dochstader. ‘Investment groups and private equity firms buy with the intention to expand the portfolio and to make future acquisitions in the space. We are seeing fewer and fewer label converting players with annual sales of 10-50 million USD because they are rapidly being acquired either by strategics or by private equity. This is going to create a less fragmented industry with the largest players having huge amounts of market share. We’ve seen this dynamic occur in the flexible packaging and folding carton sectors and I believe that in another decade or so, the label sector will look very similar.’

As covered earlier, with automation in warehousing becoming more prevalent and shipping prices becoming more reasonable, the local presence that for decades drove sales of labels is still important to consider – but not quite as much.

‘Sales within labels have significantly been a strong geographic play supported by strong local manufacturers, but it’s now becoming more of a national play where the national player, along the customer side of things, are wanting a manufacturer that can handle all its volume across multiple locations,’ says Bob Cronin. ‘So that is what brought about many of those early merger strategies.’

Size and capabilities are now larger drivers for new customers than just being down the street. Because of this, the larger converters with extended capabilities and, ultimately, the money to expand and provide whatever services a customer may need are only going to become more important.

‘There are less smaller players than there were before and, speaking of the smaller businesses, they’re facing the problem of trying to compete against the capabilities of a company with a much stronger balance sheet than they may have themselves,’ says Cronin.

From a customer point of view, the consolidation has plenty of benefits. A company that provides particular services across the board, no matter where its customer may be located, is driving customers to the larger converters with said extended capabilities. And at I.D. Images, that is its ultimate end goal.

‘Our ambition is to be a one-stop shop for our customers’ labeling needs,’ says Sussman. ‘We’ll continue to expand our capacity and capability to meet the needs of the customers we serve. Acquisitions are a key part of our growth strategy to enable us to fulfill our value proposition.’

As said earlier, the full consolidation of the industry may not occur for another decade or so. It may even take longer. The label sector will, however, continue to be a safe place for investors to place money, and for the time being, the consolidation and M&A activity across the North American will surely continue, at least, for the foreseeable future.

‘As long as the cost of capital remains attractive, I think you’re absolutely going to see continued consolidation given all the new entrants, continued fragmentation within the industry and the benefits seen by customers with companies that have multiple locations and product offerings,’ says Wynne.



For more on M&A in the label industry, read Bob Cronin’s regular column on the subject at [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/bob-cronin](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/bob-cronin)





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Avery Dennison's hemp label material is 25 percent hemp and 75 PCR

# Sustainable substrates: Hemp

*Hemp is gaining momentum as a sustainable substrate option. Jordan Hart reports on its potential impact on label and package printing*

**W**ith all eyes on sustainability, many new methods of being sustainable have emerged. At end of life, there are increased compostable and biodegradable materials. For reduced carbon emissions during shipping, light weighting packaging is increasing in popularity. Other sustainability efforts include certifications such as FSC materials. However, few are looking seriously at hemp as a sustainable substrate alternative. That may change soon, as hemp could disrupt the packaging industry with its sustainability benefits and widespread applications.

While hemp may have gained some traction in the last few years, this is not a new material by any means. According to the Hemp Foundation, 'The first known use of hemp paper was in China way back in 200-150 BC.' While it fell out of favor due to government bans, the benefits of this material never faded. Compared to trees, hemp has a remarkably short growing cycle, as Hemp Foundation details: 'Hemp is ready to harvest in about 70 to 90 days from the time of seeding as compared to most trees which take around 20 to 30 years to completely mature.'

Additionally, hemp requires far less space. 'The number of sheets of paper produced from around 4,000 square meters of hemp is equal to what trees over an area of 40,000 square meters can produce for twenty years,' explains Hemp Foundation. For end of life, hemp paper 'is far more recyclable compared to other papers. Wood paper can be recycled to the maximum of three times; however, hemp paper can be

reused around seven times.'

The structural makeup of hemp also makes it as advantageous as paper. As Hempathy Living explains, hemp has a higher cellulose content and a lower lignin content than wood; this is an advantage because in processing paper, lignin must be removed and a higher cellulose content is more desirable. Additionally, hemp paper is much stronger than tree paper: three times stronger according to the Global Hemp Association. In addition to being more recyclable, OG Hemp found that hemp fiber can be totally composted in 60 days.

Paper making company Mohawk explained that turning hemp into pulp 'requires less chemicals, water, and energy than wood, and it can be used to make a vast array of paper types, from greeting cards to label paper, cardstock, and packaging.'

An added bonus of hemp paper is that it utilizes what was previously wasted. 'Previously hemp stalks never got utilized, other than being tilled under out on the fields,' Mohawk detailed. 'Now, they can be repurposed to make paper that's a benefit to the environment on every level.'

## Global Hemp Association

To learn more about the benefits of hemp L&L spoke to Mandi Kerr of Global Hemp Association. Kerr emphasizes the sustainability benefits of growing hemp, regardless of end use markets. 'Before the paper even, the plant itself is sequestering an astronomical amount of carbon. What it is capable of doing for our earth to



A sample of Tiny e Paper's hemp packaging options

**"Hemp is ready to harvest in about 70 to 90 days from the time of seeding, as compared to most trees which take around 20 to 30 years to mature"**

eliminate or substitute the deforestation is really peaking people's interest. It grows four times the biomass per acre of hemp compared to an acre of trees and hemp grows in 120 days compared to 20 years for



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## “Hemp could disrupt the packaging industry with its sustainability benefits and widespread applications”

a tree,’ says Kerr.

‘Another great benefit of hemp is what it does to the soil before its processed. It has a large tap root, up to 9-12 feet, so imagine what that does to a compacted soil and what that does for runoff prevention. That leads to reduction of water waste, better nutrients, holding on to carbon within the soil, increased microbes, and with all that comes increased crop yields.’

However, mainstream hemp paper and other hemp-derived products are held back by the current limited supply. ‘When we talk about growth of the industry, we are up against input limits. I can go build a big paper mill and there are trees available, the input is there. The input doesn’t exist on the market currently for hemp.’

She continues, ‘Hemp is growing in very



Avery Dennison's hemp paper comes in two colors, white and natural

small volumes currently and the volume we would need to support a printing press is potentially millions of acres. We are looking at larger volumes and there are other countries that have led the charge in the development of hemp because they were able to study it this whole time. But they are still small scale. Europe, for example, is supplying the majority of the processing equipment but Europe's size and volume at which they will produce is miniscule compared to the United States, so that is our next obstacle. But hemp is definitely growing, there are seed plots everywhere and test plots on what fiber to grow where. And there is a lot of lifecycle analysis happening to prove that carbon footprint and that carbon footprint is what brings hemp to the forefront of the discussion now.’

### Current market offerings

Despite these input limitations, there are already several hemp paper options on the market. Greenfield Paper offers a hemp paper that is 25 percent hemp and 75 percent post-consumer recycled waste (PCR). L&L previously reported that Mohawk, partnered with UPM Raflatac to create a labeling material composed of 30 percent hemp and 70 percent PCR.

Printed on Hemp produces a hemp paper that is 50 percent hemp and 50 percent PCR. The company claims the benefits of its hemp paper include ‘45 percent less energy used, 38 percent less greenhouse gasses produced, 45 percent less wastewater generated, 50 percent less solid waste created.’

L&L has also reported on Acucote's portfolio diversification into hemp. Targeted to the cannabis industry, Acucote's 60# hemp paper is made of 25 percent hemp and 75 percent post-consumer wood.

Avery Dennison has also branched out into hemp. The company offers two hemp substrates, one white and one in a natural, green tinged color. Both are 25 percent hemp, 75 percent PCR. Vanita Marzette, senior product manager for wine and spirits, explains the demand for hemp.

‘I'm always on the lookout for more papers that are sustainable. We are getting more and more requests for papers with organic ingredients in it. Hemp was one of the ones we get a lot of requests for, specifically from brand owners and converters who are working with those brand owners who want to bring some of the essence of what is in the bottle to the outside packaging,’ says Marzette.

The company launched the original, natural tone hemp paper in 2019 for the wine and spirits sector and added the white hemp paper in 2020. There are no plans to expand its hemp offering.

While most companies stay between 25 to 50 percent hemp and rely on tree-based paper, recycled or not, for the remaining percent, one company is a standout in the field of pure hemp paper: Tiny e Paper.

### Tiny e Paper

Tiny e Paper, founded in 2017, makes 100 percent hemp paper. According to the company website, Tiny e Paper makes its hemp paper ‘out of hemp stalks and the waste from CBD extractors, taking care of two problems within the cannabis industry.’

To learn more about the company and its products, L&L spoke to Erica Halverson, founder and CEO of Tiny e Paper. Halverson gained an interest in hemp paper after seeing the volume of paper product wasted in packaging in her previous jobs. She founded the company in November 2017 to be a solution to that waste problem. Like Kerr, she is painfully aware of the lack of



Tiny e Paper's logo

### Behind the name: Tiny e Paper

‘Tiny e is a nickname my dad gave me as a little girl,’ explains Erica Halverson, founder and CEO of Tiny e Paper. ‘He passed away four and a half years ago; I started my company six months after he died. He never had a chance to see what I was doing with my company. We also always used to talk about if we were on our right path in life, so the company name is the nickname that he gave me and my logo is an homage to my dad. The brown line that separates Tiny e and Paper Company is the path my dad and I used to talk about walking all the time. Tiny e is on top of the path because that is me actually walking that path, because I feel I am on my right path now that I have started this company. Just saying my company name is keeping my dad's spirit alive and he inspires me every day still.’





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hemp production.

'Two thirds of the processing of the hemp stock is exactly the same whether you are making textiles, plastics, biofuel, paper, kitty litter, or horse bedding. You still have to process the plant somewhere. The processing and the supply chain for the hemp stock is not specific for any one industry,' says Halverson. Because of that, the limited supply has a very large demand for a variety of industries.

Halverson has a bold mission for her company: 'My mission is to get everybody to stop using trees for paper and switch over to hemp. If I am truly going to do that, I have to have hemp paper do everything tree paper can do. It has to fold the same, perforate the same, cut the same, glue the same, ship the same, hold up the same – it has to do everything that regular tree paper can do.'

She sees this mission as more timely than ever. 'Covid has



VPF has developed a self-adhesive labelstock made entirely from hemp fiber

### *VPF launches labelstock made entirely from hemp fibers*

German adhesive materials specialist VPF has developed, in cooperation with Gmund Papier, a self-adhesive labelstock made entirely from hemp fiber as an alternative to conventional papers made of wood.

The 120gsm hemp paper consists of pure European hemp fiber, offers a soft feel, excellent printability, and improved wastepaper cycle.

Hemp is one of the oldest cultivated plants used early for paper production. The Gutenberg Bible from 1455 was made of hemp paper, and until about 1880, 75 to 90 percent of the world's paper demand was covered by hemp fibers. Unlike trees, hemp grows quickly, can be easily cultivated, and is fully utilized.

A hemp field has four to five times the yield of a forest of the same size. Hemp grows to a height of up to four meters within a year and can be harvested three times a year, producing more biomass than any other domestic crop.

Since the fiber is naturally light in color, a small amount of bleaching agent is needed for subsequent paper production. Hemp is characterized by fibers that are five times as long as those of paper fibers, which means high tensile, tear and wet strength with accompanying long durability; at the same time, the long fibers mean hemp improves the waste paper cycle and can be recycled often.

After lengthy trials and aging tests, VPF now coats the Gmund Hemp 100 percent paper (VPF 10555) with a strong adhesive UV acrylate, HM716UV with 25g application weight. Because of the strong final adhesion, the material can also be reliably bonded to almost all more difficult substrates despite the relatively high grammage of 120gsm.

To further optimize the carbon footprint, VPF exclusively uses a 70g recycled liner (NSA700-476) for the self-adhesive finish of the hemp paper, which consists of 70 percent recycled content.

## **"My mission is to get everybody to stop using trees for paper and switch over to hemp"**

actually increased paper production, increased the need for pulp, and increased the desire for sustainable alternatives,' says Halverson. 'A lot of people have this idea that with the dawn of the electronic age, paper production and paper use was going to go down the more that we turned to electronics. What Covid showed us is that that is not true. The more that people buy products online, the more we have to ship those products, and we ship those products in paper boxes.'

For Halverson, hemp can be a complete solution. 'The box that you put the product in, the box that you ship it in, the box that you put it on display in the store in, the label that it has around it, the tissue paper inside it, the peanuts in the box, all of that can be 100 percent hemp. There is no reason for paper that is tree paper not to be 100 percent hemp.'

This is one of the key distinctions that separates Tiny e Paper from other hemp paper companies. 'Most other companies are only 25 percent hemp and 75 percent post-consumer recycled content – that means recycled trees. That doesn't solve the problem,' says Halverson. Using zero trees is Tiny e Paper's claim to fame, and is why Halverson doesn't consider other hemp paper-producing companies to be her competition.

For Halverson, being truly tree-free is of the utmost importance. 'If we don't figure out alternative resources for all the different products we make out of wood, in 300 years we will be out of trees. When I say that my mission is to save the planet one plant at a time, that might sound like hyperbole but the first plant I'm talking about is trees and it is not hyperbolic to say we have to figure something out.'

While saving trees is a noble goal, hemp is certainly no second fiddle to tree-based materials. 'There are some natural properties that hemp has on its own that when I make paper out of the hemp stock, those natural properties are in the paper as well. One of those is that its naturally antibacterial, so anything I make out of hemp paper makes that paper antibacterial,' explains Halverson. 'Additionally, hemp is UV resistant, so it won't change color as light hits it and is also naturally water resistant.'

While there are many known benefits of hemp, Halverson admits more research needs to be done. 'We need repeatable processes and we need the supply chain to exist and product to get into the marketplace in order to get more data and research about end of lifecycle analysis.'

Previous government bans and the limited supply chain availability have crippled this research, but it is vital to quantify hemp's benefits. 'We need to be able to quantify and qualify other data points such as how much hemp do I need to use to save 100 trees for example. How can I quantify to customers what it means when you make that switch over? Those are the type of metrics and data points we don't have yet.'

Even without those studies, Tiny e Paper has pushed ahead with production. Halverson is first targeting the cannabis industry with her packaging options. 'If you are selling a CBD tincture and I come to you and say "I can make your box from the same plant that you are making your product out of, look at what kind of value proposition that gives you as a brand" that's a pretty powerful statement. If you are already supporting this plant, then it just makes total sense.'



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# Turning words into action

*UK converter Mercian Labels helps its customers to reach circular economy goals by running a liner recycling service – just one of a host of sustainability initiatives. Piotr Wnuk reports*

**M**ercian Labels has been operating since 1969. It started in a small building in Penkridge and has since expanded to a 24,000 sqft factory in Burntwood, Staffordshire, UK.

**“As manufacturers, we recognize our responsibilities around waste and are keen to partner with our customers to ensure it is minimized”**

With a combination of flexo, screen, digital toner and inkjet technologies, it specializes in short and long-run self-adhesive labels, long-run variable data labels, barcode production and ships many millions of labels every week to more than 9,000 customers.

In 2020, the company invested 1m GBP to improve and automate its manufacturing capabilities.

‘Automation leads to increased efficiency, which leads to less energy consumption and less waste,’ says Hugo Gell, sales and marketing director, associated with the company for the last 17 years. ‘For example, all our lighting has been converted to LED. We are still learning, and keen to learn, of practical ways in which we can do better.’

Governed by a board of directors and management team, the 60-plus employees are motivated and engaged with the company values – teamwork, quality, commitment and honesty. The culture is embedded throughout the business and is the bedrock of Mercian Labels’ corporate responsibility focusing on all aspects of ethics.

Sustainability, in its broadest sense, is one of the company’s fundamental pillars. While many businesses worldwide openly speak about decreasing their carbon footprint, Mercian Labels turns words into action.

‘The board of directors has been focused for some time on the strategic importance of sustainability for the business,’ confirms Gell. ‘The Triple bottom Line concept extends the traditional idea of focusing on simple Profit, to now include measuring of



*The company partnered with community organizations, Lichfield District Council, the Town Council and local schools to plant 450 trees*



*Mercian Labels’ 24,000 sqft factory in Burntwood, Staffordshire, UK*

the social, and environmental performance of a company over time.

‘This brings greater and broader value to the business and ensures that we remain focused on the bigger longer-term picture – not just “get rich quick”. After all, Mercian Labels has been trading for over 50 years, something which only 1 percent of businesses manage to achieve, and this has been done through careful and considered long-term strategic focus.’

## **Closing the liner loop**

The latest initiative, the new Closed Loop label liner recycling service, is set to impact not only Mercian Labels but businesses throughout the UK and the wider environment, generating cost savings and contributing to the growing circular economy. The program is currently wide open. Mercian Labels encourages all

new and existing customers to join the recycling efforts.

‘Self-adhesive labels have traditionally had an inherent problem, which is the waste that is the liner. The liner is an essential part of the labeling process in many instances, and often it constitutes to more than 50 percent of a run of labels,’ declares Gell. ‘As manufacturers, we recognize our responsibilities around waste and are keen to partner with our customers to ensure it is minimized.’

Customers participating in the program can return pre-sorted Mercian Labels’ liner waste to the company, where it is checked, collated, and sent off to the pulping plant to be turned into release liner and paper.

‘We keep any liner waste that is created here in the factory, and we encourage our customers to store their liner waste until they have sufficient volume to ship back





Brands often forget about release liners, says Mercian Labels, because there simply hasn't been a sustainable alternative to landfill or incineration



Customers participating in the Closed Loop program can return pre-sorted liner waste to Mercian Labels, which will check, collate and send it off to a pulping plant, where it will be turned back into release liner or paper

to us,' says Gell. 'This generally costs our customers less than sending it to landfill or other waste streams. Once we have sufficient liner waste in our factory storage area, it can be shipped to a paper mill in Europe where it can be turned back into label liner again or similar products such as paper for the magazine industry. This is a truly circular waste cycle.'

According to Mercian Labels, the label release liner is often forgotten about by brands because there simply hasn't been a sustainable alternative to processing label liner waste other than landfill or incineration for many years.

Many of Mercian Labels' smaller customers have quickly adopted the initiative and find it simple and beneficial. They can turn these ideas around without any long decision-making process.

'The larger blue-chip organizations involve more people over more departments, so there tend to be protracted periods of discussions,' adds Gell. 'We are a little surprised that the higher powers such as sustainability officers or CSR execs aren't seizing this opportunity with both hands, but we have been faced with home-working issues, which doesn't help.'

As a result of the Closed Loop initiative, the company expects to recycle around 100 tons of liner waste in the first year alone – the equivalent in weight to a Boeing 757-200 aircraft. This volume of waste prevents 228 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which, in turn, equals six average-sized cars driven for a year. To capture and store the same amount of carbon dioxide would take 3,770 tree seedlings grown over ten years.

### Helping nature breathe

'Recently, we partnered with 100 pupils from local schools to plant 450 trees in an area donated by the local council,' says Gell. 'Younger trees absorb more carbon

## "Social responsibility, engaging with the local community and sustainability are becoming increasingly important in the world of business"

than mature trees as they grow, and this all helps nature breathe. Also, these pupils will remember about this initiative for years to come. They are our future – whether direct employees or residents.'

This is an excellent example of partnership between a local business, local schools, community organizations, Lichfield District Council, and the Town Council.

'We have been more than happy to make the links between the various partners and facilitate this exciting project which will enhance the local environment for many years to come and help address climate change issues in our town,' comments Susan Woodward, leader of Burntwood Town Council. 'For me, the project ticks all of the boxes and I'm delighted that it's now starting to happen.'

It is another story Mercian Labels can tell its customers and another way of reminding its prospective suppliers that it wants to continually improve its Triple Bottom Line credentials.

'Social responsibility, engaging with the local community and sustainability are becoming increasingly important in the world of business these days, and we are already working with customers who are looking for more sustainable products, whether it be the materials used to make them or where they are sourced,' confirms Gell.

In March 2021 the company gained ISO 14001 certification, reinforcing its commitment to being a sustainable and environmentally conscious manufacturing business.

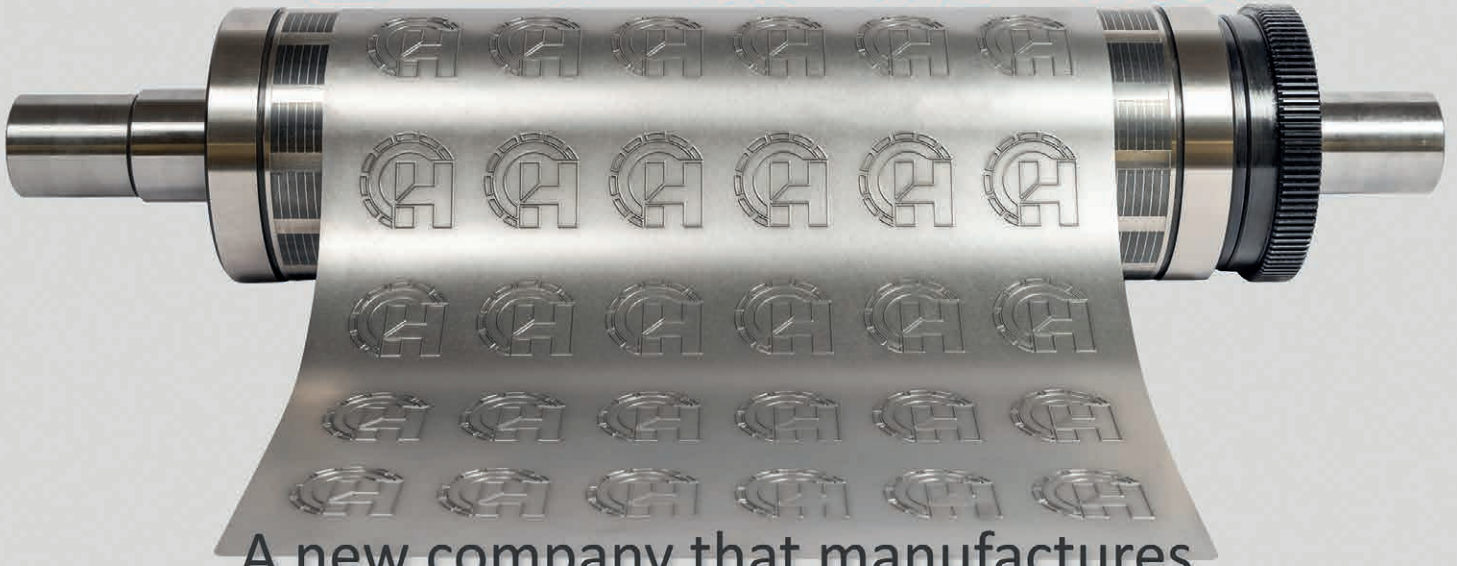
'We have enthusiastically undertaken the environmental management standard that is ISO14001 – not because we want to pay lip service, but because we want to really make a difference. We offer an extensive range of increasingly sustainable materials,' says Gell. 'Where synthetic or filmic materials have traditionally been made with fossil fuels, we are offering materials with the same properties that are made using harvested trees.'

When a company achieves ISO 14001 certification, it commits to do its part to protect and preserve the environment for future generations to come. By identifying its environmental impact, the company has developed actions and procedures to improve its performance to create a more efficient business with less waste and a sustainably responsible supply chain.

'We are always learning, asking ourselves and each other what we can do better, how we can make more positive contributions to our colleagues, our local community, and our environment,' concludes Gell, reaffirming that these ethics will drive Mercian Labels for several more decades to come. 'It is vital for our future and very important for the local community surrounding us. We fully recognize our impact on the local environment, and we want to make it positive.'



More information about the Closed Loop Liner recycling program go to: [www.mercianlabels.com/liner-recycling-programme/](http://www.mercianlabels.com/liner-recycling-programme/)



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# Unstoppable force

*Polish label innovator Reganta impresses with significant investments, innovative equipment and ambitious expansion plans. Piotr Wnuk reports on the unstoppable force that is the company's founder*

**R**eganta is based in Łódź, the third-largest city in Poland and a former industrial center. The company currently employs a team of 75 and has significantly expanded its production capacity and flexibility to accommodate an enormous spike in market demand.

Two new Mark Andy flexo presses, a Performance Series P7 and Evolution Series E5, have just arrived at Reganta, joining an already impressive line-up of a 17in (430mm) Performance Series P7 purchased in 2019, a 13in (330mm) Performance Series P5 model, a Performance Series P3 and a Scout.

Reganta specializes in flexo-printed labels and packaging and has continually chosen international brands as its business partners. Mark Andy is one of the critical contributors to the company's success. Its narrow web flexo presses have been the production base at Reganta since the company's foundation.

Reganta's current plans are ambitious and include creating 60 new full-time positions and a state-of-the-art label and packaging design studio to accelerate expansion beyond Poland's borders.

'We're one of the most innovative printing companies in Poland, supplying over 120 major local and international brands,' says Igor Szlaski, owner of Reganta, who founded the company when he was only 25. 'Having carefully watched the market trends, we now offer out-of-the-box technologies supported by some of the most modern equipment available on the market.'

## P5 success route

It is an impressive statement from a young entrepreneur who, eight years ago, started the company on his own, working tirelessly to get the business off the ground.

'I graduated from the Warsaw School of Economics. I stayed in the capital to work in a typical big corporate environment. I quickly realized it wasn't really for me, so I decided to make a few changes, I resigned and moved back to my hometown Łódź to open the business there,' states Szlaski. 'This is how Reganta was founded. I started it completely from zero. I managed to employ one printer, Robert. I was helping with the production; I was selling our services, was responsible for accounts and invoicing – simply doing everything that needed to be done. My ambitious approach and Reganta's production potential impressed a few clients who placed the first orders almost instantly.'

The first machine on Reganta's production floor was the 8-color 13in Mark Andy Performance Series P5 press that put Szlaski's business on the Polish printing scene.

Despite its small size, the business attracted big, strategic customers, including Coca-Cola, which ordered a limited series of shrink sleeve labels to commemorate the anniversary of Solidarność, the Polish trade union which played a central role in the end of communist rule in the country.

'This was a real roller-coaster but extremely fun project to work on for a small business like us. The bottles with shrink sleeve labels printed at Reganta were held by famous politicians such as Barak Obama and the German chancellor,' says Szlaski, smiling at the recollection.

The company's growth was so dynamic that after just two years Reganta placed its second order with Mark Andy, this time opting for a Performance Series P3 press, also fitted with lamination and double die-cutting capabilities.

'Without Performance Series P5, we certainly would not be



*Igor Szlaski founded Reganta when he was only 25*

**"The printer is no longer covered in paint but is a highly specialized operator of sophisticated, automated equipment"**



*Szlaski says that Mark Andy has been a close partner in the company's development over the years*

where we are today, thanks to its potential, versatility, and the ability to deliver a very diverse product range,' notes Marcin Janicki, general manager of Reganta. 'This machine has opened our doors to first customers from automotive, cosmetics, alcohol, household and food industries. The second machine, the older Performance Series P3, acted as its perfect extension of the equipment, significantly increasing our production capacity.'

## Growth partners

The company soon gained more strategic clients such as Procter & Gamble and Lotos, and before long the P5 and P3 were unable to meet the growing demand for capacity.

Szlaski found the solution with a wider 17-inch, 10-color Mark Andy Performance Series P7 with multi-layer label capability. The press is equipped with a web reversal system, automatic register and preregister, cylinder cooling, and QCDC die-cutting, two screen printing units, a cold foil stamping module and a laminator.





Reganta is contributing to the Polish city of Łódź's historical strength – the creative and design sectors

## “We estimate that thanks to the latest investment in Mark Andy presses our productivity will increase between 50 and 60 percent”

Thanks to the most recent investment in the Performance Series P7 and Evolution Series E5, now printing their first jobs, Reganta has increased its focus on producing value-added labels and shrink sleeves. The latter already constitutes to 30 percent of its production, with demand doubling year-on-year.

‘The purchase of these new machines is another enormous step in the development of our company. We estimate that our productivity will increase between 50 and 60 percent thanks to this investment. Therefore, we are very interested in expanding our client portfolio even further,’ says Szlaski.

After just eight years of operation, Reganta is working with leading brands in the food, pharmaceutical, construction, household chemicals, automotive and logistics industries.

‘We are ready to start servicing new industries,’ continues Szlaski. ‘We are flexible and constantly adapt to market needs. We go beyond satisfying demand. We constantly develop new technologies to meet the future expectations of our clients. Thanks to our experience, creative approach and technological development, we create flexo labels and packaging from films and laminates which our clients are proud of.’

Szlaski says that the partnership with Mark Andy has played a key role in the company's success.

‘Reganta bought the first Performance Series machine as an inexperienced printing company from the then representative of Mark Andy in Poland,’ explains Lena Chmielewska-Bontron, European marketing manager at Mark Andy. She points out that Reganta's development went hand in hand with the development of Mark Andy's Polish operation.

‘We're proud to support Reganta at such an important time in the company's history and help to shape its future growth,’ adds Tom Cavalco, executive vice president of Mark Andy.

### Sharing success with society

The Łódź region has a strong printing heritage which Reganta is committed to building on.

Adam Pustelnik, vice mayor of Łódź, states: ‘Reganta contributes

to the historical power of Łódź – the creative and design sectors of the city were always well known.

‘I encourage people to take a bigger interest in the printing industry in general and consider finding employment at Reganta. Traditionally, we think of production jobs as a typical blue-collar environment, but this is a misleading old myth. The modern production environment, such as the one set up by Reganta, is an advanced operation in terms of offering highly technical jobs.’

Szlaski is a big promoter of the print sector, especially amongst the younger generation. ‘We are trying to convince the population that we are not just a printer but a very innovative business with highly modernized production lines,’ he says. ‘The modern printer is not what this job used to be years ago. The printer is no longer covered in ink but is a highly specialized operator of sophisticated, automated equipment.’

Reganta works closely with local schools, colleges and universities, offering a wide range of opportunities to learn what the printing market can provide in terms of a fulfilling career path for young people and students.

Małgorzata Antczak, who runs the PR and marketing department in Reganta, adds that the company is closely involved with its community. ‘As part of our social responsibility programs, we are supporting young talent in developing their careers by organizing partnerships and exchange opportunities for the future leaders of our market.’

The future certainly looks bright for Reganta. In the first quarter of 2022, the company plans to employ an additional 60 full-time workers as it continues to expand.

‘People who want to achieve something should persistently pursue their dreams and not be afraid of risk or failures, because they are an integral part of the company's development and learning,’ concludes Szlaski.



For more information about Reganta, go to: [www.reganta.pl](http://www.reganta.pl)

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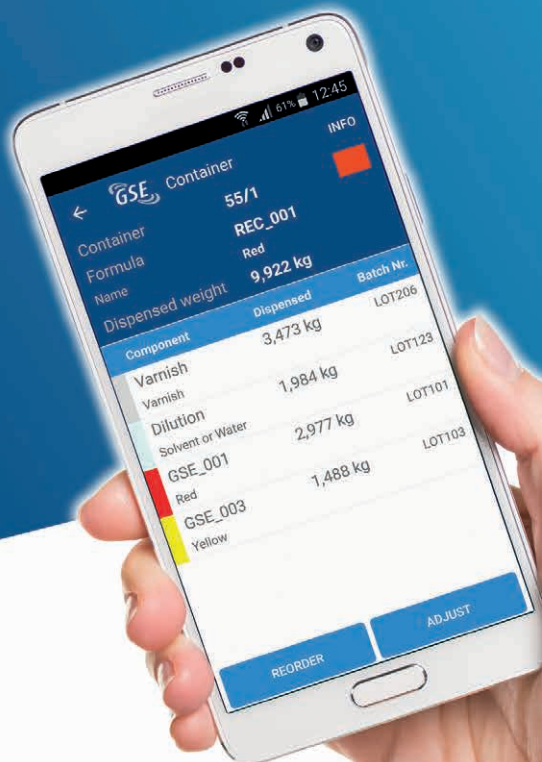


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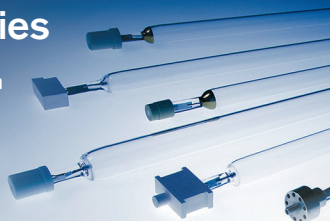


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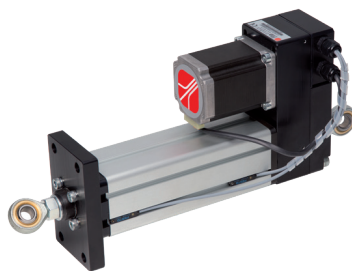


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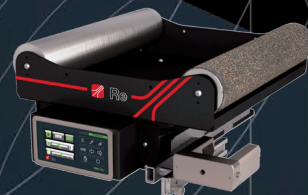
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# 3D effects for shrink sleeves

*New technology from Pantec enables 3D images to be printed on shrink sleeves, writes the company's application engineer Berat Abazi*

**T**he demand for shrink sleeves packaging is continuously growing. Brand owners are looking for new embellishments for this kind of packaging to attract customers' attention. It is well known, and studies have proven, that haptic effects are the best embellishment option to gain attention. Unfortunately, haptic effects can hardly be achieved on shrink sleeves. Embellishing shrink sleeves with 3D images is an innovative alternative.

Shrink sleeves offer 360 degree decoration, which guarantees a high level of attention on the sales shelf. Shoppers are generally attracted to the intense colors on shrink sleeves. Now, embellishing shrink sleeves with 3D single images from hot foils offers another great advantage. The 3D effect of this innovative embellishing option encourages the customer to take the product in their hands, which drastically increases the chance of purchase. In addition, 3D individual images can also be used to counteract product counterfeiting, as copying such images is very difficult.

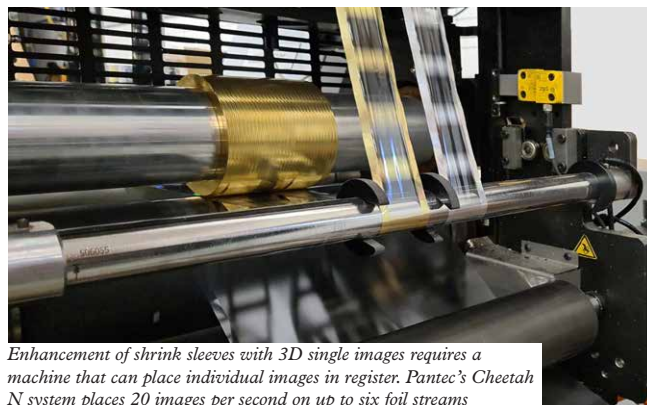
## Custom designs

For a perfect appearance, the 3D image must act as an integral part of the overall design. Therefore, these special effect images are customizable to the requirements of the brand. For example, logo elements or key visuals can be perfectly integrated into the design and become the focal point on the packaging through the 3D

**“The 3D effect of this innovative embellishing option encourages the customer to take the product in their hands, which drastically increases the chance of purchase”**



3D effects are an eye-catching way to enhance packaging



Enhancement of shrink sleeves with 3D single images requires a machine that can place individual images in register. Pantec's CheetaH N system places 20 images per second on up to six foil streams

effect. The creation of the design takes place in close cooperation between brand owner, designer, foil supplier and Pantec.

In recent years, Pantec GS Systems has been intensively exploring the application of single images using the hot foil process. In doing so, Pantec has adapted its established rotary hot foil technology to the special requirements of shrink sleeves applications. In addition to some adjustments on the equipment, the definition of the correct process parameters was crucial. Pantec's rotary technology enables the application of up to 20 images per second with multiple foil streams and individual positioning of each image. Thus, the foils with the individual images are optimally utilized, which is not only cost-effective but also sustainable. This sustainability can only be achieved with hot foil stamping.

For such a project to be completed efficiently and successfully, good coordination between brand owner, designer, the supplier of the foil with the 3D images and the printer is essential. Pantec offers not only the know-how in process technology but also the coordination between the different stakeholders. A key aspect of the development of an extraordinary design for shrink sleeves is to define the limits of feasibility and thus the economic feasibility.

The embellishment of shrink sleeves with 3D single images is particularly interesting for FMCG products. On the one hand, this innovative finishing will make the product stand out on the shelf and on the other hand, the initial costs for the production of the 3D images can be spread over a large quantity. To make it economical, several million images should be needed over the lifetime of the product.

The development and manufacturing of the embossing tool is straightforward for this application. Only a standard tool in the dimension of the image is needed. Pantec also offers its experience in the preparation of the necessary information for the tool manufacturer and can coordinate the entire package – the printer only needs to unpack the hot stamping tool, mount it onto the machine and start the production.

The shrink sleeve market is growing internationally and taking an ever larger share of the packaging market. With the embellishment through 3D image effects, it is now possible to make shrink sleeves even more visible on the shelf and attractive for the customer with eye-catching design effects.



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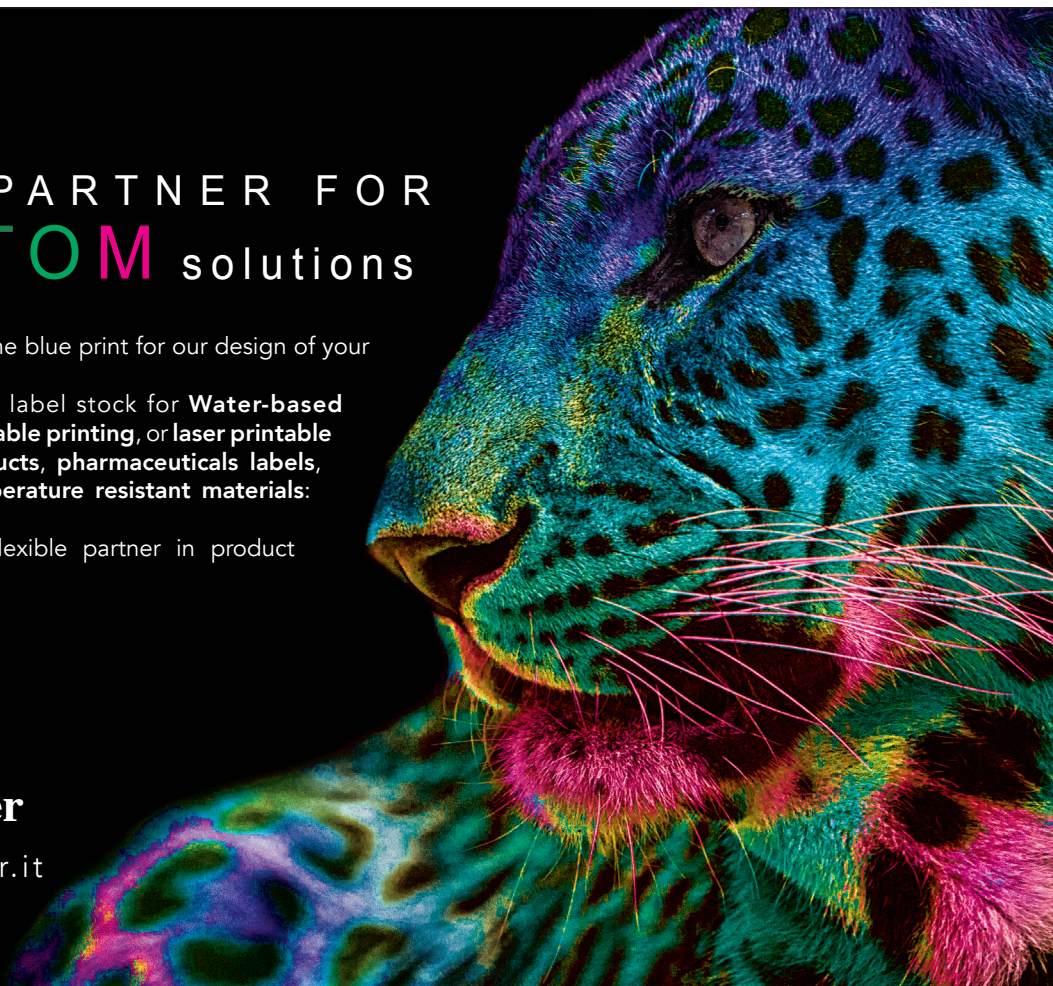
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*Flint Group Evolution Series Deinking Primer enables ink release from shrink sleeve without contaminating the PET bottle*

# Sustainable inks and coatings support circular economy

*Flint Group Narrow Web has introduced the Evolution Series of inks and coatings along with new test facilities to help brands meet tough new sustainability targets for labels and packaging. Adrian Tippetts reports*

Governments worldwide are setting ambitious packaging recycling and emissions targets. Early in 2018 the European Commission launched a European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy with ambitious targets for the plastics industry:

- All plastics must be recyclable by 2030
- 50 percent of plastics must be recycled by 2025

Furthermore, The European Commission has begun a review of the Food Packaging Regulations and impact on recycling aimed to be ready latest Q4 2022.

In addition to governmental demands, over 100 brand owners have signed up to the US Plastics Pact's five-year plan. Commitments include using on average 30 percent of recycled or bio-based content by 2025, recycling 50 percent of plastic packaging by that date and making all plastic packaging reusable, recyclable or compostable. The plan also sets out a policy for identifying and phasing out harmful or unnecessary packaging materials, improving infrastructure and incentives to increase recycling.

The goal is to move from a linear economy – where materials are taken from the Earth, used and thrown away as waste – to a 'circular economy' where waste is turned into raw materials that are kept in use, reducing the need for virgin plastic.

The rates of plastic waste recovery must rise significantly – and fast. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a charity that promotes the circular economy, only 14 percent of plastic is recycled – the rest going to landfill, incineration or unmanaged dumping.

Flint Group Narrow Web saw the potential for significantly improving the sustainability of packaging through optimizing inks and coatings. The choice of ink used, along with the printing and drying process, will affect the recyclability and the overall eco-footprint of the packaging it is used for.

Difficulties with removing ink without staining plastic or

**“Olsson says the Evolution Series has already attracted strong interest from brand owners as well as from converters since its introduction in September 2021”**

affecting the recycling process have been an obstacle to recycling PET and polyethylene sleeves and bottles. The key driver is to prove that the recycled material (recyclate) is of sufficient quality to be reused without discoloration or changing characteristics of the plastic bottle.

In Europe, there is an additional concern regarding the possible contamination of recyclates for food contact materials (NIAS). There are guidelines from bodies such as RecyClass and the European PET Bottle Forum (EPBP) that demand the use of non-toxic inks as classified by Eupia, the European Printing Ink Association.

## **Sustainability guidance**

In North America, Flint Group Narrow Web's first action was to join the Association of Plastics Recyclers. This association includes member companies at all stages of the packaging supply chain, working to enhance quality and increase supply of recyclable plastic.

The APR plays an important role in setting standards that are globally acknowledged, enabling products to be brought to market faster. It also provides design guides to help producers create recycle-friendly packages, rigorous testing protocols to evaluate a product's recyclability, and recognition programs



## “These laboratories and test facilities enable a faster switch to approved sustainable coatings by label and packaging converters”

for innovations that are designed to be recycling-compatible.

For a sustained circular economy to work, a sustainable innovation must ensure quality and be economically viable – it must not add complexity, but increase efficiency within the production process. If an innovation compromises the process, there is less likelihood that the supply chain will invest in it or adopt it.

This was the philosophy behind Flint Group’s new Evolution Series of ink and coating products. The series will deliver greater recyclability and reduced CO2 emissions (LED curable).

Flint Group set up a sustainability task force to bring the new products to market, including Dr Paulo Vieira, Niklas Olsson and Chris Price.

‘Evolution is based on a “plug and play” approach,’ explains Niklas Olsson. ‘This means a proven, sustainable coating can be introduced, and the same quality can be achieved without further changes to the converting process. Such a solution means the supply chain can achieve a step change in, for example, the recovery of recyclable plastic, with minimal disruption or added costs in the converter’s workflow. Furthermore, each product has achieved APR recognition after rigorous testing, accelerating and simplifying the verification and adoption process.’

### Boosting PET recyclability

The first products in this series, both UV flexo, assist in boosting the recyclability of PET packaging with shrink sleeves or self-adhesive labels.

The first product is the Evolution Deinking Primer, which causes an ink to release from crystallizable polyester shrink sleeves (cPET) in the recycling process without contamination. The primer keeps the ink anchored to the substrate through the usable life of the sleeve. But when the substrate is immersed in a caustic bath, the ink is removed from the sleeve material without staining the valuable bottle flake. Both PET sleeve and bottle are then rinsed and pelletized into recycled polyester (rPET) for reuse.

The second product, the Evolution



Flint Group Evolution Series coating products comply with APR critical guidance for recycling of PET packaging

Caustic Resistant OPV, is an overprint varnish to facilitate recycling of PET bottles utilizing pressure-sensitive labels. The varnish minimizes contamination of the wash water and bottle flake in the caustic bath by keeping the ink secured to the label substrate. When immersed in the float-sink bath, the label is released from the bottle and floats to the surface where it is separated from the bottle recycling stream.

‘We are developing further solutions, for example FCM (food contact materials) compliant coatings, and coatings to improve the recyclability of other plastics such as HDPE,’ says Dr Paulo Vieira. ‘We are also addressing the safety of water-based inks. In the latter case, we are exploring the possibility of replacing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) with bio-renewable products in their ink formulation.’

### Laboratory testing

Flint Group’s laboratories in the US and Europe are focused on developing new sustainable products, following the relevant guidance, procedures and test methods in different global markets. The labs feature state-of-the-art narrow web presses and test equipment that replicates the conditions of the recycling process as well as a fully equipped migration testing laboratory. Working with major substrate and labelstock manufacturers, coating and material performance are assessed from a number of perspectives.

What are the KPIs for an efficient recyclable coating? Chris Price explains: ‘First, a sustainable coating needs to perform in the same way as conventional counterparts before recycling. Tests include maintenance of color, shrinkability, ink anchorage, yellowing and resistance properties for instance. Second, at the recycling stage, there are additional attributes to measure. Recycled PET is only valuable in its clear state – free from stains, haze or discoloration. So, we measure the L\*a\*b\* color values of the plastic pellets, to ensure the coating causes no color change.

‘Third, we look for any impact on the pellet formation and extrusion process. All non-recyclable material must be removed in the bath before these stages,

to avoid clumping of the plastic, with the risk of melting and machine damage. Any contamination can result in rejection of the complete recycled batch to landfill.

‘Finally, we investigate the impact on the wastewater to ensure it meets stipulated requirements. The Deinking Primer for instance, meets this expectation by acting as a fine powder that can be filtered after removal from the substrate.’

These laboratories and test facilities enable a faster switch to approved sustainable coatings by label and packaging converters. The facilities are able to plan and run experimental or commercial jobs with customers seeking to adopt a new coating. The job would be run both with and without the new product, from file to print. After washing, a lab report can be generated on how the substrate washes. A successful performance would mean the converter gains a product in their portfolio that they can offer to brand owners. This would allow the converter to engage in formal critical guidance testing using certified institutions in their respective locality. Best case timescales from initial discussion to product roll-out are two to three months. Testing of customer printed material supported in the field by Flint Group personal can also be evaluated.

‘At industry conferences on sustainability, we often debate what the best approach should be on boosting recycling, and meeting sustainability targets,’ says Olsson. ‘For suppliers at least, the answer is “every little helps” – but with only a short time-frame to do so, collaboration is vital.’

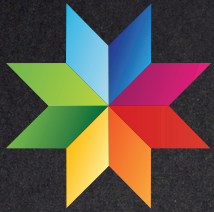
Olsson says the Evolution Series has already attracted strong interest from brand owners as well as from converters since its introduction in September 2021.

‘By providing both a dedicated product program along with testing and R&D facilities, we expect to help sustainable coatings and inks play an important role, in helping the industry rise to the challenge,’ concludes Dr Paulo Vieira.



Go to [www.flintgrp.com/en/divisions/packaging-narrow-web/narrow-web](http://www.flintgrp.com/en/divisions/packaging-narrow-web/narrow-web) for more information





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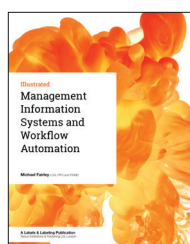
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**Mike Rottenborn, CEO, Global Graphics**

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# Automatic plate mounting

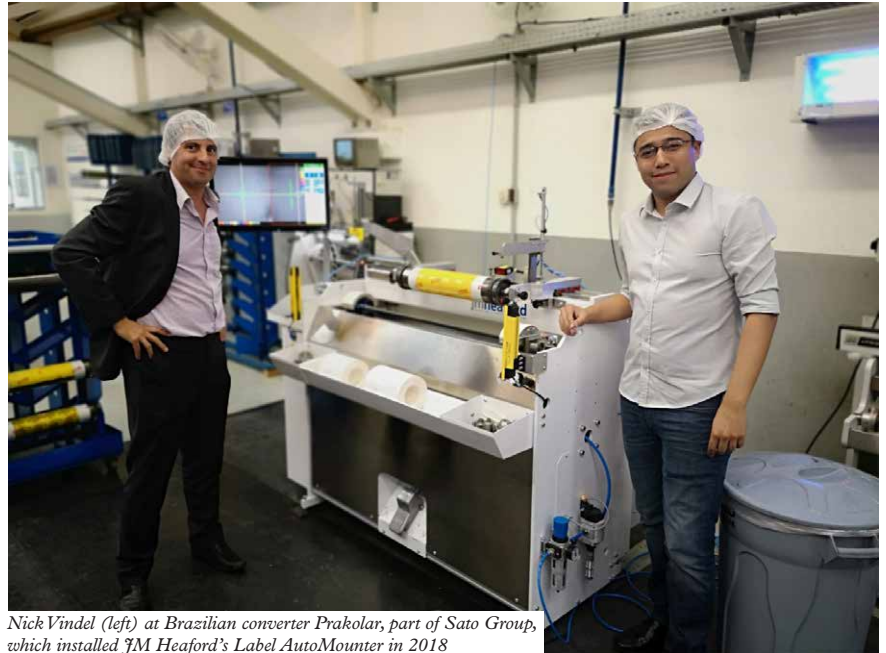
*Nick Vindel, international sales manager at JM Heaford, discusses the benefits of automatic plate mounting*

**T**he automatic mounting of photopolymer plates in flexographic printing is well documented in mid and wide web applications. Significantly, these automatic mounters are also being supplied in the narrow web market with many label manufacturers now adopting this technology – not just larger label converting groups with multiple presses and facilities but also smaller independents who see the flexibility gains of equipment that doesn't need highly skilled operators. Many press manufacturers are also recommending automatic mounters to their customers, as they complement the continuous advancements they are making in technologies to improve flexographic print quality. With this shift to automation, we explore how they work and what advantages they offer over other conventional plate mounters.

Speed of mounting is an important variable in the mounting and printing workflow, but printers are also looking for machines that are operator independent and have repeatable results. Accurate and repeatable consistency eliminates the possibility of time-consuming re-mounts, reducing press downtime, as well as wasted substrates, inks etc. Often, mounting machines are used to service multiple presses, and therefore it's critical to ensure that mounting doesn't become a bottleneck in the job set-up process, which can lead to reduced press productivity, and ultimately reduced profitability. Reducing run lengths increases the number of job changeovers per shift, making fast, 'right first time' job set-up/changeover critical, 'as the press is only generating revenue when printing products of commercial value', to quote our founder John Heaford. Some mounting machine manufacturers have responded to these market demands with automatic mounting machines, so that mounting is not only fast, but is highly accurate, repeatable and an easy process with consistent results.

## Automatic mounting

Typically, most automatic mounting machines work in a very similar way. The plate is positioned in the mounter, so that the registration marks are in the field of view of the camera; the mounter's image recognition system searches for the register mark – usually trying to match a register mark on the plate to a pre-selected register mark in



*Nick Vindel (left) at Brazilian converter Prakolar, part of Sato Group, which installed JM Heaford's Label AutoMounter in 2018*

**“E-Z Stick Labels of California, which installed a Label AutoMounter in 2018, has achieved a 75 percent reduction in plate mounting times”**

the image database. Once it recognizes the register mark, the 'actual' position is compared with the 'target/pre-programmed' position. This positional data is sent to the mounter's computer which in turn sends instructions to the mounter's drives/motors to move the plate to the correct position. Different manufacturers have different systems for doing this positioning, and with different margins of precision.

Once positioned in the correct mounting position the mounter automatically sticks the plate to the pre-taped sleeve, usually with a pressure roller to eliminate air bubbles between the plate and the tape. Different manufacturers do this in different ways, but the result is plates that are mounted automatically with little or no operator interference, with great accuracy and with consistent, repeatable results. These same mounters also have systems to check the accuracy of the mount. This automation follows the trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies, as is the philosophy of Industry 4.0. As the operator's variable input is eliminated, and it is the machine mounting automatically, this reduces or eliminates the need

for re-mounting.

Automatic mounters work by using different methods and algorithms in image recognition, from the most basic systems that take a photo/frame of an image and search for a near-perfect match, to those that use more sophisticated methods to identify a wider range of register marks. It is important to note that the more basic 'photo-matching' systems work well in situations where there is very little variation in the registration mark and its surrounding area. However, in practice, especially with the smaller register marks and used plates, these methods are limited and more complex algorithms based on synthetic target models and multiple matching systems are required to ensure consistent image recognition across a reasonable range of 'real life' used registration marks. If one can only use new, perfect plates with large register marks, then this is not a real-life scenario in a flexographic printing factory.

The different image recognition systems and software to identify, recognize and match the database of the different register mark/microdot types is crucial – if the automatic mounter does not recognize the target, it cannot be automatically



mounted and has to be done manually, or the register mark model has to be entered into the mounter's database manually, which reduces automation and increases mounting time. The precision to which the system recognizes the registration mark is fundamental, because, if the recommended tolerance by the manufacturer is 0,6mm, for example, but the registration marks of the plate are 0.3mm, as is the case in many plates, the automatic mounter does not recognize the register mark of the plate and it cannot be mounted automatically. Therefore, the smaller the tolerance of the recognized register mark size, the better. The Heaford 'Label AutoMounter' automatic mounting machine, for example, recognizes down to 0.25mm register mark diameter.

Also, the type of register mark or microdot can affect its recognition, or not, depending on the technology. In discussions with the technical department of a leading plate manufacturer, they reported that in mid and wide web applications most of their customers now use negative microdots, and although these are typically larger, the tolerances of each manufacturer are still the difference between a truly automatic mounting machine and one that has to be stopped for the mounting machine to be reprogrammed to recognize the register mark. With negative microdots, some automatic mounters recommend 0.6-1mm minimum microdot diameter, while the Heaford AutoMounter recognizes down to 0.40mm diameter negative microdots. Although in the label industry register crosses are more common than microdots, ensuring an automatic mounter can automatically mount smaller register marks is essential.

The other big advantage of automatic mounting machines over traditional mounters is that while the mounter is mounting a plate, the operator can do other tasks in the pre-press process, such as preparing subsequent jobs or removing used plates from a used sleeve. These tasks are important when we determine 'mounting times', because mounting time is not only the physical time to mount the plate, but also the time needed for each step of the process, such as removing used plates, cleaning, preparing plates, taping the sleeve, entering data into the mounter for jobs or recalling repeat jobs, mounting of the plates, and transferring the mounted plates to the press.

#### Critical work

Antonio Oliveira of Prakolar Rotulos Brazil (part of the Sato Group), which installed an AutoMounter in 2018, says: 'Today, my operators do not have to worry about the precision of the mounting to be done, they only have to position the plate in the

**"It is this repeatability and operator independence that attracts label manufacturers to this technology, as reducing remounts and increasing productivity of operators leads to a faster workflow"**



*The Label AutoMounter from JM Heaford*

machine and, while the AutoMounter does the critical work, they can prepare the other elements in the process.'

Many customers around the world have invested in this type of automatic mounting, and although they have a higher initial investment, they typically have a return on investment of approximately 12-18 months, as they significantly reduce or eliminate re-mounts, stopped printing presses, whilst enabling faster job start-up and increasing the efficiency of their operators. Antonio Oliveira comments: 'We have drastically reduced the number of remounted plates, all plates are accurately mounted together, preventing remounting and helping us to achieve better color matching for critical registration jobs.' In Prakolar the AutoMounter replaced three traditional mounting machines, and also reduced mounting times by 20 percent.

These time savings can be even greater. E-Z Stick Labels of Santa Fe Springs, California, which also installed a Label AutoMounter in 2018, has achieved a 75 percent reduction in plate mounting times since its installation. According to owner Richard Martinez, it is already saving about 50 hours of work per week.

One of the important features in the use of automatic mounting machines is their ease of use. Richard Martinez says the ease of use of the Heaford AutoMounter was the first big surprise. 'I think the slogan at the show was something like "so easy to use your boss can mount"'. I assumed those were just marketing words, until I actually used it,' reports Martinez. 'Actually, everyone in our factory has been trained in how to use it. We've been using it since day one without any dedicated operators and it has been absolutely accurate each and every time.'

It is this repeatability and operator independence that attracts label manufacturers to this technology, as reducing remounts and increasing productivity of operators leads to a faster workflow. So, if you are thinking of investing in a new plate mounter to service multiple presses, either cylinder or sleeve based, automatic mounters should be considered in your capital expenditure.



For more information about JM Heaford's Label AutoMounter, go to [www.jmheaford.com](http://www.jmheaford.com)

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PX UV inkjet press series

# Xeikon focuses on automation and color management

*Automation of both color workflow and downstream finishing were key focus points for the most recent Xeikon Café events.*  
*Andy Thomas-Emans reports*

A major theme of the recent Xeikon Café event was the company's continued drive towards automation of both workflow and downstream finishing processes.

## "Xeikon Color Services (XCS) v2.0 now allows converters to manage color automatically across digital and conventional presses"

On the finishing side, Xeikon has developed the FEU digital embellishment and finishing system, first launched by the company in 2020. Based on MGI technology, FEU provides UV spot varnish, tactile varnish, foiling, 3D textures and holograms across a wide range of substrates including clear on clear, common BOPP and paper facestock including natural structured papers. Optionally, the FEU can be equipped with a semi-rotary die-cut unit to deliver fully embellished and finished labels.

The FEU's workflow is integrated into Xeikon's X-800 Vectorizer. 'This will ultimately provide our customers with all they need to effectively move towards total digital label print manufacturing,' says Filip Weymans.

Now at the Xeikon Café was launch of the company's modular LCU (Label Converting Units) system, engineered for maximum automation of the analog

finishing process. The LCU series is designed with a modular and scalable architecture along with Cloud connection for full integration into factory management systems.

There are two base models, the entry level LCU33 and fully modular LCU350. The LCU Series is designed to work in-line and off-line with Xeikon's Panther and Cheetah digital presses.

LCU sales will be channeled through Xeikon Solution Services, allowing customized configurations depending on the application and volumes required – for example from a basic varnish through to automatic laser die-cut capability and wider web versions up to 520mm (20ins).

Automation is available for processes including automatic turret rewind, die plate change and transfer of job data to different units, with real-time information on machine status available through the Cloud connection.

Other options include additional flexo stations (to avoid changeover between different varnishes), laser die-cutting, hot foil and screen printing stations. Semi-rotary die-cutting speeds are up to 80m/min and full rotary up to 130m/min.

### Color in the Cloud

Automated color management was another key theme discussed at the Xeikon Café. With Xeikon able to leverage the flexo color expertise of parent company Flint Group, Xeikon Color Services (XCS) v2.0 now allows converters to manage color automatically across digital and conventional presses.

The first step in the process is to print and measure color charts for all presses in

the plant on a range of substrates. These measurements are loaded to the XCS Cloud database which automatically creates lookup tables translating Pantone spot colors to the available color stations on the digital presses and flexo presses running 7-color ECG (extended color gamut) ink sets. Each profile is tied to a specific substrate category. That data is then downloaded to the RIP that drives the plate making engine or the digital press. In both cases the color chart is printed again and measured to check against the data held on the XCS server to verify its accuracy.

In the case of a flexo press using spot color printing, the profiles are loaded into the Vivo Color Cloud, developed by Flint Group, which sends the ideal spot color mixing formulation to the digital ink kitchen.

Color files sent to the plate making

### Business case

Also discussed at the Xeikon Café was a new business analysis program which helps label converters implement a successful diversification strategy. This might be moving into digital printing, or it might be moving to a related label or packaging technology such as wraparound, IML, sleeves or flexible packaging. Using the 'Distance from the core' model, converters can quickly and intuitively understand which business initiatives are most likely to work. Essentially, with each step away from the core product, the probability of success reduces proportionately.



RIP are locked, but files sent to the digital presses can still be manipulated. The importance of this becomes clear with the new generation of Cheetah 2.0-compatible Xeikon presses fitted with in-line spectrophotometers.

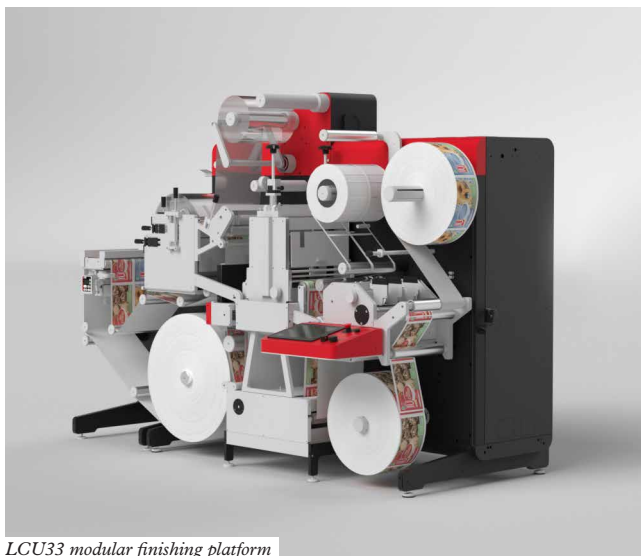
The spectrophotometer automatically measures the printed color and sends that information back to the RIP, which can trigger an on-the-fly re-profile in less than eight minutes. The print is then measured again. This closed loop system will also warn the operator if there is a major color problem that needs to be addressed back at pre-press.

'This is a real revolution compared to manual profiling, which takes much longer and needs human skills, hardware and software,' explains Filip Weymans. 'Of course, you still need to take the same time to profile the press, but you do not need the skilled operator to verify the color after that. Since we are automating and moving onto the Cloud, our color services are available 24/7 and you do not need the expertise in-house to achieve consistent color. What we are aiming for is true "lights out" color quality monitoring.'

Another link in the color management chain is provided by Color Forecast, which allows a brand manager to understand how closely a color can be reproduced from an ECG ink set. The system starts by running a PDF through the XCS server's Pantone look-up table, then selects a substrate-related press profile. The system then indicates the expected color deviation.

'This means that the printer can offer the customer different options, which will affect price. For example to keep within a certain deltaE you might need to add extra colors with an additional cost,' explains Weymans.

A related application is the Candyshop color-picker. This presents the brand owner with the printed Pantone color they



*LCU33 modular finishing platform*

have specified, along with a grid of closely related shades.

States Weymans, 'This is for a situation where a brand owner has only seen that color on a screen, and is not quite happy with the printed color. So now they can select the color he or she wants it to be. This works quickly in digital. It can also be done for a flexo press, though of course this takes more time.'



For more information about Xeikon Café events, go to [www.xeikoncafe.com](http://www.xeikoncafe.com)

## *Sappi launches Parade Label SG range*

Sappi has expanded its product portfolio with Parade Label SG, a one-side coated, semi-gloss facestock paper with performance characteristics suitable for a wide range of applications. Parade Label SG is approved for direct contact with food and complies with DIN EN 71 for toy safety. The range of applications includes labels for food, non-food, beverages and health and beauty aids (HABA), as well as for logistics and variable information printing (VIP) due to its thermal transfer printability.

The Parade Label SG range is available in grammages of 77, 78 and 80gsm and features high stiffness and resilience to resist damage during the printing and die-cutting process.

Michael Bethge, sales director Specialty Papers at Sappi Europe, says the label market continues to show strong growth for the company in both self-adhesive and wet-glue label sectors, and in both wet-strength and non-wet-strength grades.

'We have made it our goal to strengthen the label paper segment as a whole and to address gaps in our portfolio,' says Bethge. 'That's why we launched two new label papers last year: a semi-gloss paper in the self-adhesive

segment and a new glossy wet-glue label. Both launches were very successful and have far exceeded our expectations. Another launch is currently being planned. With our state-of-the-art mill in Gratkorn, Austria, we are ideally positioned to expand our label paper production and to deliver absolutely reliable service.'

Sustainability is a key focus. 'The trend towards more sustainability is becoming clear in all areas – and of course, this also involves label materials,' says Bethge. 'We are hearing more and more often that brand manufacturers are looking to switch from plastic to paper, because with paper they are using a renewable raw material for their labels.'

'We are also seeing an increasing number of experts talking about the possible use of recycled fibers. As a virgin fiber manufacturer, we are watching this trend closely. At present, virgin fiber papers still have decisive advantages over recycled material. These include better printing and finishing results, for example, and they are considerably more tear-resistant in use.'

FSC or PEFC certificates are available on request for the Parade Label SG series, as for all Sappi's paper grades.



*Michael Bethge, sales director  
Specialty Papers at Sappi Europe*

The company is also working hard to minimize CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This begins with the development of new products, through the optimization of production, all the way through to more efficient services.

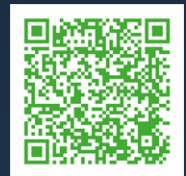
### **Market growth**

'The label paper business has become a key area of activity for us, and one in which we intend to invest further,' states Bethge. 'We have already established a very good foundation for further growth. In the case of self-adhesive labels, our customers benefit from the fact that they can also obtain the silicone base papers from us. Everything from a single source, so to speak, from an independent supplier.'

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# Digital takes on flexo

*Although Labelexpo Europe 2022 has been postponed, the digital press launches announced for the show tell us a lot about the current status of digital print technology. Andy Thomas-Emans reports*

**T**he digital and hybrid press launches announced for Labelexpo Europe 2022 – now postponed until 2023 – demonstrate how far the technology has come.

When narrow web digital presses were commercialized in the late 1990s, digital was seen not as a challenge to flexo, but as a complementary technology, designed to take away the pain of short run jobs at a time when changing jobs on an 8-color flexo press could take the best part of a half a day. Fast forward to 2022 and the digital landscape has been completely transformed. Digital presses have become faster, wider, and with print resolutions and color gamut to match flexo.

The greater productivity of today's digital print engines has also changed the equation of off-line versus in-line finishing. Narrow web converters have traditionally been used to printing, decorating and converting labels in one pass on modular in-line presses. With digital, finishing was, in the early days, predominantly an off-line process since conventional converting and finishing systems were so much faster than digital print speeds.

But faster and wider digital print engines soon made in-line finishing a more viable proposition, and we have seen the development of both hybrid digital-flexo presses and digital press manufacturers adding in-line finishing and flexo print units to their presses.

In-line finishing is by no means universal, however, even for faster digital presses. For many applications off-line remains the preferred option, particularly where rolls contain multiple short-run jobs with varying die-cuts and decorating requirements.

The main takeaway is that the modern digital press platform is highly flexible and well suited for a wide range of applications from multiple short runs to increasingly challenging flex on medium and longer runs.

Durst provides an excellent example of all the points made above. The company announced the introduction of the 510mm (20in)-wide Tau 510 RSCi, printing at speeds up to 100m/min (80m/min at full resolution). The press will be configured with flexo decks both before and after the 1,200dpi print engine. Save-Ink mode is a new feature aimed at reducing the cost of inks to compete more effectively with flexography. It works by analyzing the image and reducing ink consumption where it will



*The Mark Andy DSiQ powered by Domino*

## “Digital is competing with flexo in terms of print quality”

least affect print quality.

Working with industry OEM partners, Durst has also developed hybrid digital-flexo print systems alongside its own digital print ecosystem, and the company now promotes both the advantages and disadvantages of hybrid configurations depending on the job profile of the converter.

Martin Leitner, Durst product manager, Label & Flexible Packaging, believes these developments mark a turning point for UV inkjet digital printing: ‘Digital is competing with flexo in terms of print quality – the Tau RSC print quality is as good or even better than flexo. Some customers compare it even with offset. Productivity-wise the presses are extremely competitive with low setup times combined with high printing speeds. Keep in mind that the minimum printing speed on our presses is 40m/min, so the operator cannot go lower, which he is often doing on other technologies.’

Leitner says Durst already sees multiple customers substituting conventional flexo presses with UV inkjet technology. ‘We have several customers which really produce volume jobs on our presses. In 2021 we had customers printing in 12 months more than 2m sqm on a single press, or multiple customers with regularly daily productions between 20-25,000 sqm, so 60-75,000 linear meters a day.

‘I do not say that UV inkjet is today a

full substitution for flexo. Each technology has its space and advantages, but in the past two years UV inkjet made huge steps forwards and provides customers with more and more advantages.’

Xeikon is another digital press manufacturer promoting the benefits of wider print webs, with its 520mm-wide CX500 press printing full rotary at speeds up to 30m/min. The company says the press’ 1,200dpi print resolution makes it ‘impossible’ to distinguish any difference from flexo, and its productivity also now approaches the flexo process, as Filip Weymans, VP marketing at Xeikon, explains: ‘The CX500’s unique print width and print speed makes possible the printing of large volumes of many variants using the same die-cut and also larger sized labels compared to a 13in web. Think oil labels, cosmetic labels for example, which are 160mm high and which fit only 1x across on a 13in web. This makes the CX500 press very cost effective and enables applications beyond self-adhesive labels such as pouches and sachets.’

Xeikon of course also now plays in the UV inkjet arena, which it promotes mainly for durable label applications. The line-up now includes the entry-level PX3300 and the PX30000 for longer runs and where a wider color gamut (CMYK+OVW) is required. ‘This is indeed the ideal substitute for older UV flexo presses,’ says Weymans. ‘From speed and color gamut the Xeikon PX30000 can replace a UV flexo press but with digital values, no tools, no setup time, so you gain a lot of efficiency.

Screen, meanwhile, continues to build on the success of its Truepress Jet UV platform



with the Truepress Jet L350UVSAI E and its high-end counterpart the Truepress Jet L350UVSAI S.

The Truepress Jet L350UVSAI S can be equipped with up to seven colors (CMYK+Orange+Blue+White) and prints at speeds up to 60mpm. Screen promises new features for the press at the show, with details currently confidential.

The Truepress Jet L350UVSAI E is now Screen's standard model and can be equipped with up to 6 colors (CMYK+Orange+White) and optionally configured to print at speeds up to 60m/min.

#### Hybrid launch

Labelexpo Europe 2022 was to have seen the European launch by Mark Andy of its Digital Series iQ hybrid press powered by Domino. The iQ press combines units from a Mark Andy 13in Evolution series press with a Domino N601i UV inkjet engine, and is targeted in particular at replacing legacy entry-level flexo presses for smaller and mid-sized label converting operations.

Mark Andy was also going to show its flagship Digital Series HD (DSHD) press, based around the proven Performance Series P7 full servo platform with fully integrated UV inkjet engine. The DSHD press prints with a resolution claimed to match high-definition flexo at speeds up to 73m/min (240 ft/min).

Both the Mark Andy DSHD and Digital Series iQ are inkjet digital hybrid presses capable of printing with extended color gamut, 6-color process, and opaque white. Both machines are designed with fast-change flexo features for top coating, lamination, foil stamping, and specialty color printing and product decoration, along with Mark Andy's high-speed semi-rotary die-cutting system.

Comments Tom Cavalco, managing director of Mark Andy Europe, 'Since its launch last year in the Americas, Digital Series iQ has been



Epson has launched the latest version of its SurePress L-4733 water-based inkjet press

## "In the past two years UV inkjet made huge steps forwards"

a fast seller, easily integrated by label converters.'

Konica Minolta now has a wide range of equipment specialized for the label market. This includes the AccurioLabel230 digital press, which can now be configured in-line with a DC330Mini converting unit with a new compact buffer and flexo unit.

Carsten Bamberg, business development manager, Professional Printing Group, Konica Minolta Europe, says the company remains fully committed to the label market seven years after moving across from the commercial print sector. 'Label, packaging and embellishment markets will continue to be as vibrant as ever. The potential to push boundaries, enter new markets and seize

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
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Durst's Tau 510 RSCi

opportunities to create unique customer experiences has never been more exciting.'

Automation and a continued trend towards digitization are other trends identified by Bamberg: 'Demands will continue to increase for complete start-to-finish manufacturing process with more all-in-one solutions, as well as a need for production devices that need fewer and less-skilled operators. One specific growth trend includes enhanced finishing such as embellishment, increased automation, online print purchasing and webshops, plus, of course, the unstoppable analog to digital transition.'

Canon is a relatively recent entry to the narrow web market with its LabelStream 4000 UV inkjet technology, which can be configured either standalone unit or as part of a hybrid line. The press prints at 75m/min on a 410mm print width using Xaar 2001 inkjet heads. The hybrid format LabelStream 4000 incorporates a 6-color print engine (WCMYKO) with one flexo station before

and one after the digital unit, along with cold foil unit, semi rotary die-cutter and slitter, all in-line.

The LabelStream 4000 has been awarded Pantone Capable certification, meaning it can cover over 81 percent of the Pantone range using a 5-color CMYKO ink set and adopting a Delta E 2000 < 1.5. Applying a Delta E of 2 enables coverage of 96 percent of the Pantone book. The press has also been certified to the Process Standard Digital (PSD) Print Check based on the Fogra 55 7-color reference gamut.

Epson has further developed its highly successful SurePress L-4733 water-based inkjet press. The 6-color SurePress L-4733A/AW uses new water-based inks with improved wettability to expand substrate and application versatility and new print modes for higher productivity and print quality. A focus on greater automation including a new head cleaning system which reduces maintenance activity and minimizes downtime.

Afinia is looking to widen the options available for digital printing of flexible packaging with the commercial launch of its FP-230 press – seen at Labelexpo Europe 2019 in its prototype form. The FP-230 uses the company's L901 Plus 1,600dpi Memjet print engine to produce full-color prints on rolls up to 230mm wide with a maximum speed of 18m/min. Variable data and color matching are handled by the optional Northstar RIP. The water-based inks have been approved for food packaging when combined with in-line cold lamination, with the finished roll trimmed using the two rotary knives.



Labelexpo Europe now takes place in Brussels in September 2023. The technology in this article can next be seen at Labelexpo Americas in September 2022. [www.labelexpo.com](http://www.labelexpo.com)



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# Inspirational showcase for wine and spirits labels

*Labels displaying the local heritage of wine and spirits are being produced by All4Labels' flagship facilities around the globe. In Cape Town, Gill Loubser, witnessed the launch of an exciting global marketing strategy*

**W**hat do these eight, seemingly unrelated, countries have in common – Argentina, China, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Russia and South Africa? They all have distinctive wine-growing credentials and are described by All4Labels as the eight locations of its blue-chip sites, specializing in label production for this ever-burgeoning sector.

This was brought home at the Cape Town launch of the group's global business strategy – dubbed 'Motherland' – at the core of which is a marketing campaign designed to emphasize the creation of sustainable labels and packaging, especially aimed at the wine and spirits market.

Through the use of eye-catching design and innovative production, examples of labels were unveiled that encapsulate a wine's particular essence and local heritage.

Welcoming guests, an understandably proud MD of the South African operation, Marco De Pizzol, said: 'This is a big day for us. We're not only celebrating the launch of the global Motherland project dedicated to the wine and spirits industry, but we're also officially opening our new digital printing facility here in Cape Town.'

In concert with All4Labels' global strategy, the Cape Town facility is dedicated to digital offset technology. It was three years ago that this plant embarked on a transformation and growth project that has now resulted in the formal opening of this digital printing facility, marking a further milestone in All4Labels' investment plan and allowing entry to South Africa's wine and spirits market.

'We rely on our digital DNA; to us it's more than just a printing technology,' Marco De Pizzol told his audience. 'We truly believe that the future of label printing, and packaging in general, is digital. At our flagship plant in Hamburg, Germany, we operate the world's largest fleet of HP Indigo presses. It's our firm belief that this commitment to digitalization allows us to improve agility in the supply chain; reduce a product's carbon footprint; increase efficiency and speed to market; and minimize waste during the print run,' he added. 'Digital printing, along with variable data printing, allows a high level of personalization, ensuring products that stand out on retail shelves.'



*Motherland, All4Labels' global showcase for the wines and spirits markets, aims to capture the unique essence of each product and express it through packaging*

## Why South Africa?

The choice of South Africa as the launching-pad for this global campaign was intriguing. However, it's logical, as Marco De Pizzol explained: 'South Africa is one of the oldest and best-known wine-growing regions in the southern hemisphere. The Western Cape in particular is ideal for wine cultivation. Here cold Atlantic Ocean currents meet the warmer currents of the Indian Ocean, resulting in a Mediterranean-like climate, with temperature fluctuations that provide the magic formula for our excellent South African wines.'

In fact, as he went on to emphasize, South Africa is the ninth-largest wine-producing country, accounting for 3.4 percent of the world's output. And, with many the country's finest wine varieties famous on global markets, it's also a sector of prime economic value, giving direct or indirect employment to some 300,000 people, and representing a major revenue stream for the country.

'The wine and spirits market is demanding and emotionally driven and we're glad to embrace this challenge,' he added. 'We're part of a global network but our focus remains on the local market. If a customer has a specific decoration requirement, we can draw on the experience of our production network partners, as well as our global hub for innovation at our Centre of Excellence.'

Also addressing guests was the group's chief sales officer, Guido Iannone, who attended the event. 'In the coming months, All4Labels will be producing eight special label concepts on wine and spirits bottles,'

he explained. Created in conjunction with a newly launched packaging design division, called All4Graphics, each label will embody the natural beauty and traditions of its region of origin, while demonstrating All4Labels' technical and innovative capabilities.

In addition, underlining the importance of building an open environment with relationships throughout the value chain, All4Labels is working closely with a group of partners to share this ethos, including Avery Dennison, Fedrigoni Self-Adhesive, Leonhard Kurz, H+M, Estal, Actega, Nilpeter, Omet, HP Indigo and Luxoro.

According to Guido Iannone, the Motherland campaign will demonstrate how All4Labels is pioneering innovation with bold creativity, high quality and sustainable packaging for local and global wine and spirits brands.

'The goal for All4Labels,' he continued, 'is to enlarge its presence in this premium market. 'Wine and spirits have been a core focus of our sales strategy for a long time, and we have developed an extremely high level of technical expertise in label and shrink sleeve production with exceptional finishes and embellishments for premium brands. We are now using this global campaign to deliver exceptional stories through our premium labels, supporting our customers with sustainable solutions and high premium effects.'

In addition, All4Labels is committed to producing labels and packaging in the most efficient and responsible way.

Sums up Paola Iannone, VP marketing and communication: 'The Motherland campaign offers the opportunity to promote our brand with an inclusive message that we all are daughters and sons of a mutual motherland. We believe products and brands, as well as people and countries, have their own specific DNA – identities based on lands, heritage, stories and individual peculiarities. It will be a truly global journey and we are expecting to discover what makes us special through these unique designs.'



For more from Gill Loubser on the Africa market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/gill-loubser](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/gill-loubser)



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The V275 can grade 1D and 2D barcodes to ISO 15415, ISO 15416, and GS1 standards

# Machine eye ensures patients' safety

*Validated labeling processes play a crucial role in patient safety, and machine vision systems are leading the way in eliminating the risks of human error. Piotr Wnuk reports*

In the life sciences and pharmaceutical industries companies throughout the entire supply chain must ensure packaging and labels show the correct content, are legible and meet mandated quality requirements.

Validation impacts every process and component of pharmaceutical production, including machines, systems, equipment and computer systems.

The printed label is a key element in the validation process in today's supply chain, and with regulatory complexity increasing and an industry-wide movement towards last-minute production processes, validation at the labeling stage is a critical component of the process.

In 2018, nine percent of all medical device recall events – and the return of over a million units – were due to labeling issues, with printing errors undoubtedly a factor. It only takes one stray label, printing error, or simply a faulty print ribbon leading to missing, unreadable, or misinterpreted content to cause a product recall.

It's an expensive business, with organizations known to spend as much as USD 350,000 for every global label change. And yet, despite opportunities to de-risk the process through automated technologies, many persist with archaic methodologies that leave them vulnerable to human error.

When the error goes undetected and products reach the supply chain, patient safety is put at risk. Moreover, with an increasing shift towards just-in-time production processes, organizations need to ensure robust mechanisms to ensure batch integrity.

For PCI Pharma Services, a drug development and clinical trial specialist, the challenge was identifying an electronic inspection system to assist with its in-house label printing and inspection processes. Historically, all PCI's San Diego branch labels went through a '500 percent' manual visual inspection process. Multiple employees performed 100 percent manual visual inspections during the label printing process, during the production packaging

**“When the error goes undetected and products reach the supply chain, patient safety is put at risk”**



The V275 includes a high-resolution line scan camera and printer controls built into a Zebra ZT600 Series high-performance thermal printer





Multiple employees used to review the labels at various stages throughout the manufacturing process

## **“The label inspection system allowed us to repurpose individuals to better suit our organization, versus having them tied to manual inspections of the printed labels”**

process, and during the final distribution process before completing shipments for clinical trials.

‘For us, the 500 percent manual inspection was effective while we were growing as an organization,’ says Derek Truninger, director of quality operations at PCI Pharma Services. ‘As multiple employees reviewed the labels at various stages throughout the manufacturing process, we were confident any potential print-related discrepancy would get flagged before distributing the materials for our clinical trial clients.’

Truninger mentions that as the company began to grow and increase its label production output, it became apparent it could not reasonably continue to rely on manual inspection. The company started searching for a vendor to support 100 percent in-line electronic verification of printed labels.

‘We leaned on our previous relationship with US Automation and asked for recommendations on applications which would meet our needs,’ states Truninger. ‘Based on the feedback from our US Automation partner, we selected Omron. It quickly became apparent Omron had the technical knowledge and service offering to meet our desired configuration.’

Omron, one of the global leaders in end-to-end automation, suggested its recently launched V275 Series printer with an integrated label inspection and barcode verification system.

The system reduces the number of manual inspections by implementing 100 percent electronic verification. It can assess multiple print defects and compare variable data against a source document.

‘This ability to ensure variable data is aligned to the source document is invaluable to our organization as we continue to grow and increase our client base,’ adds Truninger. ‘By continuing to invest in technological advancements, we can build quality into the process, versus inspecting for quality after the printing process completes.’

The V275 can grade 1D and 2D barcodes to ISO 15415, ISO 15416, and GS1 standards while inspecting human-readable content for accuracy and print quality using optical character recognition (OCR), optical character verification (OCV) and blemish detection tools. This complete label verification occurs while

printing at normal speeds.

The software allows for automated inspection of barcode content to expected values and data formats for both the machine-readable and human-readable information on each label. In the event of a label quality error, the system automatically stops the printer and alerts the operator via an output to a light tower.

The V275 includes a high-resolution line scan camera and printer controls built into a Zebra ZT600 Series high-performance thermal printer. The web-based user interface runs on Ethernet-based communications from the V275 to the customer’s PC or server. It offers label inspection template design, real-time label quality monitoring, template and inspection results data archiving. It can work with the ZT610 (4-in labels) and ZT620 (6-in labels) for 300 and 600dpi resolution printer models.

‘From an integration perspective, overall, the system is very user-focused,’ explains Truninger. ‘The screens are easy for operators to use and understand, and the system is intuitive. We partnered with Omron to facilitate the installation and qualification activities, which allowed the company’s representatives to be onsite at our facility. We were able to receive hands-on training, which was vital to the launch of the system.’

By identifying an electronic vision system, PCI was able to significantly decrease the number of manual verifications and provide higher-level quality control through the utilization of electronic technology. By providing highly accurate automated inspection, the V275 supports traceability throughout the supply chain of finished goods and labeled production materials and dramatically reduces the risk of incorrect or poor-quality labels making it to market.

‘We were able to streamline our inspection processes, reduce the total number of manual verifications required to ensure the labels were correct before application onto the final units, and increase our overall quality level as each label is going through 100 percent electronic verifications,’ says Truninger. ‘From a regulatory standpoint, 100 percent electronic verification is always the preferred method for any type of inspection, and the V275 provides the perfect solution for our organization.’

According to Truninger, with the addition of the label inspection system, the company could also transfer employees away from the label room and have them directly support profit-generating activities.

‘The label inspection system allowed us to repurpose individuals to better suit our organization, versus having them tied to manual inspections of the printed labels,’ concludes Truninger.



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# DLS finds success in blank labels

*After a record-breaking year, the US converter has greatly expanded its press fleet. Luis Rodriguez reports*

**T**hroughout the pandemic the label industry proved to be resilient, with many converters showing high profit margins. For US converter Diversified Labeling Solutions (DLS), that profit margin was significantly higher than it had ever experienced.

'We've had a growth rate of about 24 percent over the past year,' reports James Cirigliano, vice president of marketing at DLS. 'On average, we're typically looking at around a 6-8 percent year-over-year growth rate, so the past year was huge.'

Because of this high growth rate, DLS has made a significant investment in equipment across its manufacturing and warehousing facilities in the United States.

At its headquarters in Itasca, Illinois, the company has installed a 4-color 17in Mark Andy 2200XL and a 2-color 17in Mark Andy 2200XL, with Martin Automatic roll splicers and AB Graphic turrets installed on both. In Duluth, Georgia, an 8-color 17in Mark Andy LP300 press has been installed. At Arlington, Texas, a 1-color, 21.5in Mark Andy 4150 press has been added. And in Reno, Nevada, the company has brought in a 2-color 17in Mark Andy 2200 press.

DLS says it chose to install Mark Andy presses across the board due to the reliability of the machinery – the company is still using presses it purchased some 25 years ago. But it's also to ensure that the converter has extra capacity across its factories. It wants to remain local for its customers and offer the exact capabilities no matter where in the country someone is located.

The multiple presses are just one portion of the investments by DLS. Others include forklifts, scanners, compressors, tabletop rewinders, anilox roll cleaners, and expanded shelving for its warehouses to store materials.

And though this spending spree is much higher than what DLS would typically make in a year, it's not wholly out of its typical *modus operandi*.

'We've always looked for places we can upgrade, make things easier, or increase efficiencies across the board,' says Cirigliano. 'But we've been on kind of a spending spree lately, buying new equipment and making sure that we're covered on materials. It's mostly just to keep up with all the work that's been coming in.'

According to the company, the work has been coming in partly from existing customers, who are purchasing well ahead of time to compensate for the extended lead-times experienced throughout the label industry due to ongoing supply chain issues. And it's also from an influx of new customers, which Cirigliano says has been so large that 'we're actually starting to dial back the number of new customers we're taking in, because we want to be able to take care of the customers we have right now'.

Though the growth has been seen across the converter's range of end-user markets, there has been one area where revenue has grown more than any other: blank labels.

'Right now, blank labels are driving a large part of the increased revenue we've been seeing,' reveals Cirigliano. 'Over the past year, people have been ordering more things from home which means more shipping labels. So, it makes sense that this is where we're seeing the most growth.'

To put the growth into perspective, the company's revenue hit around 89 million USD this past year, where just ten years ago it was at 34 million USD. The goal, according to DLS, is to make it to 100 million USD – a target it is confident of hitting.



*This Mark Andy 4150 press at DLS's Arlington, Texas facility, is one of five new Mark Andy presses the converter has added across its facilities in the past year*

**"We've had a growth rate of about 24 percent over the past year. On average, we're typically looking at around 6-8 percent, so the past year was huge"**

## Growing pains

There are necessary steps a company needs to take in order to successfully expand. Ensuring a company has the necessary capabilities within its current equipment portfolio is just one step, another is making sure it has the staff to run said machines.

DLS has grown its staff over the past few years from 130 to upwards of 200. However, as the company experiences more growth and expansion, it's struggling – like many other converters – to find skilled operators to work on the new presses.

'One of the biggest problems we have is finding new employees. Finding people to work has just been difficult,' says Cirigliano. 'We've placed job postings, gone to job fairs, we've put out advertisements – basically anything you can think of, but it's been a challenge.'

As a unique position, a skilled press operator is not the easiest job to fill. Many press operators are already employed and the number who are looking for work is relatively small. This exact problem is a common occurrence throughout the industry, and the clear-cut answer to it is nowhere to be seen.

However, DLS has seemingly found a solution within the company itself. 'What we have been doing is bring people up. We promote a lot from within,' says Cirigliano. 'Often, we'll have a press helper and after a few years if we think they're ambitious enough and have the skillset to operate a press, we'll train them up to work the press on their own.'



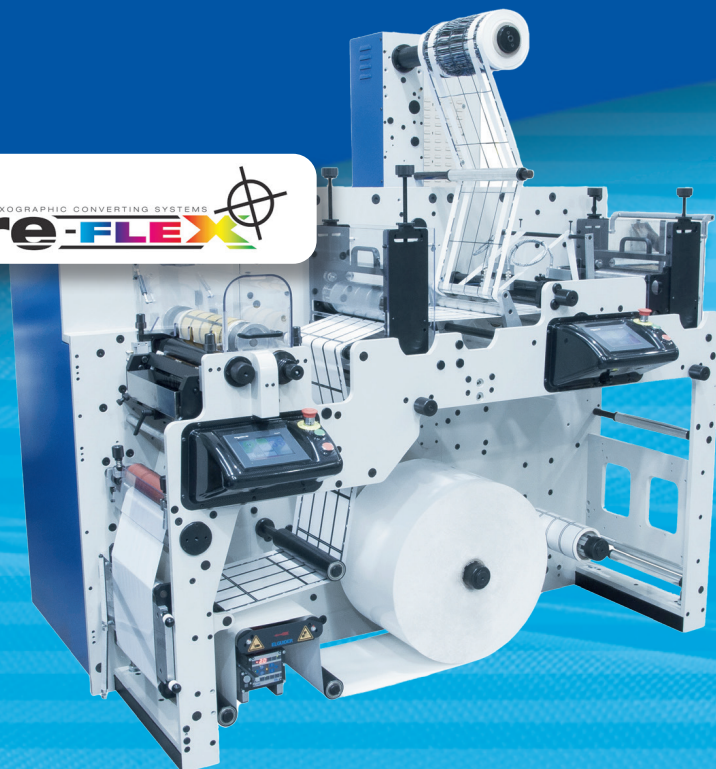
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# Monarch Graphics 2.0

*Indian label converter Monarch Graphics has set up a second production unit with a new Gallus Labelmaster press alongside slitting, die-cutting and inspection equipment. Akanksha Meena reports*

**E**stablished in 2006 by Pavail Jain, father of techno-commercial director Bhrigav Jain, Monarch started as a small team of 10 including the father and son.

Monarch's initial infrastructure revolved around a used single color offset machine converting tags and a flatbed die-cutting machine for blank label conversion, along with a used intermittent Iwasaki letterpress machine to print barcode labels.

In 2011, Monarch invested in a 7-color Orthotec letterpress machine. In 2015, it acquired its first Gallus ECS 340 9-color flexo press with a rotary screen unit – a rare configuration at the time in Delhi NCR, Bhrgav Jain says.

The company devoted itself to mastering the flexo process, implemented ERPs and gained certifications. It invested in custom training programs from Gallus to learn new printing processes and achieve the best out of its technology.

In 2021, the company decided to expand with a second production unit and invested nearly 1.09 million USD in its 18,000sqft in Noida that houses its second Gallus press along with slitting, die-cutting and inspection equipment.

The new manufacturing facility will enable the company to meet the demands of current and future customers, more than double production capacity, and create new jobs within the company.

Jain plans to produce complex labels and reduce wastage with the new set-up. He says that it has been designed for a lean manufacturing process and to address manpower challenges. The floor layout has been designed to foster internal communication and eliminate unnecessary wastages by streamlining the production process.

## Second Gallus

Before buying the Gallus Labelmaster 440, Jain visited multiple flexo press manufacturers and traveled extensively to understand their products.

Why another Gallus? Jain says that buying technologically proven products has always been a push from his father, who has never compromised on technology. 'There were several reasons for Monarch to opt for another Gallus press,' he says. 'We have adapted to the machine and its UI and had complete confidence in machine manufacturing process and its stability at higher speeds. Seeing an open machine, how it is configured and its accuracy, was crucial.'

In addition, he cites Monarch's relationship with Gallus a contributing factor.

Earlier, the plan had been to invest in a hybrid press that could perform both digital and flexo functions. At one point, Jain considered investing in both digital and flexo presses for his new plant but it was not an economically feasible option.

'At Labelexpo Europe 2019, I saw a few applications that only the Labelmaster was showcasing and which really fascinated me. We decided to buy a good flexo press with not too many bells and whistles and not for the glory shot, as they say in cricket.'

The 10-color Gallus Labelmaster is equipped with multiple in-line converting options such as rotary screens, dual cure drying systems and auto registration, special print units for in-line embellishments along with several converting options.

Monarch is running both short and long runs on the press with an average run length of 1,500-2,000 meters.

'The Gallus team made the installation really smooth and today I am very happy I made this decision. It is helping us to reduce a lot



*Bhrgav Jain, techno-commercial director of Monarch, with his new Gallus Labelmaster 440 flexo press*

**“Adding new products is the goal of the organization. The next two years will provide a base for what we produce after 2025. This plant will fuel growth for the coming five years”**

of waste and at the same time to be innovative,' he says.

Monarch has obtained G7 certification on the new Gallus press and is working to maximize standardization of its processes in the quality of products.

'G7 is a difficult process to achieve in flexo printing and by doing that we are hoping to fully stabilize the process. We fully understand the machine and its capabilities. We are stabilizing the process in day-to-day printing so that we can provide them G7 print.'

The Luster inspection system has enabled Monarch to eliminate human errors. The machine detects errors such as missing print data and shade variations, and inspects variable data.

It also invested in UV inkjet head to print variable data on labels. 'We have further ancillaries from reputed companies such as JM Heaford and RotoMetrics,' adds Jain.

The company aims to have annual revenue of 5.4 million USD by end of 2024. To achieve this, Jain is looking to enter the in-mold and shrink sleeve segments and invest in more converting equipment. The company is considering investing in another flexo press in 2023 to target new label sectors.

'Adding new products is the goal of the organization. Lots of our customers have requirements for in-mold and shrink sleeves. The next two years will provide a base for what we produce after 2024. This plant will fuel growth for the coming five years.'

Jain hints that considering his experience with the press manufacturer, he might go for another Gallus press. 'Having a similar machine is always useful from the training perspective of staff. And the relationship with the manufacturer is important for quick service in times of crisis and support of the entire local team present in India.'

Monarch will increase its exports to the US and Europe for high end decorative labels. The company currently exports 20 percent of



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Rhyuan slitter rewinder with Luster inspection system

## **“If you don’t have the right team, you don’t have the confidence to expand further”**

its products.

‘We are equally proud about our ethics and quality to go with 15+ years of being a part of this industry; we feel we have a great future ahead,’ says Jain. ‘We focus on lean practices that enhance labels and cut down wastage. I firmly believe, after working with a few Japanese customers and knowing Japanese label converters, we too can adopt a lean 6 Sigma approach and not compromise our values of differentiation. Every company has a process that suits its workers. I think we have been able to find it, but it is a work in progress.’

Jain prides himself in assembling a young driven team. ‘If you don’t have the right team you don’t have the confidence to expand further and take up new challenges.’

Monarch has rebranded its logo to symbolize the ever-evolving nature of the company with a global footprint. ‘Our logo is inspired by the ubiquitous and magnificent winged beauty, the monarch species of butterfly.’

‘The rebranding and our new website are all about how we are doing our business in the next five years and our decisions are in line to achieve that vision. The Gallus Labelmaster marks the start of Monarch 2.0, which is about being efficient, colorful, sustainable, lean, agile and fast.’

Jain highlights that Monarch has been known to create unique PS jobs, and that customers approach the company with special and challenging work. ‘We have been converting lots of non-PS jobs to PS jobs.’

The company services more than 20 verticals and uses some 25-30 different PS raw materials. It also provides a flexo prototyping service for several customers and intends to add a digital prototyping machine soon.

The company saw a temporary surge in sanitizer and pharma label jobs during the first wave of Covid, and Jain says that demand cannot be estimated in the current market circumstances. ‘We are part of a global supply chain and everything cannot be “Indianized”. The global supply chain will impact everyone on micro levels. On the label side, we shall continue to experience an uptick in raw material prices and availability challenge. There shall be continuous supply shocks and uncertainty around covid variants that shall exist till 2024. Hence, we all would need to be positive and wait for the stable times again.’

However, he is thankful for the fact that his team and their families were not impacted by Covid as the company operated on almost every day during the multiple Covid waves in an

organized manner.

‘We identified group of responsible employees to work on the shop floor who were willing to work in an extremely secured environment which created confidence in the team and they could rely on each other in trying times. I made sure my presence was there to assure them we all shall sail through this. It made me realize the importance of leadership qualities,’ he adds.

Jain says that the free hand to make decisions in the last decade and extensive global travel contributed to his learning experience, particularly in technical aspects of the business. His background in finance helped him to take control of the reins during the Covid crisis.

### **Sustainable production**

Jain believes that sustainability can be achieved through several means. ‘Sometimes sustainability is misunderstood. Switching completely to paper or eliminating foils is not the answer. You don’t need to use foil or varnish on the entire label and print it in eight colors, especially in front and back labeling applications. Reduction in set-up costs, energy costs and optimal use of foiling areas adds to being sustainable through wastages reduction.’

Monarch tries to print its complex labels in CMYK and prints with lower ink gsm for sharp graphics, reduced ink and energy usage

With the addition of the Labelmaster 440, Jain has been able to print labels in four colors that he says his customers assume would need six-to-eight.

Monarch prides itself in providing embellished labels without a sharp rise in cost. ‘We believe that the labels should be aptly priced, so the materials chosen are not expensive and don’t hamper customers from buying a new product.’

The industry is seeing the entry of new label converters which is leading to increased competition, according to Jain. There is intense competition in the ‘easy-to-manufacture’ label segments such as pharma, liquor, barcode and e-commerce, backed by availability of low-cost flexo machines and ancillaries.’

Jain explains that new entrants to the industry look to provide multiple printing applications using several technologies. However, each print process requires pre-press expertise, standardization and trained manpower and the willingness of management to exploit it. This results in redundancy in the market, underutilization of assets and standardization in print technology. The market has evolved this way due to the small number of players ready to ‘exploit’ a print technology, he says.

This is often discouraged due to the unwillingness of customers to pay more for value addition and high equipment costs.

Another trend he highlights is the changing legislations for labels in India. ‘There are new legislations coming into the Indian market for example for tire, chemicals and food labeling.’

Brands are now adopting variable data or authentication features directly printed on labels for anti-counterfeiting and customer loyalty programs.

Another upcoming tech is inkjet-printed labels, he says. New brand owners are buying desktop digital label printers in roll form to print labels in-house on pre-cut blank labels.

Transparent labeling or full disclosure labels are picking up in the American and European markets. ‘But once you do full disclosure labels there is too much information so this brings AR (augmented reality) and intelligent labels into play along with multilayer and booklet labels.’

RFID enabled labels and printed electronics are the next segments for labels which will require standardization of processes and dust-free environments, Jain explains.



For more from Akanksha Meena on the India market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena)



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Cosmo Films' Aurangabad plant will house what the company claims is the world's largest BOPP film production line

# Cosmo Films enters new market segments

India-based film manufacturer Cosmo Films will launch several products to target new market segments including film adhesives and signage. Akanksha Meena reports

Cosmo Films launched several new products in 2021 including direct thermal printable film and several synthetic papers. These products are now being scaled up. Cosmo is also ramping up to launch its shrink label materials. The company has started producing finished products using films launched under the Ozge brand name.

**“We wanted to diversify into new areas. Some of the chemicals and adhesives make sense because we have strong research capabilities and it is a familiar area”**

‘A major innovation that we have come up with is laser printable paper. These are A4 non-tearable sheets made of polypropylene. Now we are trying to find distributors for it. These are for home and office applications. They have a long shelf life and give beautiful print, but are only laser printable. They are out in the market,’ CEO Pankaj Poddar explains.

Cosmo will also launch its film adhesives for packaging, labels and lamination. It will offer paper to film, film to film and film to bottle lamination. The three types of adhesives will be launched in the next 3-6 months.

‘We are working on the bond properties of the adhesive. There were a lot of challenges that we saw in the market and in some cases the curing time was a

challenge, so we tried to resolve that. There is a host of adhesives that are coming out in the market, and different adhesives have different needs, from what our customers tell us. We worked on those specific areas. Cosmo believes in better than the best so we will continue with the same philosophy when it comes to adhesives,’ Poddar adds.

‘We wanted to diversify into new areas. And some of the chemicals and adhesives make a lot of sense for us because we have very strong research capabilities and many of the research scientists we have are from chemical and adhesive backgrounds. It is a very familiar area which we understand very well.’

Cosmo has sales and distribution networks in several countries and a plant in Korea. ‘From a manufacturing perspective, India is low cost and has a lot of talent which is why majority of our manufacturing footprint is here. As far as sales network is concerned, we are growing globally. We are trying to increase sales for all our segments and especially the adhesives and the new business segments that we have gone into. The objective is to increase exports and set up different distribution channels in different countries,’ Poddar explains.

Poddar highlights that the company is establishing the world’s largest BOPP line, which will be operational by the FY 2024-25. The manufacturer is also setting up a new polyester line which is coming up next year and investing in metallizers in India. The expansion will happen mostly in Aurangabad, other than a small expansion in Baroda.

## Covid challenges

Speaking about demand for its products, Poddar says that most parts of the world have seen a growth in demand post-Covid. ‘People have saved money and now they



Pankaj Poddar, group CEO of Cosmo Films

## ‘World’s largest’ BOPP film production line

Cosmo Films has set up reportedly the world’s largest BOPP film production line in Aurangabad, India, with an annual rated capacity of 67,000 metric tons.

The BOPP line will require investment of about 350 crores INR (47.5 million USD) to be funded through internal accruals and debts and is expected to be commencing commercial production within FY 2024-25.

Pankaj Poddar, group CEO of Cosmo Films, said: ‘With current capacity expected to produce primarily specialty films (more than 80 percent) in next two years and projected BOPP film demand growth in India, the company planned capacity expansion which will be world’s largest production line with an annual rated capacity of 67,000 metric ton with the lowest cost of production.’

Other growth plans include specialized BOPET line, focused on growing specialty sales, expanding into Cosmo Specialty Chemicals.





Inside Cosmo Films' Aurangabad plant

## “The objective is to increase exports and set up different distribution channels in different countries”

want to spend. Barring cases in some countries where a Covid wave has come back again, we see strong demand in most parts of the world.’

Initially when Covid began spreading in India, Cosmo faced its own set of challenges. The company shut down its plants due to government directives. Later on, the majority of its supply chain partners was affected and many of them were closed. The manufacturer had to personally ask them to restart their operations so Cosmo Films could supply essential products to its customers.

‘April and May 2020 were extremely challenging. Since then, things have started to stabilize. With the rise in demand for hygiene products, the packaging segment did well. But some segments did not do so well. For example, we supply synthetic paper for restaurant menu cards. A majority of the restaurants were closed and shifted to digital when they opened. That hurt demand. Broadly speaking, there was a positive impact on demand especially on the label side. The demand for disinfectants went up and we have strong presence in labels which in turn resulted in increased demand for us,’ Poddar says.

Freight costs went up significantly and getting a ship or shipping container was a ‘huge challenge’.

‘That clarified for us which vendors were long term partners and which were not. Some said they could not stand on MOU terms and wanted spot terms; others abided by MOU terms during those days. It helped us identify who are more ethical in their business practices. There were few others who all of a sudden stopped supplying containers to us despite several years of relationship,’ he adds.

### Sustainability efforts

Covid shifted priorities for everyone, but Poddar says that sustainability was always a concern. Cosmo is doing its part by helping customers with sustainable and recyclable products in packaging or labels.

The company is also investing heavily in eco-friendly operations. It is shifting to renewable energy in a significant way and aims to become a ‘water positive’ company. Cosmo has planted 5,000 trees in the last year and over next 2-3 years plans to plant around 20,000 more.

‘We are working on using post-consumer waste back into whichever way it can be used. We have already started to do this in a limited way,’ Poddar explains.

‘The majority of our focus is on mechanical recycling and put it

## Cosmo Films reveals positive financial results

Cosmo Films has declared its financial results for the quarter ended December 2021. Q3 FY22 EBITDA has increased by 44 percent (versus corresponding quarter) on the back of higher specialty sales, better operating margins and improved performance by subsidiaries.

Enhanced EBITDA together with lower finance cost and lower effective tax rate led to increase in PAT by 65 percent. Increase in EPS was still higher at 75 percent due to impact of buyback of shares in December 2020.

The board of directors has declared a second interim dividend of 10 INR (0.13 USD) per equity share for FY22. Together with the first interim dividend, the total dividend for FY22 would add up to 35 INR (0.47 USD) per equity share compared to 25 INR (0.33 USD) for FY21.

During the quarter, the company has received sanction under the Production linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the production of specialty films for use in electronic products. The incentive under the scheme will be for five years on 100 percent production of the new plant.

back into the supply chain. We have in-house recycling operations in a small way for PCR waste. We have a research team working on it. We have recently put up a de-metallization facility where metallized film can be de-metallized so that we can have the film back and convert it into granules. The research team is also working on deinking the film to remove the ink and use it back as base film. Those are the initiatives we are taking and it is just the beginning.’

In the next two years, the company will have a system for mechanical recycling to make PCR films as close to virgin as possible and reuse it in several applications.

Apart from this, the company is trying to reduce its in-house waste. It is also attempting to reduce noise by 20 decibels. Around 20 different projects are going on in the company purely from sustainability perspective.

### Graphic arts applications

Cosmo Films is launching a film for graphics applications in the next six months.

‘The biggest thing was that PVC in general has low cost for printing so we wanted to make something competitive from a price perspective which at the same time gives a nice print on signage banners. We have been able to be as close as 90-95 percent and our focus is sustainability. With PVC there are sustainability concerns and we are trying to come up with a recyclable film. It is printable on all current print technologies used for signage applications,’ Poddar explains.

The company’s goal is to focus on these new market segments over the next three to four years.

‘We have been working on becoming a stronger proposition for our customers over last few years. We have worked aggressively on reducing quality complaints. We have 5S awarded plants and we are moving forward in terms of aiming for global level awards and quality such as Golden Peacock award. We have implemented TQM project in the company and have been working on it for the last six months.

‘Over next three years, we really want to be the best in class in the world in operations. That is what Cosmo team is working on – achieving 6 Sigma levels of quality over next 2-3 years,’ Poddar concludes.



Read more about L&L coverage of Cosmo Films at [www.labelsandlabeling.com/search/node/Cosmo](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/search/node/Cosmo)

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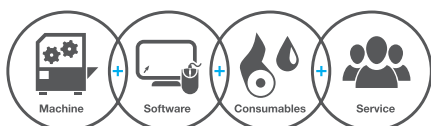
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# Story of the moon

*Rohan Rehani, co-founder of Indian mead start-up Moonshine Meadery, tells the story behind its eye-catching labels.*  
Akanksha Meena reports

A hobby turned into a business, Moonshine has made waves in the Indian alcobev market with its out-of-the-box flavored meads and label design concept. The brand gained further popularity when it appeared on the business reality television show Shark Tank India.

Mechanical engineer Rohan Rehani and ex-McKinsey employee Nitin Vishwas transformed their hobby into a business, launching Moonshine Meadery in 2018.

The story of Moonshine's label design began with a minimalist Scandinavian logo of uppercase and lowercase 'M' which Rehani says received positive customer feedback. Depending on the SKU, the color of the label and text would change but the overall design remained the same. The start-up introduced wordplay around its logo to create customer engagement on social media with 'Mm' standing out in slogans such as 'IMMune to bullshit'. Rehani recalls he saw people wearing t-shirts bearing the slogans. This convinced the founders that there was a scope for clever marketing behind the original logo.

However, as the business brewed, the duo realized that there were several constraints surrounding the logo. 'One was that we had misjudged the target audience,' says Rehani. 'When Vishwas and I first started, we priced the meads at 220 INR [2.92 USD] so that consumers above 30 years of age would be able to buy them and would like minimalist designs. We were, of course, wrong. Young India has the power to spend on products that appeal to them.'

'The second thing was that while all our communications were about Moonshine, we hadn't realized that "Mm" was the biggest thing on the visible on the bottle.'

The brand faced a peculiar problem. Customers would walk into liquor shops asking for Moonshine only to be told that it is not available. When a customer notified the co-founders of the unavailability, Vishwas called in to a shop in Chembur that was selling Moonshine meads, but was told that the product was unavailable.

'Vishwas called me and said either the stock is selling out too fast (within eight hours of shipment) or the shopkeeper doesn't know what Moonshine is.'

He went to the store and asked for Moonshine and received the expected response. But Vishwas pointed out the Moonshine meads stacked neatly behind the shopkeeper, to which the latter replied: 'Oh, you mean "M-M"!'

The brand launched in February 2018 and by June the problem was apparent. Rehani and Vishwas started looking for a design agency and found The Jungle Gym and its founder Nikhil More.

'We told them we wanted a visual-forward brand language. Prior to that we had text-heavy brand language which was nice and fun but we felt several constraints. When we realized the target group was much younger, the bottle needed to be a lot more visually striking,' Rehani explains.

He was determined to do away with the animal or insect mascots that are popular among craft brewers. 'To have a bee as a mascot for a honey-derived drink made the most logical sense. But honestly, that's why we didn't want it – because it made logical sense. We were very unconventional in such a way that we didn't want to belong to this industry for any logical reason.'

'We decided to do this out of a passion which became a hobby. Everyone said, why not make beer – something people already understand. That's the point: if everyone is zigging, we wanted to zag.'



(L-R) Nitin Vishwas and Rohan Rehani, co-founders of Moonshine Meadery

**“To have a bee as a mascot for a honey-derived drink made the most logical sense. But honestly, that's why we didn't want it”**

Another thing Moonshine was sure of was collaborating with artists.

When More came up with the moon logo, Rehani thought it was radical as an idea. A white circle in the middle morphed with label design was unique and integral to the brand identity.

'Both Vishwas and I were like – whoa! More came back with 8-9 different artworks and rough sketches to show us how the entire architecture pops out when you line the bottles together.'

The circle in the center of the label with the brand name Moonshine beneath, along with the name of the mead, remains consistent in the design. The company contacted several artists across India and asked them to design something using the template.

'The product inside of the bottle is so handcrafted that we wanted the label – our identity – to be integral with the artwork. Instead of treating our logo as sacrosanct and saying you cannot touch it, we wanted the artist to overlap the logo by 20-25 percent. The circle is such a universal symbol that you can do so much with it, and it worked!'

## Collaborating with artists

The co-founders chanced upon their first artist, illustrator and graphic novel artist Anand Radhakrishnan, at a Starbucks coffee shop where they noticed him sketching them. Radhakrishnan was commissioned to design Moonshine's Apple Cyder mead. 'In the rough sketches he came up with, the cross-section of the apple also looks a lot like an owl's face. He morphed the circle into an owl's face. He used the 25 percent rule very well,' Rehani says.

The second artist was Aniruddh Mehta, a designer, visual artist, art director and a DJ known for his work in Sacred Games, a Netflix series. Mehta designed his own favorite variant – the Coffee mead. His art style includes repetitive patterns and elements of coffee and





Once the design template was created by The Jungle Gym founder Nikhail More, Moonshine Meadery commissioned artists to create designs for the different flavors

## “What we love about the circle is that it is ‘freshly consistent’. The label architecture allows variety and consistency, which is super-exciting for us”

hexagons of honeycomb to show what the product is made of.

‘My personal favorite is what More did,’ says Rehani. ‘He came up with the design for Traditional mead. It is closest to what our ancestors drank. Mead is the oldest beverage known to mankind – it predates beer and wine by thousands of millennia. It’s also a part of our culture and is mentioned in the Vedas.’

The Traditional mead label shows India’s first satellite, Aryabhata – named after the famous Indian astronomer and mathematician – in space, partly silhouetting the moon.

The company has launched 12 variants of its meads so far and each label is designed by a different designer, depicting the diversity of the brand.

For Grilled Pineapple mead, the company launched it as a competition on social media to crowdsource the design during the first lockdown in India.

‘What we love about the circle is that it is “freshly consistent”. The label architecture allows variety and consistency which is super-exciting for us. This year, four new meads are coming out and we are reaching out to artists and finalizing artwork for them,’ Rehani says.

The company outsources printing services and started out applying the labels manually. Now it has an in-house Skanem automatic label applicator for front and back labeling and a bottling machine developed by Rehani and Vishwas.

The labels also include QR codes with a link to the artist and the inspiration behind the artwork. ‘We see this as an opportunity to shine a light on artists. That’s important for us, which is why we will always outsource the design.’

### What you see is what you get

Rehani says that all Moonshine labels show what you are going to get inside the bottle.

‘If it’s grilled pineapple there will be grilled pineapple in it and if there’s apple there will be apple in it. We are strong believers in naming our product to depict what you see is what you get,’ Rehani adds.

Apart from the three flagship meads, the seasonal variants will be produced in limited stocks which may not be available again for a year or so. The reason is the unavailability of seasonal fruits as the brand insists on using fresh ingredients instead of rehydrated fruits and pulp.

‘We didn’t start Moonshine to start a business. We began as home brewers and it became a passion. We ask everyone who

comes to work with us to create their own mead. When one of our employees, Devashish, joined us as an intern, he came up with Guava Chilli mead which is now one of our best-selling meads. This is why it is exciting. There is a new label on the horizon and that freshness is consistent,’ Rehani highlights.

Moonshine has also launched its own brand of the high-quality varietal honey used in its meads. It claims to be the only alcobev producer in the world which sells its raw material as well, ‘because we are proud of its quality’.

The brand uses silver PP and a matte lamination layer on its labels. ‘This shift to silver PP and matte lamination happened 3-4 months ago. You might still find regular PP labels in the market, but over time the transition will happen to silver PP.’

Moonshine won the Kyoorius design award for its rebranding strategy.

‘I sometimes see the brand out in the wild, which is not really the brand. And a couple of times on Instagram we have had people taking pictures of white circles and sending it to us and tagging us when it is not even our artwork. The circle for us makes a lot of sense,’ Rehani says.

Moonshine is making its mark on the Indian alcobev industry with a fresh outlook in product and package design. Often product differentiation is a challenge for new start-ups on the overly cluttered FMCG shelf. Rehani recommends that start-ups have a clear brief and reference of what they want.

He says that working with an agency that guides a brand through the complete thought process is ‘invaluable’.

‘We had a one-hour long session with More, who helped us through the process of understanding the exact design that we would like. By the end of it, we were clear about what direction we wanted to go in.’

He encourages originality and suggests moving away from conventional thinking. ‘Again, don’t be afraid to zig when everyone is zagging. Don’t go with what people believe how things should be done or should be like. You can start afresh and do something really unique. As clients, More was happy to work with us because we didn’t give him too many constraints about what he cannot do. We are huge fans of trying something new – our whole business model is dependent on trying new things.’



For more information, go to [www.moonshinemeadery.com](http://www.moonshinemeadery.com)

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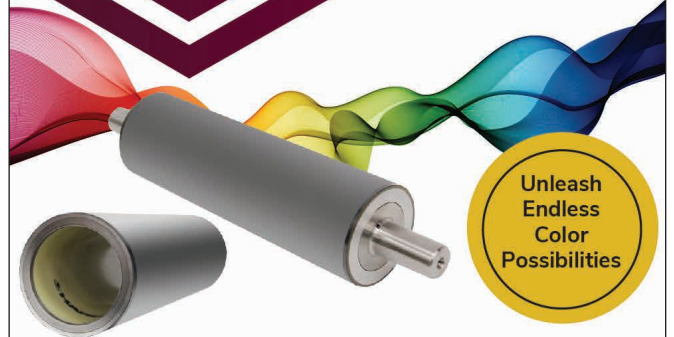
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# Vintex enters flexo market

*Indian pre-press specialist Vintex has moved into the flexo market. Akanksha Meena reports*

**K**olkata, India-based pre-press specialist Vintex Rubber Rollers Industries has launched new products for the flexo market including laser engraved sleeves and elastomer plates in several thicknesses and sizes, polymer HD plates, plate mounting sleeves, end seal for ink chamber and anilox protection cover.

The company was established by current director Mayank Chhabra's father LN Chhabra in 1999 in Udyog Vihar, Gurgaon. It gradually expanded to five units to serve customers across India. The company supplies offset and gravure consumables and has introduced flexo products as well.

'I joined my father's business in 2004 and gradually we increased our presence across India. We are supplying to almost all OEMs in India,' says Mayank Chhabra.

Vintex also exports its products to the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Current roller production capacity is at 2,000-4,000 a month; Chhabra says it will increase in the future.

Two years ago, the company began producing flexo consumables after observing growth in the segment. The company invested in Esko and DuPont equipment to support this expansion.

Vintex has launched laser engraved elastomer plates in several thicknesses – 1.14mm, 1.70mm and 2.84mm. It has also introduced polymer HD plates in 1.14mm, 1.70mm, 2.84mm, 3.9mm and 4.7mm thicknesses.

**“Vintex is the only company in India that refurbishes sleeves for reuse. We can use the same fiber base to refurbish the sleeve and send it back to customers who can use it again”**

The new elastomer plates are claimed to be similar to polymer plates but are relatively more resistant to inks and solvents and are durable, according to Chhabra.

Another new product, elastomer laser engraved rollers or engraved sleeves have 'excellent' ink transfer properties, he says. They offer optimum registration, exact dot reproduction and are resistant to solvents such as ethyl acetate, ethanol, methyl ethyl ketone (MEK). Chhabra adds that the rollers are environmentally friendly, highly resistant to light and ozone, and offer jointless printing.

'The rollers eliminate the cost of mounting double sided tape and offer high print speed in comparison to plates. There is also hidden benefit of downtime by faster change-over and minimum waste.'

The rollers are suitable for long run jobs and continuous runs. They are claimed to be five to six times more durable than plates.

'Being elastomer it has better resistance to chemicals and good transferability. It has micro holes which give better coverage and ink transferability especially in the overprint varnish,' Chhabra highlights.

Print results often show joints if plates are used. 'The advantage of DLE sleeves is that it gives jointless results which can be seen in gravure. First, we make rubber covered sleeves to a certain size. And then we engrave it according to the design by the customer. They can go for all sleeves according to colors or they could go with a combination of polymer and elastomer plate or sleeve. Sleeves can



*Vintex laser engraved sleeve*

be used for any color that is required to be seamless. The rest of the colors can be printed with plates. It is economical and customers get the desired results.'

He explains that the major reason for converters choosing gravure over flexo is seamless printing. With laser engraved sleeves, the print results are comparable with gravure.

The company provides custom sleeves and rollers. 'Even though they are used in the same machine, the use might vary from customer to customer and minute changes are required by each one. This is how we have gained preference in the industry.'

## Local manufacturing

Products such as plate mounting sleeves previously had to be imported into India. Vintex is making these products available locally with its manufacturing facilities in Gurgaon. The company receives expert support from its UK partner North West Rollers Services, which has been in this business for the last 30 years.

Vintex also refurbishes used sleeves to repurpose them for the next job. 'If a customer has plenty of sleeves and they are of no use, they have to be discarded. Vintex is the only company in India that refurbishes them and saves the customers' costs. That is also environmentally friendly since the fiber that is discarded is not easy to dispose. We can use the same fiber base to refurbish the sleeves and send it back to customers who can use it again,' Chhabra explains.

The company can refurbish sleeves in any size, color and hardness. Vintex Sleeves are fully compatible with any machine make. It also makes sleeves for gravure, laminators (solventless or combi), coating and embossing.

The company is targeting the flexible packaging segment due to the growth Chhabra sees in it. 'Plastic is a part of daily life and cannot be avoided. And there is a growing demand for it. The demand did not diminish despite the pandemic because it was an essential service. We invested in our machines to stay up to date with the coming trends in the flexo market. The demand for short runs in flexo will rise next. When there is sufficient demand and customers, we want to ensure that we are ready.'

The company is seeing an encouraging response from the market. The flexo customer base is the same as gravure. 'Customers who bought gravure products from us have the same confidence in our flexo products.'

Vintex will expand its roller business and production capacity by adding new equipment in all its manufacturing units. It plans to multiply production by three times by 2025.



For more from Akanksha Meena on the Indian market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena)



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# Sanchuang makes digital move with Screen

Chinese label converter Sanchuang is making full use of its conventional and new digital resources to offer customers innovative label products. Yolanda Wang reports

**L**ocated in Bishan district, Chongqing, label converter Sanchuang has a workshop of 2,500 sqm and more than 50 employees. The company is equipped with two Label Source satellite letterpress, Zonten intermittent letterpress, Zonten intermittent offset press, a Screen Truepress Jet L350UV SAI UV inkjet digital press, two Reborn high-speed die-cutting machines, a Rhyguan die-cutting machine, Luster automated inspection system, Pulisi visual inspection equipment as well as a Xinhua ERP system.

**“Label printing is deceptively simple, but it needs constant effort and innovation to produce better products. This process will be endless”**

Owner Chen Baixiang previously had a highly successful career in international trade in Guangdong Province. In 2013, he happened to find out that Sanchuang was about to be sold, at the same moment he had decided to invest his earnings in his home town.

With his years of working experience in international trade, Chen saw that demand for labels would continue to grow, opening up huge opportunities for future growth. Therefore, he made the decision to take over Sanchuang.

Chen admits he knew very little about the technical side of label printing at the outset. ‘Although I am full of confidence in the development of this industry, I didn’t know much about the technology and market, so I had to start from scratch. Fortunately, a partner who carried on from the original company knows a lot about this industry, so production and operations were not greatly affected by the change of ownership.’

Chen gave full play to the ‘courage and aggressiveness’ of his ‘newborn calf’. He went straight into the front line and worked in different roles such as sales

assistant, merchandiser and delivery driver to support the development and expansion of the business. Sanchuang was soon on the right track and achieved positive and steady growth.

After years of development, Sanchuang has created its own blueprint for success, which it calls its ‘best tricks’: standardized management, high-quality products and professional services. For standardized management, Sanchuang has set up an internal ‘7s’ management system, whose procedures cover a wide range of quality assurance processes, including reorganization of the production workflow, cleaning and safety training. For high-quality products, a rigorous quality inspection system has been established with automatic quality inspection equipment. Samples of each tested roll of products are kept for archiving to ensure consistency of product color and quality. And Sanchuang set up a professional service team to monitor the ERP workflow from receipt of customer orders, to internal processing of orders, material allocation, production scheduling, printing, post-press finishing and inspection, warehousing and finally outbound delivery, to provide customers with a first-class services.

## Digital investment

In March 2021, Sanchuang installed a Screen Truepress Jet L350UV SAI series UV inkjet press – the first such press in the Chongqing area. From the initial contact with Screen to the official installation of the press took only three months. ‘However, we looked around for two years before investing in this digital press,’ Chen tells L&L. ‘I’ve been learning about different digital printing technologies, the performance, range of label materials, market segments and so on. But I didn’t find suitable equipment matching our order structure.’

With the pandemic-era label industry now being pushed towards automation and AI, we are entering an era full of opportunities but also uncertainty and new challenges, in which enterprises need to think hard before investing in new equipment.

Before investing in the Screen press, Sanchuang conducted several rounds of



Chen Baixiang, general manager of Sanchuang

tests. ‘We chose this digital press because it happened to match a new order we were developing. It has a stable color quality, wide color gamut and easy color matching and the print quality of repeat orders can be guaranteed,’ says Chen.

‘Additionally, customers are fascinated by the gloss and tactile printing effect of a UV inkjet press. Moreover, I am impressed with the brand credibility and service concept of Screen.’

Sanchuang has fully tested the performance of this digital press with different materials and orders. They have also tried to combine conventional and digital printing processes to varying degrees to provide customers with more diversified label products.

Most of Sanchuang’s products are currently used in the beverage and electronic products industries, with beverage accounting for about 70 percent. Filmic PS labels account for between 60-70 percent of all orders.

After eight years working in the label industry, Chen knows he always has more to learn. ‘Frankly, although it seems that I have learned a lot compared with when I took over Sanchuang in 2013, the more I know, the more I find I need to know on a deeper level. Label printing is deceptively simple, but it needs constant effort and innovation to produce better products. This process will be endless.’



For more from Yolanda Wang on the Chinese market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/yolanda-wang](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/yolanda-wang)





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# World class converters emerge in southwest China

*Southwest China's geographical isolation has meant label converters remaining small and fragmented. Now, development of communications has created opportunities eagerly seized by a new generation of world-class converting companies. Yolanda Wang reports*

**S**outhwest China includes Sichuan province, Chongqing Municipality, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region. Label converters in this area are generally characterized by the low level of consolidation and small scale, which is common for Chinese label printing enterprises.

In addition, due to the geographical limitations of the location, the speed of development of label converters in this region is lower than that in east China, south China and other regions.

In recent years, with the development of increasingly efficient transportation and communication networks, many international top 500 enterprises have set up factories in southwest China, including in the electronics, automobile and aerospace industries.

In addition, the development of local industries including food, wine, bottled water, pharma and others has driven demand for label products. In the future these combined trends will bring great opportunities for label converters in the region.

For this reason, L&L wanted to give the top ten label converters in southwest China the opportunity to be better known by their industry peers. We also express our sincere thanks to the support given by the Sichuan and Chongqing label association.

## Tianxing Printing

Established in November 2010 with a production area of 12,000sqm, Tianxing Printing is a high-tech enterprise with an annual sales revenue of nearly 200 million RMB (USD 31m).

In 2016, Tianxing was listed on China's National Equities Exchange and Quotations (NEEQ), entering the new technology division in May 2017. The company's business is mainly focused on the printing of anti-counterfeit labels, barcodes and packaging.

Tianxing Printing's battery of presses includes a Weigang ZJR-330 flexo press, Label Source satellite letterpress, intermittent offset press and a Rhyguan high-speed die-cutting machine.

As well as decorative labels, the company prints a wide range of commercial work, including business forms and instruction leaflets. It is also a lead supplier of paper products for the Bank of China, China Construction Bank, Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport, Sichuan Guanghan Jinyan Distillery and others brand owners.

Tao Tian, general manager of Tianxing, says innovation is the key principle of the company's development. 'As a label converter, we need to cope with a hostile macro-environment. Firstly, increasingly fierce competition; secondly, shrinking profits as we face price increases from our downstream material suppliers and lower prices from upstream brand customers. Finally, we need also to consider rising staff wages and rising costs of operating a company. Only with support of innovation, can the company break these shackles.'

Tianxing Printing has put this philosophy into practice, and today has more than 40 technology and design patents.

In line with the trend towards the Internet of Things, Tianxing Printing has developed additional functions on its product packaging including anti-counterfeiting, product tracking, mobile marketing and brand promotion using QR codes, invisible watermarks, digital watermarks, dot matrix technology and RFID labels.

QR code labels are used for anti-counterfeit and track and trace



Weigang ZJR-330 flexo press in Tianxing Printing

## "As a label converter, we need to cope with a hostile macro-environment"

applications, as well as 'one object one code' labels. Hundreds of millions of the company's QR code labels are being used by Foxconn, Bosch and other global Top 500 brands industries. In 2017, Tianxing established a dedicated smart label operation called Guiyang Tianxing and set up an office in Chongqing, marking a breakthrough in the intelligent packaging market in Southwest China.

## Chengdu Megavision

Founded in 2005, Chengdu Megavision has a production area of 4,000sqm and 60 employees. The company produces roll and sheet labels for the food, wine, pharma, household chemical, industrial chemical, anti-counterfeit and electronics industries. Daily label output can reach up to three million pieces and annual capacity more than two billion labels. The company's long-term clients include a wide range of well-known enterprises including Red Star, Jiangxiaobai, Gemmy, China Resources Sanjiu and others.

Chengdu Megavision's converting equipment includes three Bobst flexo presses, a digital press, intermittent offset label press and screen printing presses, as well as finishing equipment including high-speed hot stamping and die-cutting machines and automatic inspection systems. Today it is one of the best-equipped and most heavily automated enterprises in the label printing industry in southwest China.

Liu Jincheng, the founder and general manager, has a design background. 'A label printing company is not only the manufacturer and converter of label products, but also a key contact between brand owners and designers,' says Liu Jincheng. 'As a label converter, we need to give full play to our advantages in understanding printing materials, printing technologies and finishing processes to provide constructive opinions and suggestions for the brand owners' product design at an early stage. We can recommend appropriate materials and processes based on a consideration of the brand's image, impact and concept, so as to achieve a deeper strategic cooperation with brand owners.'

Megavision provides professional services from pre-press design, document processing and typesetting to printing production,





Bobst flexo press installed in Megavision



Label Source full rotary letterpress in Gaoda Printing

**“A label printing company is not only the manufacturer and converter of label products, but also a key contact between brand owners and designers”**

assigning variable codes, post-press decoration and die-cutting.

The company runs 3D simulation software which allows customers to preview the effect of their labels on actual products, which not only saves time and improves efficiency, but also reduces the waste of materials and time caused by repeated proofing.

Megavision has set up a specialized label laboratory equipped with professional testing instruments including a multi-functional computerized tensile testing machine, color densitometer, colorimeter, viscosity tester and sunlight resistance tester, providing standardized and professional tests on the performance and function of its label products.

Early on, Megavision invested in ERP management software and fully upgraded the whole system in 2013. Today the company has a standardized management system from customer order to design/pre-press, production scheduling, printing, to warehousing and delivery, along with full process monitoring, financial accounting and HR functions.

Megavision has trained a team of technicians to regularly introduce new materials, new processes and new technologies to provide inspiration for their customers' R&D and design teams.

### Chongqing Zhiwei

Founded in 2003, Chongqing Zhiwei mainly produces PS and shrink sleeve labels for the pharma, electronics, food and wine industries.

Peng Donglin, the general manager, graduated from Shanghai Publishing and Printing College and used to work in the Third Chongqing Printing Factory, the so-called 'Printing King of Southwest China'. After three years, he was moved to the Huaxi Packaging Group, and was appointed successively general manager of the design and platemaking division and the paper container division.

In 2003, Peng Donglin finished working there after 16 years and started his own business. 'The growing national economy

has brought many opportunities to the printing industry,' he says. 'A favorable economic environment and preferential policies have provided lots of supports for entrepreneurs. I thought it was time to start my own business and realize some of my dreams and ambitions.'

In the early days, Chongqing Zhiwei mainly produced paper cups and similar products, serving dairy customers such as Guangming, Wuhan Xiangmanlou and Hubei Angel, as well as companies such as Air China and Pepsi. At its peak, Chongqing Zhiwei once took over the paper cup business of 14 branches of Pepsi-Cola.

The exposure of the 'Melamine scandal' in 2008 had a significant impact on the whole dairy industry, and Chongqing Zhiwei's business was hit hard. The company quickly adjusted its business model and turned to labels.

'We had previously produced small-scale batches of labels along with our packaging products for brand customers. Since 2006, most central and western Chinese manufacturers started to move from manual labeling to high-speed automated machine labeling, opening up a good opportunity for Chongqing Zhiwei,' Peng explains.

Subsequently, the company invested heavily in narrow web converting equipment including intermittent letterpress, full rotary letterpress and Weigang in-line flexo press, as well as pre-press, CTP, finishing equipment and fully automatic quality inspection systems. 'This combination of different equipment, each with their advantages and weaknesses, allows us to select the appropriate printing technology according to the requirements of the job, based on customer requirements, materials, quantity and delivery time,' adds Peng.

For many years, Chongqing Zhiwei has adhered to a model of in-depth cooperation with customers. At present, 70-80 percent of orders come from existing customers. The company is involved at the development stage of brand owners' new packaging designs, helping them consider the impact

of processes including labeling and product storage environment to achieve a win-win for the converter and its customers.

Chongqing Zhiwei is also equipped with a label traceability management system, tracking each label from incoming raw materials through the manufacturing process and finished product warehousing to customers' end use.

This combination of services has led to Chongqing Zhiwei being rated as an 'Excellent Supplier' by many customers for consecutive years.

Today the company serves customers in industries as varied as pharmaceutical, sanitary products, electronics, food and wines. It has 50 employees and a plant area of 4,200sqm producing up to two billion labels a year.

Chongqing Zhiwei is now planning to use its in-line flexo presses to produce shrink sleeve labels to diversify its product structure and improve 'adhesion' with customers. In the future, the company will also focus on environmental protection and digital printing technology.

### Gaoda Printing

Gaoda Printing was founded in 2013 and now has 37 employees covering a production area of 2,700sqm.

Huang Youzhuan, general manager of the company, is a second generation printer. 'It was mainly influenced by my father to enter the label printing industry, but at that time, everyone in my family opposed me about this decision and thought printing was too tough. However, I was very optimistic about the potential of this industry. Labels are used everywhere in peoples' daily lives, and the future development space of this market will be infinite.'

Without funds, contacts or customers, Huang invested in the company's first printing equipment – a Weigang intermittent offset press – with a loan.

'We didn't have our own orders at the beginning and could only process orders from other label companies. Such OEM orders once accounted for about 90 percent



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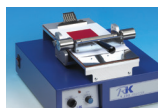
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Omet 12-color flexo press in Zhiyue

of the company's total business,' Huang tells L&L.

With the development of the company and a gradual understanding of the consumer label market, Huang realized the necessity of connecting directly with brand customers to achieve long-term growth.

Gaoda began gradually reducing its trade label orders and studying in-depth local industries including liquor, beverages and pharma, gradually accumulating a number of high quality brand customers.

The company began investing in new production equipment including a Label Source full rotary letterpress, screen press, Weigang in-line flexo press, Luster and Zhongheng inspection systems and a Jianhong high-speed die-cutting machine.

Just eight years after its establishment, Gaoda has developed from one person and one press to an annual output value of nearly 30 million RMB (USD 4.7m), with five years of consecutive growth.

Today its label products are widely used in the food, beverage, pharma and other markets, and the company has expanded into RFID labels, anti-counterfeiting and trackable labels for industrial label users with special requirements such as oil resistance, temperature resistance and lightfast.

### Chengdu Zhiyue

Chengdu Zhiyue is a subsidiary of Chengdu First Packing group. First Packing group was established in 2015, producing labels and instruction manuals. After a major investment in new production machinery in 2017, Chengdu Zhiyue was officially established in 2018.

Zhiyue offers a wide range of PS products, including trackable labels, pharma labels, digital labels, die-cut products, film switches and also instruction manuals.

Today the company is equipped with an Omet 12-color UV flexo press, Zonten intermittent offset press, another 10-color full rotary press, high-speed die-cutting machine, AVT Helios C quality control system, engraving machine, X-rite IGT color matching system and an XRF testing system.

Adhering to a strategy of digitization and automation, Zhiyue installed ERP and MES lean production management systems. More recently the company has adopted apps for remote and mobile working. For warehouse management, Zhiyue uses a high rack automatic storage and retrieval system (AS/RS) incorporating intelligent warehouse location management.

'Automation and intelligence are the inevitable trend of the future development of the label printing industry,' says Peng Dong, general manager of Zhiyue. 'As we progress, Chengdu Zhiyue will continue to deepen and strengthen its construction of intelligent systems.'

### Kunming Heyu

Kunming Heyu was founded in 1999, with a production workshop covering 5,600sqm. The company is equipped with an HP Indigo 6900 digital press, Weigang ZJR-330 in-line flexo press and a dedicated coating machine.

Kunming Heyu supplies PS roll labels, packing tapes (with lettering) and other adhesive products. The company can typically

**"The restriction of international logistics, the increasing price of upstream raw materials and the launch of updated environmental policies compel us to strive for innovation and change"**

produce up to 6 million pharma labels in a day, along with 10 million BOPP and PE tapes. The company has 63 employees, including 28 professional technicians.

To improve its R&D base, Kunming Heyu cooperates with professional print colleges, universities and scientific research institutions – for example the Kunming University of Science and Technology, Yunnan University, Yunnan School of Chemical Technology, Yunnan Press and Publication News, and the Yunnan Bureau of Quality and Technical Supervision.

Focused on the research and production of high-end adhesive products, Kunming Heyu's label output includes paper, PET, environmental protection labels, RFID labels, and other special label constructions. The company claims to rank first in term of market share in Yunnan Province.

One specialty of Kunming Heyu is anti-counterfeit pharma labels, and the company is credited with replacing the outsourcing of these products from other provinces.

### Guizhou Yumaxian

Founded in 2009, Guizhou Yumaxian has a production space of 3,300sqm and 39 employees. Starting from a single small label press, the company now owns an extensive battery of equipment including a Weigang 8-color in-line flexo press, 6/5/4-color intermittent offset presses, a screen press and comprehensive post-press facilities including fully-automatic inspection machines, an automatic laminating machine, Xinpengxing hot stamping machine, and high-speed slitter and die-cutting machines.

Yumaxian has positioned itself as a comprehensive service supplier integrating design with printing, slitting and inspection of PS labels.

The company operates in the food, wine, pharma and household chemical sectors and prints on a wide range of materials including coated paper, PVC, PET labels, and frangible labels.

Guizhou Yumaxian has developed long-term cooperative relationships with a number of well-known Guizhou-based enterprises including Maotai Group, Yelanggu Wine group, Hanke Junfeng Wine group, Ethnic Liquor Group, Laogandie Food, Sifang Cereals and Oils, Guizhou Xinyuan Biological Technology, Guishanhong Food, Guizhou Communications Construction Group and Sinopharm Group's Guizhou division. The company's annual output is valued at over 20 million RMB (USD 3.2m).

In the face of the Covid-19 epidemic, production capacity control by the Chinese government and the rising cost of raw materials, Yumaxian actively communicates with material suppliers to collaboratively push forward the application of new materials and technologies, to reduce costs and achieve win-win growth with the end customer.

In response to the Chinese government's national environmental protection policy, the company outsourced CTP and flexographic platemaking to specialized suppliers in 2018; all its waste gas has been treated with activated carbon before discharging. In addition, the company's operators use sustainable machine cleaners, environment-friendly ink and reduce the use of multi-layer coated products.





Satellite rotary letterpress in Chingqing Zhiwei

### Yunnan Guolian

Yunnan Guolian was founded in 2013. From the outset the company invested heavily in equipment, installing a 5-color intermittent offset press, a Taiwanese 6-color rotary press, two Taiwanese high-speed die-cutting and hot stamping machines, a screen printing press, Esko CTP platemaker and automatic offset plate punching machine, covering the whole workflow from pre-press and platemaking to print production and finishing. Yunnan Guolian's investment has also extended to digital equipment, installing a UV inkjet press in April 2018, and in July 2021 updated its existing production equipment with the first Weigang 12-color in-line flexo press in Yunnan Province.

In order to promote the introduction of new processes and materials, Yunnan Guolian set up its Design and Development department in January 2021, consisting of a general manager, marketing director, factory director, chief designer, printing workshop supervisor and die-cutting workshop supervisor. They cooperatively study and discuss each customer's design documents regarding the materials, technologies and process flow, then conclude a final production scheme. Such working practices have reduced both production costs and the cost of introducing new products, and this has been recognized by its customers.

'After years of cultivating this in-depth development, Yunnan Guolian has gradually gotten recognition from our customers and the wider market,' says general manager Zhang Guolian. She tells L&L that Sinopharm group, Hongxiang Yixintang, Duoshang Fruit Juice, Zhenming Jinlong Water, Mingcheng Group, Heqing Royal Liquor, Europe-Asian Dairy, Lesson Dairy and Zhadian Dairy have all become loyal customers and partners of the company.

### UseEveryDay Printing

UseEveryDay Printing was founded in 2018, but the company has a history of 21 years in the label printing industry with the original name of Chengdu Qingyang Daily Printing. Now the company has its own plant in Xinh Industrial Park, Pengzhou City, Sichuan Province, about 25 minutes' drive from the central urban area with very convenient transportation.

Yan Tianhui, general manager of UseEveryDay, says, 'Each label not only gives the user information, but also adds luster to the brand. That's why our company insists on carefully producing labels for customers, from raw materials, technology, design, creativity, transportation to after use at the consumer.'

The company is equipped with a Gidue 12-color flexo press, Haide 9-color flexo press, Zonten offset press, Weigang offset press, Reborn high-speed die-cutting machine, Rhyguan die-cutting machine, Luster inspection system and Daheng inspection system.

UseEveryDay's main markets are food, condiments, pharma, beverage, water and wine industries.

'In 2021, the Covid-19 pandemic became normalized, which indeed brought numerous challenges to industrial development. The restriction of international logistics, the increasing price of upstream raw materials and the launch of updated environmental policies compel us to strive for innovation and change,' says Yan Tianhui. 'Take increasing costs, for example. Apart from a small number of brands willing to accept cost increases, generally these costs need to be absorbed within the factory by means of introducing new processes, exploring added value pathways and going after new business orders.'

UseEveryDay Printing has organized an efficient team, holding team meetings every week, and regularly organizing visits to professional exhibitions such as Labelexpo Asia to learn more about industrial updates.

'In 2021, the annual output value of Chengdu Daily Printing is expected to be over 40 million RMB (USD 6.4m). Such achievements are inseparable from the hard work of everyone in the company,' he adds.

### Chengdu Youpin

Chengdu Youpin was established in 2015. Luo Xiaobing, the general manager, started out in a quick print operation in 2004, then turned to the label printing industry.

In just seven years, the company has expanded from renting a workshop of only a few hundred square meters, to purchasing its own plant in 2020 and moving to a new plant in November 2021.

Youpin mainly produces PS labels, film stickers, shrink sleeve labels, variable QR code traceability labels and similar products. They are now developing multi-layer labels.

Their labels are used mainly in the household chemical, food, beverage and wine fields. Mineral water labels account for the largest proportion of the company's sales, which is related to the abundant water resources and related industrial chains in Sichuan Province.

Chengdu Youpin attaches great importance to equipment investment. Its press park includes an intermittent offset press, HP Indigo 4600 digital press, and Qianrun satellite full rotary letterpress introduced in 2017. Additionally, the company introduced an HP Indigo 6900 at the end of 2019 and then invested in a 13-color Gallus ECS 340 press in early 2020.

The company added supporting equipment at the same time, including a Reborn digital die-cutting machine, inkjet printing unit in-line with the flexo press, in-line inspection system, off-line inkjet printer, Kaiwei variable data inkjet printing system, Reborn high-speed die-cutting and hot stamping machine, automatic high-speed inspection-slitting machine and single-sheet QR code inspection system. In addition, the company set up a platemaking room to support its flexo and letterpress machines.

In 2021, the company's turnover increased by 23 percent year-on-year. At present, Youpin handles a large proportion of small and medium-sized orders, which is the main reason it invested in digital technology. In the future, it will continue to apply digital printing technology to develop more products and applications such as VIP labels and smart labels.

In 2022, Chengdu Youpin will focus heavily on flexible package printing. 'The growing demand for short orders in the flexible packaging market provides a wealth of opportunities for label manufacturers, presenting huge space for future development,' says Luo Xiaobing, general manager of Chengdu Youpin.

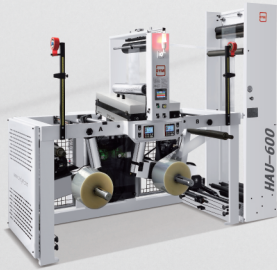
For the future, Luo insists on diversified development and reveals that he plans to invest in an advertising printing company in 2022.



To see the machinery mentioned in this article in action, visit Labelexpo Asia in Shanghai June 28 to July 1, 2022. [www.labelexpo-asia.com](http://www.labelexpo-asia.com)



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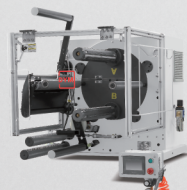
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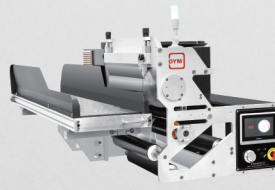
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# The path to success

*In a shrinking labor market, offering a clear career path can be invaluable for recruiting and retaining workforce talent.*  
Jordan Hart reports

**T**he labor market continues to shrink. The 'Great Resignation', which began in spring 2021 in the United States, has left employers hard pressed to fill staffing vacancies. As workers can afford to be choosier in terms of employment, companies need to up the ante in terms of offerings. One way to do this is by clearly defining career paths within the organization to both attract and retain employees.

In current hiring conditions, employers need to mind that interviewees could be in communication with several companies, and potentially entertaining multiple job offers. As an employer, you need to differentiate yourself. By showing a potential employee what their career path could look like within your organization, they can envision a successful career for themselves at the company. As Claudia St John, president of Affinity HR Group, says: 'Whether you are trying to attract talent or keep talent, nobody wants to think that what they are doing at this moment in time is what they are going to do five days a week for the rest of their lives.' However excited your potential hire may be about the position, they will eventually want more from their career. Laying out a clear career path demonstrates that your company can offer a fulfilling employment environment in the long run.

Affinity HR recently encouraged their clients to 'visualize the talent they seek and work to understand what their desired employees are looking for'. St John cautions: 'Too often, business leaders fail to recognize the unique needs and wants of their talent and focus instead on what they as employers want.' Now more than ever before, those hiring new employees need to recognize what their potential and current employees need and want if they want to grow and retain their workforce. While employers may be able to hire someone for minimum wage, that may not be a wise decision for the business in the long run; hiring new employees is not just about getting people, it is about getting the right people.

However, hiring new employees may prove to be easier than retaining current ones. Even before the 'Great Resignation', employees knew that the best way to get ahead was often by

abandoning ship at their current company. As HR company Lattice detailed, Glassdoor found that '73 percent of employees change employers to get ahead in their careers, while only 27 percent of employees stayed at their current employer for their next role.' Lattice elaborated: 'Having a detailed framework in place makes it easy for employees to understand which of their skills are transferable to other departments and roles within an organization, and encourages internal career changes.' If employees see a clear path at their company, their eyes may not wander to other employers.

The label printing industry is not just struggling to keep employees from competitors; retirement may be a bigger threat than competition. With an older workforce, succession planning for roles company-wide is crucial. If employees are laying out career paths for all of their employees, then it is easier to see who is eligible to move into a new role when another employee leaves or retires. As Glassdoor explained, with career paths 'you can have candid conversations with employees about future planning and invest in their journey to develop the skills and knowledge needed to fill highly-specialized senior positions.' This is one way to close the knowledge gap in the print industry.

## HR perspective

To get an HR professional's perspective on career planning, L&L spoke to Claudia St John to get her input on career planning in the current labor market.

'The labor pool is shrinking so there is always going to be a tight race for talent; if all you are doing is trying to take somebody and plunk them in a job and give them ten more bucks an hour, you aren't going to keep them,' says St John. 'I think everything is on the table. Employers should be looking at career paths, succession planning, compensation, perks, benefits, workplace structure, scheduling, hybrid, you name it.'

'In this time when it is very hard to find talent, having a clear, intentional development plan for your workforce is an asset.'

Everybody wants to know how they can grow professionally and being deliberate and intentional about that growth through finding mentors, identifying key tasks and responsibilities that will get you to the next level if you achieve them, and seeing where your progression can take you is fundamental.'

**"The label printing industry is not just struggling to keep employees from competitors; retirement may be an even bigger threat"**





St John emphasizes that a career path is a way to stand out from a crowd of competing employers. 'If you are just chasing the almighty dollar, there will always be somebody who can pay more. But that doesn't mean that people won't be happy working for you. There is more you can offer culturally and in terms of opportunities.'

However, many companies are not making the opportunities within their business known, or are failing to appropriately plan for position vacancies. 'I have seen lots of companies do this poorly because they are not intentional,' said St John. 'A lot of employers will have a vacancy and then look to see who to plunk into that vacancy without the idea of systemic succession planning all the way around.'

Conversely, some companies excel at career path planning. 'I have seen companies do it really well. First, they invest in their managers so that they have solid training and know what it takes to be a good manager. That's the first step. Then they identify a few candidates who would be good to grow in their roles and have those intentional conversations around career path.'

'I've used this word a couple times: intention. Often people grow up and develop a career path that is sort of accidental. Being intentional about developing your people will give you a bigger bang for your buck, because then those folks know there is a program and a path. If they are on the wrong path, then they can figure out what they need to do to get on the right path.'

Ultimately an investment in career paths is an investment in the company, according to St John. 'The important thing that I want folks reading this to know is when you invest in career paths you are

investing in your company. Those dollars go directly toward growth and prosperity of your company because whenever you develop people, you get their knowledge, perspective, commitment and support.'

#### Yerecic Label

One company that understands the value of a clear career path is Yerecic Label. When hiring production workers, the company outlines a clear career progression which moves them up through the ranks of equipment with compensation increases at each stage.

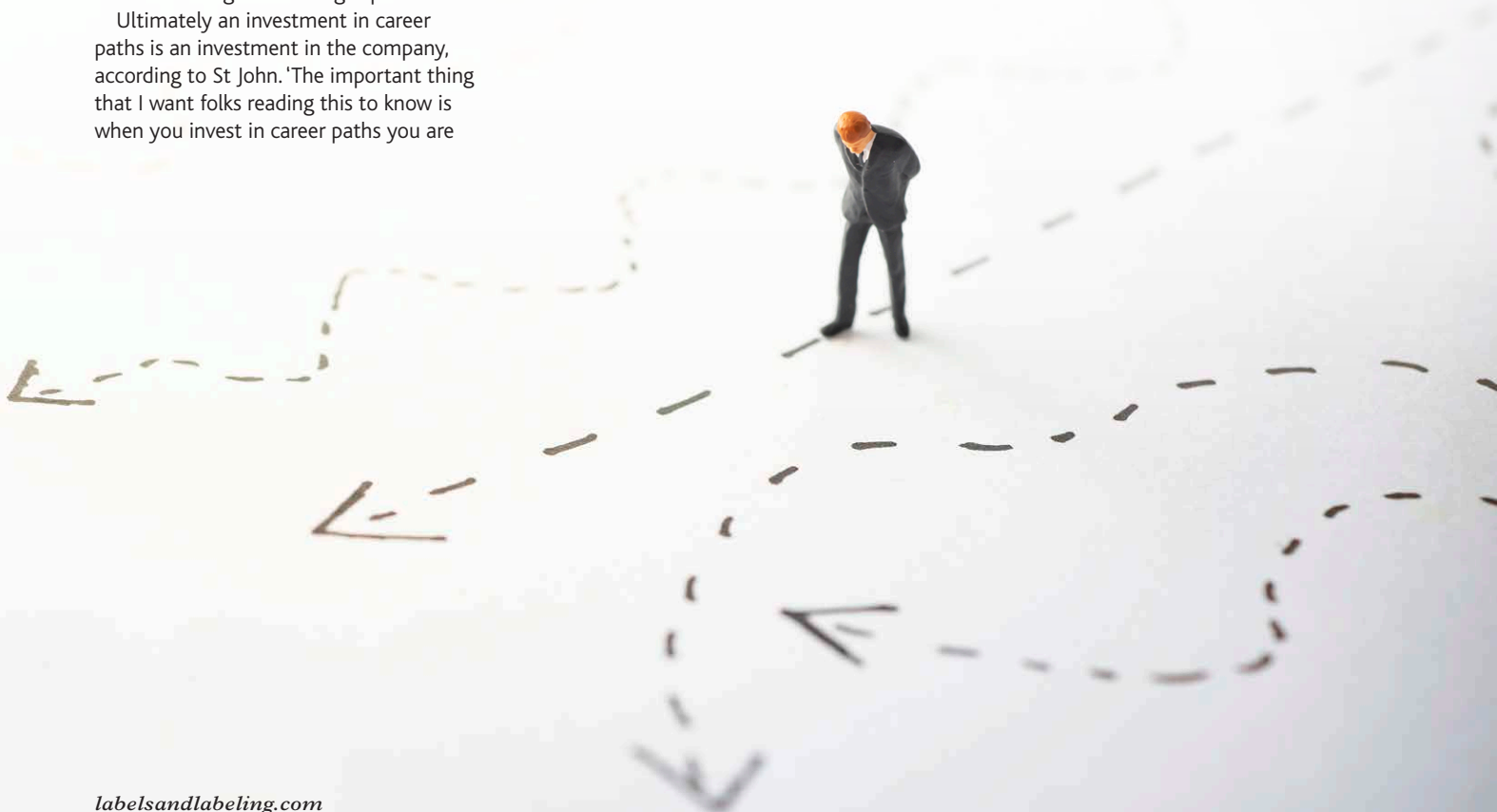
Asked why Yerecic Label started defining career paths, Elizabeth Yerecic, key account manager the converter, says: 'The market for labor became a lot tighter over the past few years and we wanted to be more attractive to applicants, particularly on our production side.'

'This was also partially due to listening to the feedback from our current employees. Often when someone would go on vacation, another person would be asked to fill in. There was feedback that they wanted to be compensated for that specific work since it was a different level of training or a different piece of equipment. We felt that there was value in the cross training that they had so we took that in and looked at

#### Burnout

Having a fully staffed company benefits not only the bottom line but also protects your employees from burnout. In trying times, employees may step in to cover extra work left behind if a position is vacated – however, this is a band-aid, not a solution. As BCC details: 'The employees who rally to help colleagues and under-fire managers are those most likely to suffer in the longer term.' Overloading workers is not sustainable and, according to BBC, 'while co-workers feel obligated to help one another, they're more likely to have more contempt for their organization, reach a breaking point and leave.' This then leaves more vacant positions, which overloads more employees, and the vicious cycle continues. While it may be tempting to let employees strain to cover a large workload and save money on a vacant position, this supposed money saving maneuver is a red herring. Companies will pay one way or another – either in higher salary costs up front or in employee burnout and overtime.

**"In a time when it is hard to find talent, having a clear, intentional development plan for your workforce is an asset"**



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<sup>[2]</sup> Requires purchase of the KURZ DM-Jetliner® solution.



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**“If you have a lapse in knowledge on equipment you see it in your throughput. You have extended lead times and unhappy customers. Being able to move people around is particularly important for us to stay agile as a company”**

what we could offer to new hires as well.

‘Our VP of production, Brian Hurst, reviewed all the equipment within our facility and created different levels according to operating difficulty from start to finish. You are being paid for your knowledge here and that is extremely attractive to a lot of people, especially in the trade world.’

Introducing this type of structure has also led to better quality hires, according to Yerecic. ‘In our industry right now, with so many changes not only in digital but in flexo too, technology is always improving so we’re happy to reflect that in the way we pay people. Creating a clear career progression path was a natural step toward attracting the right type of people into our environment that truly want to learn more and are willing to grow with us as a company.’

This has not only helped recruiting, but also retention. ‘Retention is where we are going to see some of the biggest impact,’ says Yerecic. ‘It is great to bring people on but, specifically in our industry, the training is so important that when you lose someone, it really hurts.’

She continues: ‘Having an impact in saying: if you cross train here, here and here, then we are going to pay you for all of that effort, goes a long way towards A) showing respect to the employee and what they are doing for you by furthering their education and B) it helps them want to stay because they have the opportunity to earn more money and grow their career.’

For Yerecic Label, this program

keeps the company agile by protecting against knowledge gaps. ‘If you have a lapse in knowledge on equipment you see it in your throughput; you have extended lead times and unhappy customers. Being able to move people around is particularly important for us to stay agile as a company.’

#### **Implementing career paths**

Creating a career path structure can have significant benefits, so how can a company start creating these paths? St John advises asking your employees for help. ‘As employers, we often feel we need to have all the answers, but often the people who have answers are the ones doing those jobs. If you don’t know how to create a career progression within your company, ask the people who have done it. Ask them what they needed and how they grew. If you have someone who is now a vice president, what did they need to learn and how did they learn it and who taught them? Build that career path intentionally from that.’

Glassdoor has outlined some tips to creating a clear career

path. The first step is outlining ‘all the core competencies required for each career path and identify potential cross-departmental movements’. Once the core competencies are defined, create benchmarks for each position and clear progression steps.

Once the plans are solidified, share them with the organization. This can be done with new hires during the interviewing process, so potential employees ‘know from day one that your company is invested in their growth and wants them to have a long, successful career with your organization,’ as Glassdoor states. ‘For existing employees, make sure the information can be easily found so employees can chart their own career paths and identify personal growth opportunities.’

Ultimately the Society for Human Resource Management found that creating career paths may have ‘a direct impact on the entire organization by improving morale, career satisfaction, motivation, productivity, and responsiveness in meeting departmental and organizational objectives’.

If your company has not started creating defined career paths and investing in succession planning, now is the time to start.



For more information about Affinity HR, visit: [affinityhrgroup.com](http://affinityhrgroup.com)





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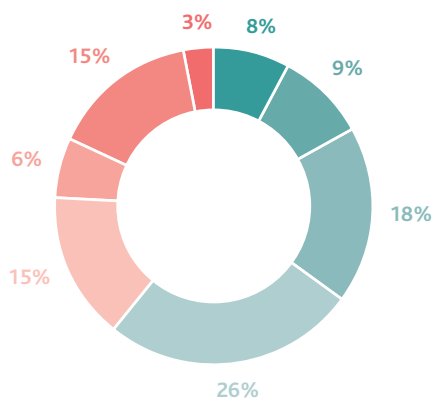
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# Label trends

The latest Finat Radar report breaks down label purchasing volume growth projections and the impact of the pandemic on sourcing and supply availability

## Will brand owners be buying more labels – projections volumes for 2022



Participants' label volume purchasing projections for 2022 for all formats:

- Volumes will increase by more than 20%
- Volumes will increase between 16-20%
- Volumes will increase between 7-15%
- Volumes will increase between 4-6%
- Volumes will increase between 1-3%
- Volumes will stay the same
- Volumes will decrease between 1-3%
- Volumes will decrease 4-6%

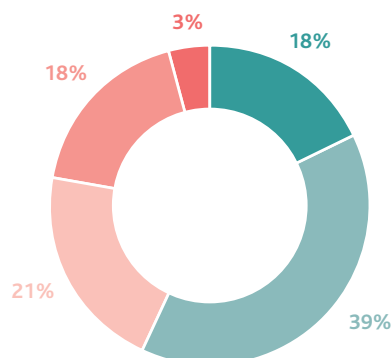
## What do brands consider the most important drivers related to sourcing digital labels?

1. The ability to print small runs (*most important*)
2. Turnaround time
3. Ability to print variable logistical data
4. Inventory reduction
5. Late-stage customization
6. Personalization (*least important*)

## Pandemic's impact on companies' label sourcing volumes

Did companies purchase higher or lower volumes of labels in 2021 than forecast?

- Purchased much higher volumes of labels than projected
- Purchased slightly higher volumes of labels than projected
- Purchased the same volumes of labels as projected
- Purchased slightly lower volumes of labels than projected
- Purchased much lower volumes of labels than projected



## Charting projected label procurement growth: all labels vs digital labels only

	2020 Survey (projected procurement for 2021)	2021 Survey (projected procurement for 2022)
All Labels	Projected 3.3% growth	Are projecting 5.4% growth
Digital Labels	Projected 3.6% growth	Are projecting 6.4% growth

Source: Finat Radar Report 16 – 2nd semester 2021, report and analysis of the European narrow web market



# LUSTER

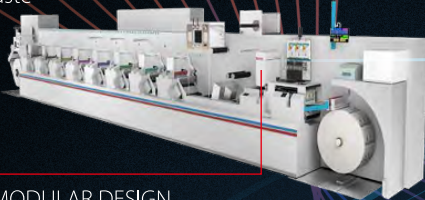
## IMPLANT EYES & BRAINS IN MACHINES

World class quality control solutions for Narrow Web, Carton, Wide Web, Aseptic Pack, Tipping Paper, Plastic Web Industries

### LabelMaster-P Inline Inspection System

REAL-TIME light, sound alarm,  
visual alarm to prevent  
continuous waste

IMPACT and MODULAR DESIGN  
for easy installation and  
maintenance



- 100% INSPECTION for printing defects such as register, text, color, spots, as well as special defects of varnishing, laminating, foil stamping.
- ACCURATE quality control for ALL types of substrates: paper, film, clear on clear, metalized, high reflective
- POWERFUL and FAST code inspection performance of reading and verification for barcode, QR, DM, OCR, OCV

### LabelHERO-F Offline Inspection System

REAL-TIME alarm and  
automatic stop on defect  
position



PRECISE and HIGH-SPEED slitting  
and rewind performance



FULL integrated LUSTER  
inspection camera and slitting  
rewinder (**370mm**, **450mm**,  
**520mm**) to ensure high-speed  
and accurate defect control

### LabelTANK-220T Table Top Inspection Rewinder

- TABLE Top Inspection Rewinder with Short Web Path and Small In Size
- FULL Integration Inspection Solution
- INTUITIVE Operation
- MULTIFUNCTION Rewinding Solution



LUSTER LightTech Co., Ltd.

 <http://en.lusterinc.com>

 Email: [sales.support@lusterinc.com](mailto:sales.support@lusterinc.com)



# PERFECTION IN THE PRINTING PROCESS

INCREASE QUALITY, OPTIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY



## #STARTSMART

## WITH EL<sup>NET</sup>



WEB GUIDING SYSTEM ELGUIDER

**SPEED SETUP** ⊕

- ⊙ Commissioning, operation and maintenance ⊕
- ⊙ via web-based management
- ⊙ Wear-free, brushless motor ⊕

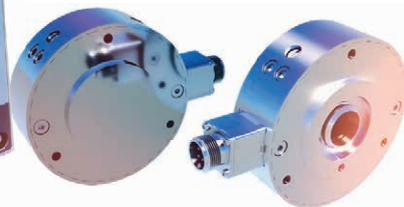
100%

WEB TENSION SYSTEM ELTENS

⊕ **NETWORKABLE SYSTEMS**

- ⊙ Graphic touch panel
- ⊙ Web tension trend for process analysis

10Sec



200%

PRINT IMAGE INSPECTION SYSTEM SMARTSCAN

⊕ **INSPECTION**

- ⊙ 100% Affordable
- ⊙ 0 Defects



WEB MONITORING  
SYSTEM ELSCAN

**IMAGE QUALITY** ⊕

- ⊙ Delay-free digital zooming ⊕
- ⊙ Suitable for different materials ⊕

4K

