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Labels & Labeling is the leading global information source for the label and package print converting industries with an editorial team and network of correspondents spread throughout the world



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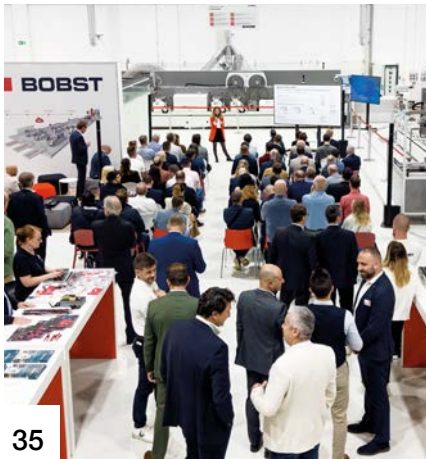
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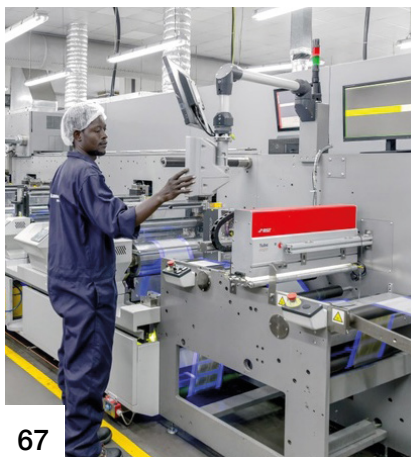
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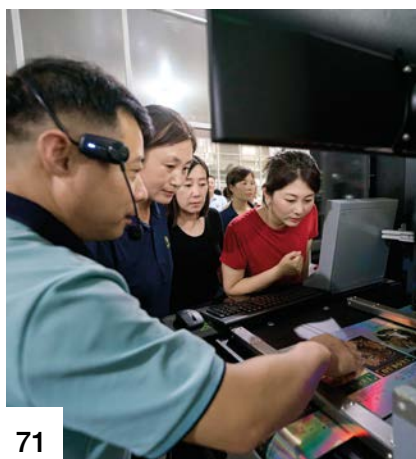
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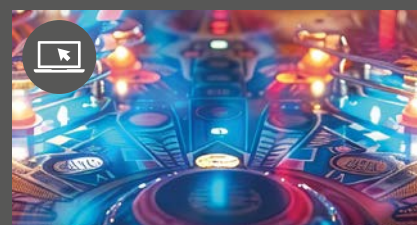
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Label awards winners revealed (video)

The winners of the 2024 Label Industry Global Awards revealed



Read L&L Issue 3 online (magazine)

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All4Labels enters new era (feature)

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L&L looks back (*L&L issue 3, 2004*)



P23 Andy Thomas was reporting from Canada, where Toronto-based wine importer has taken full advantage of the possibilities presented by outsourced digital printing to fulfill its complex labeling requirements. The work was done by Label Image Industries with its battery of digital printing equipment including a Hewlett Packard VIP VP2020 system.

P26 The hunt for a commercially viable liner-free label has been the holy grail of the industry in early 2000s. Liner was then treated as packaging waste and the industry was awaiting the EU's revision to its regulations. Katy Wight reported about UK-based company Catchpoint which developed a liner-free labelstock and an applicator that was showing real promise.

P55 Andy Thomas reviewed the first India Label show which demonstrated the potential for growth in the labeling industry. Held in Mumbai, it attracted nearly 6,600 visitors over three days including label printers and label buyers from all over the country and abroad, with significant representation from as far afield as Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Middle East and Africa.

P70 Pressures on margins in the wet glue sector have driven many sheetfed printers to move to UV flexo to enter the faster-growing markets of sleeves and pressure-sensitive rolls. Andy Thomas visited Viappiani, an Italian converter, headquartered in Milan, which provided an excellent case study of this process and pressures sheetfed printers are facing.

Reflecting on Labelexpo Americas 2024

Editor's note

As the dust settles from another edition of Labelexpo Americas, we should all be left with a renewed sense of excitement and optimism for the state of our industry.

The event held in Rosemont in September was remarkable in many ways.

It marked a full-fledged return of flexo as the industry progresses toward further integration of digitalized workflows. When it comes to press technology, the exhibitors showed what Andy Thomas-Emans calls 'extraordinary degrees of automation', adding that the mid-wed flexo presses on display at Labelexpo Americas 2024 were at 'the pinnacle of automation'.

If you know Thomas-Emans, you know that when he's excited about technology, you

should sit up and pay attention.

Automation was front and center at this year's Labelexpo, as more converters embrace it as a way to enhance productivity, reduce costs and optimize workflows. With labor challenges and rising operational costs continuing to plague the industry, this year's Labelexpo saw exhibitors responding to that call.

We saw many exhibitors debut fully automated press systems; we saw inspection technologies and finishing equipment that demonstrate how far automation has come; we saw software that fully embraces and optimizes artificial intelligence.

For label converters, automation is no longer a

luxury, it is quickly becoming essential to stay competitive in today's fast-paced, high-demand label and packaging market.

The same can be said for sustainability, as brands increasingly invest in greener technologies. For label converters driven to make similar sustainability moves, it's not only a matter of if they will embrace eco-friendly initiatives, but when.

At Labelexpo Americas, we saw exhibitors unveil technologies focused on reducing waste, using recyclable or compostable materials and lowering carbon footprints through more efficient production processes. Sustainability is not just a

passing trend—it's a necessity for all businesses.

In this issue, we take an in-depth look at the technology, trends and innovations that were center stage at Labelexpo Americas 2024. We review the standout products, technologies and key developments that driving the future of the industry, highlighting how these innovations are helping converters stay competitive and adapt to evolving market demands.

Chelsea McDougall
Group managing editor

Installations



HP Indigo V12 Digital Press **Nosco, USA**

The latest installation is part of the company's investment strategy in systems and equipment to fulfill its bold growth plans. With more than 115 years of experience, the company brings together business resources and technical expertise to better understand packaging challenges and deliver customized products. The HP Indigo V12 Digital Press enhances the company's power to successfully serve printed packaging for the pharmaceutical, natural health and consumer markets with four core product lines, including cartons, inserts, labels and flexible packaging. 'Being able to assure our customers that they are getting a quality product with all the copy correct and the color just right is not a nice-to-have, but rather, a must-have,' said Craig Curran, president at Nosco.

Nilpeter FA-26 **Catapult, USA**

Catapult has become the first company in the US to install the Nilpeter 26-inch 9-color printing press with a die station. The new addition is the printer's eighth FA-Line press in the last five years but the first in 26in web width, signifying a leap forward in printing capacity and delivery speed. The Nilpeter FA-26 enables Catapult to deliver wider and faster capabilities, ensuring customers receive high-quality pressure-sensitive labels, linerless labels, and narrow-web films. 'Having a whole suite of state-of-the-art equipment allows us to do this, and the 26-inch press is a complete game-changer, especially when combined with our highly skilled team, Crystal tracking and management information system,' said Mark Cook, Catapult's founder and chairman.



Hontec FlexiCom350-8C flexo press **Pintexe, Tunisia**

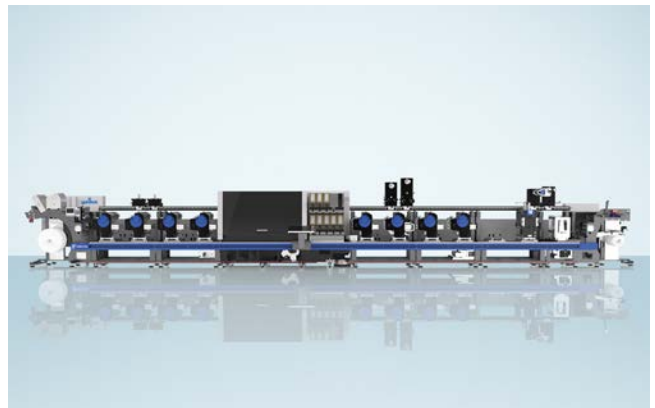
Tunisian label and packaging converter Pintexe installed a Hontec FlexiCom350-8C 8-color flexo press to expand its production capacity and print quality. The latest investment is expected to significantly enhance Printexe's production capabilities, particularly in the high-demand area of flexible packaging and labels. Mohammed Dliissi, owner of Printexe, said: 'Hontec's FlexiCom350-8C delivers outstanding print quality and precision, especially in challenging applications like ours. This investment will help us meet our clients' increasing demands for high-quality, innovative packaging solutions.' Dliissi expressed his satisfaction with the new equipment, highlighting its excellent performance in printing 12-micron BOPP with in-line cold foil.



Gallus One **NextGen Label Group, USA**

NextGen opted for the Gallus One hybrid press to expand its capabilities with both flexographic and digital printing. The group serves some of the world's most recognizable brands in the spirits, beverage, beer, food, health and beauty markets. 'The Heidelberg Gallus One met all the criteria we consider when investing in new technology,' emphasized Tom Sargent, president and CEO of NextGen Label Group.

'Built on the Gallus Labelmaster platform, this state-of-the-art hybrid press provides reliability, redundancy, and full modularity. It will allow us to continually deliver on our promise of brand custodianship.' The 17-inch wide, 15-color hybrid press is the first of its kind in North America. It is perfectly suited to print a variety of labels using flexo and digital print technologies.



Installations



Bobst Digital Master 340

Northern Label Group, Canada

The decision to integrate the Bobst Digital Master 340 into the company's production line marks a new era by enhancing speed, automation and overall quality with an all-in-one platform. Designed for high productivity, the Digital Master 340 prints at speeds up to 328 ft/min with a resolution of 1,200x1,200 DPI, utilizing Bobst's proprietary digital inkjet technology. Sean Murray, president of Northern Label, commented: 'The Digital Master 340 has truly transformed our production capabilities. It's not just about increasing our speed and efficiency; it's about consistently delivering the high-quality labels our clients expect. Partnering with Bobst has been a strategic move that aligns perfectly with our commitment to innovation and excellence.'

Durst Tau 340 RSC-E LED press Label Express, UK

UK-based converter Label Express invested in a Tau 340 RSC-E LED single-pass label press from Durst Group, to further expand its production capabilities to accommodate the company's growth. A crucial factor in the choice of digital technology was the robustness of the inks required for label production – particularly for beverage labels – along with the quality of print at a native 1,200 DPI, which were key to the investment in the first Durst RSC-E LED press in the UK. Simon Williams, managing director of Label Express, said: 'The need to respond to customer orders quickly is a main focus for Label Express, and the LED technology enhances our commitment to our sustainability credentials. This is a great addition to our product offering and is a key factor in driving new business to the company.'



Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 400

Holly Tag & Label, USA

North Carolina-based Holly Tag & Label invested in a Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 400 digital label press, which brought operational time savings, 30 percent running costs savings and introduced environmental benefits. After learning about Konica Minolta's latest label press, which offers quick and easy set-up, increased speeds and a fifth station for white toner, the printer decided it was the right fit for its requirements and invested in an AccurioLabel 400. 'The AccurioLabel was exactly what we needed to transition away from our other label press and has become an invaluable asset to us,' said Harris. 'Konica Minolta has a lot of advantages. It's perfect for short runs, and the white toner makes it superior to other equipment. The cost of entry is lower than other digital machines we have seen.'

Screen L350UV SAI S Networkpak, Australia

This strategic investment transitions Networkpak from its traditional focus on folding cartons to include high-quality digital label printing.

The new Screen L350UV SAI S press is expected to play a crucial role in this expansion, allowing the company to fulfill the increasing demand for premium labels and packaging. Paul O'Sullivan, director of Networkpak, said: 'As a company with deep roots in printed folded cartons, we have earned the trust of leading Australian brands by consistently delivering top-tier products. The addition of the Screen L350UV SAI S to our lineup is a natural progression for us, enabling us to offer an even wider array of solutions to our clients. We can now meet their label and packaging needs with the same level of quality and reliability they've come to expect from us.'



Installations



Epson SurePress L-6534VW UV
Husky Labels, USA

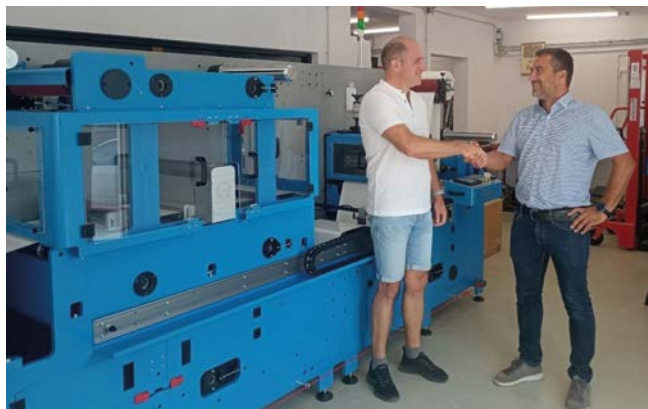
The Indiana-based converter installed the new press to meet increasing customer demand, expand media compatibility, and increase output versatility and workflow productivity.

After decades of experience in the label printing industry, co-owner Glenn DeRossett decided to start his own printing business. While still in the initial start-up phase, he inherited customers from a closing business and needed to expand output capabilities.

'I really wanted a UV press,' said DeRossett. 'I have a UV flexo printer, and I wanted to leverage that technology with a streamlined, efficient workflow for our label printers as well. We replaced an older model with the SurePress L-6534VW and now handle most incoming orders with it.'

Two Grafotronic DCL2 finishing machines
Print-ID, Germany

After successfully introducing two Grafotronic machines last year, which have become cornerstones of the company's production strategy, print-ID decided to invest in two additional Grafotronic DCL2 machines. This decision was made after the evaluation of the performance and automated functions of the existing Grafotronic machines. The new machines will play a key role in the finishing of both pre-printed and blank rolls. 'The expansion with Grafotronic machines number three and four is another milestone for us,' said Sven Rühl, co-owner and managing director of print-ID. 'Adding the two new Grafotronic DCL machines enable us to significantly increase our production capacity while further solidifying our position as a leading provider in the label printing industry.'



Lemorau MEBR+
SioPrint, Hungary

Hungarian label converter acquired a new semi-rotary embellishing and finishing machine to expand its printing capabilities and production output. SioPrint will benefit from the high-performance features of the MEBR+330, enabling the company to increase its production output while maintaining top-quality standards. The fully modular concept of the newly installed Lemorau machine offers SioPrint a wide range of further expansion with optional equipment to respond to market demands. 'The new Lemorau MEBR+ embellishing and finishing machine gives the opportunity to increase our production capacity,' said Janos Jergler, owner of SioPrint. 'With this technology, we can give higher value service for our customers, and we can become stronger in the label industry.'

Rhyguan Smart-450
Sai Paks, India

Sai Paks installed a Rhyguan Smart-450 slitter rewinder with Luster 100 percent inspection camera guided by its cost-effectiveness.

The company currently has offset presses from Heidelberg and Shinohara, flexo press from Zonten, rotogravure presses from Sanmach and a Mark Andy. The Rhyguan Smart-450 is one of the key machines used for the post-press process. 'We opted for this cutting-edge Rhyguan slitting and rewinding machine from FIG for its cost-effectiveness,' explained Deepan Samarth, managing director of Sai Paks. 'We would rather say Rhyguan Smart-450 is very economical as we never worried about its ROI. This 100 percent inspection slitter-rewinder machine with capacity to re-inspect up to 300m/min is reasonably priced when compared to others.'



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Label & packaging showcase



Winners of the 2024 IMDA Awards Competition

01 Winner: Best Label Design for IML Application

Galaxy Chocolate Milk Cup
Submitted by: MCC Verstraete
Brand owner: Mars
Product molder: Paccor
Label printer: MCC Verstraete

02 Honorable Mention: Best Label Design for IML Application

Icelandic Provisions Berry Medley Skyr
Submitted by: Inland
Brand owner: Icelandic Provisions
Product molder: Airlite Plastics
Label printer: Inland Packaging

03 Winner: Best Use of IML - Traditional Aesthetic

General Mills Yoplait Greek Yogurt
Submitted by: Inland
Brand owner: General Mills
Product molder: Greiner Packaging
Label printer: Inland Packaging

04 Honorable Mention: Best Use of IML - Traditional Aesthetic

Hiland Dairy Crema Mexicana 16oz
Submitted by: Winpak Portion Packaging
Brand owner: Hiland Dairy
Product molder: Winpak
Label printer: MCC Verstraete
Automation partner: StackTeck

05 Honorable Mention: Best Use of IML - Technical Achievement

Grillo's Pickles Spears
Submitted by: MCC Verstraete
Brand owner: Grillo's
Product molder: Berry Global
Label printer: MCC Verstraete

06



07



08



09



10



06 Winner: Best Use of IML / IMD for In-House Promotion or Prototype: Technical Achievement

Ultra-Thin 450ml PET IML Food Tubs

Submitted by: StackTeck Systems

Product molder: StackTeck Systems

Label printer: MCC Verstraete

Automation partner: StackTeck Systems

07 Honorable Mention: Best Use of IMD for In-House Promotion or Prototype

Medical IML

Submitted by: MCC Verstraete

Label printer: MCC Verstraete

Automation partners: Arburg, Beck Automation,

Kebo AG and Intravis

08 Winner: Sustainable Use of In-Mold Processes

Mirage Reusable Container

Submitted by: MCC Verstraete

Brand owner: Richardson Food & Ingredients

Product molder: Fourmark

Label printer: MCC Verstraete

09 Honorable Mention: Sustainable Use of In-Mold Processes

IML-Decorated Spice Container

Submitted by: MCC Verstraete

Brand owner: Jesus Navarro

Product molder: ITC Packaging S.L.U.

Label printer: MCC Verstraete

10 Honorable Mention: Sustainable Use of In-Mold Processes

Milram 185g Thermoformed IML Container

Submitted by: MCC Verstraete

Brand owner: DMK Group

Product molder: Pöppelmann

Label printer: MCC Korsini

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Andy Thomas-Emans: *Flexography reaches new landmark at Labelexpo Americas 2024*

The extraordinary degree of automation seen on mid-web flexo presses at Labelexpo Americas 2024 shows how far the technology has come, writes Andy Thomas-Emans

When looking back on the last 35 years of writing about the printing industry, certain things stand out as landmark events.

To name a few: the first fully automatic plate change on a Komori offset press in 1990; the first Indigo E-Print and Xeikon DCP-1 (badged Agfa Chromapress) at ipex 1993; the first close-up sight of a servo drive in action on a Nilpeter FB330S in 2005.

“Labelexpo Americas also demonstrated how far flexographic presses can be integrated into modern factory workflows”

I thought about these landmarks on the Nilpeter stand at Labelexpo Americas 2024, watching a 670mm (26in)-wide FA-26 ramp up, whisper-quiet, from makeready to full speed of 250m/min (820ft/min) and back down again without the operator touching the press. Web tension and pressure were adjusted automatically and registration was controlled by a newly developed color-based camera system. Just to prove the point, the press was deliberately thrown out of registration and automatically recovered.

Because the press was using extended color gamut inks, the only changeover in roll-to-roll format (assuming no roll change) was exchange of plate sleeves, carried out in a matter of minutes, then hands off.

Memory lane

Seeing this degree of automation and precision on a machine of this width, even given the ‘ideal’ conditions of a trade show, took me back to my first encounters with flexo presses in the 1990s. To change over

an 8-color 13in/330mm 8-color press took a sizable press crew most of the morning. Laborious washdown; tools required to disassemble and reassemble printing group components; the need for constant manual adjustment of print pressure, registration and tension throughout the print run, requiring time-served professional operators; the quality gap between flexography and letterpress/offset.

Quite understandably, we tend to focus on the extraordinary technological innovation that has driven digital from a rather flaky start to full-blown industrial strength, both toner and inkjet.

But watching that FA-26 demo forcibly reminded me of the extraordinary strides flexography has made over the same period.

This has happened across the entire flexographic ecosystem. Not only increased automation but the continual development of new photopolymer materials, better screening and film/plate imaging systems, and new anilox coatings and engravings, all of which brought flexo quality ever closer to offset.

Along with increased press stability, this also allowed extended color gamut ink systems to migrate from offset to flexography - a tougher ask for flexo because of the greater number of variable factors involved from dot gain, to double-sided tapes, non-standardized inks and anilox. Now, ‘digital color’ is here to stay for flexographic printers, allowing easier color matching with digital presses and eliminating the need to wash down the press between jobs.

Flexo has been driven down this road by many factors: firstly, by the looming threat of extinction for even medium run lengths at the hands of digital printing. Secondly, by the increasing difficulty in finding skilled, time-served flexo press operators, which required that as many manual processes as possible be automated.

The increasing availability and ubiquity of servo-drive technology over this period allowed flexo presses to be increasingly robotized.

Mid-web presses are where we see the pinnacle of automation, and of course, it is not only Nilpeter on this road. At Labelexpo Americas 2024, Mark Andy launched its own highly automated 26in press, the Performance S9 – expect a full review of that machine in a future edition of L&L – and Lombardi was showing a print group from its own Invicta mid-web press, which displays equally high degrees of automation and versatility.

Labelexpo Americas also demonstrated how far flexographic presses can be integrated into modern factory workflows, reporting production data in real-time back to a cloud-based server and with the ability to store and recall press settings for rapid set-up on repeat jobs. The next stage has to be the development of open-standard press operating systems to allow direct download of job data from an MIS, avoiding the need to double key at the press console.

Digital integration

Another aspect of digital integration shown by both Nilpeter and Lombardi at Labelexpo Americas is the ‘digital twin’ or ‘digital shadow,’ a real-time animated model of the press that records all aspects of job set-up, running and changeover. These recordings can be re-run for training, process optimization (think slow-motion replays for sports coaches), and real-time remote monitoring.

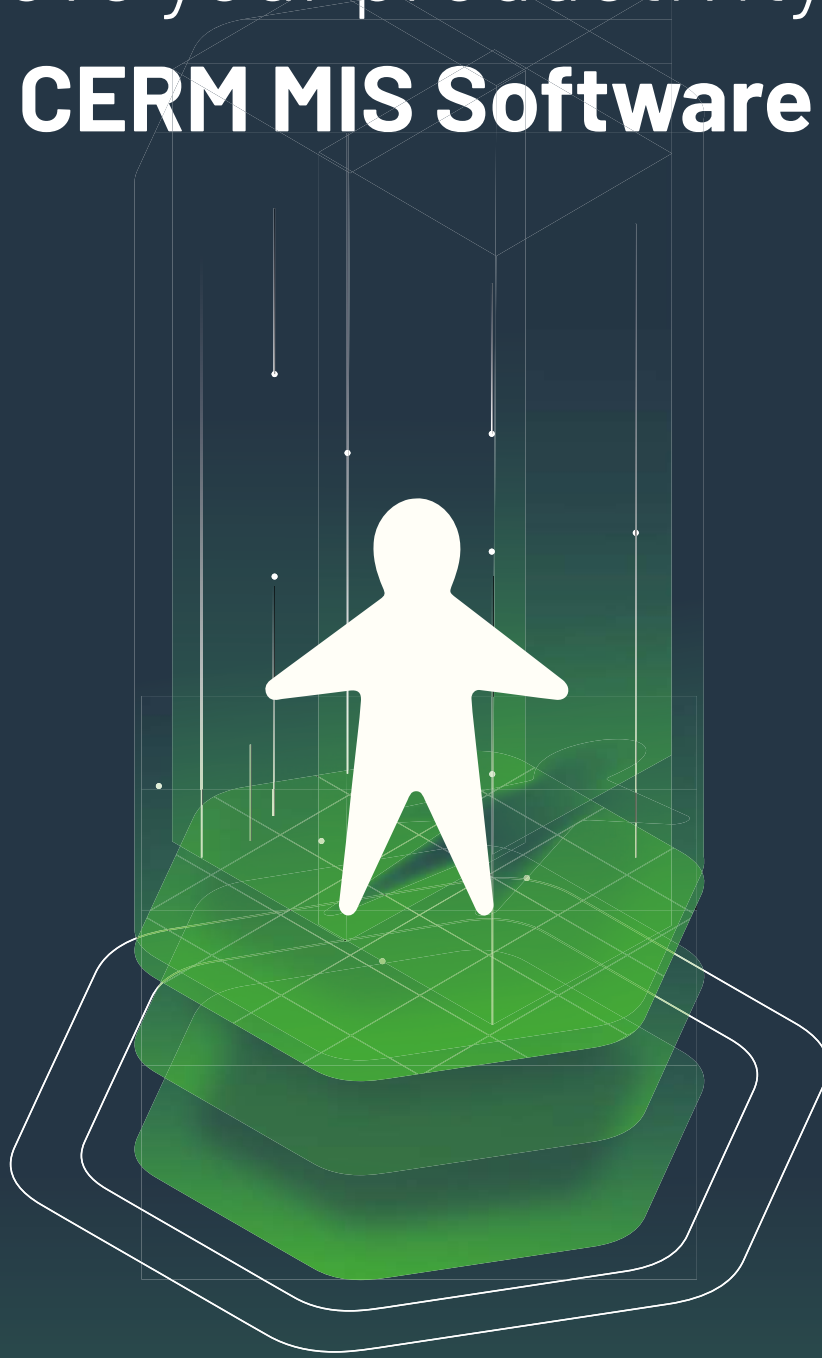
The benefits of flexo automation have flowed down in different degrees, even to entry-level machines. Also – very importantly – to the new generation of hybrid inkjet-flexo presses. The ability to automate flexo print and converting modules reduces the time the digital engine is idle, reduces waste during makeready and reduces the need for skilled operators.

This has indeed been an extraordinary journey for flexography.



Turn to page 81 for a full review of the press technology at Labelexpo Americas 2024

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Transforming sales in the era of convergence



Following up from the fall trade shows, now is the perfect time to explore your internal sales enablement strategies, writes Lois Ritarossi

Are you looking at a pile of business cards and cool new samples collected at Labelexpo Americas and other fall trade shows? Attendees and exhibitors came to meet, share, learn and invest. I was inspired by the level of enthusiasm for new technology at these events. Several Labelexpo attendees were seeking ideas to expand capabilities with inkjet and digital technologies, and we saw new offerings for embellishments, substrates, inks and coatings.

Consumer behavior changes

The trade show focused on new technologies as consumers' buying habits are changing. Increasing consumer awareness and concern for packaging's contribution to global environmental stress, plus new regulatory rules are accelerating the adoption of more efficient labeling, packaging materials and designs.

New sales approaches needed

I asked attendees who were looking at new production technologies if their salespeople were using the same old tactics despite changing buyers and new capabilities. I also asked if they were losing work to new competitors. 'Yes', to these questions indicates it's time to get clear answers to 'Why do your customers do business with your company?'

Ongoing B2B sales research indicates that there are two things individual buyers rank more important than price. The most effective salespeople regularly ask and have clarity about what is most important to key customers and projects. Part of a predictable sales discovery process is defining customers' business goals and metrics for large projects and programs beyond quality and timeliness.

Great salespeople ask and understand customers' business goals and project metrics before gathering detailed job specifications. Salespeople who understand why customers need to print can offer ideas to improve production and business results.

Suppose your salespeople don't know the 'why' for major customer projects, it's a symptom of not being in regular contact with decision-makers. Sales teams must prioritize spending quality time with decision-makers to expand relationships. Without knowing clear business objectives, price becomes a bigger factor in the decision criteria.

Can 85 percent of your salespeople sell all your capabilities? I rarely get a 'yes' to this question. What will it take to change the mindset so your salespeople can confidently sell all the applications and services your company provides? The gap is a result of insufficient training, miscommunications, with some fear and lack of confidence added to the mix. Addressing the gap means regular communications about new capabilities, investments, training and producing samples to demonstrate new applications.

Sales enablement

Effective leaders understand their critical role in supporting sales enablement across all departments. Sales and customer service

"Sales teams must prioritize spending quality time with decision-makers to expand relationships. Without knowing clear business objectives, price becomes a bigger factor in the decision criteria"

teams must trust and feel supported by estimating, pre-press, production and billing to win and keep new customers. Leaders who articulate and align the entire company with a clear strategic vision and defined capabilities will motivate sales and production teams to win and produce more. At company and team meetings, leaders must reinforce the big-picture goals and vision. With this clarity, leaders enable staff and managers to make better decisions every day.

You can read more about sales enablement strategies in previous editions of the Labels & Labeling magazine. Sales enablement means getting the entire company to support the sales process, and celebrate wins by the entire company, not just the sales team.

Successfully growing companies follow defined and repeatable sales processes. Salespeople who trust the rest of the organization will exude confidence when they suggest new ideas and applications to customers. This is one approach to regularly identifying new sales opportunities within your current customer base.

Do you need a plan to achieve your goals for 2025? Read why strategic planning is a good use of your time in my previous column in Labels & Labeling, which explores effective methods and best practices for establishing clear, achievable objectives that align with your company's vision and drive long-term growth..

Share your vision. Align your teams and explain why the future looks bright. As you define new capabilities and invest in technology to grow and evolve, encourage your sales team to embrace new sales approaches.

What got your company to this point is unlikely to get you where you want your company to go in 2025.



Lois Ritarossi is a certified management consultant and president of High Rock Strategies, an independent management consulting firm focused on sales and marketing strategies and business growth for firms in the print, mail, communications and B2B sectors. You can read more about sales strategies at www.highrockstrategies.com. Email Lois at Lritarossi@highrockstrategies.com

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Scaling label businesses to ensure exit readiness

For privately-owned companies looking to exit the market, Ian Smith and Kevin Young of Portfolio Partners offer advice on how to be set up for a successful exit strategy

The label and package-printing industries have undergone significant transformation in the past decade, driven by the rise of digital printing, sustainability demands, e-commerce growth and the need for greater efficiency.

For example, the printing and converting industry increasingly adopts Industry 4.0 principles to optimize production processes, reduce downtime and improve product quality.

Acquirers and investors in this space will likely focus on companies that have adopted these new technologies and are well-positioned to meet evolving consumer and regulatory demands.

Over the next three years, many privately-owned companies will look to exit the market with the help of investment banks, but most will be disappointed. Some will receive low offers, others no offers at all and many will fail due diligence.

The main issue is that these businesses were not built with an exit strategy in mind and are simply not ready for sale. This challenge can be overcome by employing a value-creation approach to scaling your company.

Value creation

Even if you do not currently plan to sell your business, it's smart to scale it. This calls for developing value-creation strategies that appeal to buyers and address concerns associated with risk.

Whether you've been in business for five or 50 years, the most effective way of executing this approach is to step back and look through the lens of a buyer. Perform a buyer assessment that identifies value leakage that can undermine your business's long-term outlook.

The most common areas of concern for investors/buyers:

Branding: Does this brand stand out in the marketplace? Does it have name recognition? Has the company won industry awards? Do journalists write about the company and its products?

Dependency: Is the business dependent on the owner? Is revenue reliant on a few core customers? Are the profits coming from old legacy products and services?

Talent: Is the management team world-class? Are all the major functions covered? Is morale high? Is there a

"Even if you do not currently plan to sell your business, it's smart to scale it"

succession plan?

Technology: Are current technologies in place that enhance efficiency, scalability and quality? These include business processing systems, supply chain and inventory management, data analytics and reporting tools. From a production standpoint, is pre-press technology antiquated or does it employ the latest in digital workflow, computer-to-plate, and automation to rapidly handle incoming artwork and create proofs? Does the printing, converting and finishing equipment incorporate modern auto-registration, ink control and waste-reduction technologies?

Processes: Do all departments use playbooks? Are there lead generation and sales processes, marketing strategies, financial controls and forecast systems?

As an acquirer, you will not want to intervene and fix things to successfully integrate the business or invest in significant post-acquisition costs.

Incorporating this mindset requires business owners to include key steps that are often missing in their exit strategy. Let's call this the 'value creation gap'.

Value creation strategies

Steps a business can take to fill the 'gap' include develop an audit and exit roadmap (might take up to 90 days); strategically reposition to accelerate revenue growth (90 days); enhance operations to build efficiency and scalability (15 to 24 months).

This process challenges private company owners to take a particular approach: *to see their business through the eyes of a buyer*. This perspective reveals value leaks that may be hidden in your company, not to be confused with your company's 'valuation'. Experienced buyers focus on mitigating risk; they do not want to inherit problems. They are already thinking about post-acquisition integration before they even meet you.

An audit and exit roadmap

Buyers examine issues that they most cherish. For this reason, it's helpful to conduct a saleability test that evaluates key factors, such as brand recognition, a

track record for technology investment, management team qualities, successful new product launches, management information standards and client list. The output of the test should shape the operational priorities for the next one or two years. It produces a new report card that aligns priorities and builds value.

Analyze the M&A landscape to obtain a deep understanding of an acquirer's strategic rationale. This holds for both strategic and financial buyers.

Strategic repositioning

Evaluate your brand strategy to craft a unique market position based on what buyers value, where the market is headed and why customers remain loyal. Create and implement marketing campaigns based on customer research and analysis. Continuously track key performance indicators and refine strategies for improvement. With this knowledge, you will be positioned to implement the operational changes that increase your business's value.

Operational enhancement

Operational enhancement is where you address audit findings and bring your new story to market. Value leaks can hurt your business. Weak processes, outdated technology, poor morale, slow growth and weak margins can all lead to disappointment when exiting.

By taking this approach you will build a stronger and safer business over time, making your company more attractive to potential buyers and more efficient until the time to sell arrives.

Ian Smith & Kevin Young are principals in The Portfolio Partnership, a value-creation company that scales businesses worldwide with revenue of 20 million USD to 1 billion USD organically and through M&A in the labels, print, packaging, material testing, life sciences, manufacturing and service sectors. They can be reached at ian@tppboston.com and kevin@tppboston.com or www.portfoliopartnership.com



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TLMI, Celab partner on release liner collection

A new initiative was launched to address the growing issue of label release liners in landfills. Sustainability columnist Rosalyn Bandy provides an in-depth look at this important effort

As a sustainability professional in the label industry, I have faced the same questions year in and year out about release liner: How do we help an end user meet their sustainability goals when release liner is so difficult to recycle?

The recycling process involves collecting, sorting and processing these liners so that they can be used as raw materials in the manufacture of new products. The obstacles to liner recycling are many: most waste haulers won't take it, it must be stored indoors until there is a full truckload, there is no space to store it, many recyclers want it to be baled, there's too much contamination, shipping is costly, and on and on. Because of these obstacles, liners are typically discarded to landfill after use.

Admirably, some TLMI members have created programs with dedicated personnel to try to help their customers recycle the liner, but those programs have not had broad, industry-changing success.

TLMI's liner-recycling committee has also been working for years on solutions including a map of recyclers, technical documents, PowerPoint presentations for members to use with customers and one-page information sheets.

A few years ago, an industry coalition was formed in North America called Celab, which stands for Circular Economy for Labels. It had numerous work streams, created some good research and connections, but also had no recycling success.

Paper and filmic liner production is estimated at nearly 600,000 tons per year. Recycling these liners not only reduces waste in landfills but would also conserve resources by reusing materials. Paper liner, specifically, is an incredibly clean, long fiber that has value and we know that many types of fiber are widely recycled.

Liner recycling initiative

TLMI has invited Celab to merge efforts on getting paper release liner recycled which resulted in a new project called the Liner Recycling Initiative (LRI). We have hired recycling expert Resource Recycling Systems (RRS), a global consultancy known for getting non-recyclables into recycling streams, to drive this initiative and be the boots on the ground.

Project goals

The aim of the project is to develop a robust national release liner recycling program that connects both small and large label end users that generate paper release liner to qualified recycling end markets.

The key goals of this work are the following:

- Build upon the learnings and recycling experience of the label industry to date.
- Identify best practices for convenient collection and aggregation of release liner for truckload and less-than-truckload shipments.
- Identify and develop specifications for recycling mills that

“Paper liner, specifically, is an incredibly clean, long fiber that has value and we know that many types of fiber are widely recycled across the US”

accept and recycle paper release liner.

- Elevate all existing liner recycling programs by developing an industry roadmap to scale a recycling strategy nationally.

Project strategy

Two regional pilots, in Chicagoland and the northeast US are planned around mills that accept and recycle paper release liner.

To start, the pilot will confirm the requirements for release liner for the mills, i.e.: what form it needs to be in, how much contamination is allowed, how it is packaged. Then, with label industry help, RRS will identify end users, both large (at least one truckload per month) and small (less than one truckload per month), that 'liberate' release liner, to participate in the pilots.

RRS will establish best operational practices for those end users around how to collect, aggregate and bring this valued fiber product to market for recycling. The best practices and learnings from the pilots will be used to develop a roadmap that scales the recycling program nationally. A national roadmap will also include identifying and qualifying mills willing to develop a mill specification for release liner commingled with corrugated cardboard or sorted office paper.

The mill partner for these pilot programs is Sustana Fiber. One of the next critical steps is to ask label converters to share with RRS (with an NDA in place) locations of where release liner is 'liberated' and labels are applied. These could be e-commerce fulfillment centers, brands, copackers or retailers, for example. Ideally, they would be located within 250 miles of the Sustana mills. This will help with RRS conducting site visits to help with operational best practices and to understand logistics obstacles. This collaboration sets the stage for broader industry acceptance and a significant reduction in environmental impact. To achieve a scalable recycling program, RRS will also work with brown fiber mills to include release liner in their process. The ability of end users to bale release liner with corrugated cardboard will solve many of the sorting, storage and shipping obstacles they currently face.

Want to be part of this effort or recommend a customer to be part of the effort? Contact me and I'll connect you with our RRS team to get you started.



Rosalyn Bandy is VP of sustainability for TLMI. For more information about TLMI sustainability, contact Rosalyn.bandy@tlmi.com. For information about TLMI membership, contact engagement director, dale.coates@tlmi.com



A designer's perspective: Four innovations at Labelexpo Americas 2024

Columnist Vicki Strull walked the halls of Labelexpo Americas 2024 and takes readers on her journey of discovery through the eyes of a branding and design strategist

I'm not exactly a unicorn at Labelexpo, but I'm not its target audience. After all, designers don't own the equipment or subscribe to the pre-press software; we work with the printers and converters who own the equipment and subscribe to the software. However, no matter what role you have in the industry, there was no denying the great energy at the show. It's clear people in this industry were so happy to see each other again.

I spoke at the conference this year, covering one of my favorite topics: creating value with haptics. So, it was a great opportunity to walk the floor and meet several people behind today's latest label technologies, trends and innovations. Here are four key things I noticed from my design perspective.

1. Embellishments

Embellishments relate to haptics, an essential part of my design work, so naturally, I gravitated toward these booths. I happily noticed that there continues to be a big, positive push for embellishments and finishings as a proven way for labels and packaging to engage shoppers and create positive customer experiences.

I saw several conventional foil-stamping companies with new products and inventive applications. One company that stood out was Infinity Foils. They seem to understand the designer's needs uniquely because its product line system works by color, not by application. As a designer and brand specialist, I don't want to think about whether I need a hot or a cold foil; I really just want to make a selection based on the color. With **Infinity Foils**, I can pick my particular shade of gold or holographic pattern and shade, and they will work with my printer or converter to determine what formula works best for the application. This feels very designer-centric.

I also noticed the beautiful labels on display at the **Cartes** booth. A particular show-stopper was the multi-dimensional label for PJAFÖC Imperiale, a sparkling wine. The label was covered in gorgeous 'jewels' that looked like little domed gems, and the haptics were like touching

mini cabochons. I was surprised to learn that these embellishments were applied digitally.

The fact that stunning embellishments like these can be produced digitally, faster and in-line makes them available to anyone that needs shorter runs, such as start-ups and early-stage emerging brands. At the **JetFX** booth, another digital embellishment equipment manufacturer, I saw labels for a wide range of product categories, each covering various price points. In other words, embellishments are not just for luxury items but for all types of products. That's good news for designers and brands who are well aware of the power of touch for consumer engagement.

**"I am an
outspoken advocate
for finishing
techniques that
create an engaging
experience for
the shopper and
a captivating
presence on
the shelf"**

As some of you may know, I am an outspoken advocate for finishing techniques that create an engaging experience for the shopper and a captivating presence on the shelf. In fact, every package I design these days has embellishments. As an expert in the field, I evangelize how essential it is for a brand to create a haptic experience with packaging. In addition, the foundation of that packaging needs to be a substrate with a surface quality and structure that can withstand the demands of a single or multiple finishing techniques. Why is this so important? Because shoppers develop perceptions about a product based on its

label and packaging, those that offer a tactile experience instill confidence.

Without the advanced embellishment technologies that I saw at the show, these types of dazzling labels would typically be produced for only an elite set of very high-end products. After visiting several booths, I imagined how more brands' products could be elevated in the consumer's mind with a label similar to the sparkle of that sparkling wine.

2. RFID and NFC

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) uses radio waves to transmit information, similar to other wireless technologies such as WiFi and Bluetooth. RFID has been around since World War II, when it was used to distinguish allied and enemy aircraft. You probably interact with RFID technology daily because 'tap to pay' (contactless credit card payments) is enabled by a type of RFID technology called near-field communication or NFC. An NFC tag is a tiny electrical device that can wirelessly transmit data and interact with other NFC-enabled devices, like mobile phones. While RFID and NFC are not new technologies, there was a lot of excitement at Labelexpo around new applications.

For example, in the **Avery Dennison** booth, I saw one of the healthcare applications for an epinephrine autoinjector (you may be familiar with brand names EpiPen or Auvi-Q). With NFC technology embedded in the medication's label, a user can simply bring their phone near the label and it could give them information such as dosing instructions or drug interactions. Another example might be a label for a prescription in pill form; the NFC-embedded label capability could record the day and time that the user took the medicine.

With an NFC tag, instead of using your mobile device's camera to capture a QR code, all you have to do is tap or wave your phone near the label to get the information or digital experience that the brand wants you to have. Sure, it can take you to a website, but it can also have functional applications that are deeper, faster and



Embellishments at the Cartes booth

more streamlined than a QR code.

From a designer's perspective, if my client prefers a minimalist aesthetic or wants to reduce a step in the connected print experience, I can specify an NFC label instead of a QR code, for example. However, ever the marketer and designer, it occurred to me that the brand still needs to 'show' or 'tell' the consumer that there is something for them to do—an action to take (i.e., tap for more information). Otherwise, how would they know that there's an experience for them? So, a brand will still need to have a symbol of some sort — similar to the universal tap-to-pay icon — if the NFC-embedded label trend continues to grow.

3. Sustainability in the future

According to the experts I spoke with at the show, sustainability in the future will have a different focus. Brands and consumers won't necessarily be talking about 'sustainability.' Rather, they will be more interested in carbon footprint, which is a more accurate way for a consumer to understand the impact that a brand's label or package has on the environment.

Right now, the conversation is often focused on, 'Is it recyclable?' or, 'Does the label or packaging contain post-consumer waste?' Or here's the way I talk about packaging: 'Is it on the biological side of the circular economy or the industrial side?' (Biological means the packaging is made of materials that eventually and naturally go back to the earth; on the industrial side, they don't. Some industrial materials may be recycled over and over, but eventually, these materials go into landfills.)

In the future, the perspective might be something like this: A label is made of fiber-based materials — materials that can go back into the earth. Perhaps the material is fresh fiber sourced from the wood pulp of trees in a



Software rendering from Hybrid Software

managed forest that has natural regrowth or is replanted after harvest. But let's say the label itself does not contain post-consumer waste.

Now, let's compare that to a label also made of fiber-based material with a percentage of post-consumer waste, but it requires more energy to achieve the quality needed for it to become a useful label or packaging substrate. In this example, one of those labels will have a greater carbon footprint than the other, regardless of their recyclability. And by the way, post-consumer waste does not always translate to 'better for the environment.'

It's also important to note that if brands continue to use materials with post-consumer waste and no one is adding fresh fiber to the ecosystem or managing re-forestation, we'd run out of post-consumer waste within seven months!

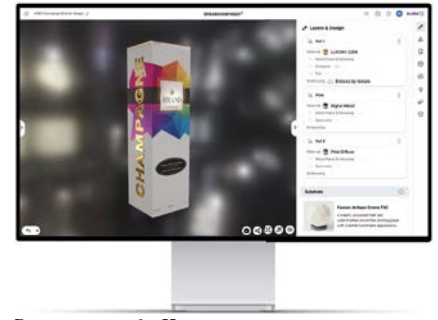
If consumers and brands start to think about packaging from a holistic carbon footprint impact, then the sustainability measurement they use will change. That, in turn, will filter through to vendors and suppliers and will impact what materials the brands use and how they use them.

Take a supplier like **Sappi**, whose booth I also visited. Sappi manufactures paperboard and label substrates — both fiber-based and on the biological side of the circular economy. Sappi also operates with one of the lowest carbon footprints in North America

for their industry, and they are rated within the top 1 percent globally across a broad range of social and environmental factors.

If I'm a brand manager working with a designer on the packaging, and I need to focus on reducing the carbon footprint of my packaging, Scope 3 emissions become important. A supplier like Sappi helps the brand and the designer work toward those goals.

All this to say, in the future, designers and brands will partner with converters and specify materials based on the carbon footprint required to manufacture the labels and packaging upstream through the supply chain.



Dreamcomposer by Kurz

As that trickles downstream to the consumer who wants to buy from brands committed to minimizing their carbon footprint, brands will need clear input to speak transparently about how their products impact the circular economy. I imagine future me saying, 'I'm going to investigate which material is more recyclable and also make sure it takes less energy to create and has a smaller carbon footprint.'

4. Rendering software

Another cool thing I noticed at Labelexpo Americas was the design-rendering software that many printers and converters use, such as **Hybrid Software's** iC3D and **Kurz's** Dreamcomposer. I spoke with both companies about the huge strides their software products have made in mimicking embellishments and finishes on digital prototypes in 3D. As a designer, it's important for me to show my clients a high-quality rendered design — a digital prototype — as a key step in the review and production process. If I specify a spot gloss or foil stamp on a label, I can typically visualize it, but my clients may not. At Labelexpo, I saw that the software continues to improve to simulate the shine, sparkle, finish, and texture — the haptic quality of the packaging. This is critically important in conversations with my clients; it helps me show-and-tell brands about the importance of embellishments for engaging shoppers and creating exciting and unique consumer experiences.



Vicki Strull is a design strategist with more than 25 years in the industry designing packaging, brand identities and a multitude of packaging and online touchpoints.

Vicki co-founded MarketWise Academy to help fellow designers and marketers accelerate their impact, level up their design strategies, and thrive in a world dominated by business. That's where the idea for The Business 6 originated. To learn more about The Business 6 and other strategies, visit marketwiseacademy.com or contact Vicki directly at vicki@vickistrull.com

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The evolution of barcodes

Over three-quarters of consumers prefer products with scannable codes that offer additional details, such as nutritional information, allergens or sourcing data

For over five decades, the familiar black-and-white lines of barcodes have quietly powered global commerce, but it is time to prepare for a future where they don't just ring up prices but unlock a world of data, transparency and connectivity. Piotr Wnuk reports

Barcodes have been a staple of retail for five decades, with their simple black lines becoming synonymous with modern commerce. However, a new chapter in barcode evolution is unfolding. The once static and basic barcodes are being replaced with more advanced two-dimensional (2D) codes, which promise to unlock a range of benefits for consumers, brands, retailers and the entire supply chain. Let's explore the journey and future of barcodes, from their inception to the upcoming digital transformation.

The birth of the barcode

Fifty years ago, in 1974, a pivotal moment in retail history occurred with the first-ever barcode scan. The scan was performed at a Marsh Supermarket in Troy, Ohio, on a 10-pack of Wrigley's chewing gum. This marked the beginning of a new era of retail and supply chain automation, fueled by the introduction of the Universal Product Code (UPC) developed by GS1 US, the not-for-profit organization responsible for global barcode standards.

Bob Carpenter, president and CEO of GS1 US, reflects on the barcode's origins: 'The barcode was created to solve a pressing issue—slow and manual checkout processes in grocery stores. Before its introduction, every product required a price tag, and cashiers manually entered each price. The barcode streamlined this process, allowing for automatic price lookup and dramatically speeding up transactions.'

Since that first scan, barcodes have become an integral part of global commerce, identifying over a billion products and being scanned more than 10 billion times daily. While the traditional barcode has primarily served to provide pricing information, the retail landscape is shifting toward greater transparency and consumer engagement, driven by increasing demands for detailed product data.

Consumers demand more information

Recent consumer behavior research conducted by GS1 highlights a growing demand for more information at the point of purchase. The survey revealed that 77 percent of consumers believe that product information is essential when making a purchase decision,

“QR code enables brands to update data instantaneously through an online portal, ensuring consumers always have the latest information”

and 79 percent prefer products with scannable codes that offer additional details, such as nutritional information, allergens or sourcing data.

This shift has spurred a digital transformation in the retail industry. While barcodes were once limited to price lookups, they are now evolving into dynamic tools that connect consumers with valuable information via their smartphones. One example of this is the increased use of QR codes. These codes, often printed alongside traditional barcodes, allow consumers to scan and instantly access detailed product information online.

Carpenter explains: 'A product's packaging can take up to 18 months to change, particularly when adjusting key information like allergen warnings or nutritional content. However, a QR code enables brands to update this data instantaneously through an online portal, ensuring consumers always have the latest information. This shift is not just about convenience — it's about giving consumers control and making informed decisions easier.'

The next-generation barcode

To meet these evolving consumer expectations, GS1 has developed a new two-dimensional (2D) barcode that builds on the existing UPC standard. These next-generation codes not only deliver product pricing at checkout but also function like QR codes, providing rich, detailed product information to consumers. This technology is designed to support both in-store checkout systems and mobile scans, offering versatility across retail environments.

'What started as a need for speed using the UPC barcodes has transformed into a need for access to product-related information,' says Carpenter. 'With better inventory management, traceability and sustainability data, the new GS1 standards incorporate QR codes to deliver this real-time information.'



The first barcode scan was performed at a Marsh Supermarket in Troy, Ohio, in 1974 on a 10-pack of Wrigley's chewing gum



The 50th anniversary of the UPC barcode scan serves as a testament to the lasting relevance of GS1 standards in a marketplace

“By adopting 2D barcodes with GS1 standards, we’re empowering consumers with greater access to information and improving traceability throughout the supply chain”

The 2D barcodes are designed to merge the capabilities of both UPC and QR codes, allowing for a seamless checkout experience while giving consumers access to product origin, manufacturing dates, lot numbers, expiration dates, and more with just a simple scan. The potential impact of this technology extends beyond retail, providing greater transparency and efficiency across the entire supply chain.

Benefits across the supply chain

The transition to 2D barcodes offers significant advantages to stakeholders across the supply chain. By enabling the seamless capture and exchange of product data between trading partners, these codes enhance supply chain visibility and control. This is particularly critical for industries like food and pharmaceuticals, where traceability and compliance are vital for safety.

For example, Topco Associates, one of the largest sourcing companies in the retail and grocery industry, has adopted 2D barcodes for end-to-end supply chain traceability. These codes support the company in meeting increased record-keeping requirements under the US Food and Drug Administration's Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Rule 204, which is designed to improve food safety and protect consumer health.

Carrie Wilkie, senior vice president of technology at GS1-US, underscores the importance of this technology for both businesses and consumers. '2D barcodes enable superior supply chain visibility, improving inventory management and recall readiness,' she says. 'For consumers,

this means easier access to health, allergen, recall, and coupon information through a simple smartphone scan.'

By bridging the gap between online and offline retail experiences, 2D barcodes create a digital portal for consumers to access personalized content, fostering stronger engagement and satisfaction.

The road to Sunrise 2027

In response to the growing need for more advanced barcodes, GS1 US launched the Sunrise 2027 initiative, a multi-year effort designed to transition the retail industry from traditional UPC barcodes to 2D barcodes by 2027. This industry-wide initiative brings together major retailers, brands and other stakeholders to establish standards, conduct testing and ensure a smooth transition to the new barcode system.

Sunrise 2027 is a collaborative process that involves setting requirements, analyzing results, and optimizing the use of 2D barcodes in various retail environments. GS1's role as a neutral standards body is critical in coordinating these efforts to ensure that all stakeholders—brands, retailers, regulators and consumers—benefit from the new technology.

Industry support for the transition

The transition to 2D barcodes is gaining widespread support from some of the world's largest brands. Companies like Procter & Gamble, L'Oréal and Nestlé have publicly endorsed the move to next-generation barcodes, recognizing the potential to revolutionize the consumer experience.

Alfredo Colas, senior vice president of information technology at Procter & Gamble, emphasizes the importance of this shift: 'By adopting 2D barcodes with GS1 standards, we're empowering consumers with greater access to information and improving traceability throughout the supply chain. This commitment to innovation underscores our dedication to delivering a superior consumer experience and value to all stakeholders.'

Retailers are also preparing for the transition. Wegmans Food Markets, a pioneer in barcode technology, was one of the first to scan a UPC and is now leading the charge in testing 2D barcodes for future use. 'We're actively pressure-testing our capabilities to ensure readiness for this industry transition,' says Dave DeLaus, Wegmans' senior vice president and chief information officer.

Publix, one of the largest grocery chains in the US, is also enthusiastic about the transition. Dave Bornmann, senior vice president of product business development at Publix, believes that 2D barcodes will empower consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions while improving inventory management and store operations.

Preparing for the future of barcodes

As the retail and packaging industries prepare for the widespread adoption of 2D barcodes, it is clear that this technology offers numerous benefits. Not only will it free up packaging space, giving brands more room to communicate with consumers, but it will also support the digital transformation of retail by integrating online and offline experiences.

GS1 continues to play a pivotal role in bringing together organizations across industries to establish best practices for 2D barcode implementation. As the barcode celebrates its 50th anniversary, this next chapter in its evolution promises to shape the future of retail and supply chain management for years to come.

Bob Carpenter concludes: 'The 50th anniversary of the UPC barcode scan serves as a testament to the lasting relevance of GS1 standards in an ever-evolving marketplace. As we embark on the next chapter of barcode innovation, GS1 US remains committed to driving progress and facilitating meaningful advancements that will shape the next 50 years and beyond in retail and supply chain.'

Scan the QR code to learn more about GS1 Sunrise 2027 initiative and how to prepare for the change





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Marzek Etiketten + Packaging grows business across Europe

Marzek Etiketten + Packaging is unique as a family-owned business for producing labels, flexibles and cartons with high levels of creativity and a strong sustainability focus. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

Marzek Etiketten + Packaging remains unique in the European labels market. Not only is the company still fully family-owned – by the fourth and fifth generations of three families – but it covers the full range of package printing applications, from roll and sheetfed labels to flexible packaging and folding cartons, in plants spanning Austria, Hungary and Ukraine. The company has over 700 employees and a turnover of 87M USD (80M EUR).

CEO Dr Johannes Michael Wareka says the Marzek Group is big enough to benefit from cooperation between multiple production sites and international sourcing while at the same time being more agile than bigger, PE-owned labels and packaging groups.

The success of the company can be measured not only in its employee numbers and turnover but also in the multiple Finat and World Label awards it has won for superbly creative label and packaging designs. All these award-winning designs originated from the company's own in-house creative department.

Going forward, Marzek Group is committed to a major ongoing investment program, with a current commitment to invest 17.5M USD (16M EUR) across the group in 2024/2025.

Greenfield flexibles

When L&L last visited Marzek, the company had purchased the flexible packaging operations of Mondi group in Kner, Hungary, and was planning to develop a new greenfield site. That has now been realized.

The flexibles plant operates under the name of M-Flexilog Kft, located in Békéscsaba, close to the existing Marzek Kner Packaging Kft factory. The 25,000sqm site includes 8,500sqm of factory space dedicated to the manufacturing of flexible packaging, pouches, sleeves and wraparound labels. Overall, the value of the four-year investment project exceeded 12.9M USD (11M EUR).

Financing of the M-Flexilog Kft plant was strongly supported by the Hungarian government, which saw it as a major strategic investment for the country. The government not only supported Marzek financially but also sent high-ranking representatives to the inauguration ceremony from the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as the Minister of State for Economic Diplomacy. High-ranking Austrian diplomats, including the Austrian commercial deputy attaché, also attended.

The centerpiece of the M-Flexilog Kft plant is an 8-color solvent-based Windmoeller & Hoeslscher (W+H) Miraflex CI flexo press, installed in 2017. The press runs at speeds up to 400m/min.

The W+H press is complimented by a Nordmecanica Combi 4000 solvent laminator and Soma Venus III slitter-rewinder and a fully automated color mixing system.

The workflow includes an automated 14m-high rack warehouse with induction loops for over 8,000 pallet spaces.

Construction of the M-Flexilog Kft plant was designed to meet high environmental protection standards with state-of-the-art energy recovery systems. The operation complies with BRC/IOP hygiene standards essential for servicing the food and pharmaceutical packaging industries.

A short drive across town is Marzek's folding carton plant, Kner Packaging, housed in a communist-era multi-story building with



Marzek Group's European operations

“In the future, it will be the people who prepare the data who are responsible for quality control, not the machine operator. This is a change in the mindset”

Marzek history

The Marzek company was established by Dr Johannes Michael Wareka's grandfather in 1879, making Michael the fourth-generation CEO. His three children are now fully involved in the business: Oliver in customer relations, Marie in accounts, and Stefanie in marketing.

On a day-to-day basis, the Marzek Group is run by a board, and a new COO has just been appointed, taking up position in January. Michael Wareka will remain as CEO centrally involved in Marzek's future strategy.

floor upon floor of state-of-the-art carton printing and converting equipment.

The plant houses nine offset presses, both Heidelberg and KBA, including a short-inking Anilcolor press for shorter runs. Printed sheets go to a fleet of Bobst cut-crease machines and a Gietz 740 foiling machine.

Sheetfed labels

A sheetfed wet glue label plant also operates from the Kner Packaging site.

The plant houses six Heidelberg and two KBA printing machines, each 6-color plus coater, one of which prints with an extended color gamut (ECG) ink set. This means that over 95 percent of Pantone colors can be simulated using the same seven inks (CMYK+OGV), so there is no wash-up of spot color units between jobs.

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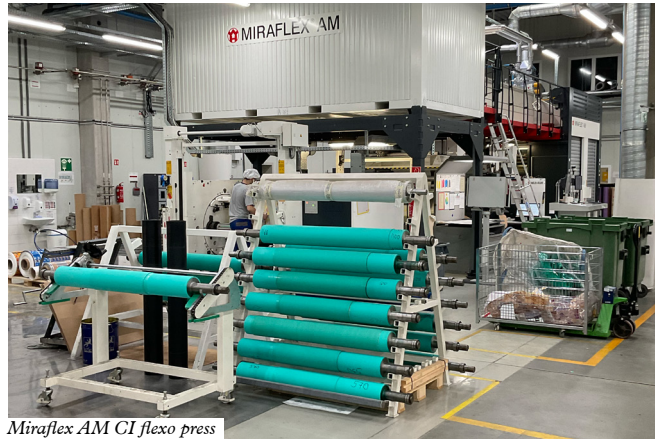
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ECG printing wet glue labels on Heidelberg Speedmaster



Miraflex AM CI flexo press

“Labels and packaging are all about communicating the product to the consumer. Packaging is a piece of communication”

This brings offset color management into line with digital, where brand owners have shown themselves prepared to accept a 7-color simulation of brand colors. It also means multiple jobs with different Pantones can be ganged across the same sheet, greatly improving efficiency on shorter-run, multi-SKU work.

Running ECG does require that everything about the workflow is standardized, including fingerprinting the press with each different substrate.

Printed sheets are sent to a Polar finishing line, where they are either square cut or die punched and bundled.

Marzek's wet glue model is to produce at maximum efficiency and allow brand owners to call off stock when required. The company has built its own management information system (MIS) to allow this to happen.

The humidity-controlled warehouse stores some 1,500 SKUs. As soon as an SKU reaches a set minimum quantity, the MIS automatically re-orders a new production run.

'This means we are free to schedule printing and finishing for maximum efficiency, and our customers are assured of consistent levels of stock at a price set once annually,' says Wareka. 'Customers anywhere in Europe can call off their order on Friday, and the next Thursday, they have everything they need. This is our key advantage.'

The sheetfed division processes around 20,000 tons of label materials a year, of which 15 percent is filmic material.

Pressure-sensitive labels

Marzek's pressure-sensitive label converting operation is based in Traiskirchen, Austria, a short drive from Vienna airport.

The plant runs a mixture of printing processes, mainly offset but also flexo and digital.

For short-run and customized work, Marzek has installed two HP Indigo 6K presses. In fact, the company has been a digital pioneer, installing the first HP Indigo 6000 press in Europe in 2009 and the first 6K press in Austria.

Marzek's internal label design team has used that experience to push the boundaries of digital print.

An example of this is the 'Flying Bird' project, which uses HP's Mosaic software to generate an animated flying sequence when labels are viewed side by side.

Further creative possibilities are added by the SEI Laser Label Master laser die-cutter.

'The laser die-cutter has been faster than we expected,' says Wareka. 'It is also very versatile. It not only eliminates the need to change tooling, but it allows for a vast range of possibilities like security marking, micro-perforation and creating unique and

variable label designs, which would be impossible with standard die-cutting techniques. We can score through an ink onto a metallic substrate to create fine embellishments or cut out complex shapes. This in itself is a security feature as it makes the label harder to copy.'

Applying the laser to hot foil creates hologram-like effects that cannot be replicated with a photocopier.

'The counterfeiter would actually need the same equipment,' says Wareka, 'Digital can do so much more than just copying conventional printing. Each collection of labels can be different, and not just the design but the shape. There are endless possibilities. And digital today matches offset quality.'

The multiple ABG Digicon finishing machines add further possibilities for creative design.

The latest Digicon 3 includes two Big Foot hot foil/embossing stations and flatbed silk screen. Marzek has perfected micro-embossing that gives an additional layer of security protection.

Add to this the ability to create a huge range of metallic shades with digital overprinting, and Marzek has a formidable resource for brands looking for truly innovative and secure packaging systems.

Marzek's offset press fleet consists of three Rotatex Brava presses, which can be switched between semi-rotary and full rotary operation. Additional modules installed since L&L's last visit include a Pantec Rhino embossing unit, Kocher+Beck automated unwind and ABG turret.

In addition, a 11-color + varnish Omet Varyflex V2 offset press with extended hot air dryer on the varnish station has been transferred from the Kner Packaging site in Hungary.

Marzek Vienna also runs an MPS EFA 530 flexo press equipped with K+B non-stop unwind.

In-line booklet and multi-layer label production is a specialty on these machines.

Offset plates are made in-house with a Kodak CTP system, along with flatbed and rotary silk screen production. Flexo plates are produced on an Esko CDI XPS Crystal 4835.

Automation will be a key component in Marzek's investment plans. 'In the future, it will be the people who prepare the data who are responsible for quality control, not the machine operator,' notes Wareka. 'This is a change in the mindset.'

Servicing brands

The Traiskirchen operation specializes in designing and printing wine labels, which can be produced either in self-adhesive or sheetfed offset formats. The company currently has over 3,000 different wine label projects open.

The Traiskirchen facility hosts an in-house creative design agency

and artwork department that uses Esko WebCenter software to proof 3D virtual prototypes to customers. 'We have a big emphasis on storytelling when we work with brands across all food and drink sectors,' says Wareka. 'Labels and packaging are all about communicating the product to the consumer. Packaging is a piece of communication.'

Marzek can leverage its multi-format capabilities to provide brands with coordinated sets of packaging – for example, premium decorated cartons and labels for promotional wine, spirits and beer brands.

The company has made a heavy investment in e-labels, which means linking a QR code or RFID on the bottle label to extensive online information about the product. Marzek provides this as an end-to-end service to brands, including online database management.

As part of its wider service offering, Marzek supplies dispensing systems and thermal transfer printers for point-of-sale and logistics/warehouse labeling.

Sustainable business

Sustainability has become a central topic when discussing new projects with brand customers. This is a core value for Wareka personally, and it has deep roots. 'I define sustainability as: You should leave for the next generation a better company than you found it. This is the only way to be sustainable, and family-owned companies have always done this effectively.'

Wareka sees the EU Packaging Directive (PPWR), with its three-pronged approach to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle, as the 'big topic' in Europe. 'It is coming, and it will be relevant to everything we do. Packaging will finally be required to become more sustainable.'

The company is developing a range of more sustainable packaging products, including alternatives to non-recyclable multi-layer flexible packaging.

Marzek reports on a wide range of sustainability metrics. 'We subscribe to SBTi – Science-based target initiatives - which is a reporting system currently very few companies follow,' says Wareka.

SBTi targets show businesses how much and how quickly they need to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to prevent the worst effects of climate change. The Marzek Group has a wide range of sustainability certifications, including ISO 14001 and FSC.

Marzek also subscribes to the CSRD (Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive) and the GRI (Global Reporting Initiative), which involve standardized reporting on a wide range of diversity, equality and social responsibility metrics.

'The big brands and retail chains are doing this themselves and they are looking for suppliers who also do this reporting, even smaller ones,' says Wareka. 'It is an administrative burden for small companies when you add it to ISO and BRC and so on, so this is an advantage for larger companies which have more resources to meet the criteria.'

Sustainability also means reducing inefficiency and waste in the production process.

In conclusion, Marzek is, in many ways, a remarkable company. It has managed to grow into a multi-plant, multi-national scale business while retaining the core values and characteristics of a family-run business, with the next generation fully engaged in the process.



Michael Wareka with Stephanie, Oliver and Marie

“PPWR is coming, and it will be relevant to everything we do. Packaging will finally be required to become more sustainable”



Marzek Ukraine employees' children

Center of the storm

During the eastward expansion from its base in Vienna, Marzek has found itself at the center of historic European events.

The Hungarian packaging operation was originally a communist-era state-controlled business with 1,500 employees. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the operation was privatized and broken up. When Marzek acquired the business in 2005, there had been literally no investment since the early 1990s and only 120 employees remained.

Today, there are 500 employees in Marzek's Hungarian business; there has been a major investment in modern equipment. Production volume has expanded by more than six times.

Then there is Ukraine.

Marzek started manufacturing in Ukraine in 2009. The Marzek Dnipropack plant is situated in the east of the country, worryingly close to the front line of the conflict with Russia.

'In Ukraine, we are still producing, even under very challenging circumstances,' says Michael Wareka. 'If there was stability there, the growth rate would be in double figures.'

To help provide some relief, Marzek arranges for groups of its employees' children to be brought across the Hungarian border to spend two weeks resting and recuperating in Békéscsaba, close to where Marzek's packaging plants are located.

Marzek's employees, led by Wareka and his family, arrange parties and excursions and the children all stay together in a hostel donated by local people.

'It is challenging making all the arrangements to bring the children over the border. The Hungarian government can be hostile towards Ukraine, but the people of Hungary are amazing and welcome the children with open arms to their country,' says Wareka.



Scan the QR code to learn more about
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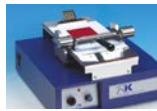
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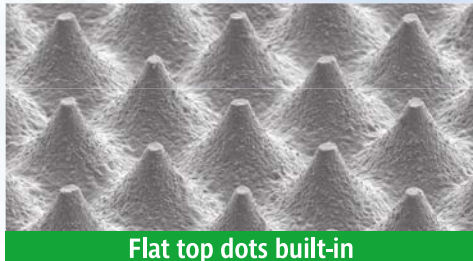
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Bobst opens Italian labels and flexpack center

The new Competence Center showcases Bobst narrow and mid-web portfolio across labels and flexible packaging.
Andy Thomas-Emans reports



Bobst labels and flexible packaging Competence Center in Firenze

Following the successful establishment of the Atlanta Competence Center in the US, Bobst has opened a new 1,200sqm Competence Center in Florence, Italy, dedicated to labels and flexible packaging. Providing access to the company's full range of narrow and mid-web printing technologies with six complete production lines - including inline flexo, digital and All-in-One technologies - the new Italian facility is designed as a hub for collaboration and innovation.

'The major investment in the narrow-mid web printing and converting product line demonstrates Bobst Group's strong commitment to this segment,' states Matteo Cardinotti, head of Bobst's narrow mid-web printing and converting product line.

'Bobst has experienced exceptional growth in labels in recent years and we are supporting that development by opening more local Competence Centers and hiring more staff worldwide. In Italy specifically, we have also expanded our production facilities and reinforced our service organization to match the needs of our European customers.' Bobst employs a total of 350 employees dedicated to the narrow and mid-web inline segment.

Cardinotti said drupa and Labelexpo Americas 2024 demonstrated how the industry is 'moving beyond innovation in hardware and software in isolation towards full integration of processes. In this respect, Bobst is leading the way with its portfolio of complete workflows designed for the future of packaging production.'

Six production lines

The production lines on show represent all Bobst's technologies dedicated labels and

short-to medium-run flexible packaging.

A Bobst Master M6 flexo press is integrated with a near-line Novolam MV mid-web laminator. This setup, in combination with oneECG printing and DigiFlexo technology, allow production of short- to medium run flexible packaging and shrink sleeves.

Bobst's 'All-in-One' platform with inkjet and flexo technology inline, was represented by the Digital Master 340 press running pressure-sensitive labels for the beauty segment. For inline flexo, Bobst demonstrated its Master M5 with single-pass production of multi-layer labels, also featuring oneECG (extended color gamut) technology and DigiFlexo automation.

All presses demonstrated live were operating with direct integration to the Bobst Connect digital platform.

Acting as a central data hub, Bobst Connect integrates every aspect of the workflow, from job management and pre-press setup to printing, converting, and quality control, based on collection of real-time production data.

'The ability to capture these valuable insights allows converters to enhance their business planning and optimize the entire production process,' says Cardinotti.

The platform is continually evolving, and Bobst recently added a new certified substrate library, job quality reports, and 'Job and Recipe Management', which streamlines machine integration and enables faster setup.

'Bobst has brought into reality the idea of the closed-loop workflow, what we call "PDF to twin-PDF" concept, addressing the main industry trends with easy-to-use machines, all orchestrated by Bobst

"The ability to capture these valuable insights allows converters to enhance their business planning and optimize the entire production process"

Connect,' says Cardinotti. 'Our main focus is to provide customers with complete workflows that help them overcome a multitude of market challenges, allowing them to deliver consistent and high-quality results much quicker and with low waste, without having to rely on highly skilled operators.'

Implementing ECG

Another issue addressed at the event was how to maintain color consistency across different types of technologies, applications and over time. This is an issue as converters move beyond labels, leveraging inline flexo technology to produce a range of short-run flexible packaging applications. With such a highly complex market, it is a great challenge for converters to maintain the consistency of brand colors from job to job.

During the event, Bobst, together with its network of partners, demonstrated how oneECG works by standardizing the colors on press and automating the color matching process, moving it from the pressroom into pre-press.

This 'digitalizing' of color management means operator skills will have less impact on the print outcome.

The benefits of oneECG printing on inline flexo presses also include savings on ink and plate costs, substrate waste reduction, faster setup, and a reduction in cleaning time and related consumables.

The event reinforced Bobst's industry partnerships with the presence of Esko, Kurz, Avery Dennison, Sun Chemical, Kongsberg PCS, DuPont and Lohmann.



For report on Bobst digital press installation at Soabar Labels see p37

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Soabar leverages history to promote change

Owned successively by Avery Dennison and Sessions, Soabar Labels is today undergoing a cultural transformation. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

UK-based Soabar Labels has undergone huge changes from a dedicated global supplier of apparel labeling machines to the cutting edge of prime label digital technology.

Business manager Rob Lee calls this a 'cultural transformation,' which has involved the installation of state-of-the-art digital presses in a new, dedicated facility, along with services including pre-press and digital workflow management.

To fully understand the breadth of this transition, a brief look at the company's history is in order.

Soabar was founded over 100 years ago in the US as a textile labeling machine supplier, a market it continued to serve after its acquisition by Avery Dennison. It had offices around the world, including a UK site which opened in the 1970s.

This UK facility was acquired by the Sessions family, and traded as Soabar Sessions until 2008, when a management buyout took place by Phil Achurch and his wife Jo. A year later, production director Robert Gallagher bought into the company and joined the board.

The company then began a major shift to complement apparel labeling machinery and consumables with prime PS labels, adding flexo equipment including an Edale Beta and Nilpeter FA430.

In 2016-17 the company made its first move into digital printing with the installation of two AccurioLabel 190 toner presses from Konica Minolta – the first machines installed in England.

At this point, half of Soabar's revenue still came from sales of thermal transfer and textile desktop printers, as well as accessories and consumables for the wash-care market. Soabar Labels still maintains a field service team which operates across Europe looking after these customers.

Soabar has been able to build on this considerable legacy business in the apparel industry where the company is an established and trusted name.

Much of today's cultural change has been driven by the installation of a LabelTraxx MIS. Order input, invoicing and job tracking have been put in place, and the next step will see the rolling out of the LabelTraxx Sitaline portal which allows customers to view their assets, approve artwork and place orders 24/7.

This ties into the Hybrid Pakz workflow suite, which runs all of Soabar's pre-press operations including color management.

Digital press investment

The renewal of Soabar's press room started by replacing the two Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 190 presses with a single KM AccurioLabel 230.

Comments Robert Gallagher, 'The AccurioLabel 230 fits very well with our operational needs, and illustrates exactly why we needed a combined multi-technology approach.

'There is also a clear costing structure through the click charge - with no hidden costs - which makes it much easier to price up jobs. This is all delivered in a smaller physical footprint, which has obvious advantages in a production facility with finite space available.'

With a strong suite of VDP software, the AccurioLabel 230 is primarily used for chemicals and food labeling applications on everything except thermal and PE-based materials.



Phil Achurch, Robert Gallagher and Rob Lee from Soabar Labels

“Soabar has been able to build on this considerable legacy business in the apparel industry where the company is an established and trusted name”

Complementing the AL 230 is a new 7-color (CMYK + OVW) Bobst Mouvent UV inkjet press – the first installed in the UK (Bobst officially refers to this press as the 'Bobst digital press using Mouvent inkjet cluster technology').

Comments Gallagher, 'As we diversify and expand what we can offer, we need the capacity to print a thin CMYKOV ink layer as well as apply a thicker layer of white to create textured or tactile finishes, which are required in the personal care and cosmetics categories. Plus, we also wanted the ability to print directly onto thermal top and PE label stocks.'

Using white ink on metallic substrates allows Soabar to simulate effects like gold, broadening the design possibilities.

The Bobst Mouvent press operates at speeds up to 100m/min, although it typically runs at 70-80m/min with white. This has allowed Soabar to handle longer print runs and move some jobs from flexo. 'The white compares virtually to Screen,' says Rob Lee. The Mouvent color engine matches 90 percent of the Pantone book.

Finishing for both digital presses is carried out on ABG Digicons.

Soabar is now consolidating its digital equipment and supporting services into a dedicated digital production unit in a new build adjacent to the existing plant, which will mark the next stage of this historic company's growth.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Soabar's heritage



Brook + Whittle secures patent for recyclable light-blocking shrink sleeve

The US-based converter has developed a fully recyclable light-blocking shrink sleeve after eight years of R&D, Akanksha Meena reports

Brook + Whittle, a Hamilton, Ohio, US-based converter of sustainable packaging, has been awarded a US patent for GreenLabel BlockOut, a recyclable light-blocking shrink technology for PET packaging.

The company reports that this innovative technology has garnered worldwide interest from major consumer packaged goods (CPG) brands as they look for technologies that support their 2025 recyclability commitments.

The latest product by Brook + Whittle enables brands to shift from problematic plastics to clear PET packaging while protecting their products with a unique light-blocking coating. It enables the packaging to be fully compatible with existing recycling processes, ensuring it does not contaminate the recycling stream. The shrink sleeve can be recycled alongside the bottle flake and processed into new PET packaging.

Fully recyclable shrink sleeves

Other light-blocking shrink sleeves in the market are heavily printed with black ink on the inner-most surface of the label.

Tyler Matusevich, director of sustainability at Brook + Whittle, says: 'This black ink does block light, but it does not allow the underlying container to be identified as PET when it goes through sorting equipment at a material recovery facility (MRF). Traditionally, these sleeves were PET-G, which is detrimental to the PET recycling process. The shrink sleeve labels on the market today

are landfilled or incompatible with bottle recycling.'

In 2007, Brook + Whittle started monitoring the consumer-packaged goods market for problematic and non-recyclable plastic packaging. With its participation in several trade groups, it was evident that clear rigid PET was the best recyclable plastic solution for the CPG market. As early adopters of clear PET shrink films for most shrink sleeve applications, Brook + Whittle began pushing many of its customers to move to clear PET packaging labeled with its PET shrink sleeves.

Then, the Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR) approved clear, crystallizable PET (cPET or PET-C) shrink film for recycling on rigid clear PET containers. The company helped commercialize its use by printing this newly approved material with APR-approved wash-away inks.

'This solution solved the recycling dilemma and provided the CPG market with a fully recyclable, printed shrink-sleeve label solution — or so we thought,' Matusevich states.

As Brook + Whittle continued its work in the rigid PET container market, the team discovered that colored PET was, in fact, not widely recyclable. The research into the use of colorants in rigid PET plastic found that brands were using them to protect their products and ingredients from light transmission.

'So, we set out to find a recyclable solution. We knew where to start — cPET shrink film has incredible properties that allow it to cover the entire container from top to bottom, protecting the product from light exposure,' Matusevich explains. 'We just needed to add a layer that would block light transmission and wash away cleanly when reclaimers processed the recycled PET. Hence, our eight-year journey to develop a light-blocking coating technology that did just that.'

Brook + Whittle worked closely with its suppliers to develop a coating that blocked UV-Vis light and adhered to the approved recycling system set out in the APR Design Guide.

The company's APR-recognized cPET shrink film is printed with recycling-compatible wash-away inks and applied with a functional barrier coating. This combination blocks up to 100 percent of light from 200-900nm while maintaining recyclability.

'When we thought we had found a solution, we then had to test to ensure it printed in a way that stayed true to the brand's historic look and met their aesthetic goals. There was a lot of back and forth,' Matusevich adds.

The label manufacturer conducted several tests to ensure the product's effectiveness and recyclability by working with reclaimers such as Evergreen and various labs. Spectrophotometers, which are used to determine the amount of light absorbed by a chemical substance, were used to ensure the sleeve sufficiently blocked UV-Vis wavelengths.

Furthermore, the company conducted shelf-life tests to confirm the new shrink sleeve's light-blocking properties matched or exceeded the product protection the previous packaging gave.

'To ensure recyclability, we went through APR's Responsible Innovation pathway and received the recognition that our solution

"This solution solved the recycling dilemma and provided the CPG market with a fully recyclable, printed shrink-sleeve label solution — or so we thought"



The new shrink sleeve is particularly beneficial for ready-to-drink beverages, such as dairy and protein drinks



The latest product by Brook + Whittle enables brands to shift from problematic plastics to clear PET packaging while protecting their products with a unique light-blocking coating

“We successfully conducted multiple commercial-scale trials to ensure the correct sortation and recyclability of this light-blocking shrink sleeve”

significantly benefits the recycling industry and plastics circularity. This thorough testing and approval process should reassure you of the quality and reliability of our solution,’ Matusevich says.

‘Unlike traditional light-blocking shrink sleeves available on the market today, which do not sort properly and end up in landfills, our GreenLabel BlockOut is fully compatible with the existing mechanical recycling system. Our solution enables brands to transition to clear PET and away from colored PET, which blocks light but has very low or no market value. It either ends up in landfills or requires additional transportation to be recycled in a chemical process. Our solution will enable millions of pounds of additional clear PET to be recycled, saving it from landfill.’

Brook + Whittle installs HP Indigo V12 digital press

Brook + Whittle installed HP Indigo V12 digital press in January 2024. After an initial beta phase, the HP Indigo V12 is enabling the label printer to deliver on the growing demands of its customers for faster lead times and more agile supply.

Brook + Whittle converted its previous conventional-first rationale into a digital-first mindset, utilizing 11 HP Indigo V12, 6K, 8K, and 25K presses. This fleet allows the company to designate each job to the best fit HP Indigo press for lower the total cost of ownership and optimized overall equipment efficiency. The V12 and 8K digital presses focus on mid and long runs, the 6K digital press takes the high versatility short runs, and the HP Indigo 25K digital press churns out the larger label and shrink sleeve jobs.

With the new V12 press completing the company’s digital fleet, Brook + Whittle has increased efficiency with short turnaround times and enhanced offerings with unique digital solutions such as variable data printing for any job size. The company’s productivity has increased with the ability of the V12 to process six colors at up to 400ft/min (120m/min).

Jeremy Letterman, chief operating officer at Brook + Whittle, said: ‘Equipped with the HP Indigo V12 in our digital value chain, we’ve been able to convert whole product lines from flexo to digital. This allows us to deliver exactly what customers want when they want it — that’s the power of HP Indigo technology. We can be sure that the press will continue to run across a variety of substrates, removing the need to pause operations, and that gives us a significant competitive advantage. The speed of response we can now deliver is essential to winning customers over and delivering value across the entire supply chain.’

Noam Zilbershtain, vice president and general manager HP Indigo and Scitex said: ‘What Brook + Whittle has been able to achieve with the HP Indigo V12 digital press is testament to the value of shifting to an ‘Indigo first’ mindset – speed, efficiency, sustainability, and ROI across a versatile portfolio of print jobs. As they expand their digital value proposition, we are excited to continue serving as strategic partners in their journey, delivering groundbreaking digital innovation with best-in-class support and training.’

Applications

The shrink sleeve is particularly beneficial for ready-to-drink beverages, such as dairy and protein drinks, and for nutraceutical products, such as vitamins. Brook + Whittle even found applications for it in home and personal care products, such as mouthwash or chemical fluids. That said, any product that is packaged in colored PET and relies on the light-blocking properties provided by the colorant to protect or preserve the contents is an eligible candidate.

‘We successfully conducted multiple commercial-scale trials to ensure the correct sortation and recyclability of this light-blocking shrink sleeve. Alongside the recyclability advantages of this solution, we expect our customers will benefit from switching to clear PET and lower their extended producer responsibility (EPR) eco-modulation fees in the future,’ Matusevich points out.

So far, Brook + Whittle customers have experienced an easy transition to this innovation, as it is a drop-in alternative to traditional shrink sleeves. A few brand owners are using it already.

‘This recognition marks a significant milestone for Brook + Whittle and our customers,’ adds Daryl Northcott, executive vice president of Brook + Whittle. ‘We are currently supplying commercial-scale orders and are working closely with multiple brands to ensure a smooth transition to this product. Being first to market with this patented solution is a testament to our ongoing commitment to leading the way in sustainable packaging and driving the industry forward.’

The company has been recognized by APR for this technology, which meets or exceeds the voluntary APR Design for Recyclability standards. Furthermore, How2Recycle has pre-qualified it as widely recyclable for eligible clear PET bottles.

Brook + Whittle also plans to expand its printing methods, enabling it to reach more markets and customer segments. For example, the company took another step in its digital transformation in January 2024 by installing a new HP Indigo V12 digital press (see boxout) and Bobst Digital Master 340, expanding the production capacity and acquiring PouchIt, a flexible packaging manufacturer based in Atlanta, Georgia, to enhance its footprint in the southeast United States.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Brook + Whittle’s light block shrink sleeves

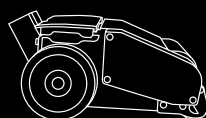
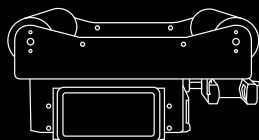
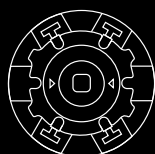


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Celebrating 140 years: The rich history of Grand Rapids Label

From printing Harry Houdini posters 140 years ago to becoming a modern, fully landfill-free operation, Grand Rapids Label has built its family-owned business on deeply rooted pillars: innovation, people-centric operations and sustainability. Piotr Wnuk reports

Founded in 1884, Grand Rapids Label has navigated the challenges of more than a century by evolving from a small print shop to a cutting-edge leader in the label industry. Initially, the company produced products as varied as Scottish poetry books and Pennsylvania Railroad schedules. Over time, it diversified and specialized in heat-sealed and pressure-sensitive labels.

The company's long-term vision, driven by its family ownership, has allowed it to embrace change while maintaining a focus on quality.

Bill Muir, executive chairman of Grand Rapids Label and a fourth-generation family member, encapsulates this sentiment: 'People often talk about the current technology revolution, but the interesting part is—we survived the first industrial revolution.'

Today, Grand Rapids Label holds steadfast to its simple yet powerful promise: 'Make it right, guaranteed.' But this promise now extends beyond the customer — it encompasses employees, the environment and the broader industry.

The roots of innovation and quality

Grand Rapids Label's commitment to innovation is deeply embedded in its DNA. Over its history, the company has consistently pushed boundaries, adopting new printing techniques, materials and processes that set it apart from competitors.

According to Muir, one of the key advantages of being a family business is the ability to make long-term decisions. With a 10-year planning horizon, the company focuses less on short-term profit and more on building a lasting legacy rooted in innovation and quality.

John Crosby, vice president of operations and another fourth-generation family member, expands on this philosophy: 'We're building a long-lasting business, not through ruthlessness or unbridled competition, but through an underlying value system that makes it endure.'

At the heart of this value system is the belief that quality isn't just a department — it's a mindset that permeates the entire company. Every employee is instilled with the idea that their work is not just about creating a product but about contributing to the family's reputation for excellence.

'Every label we produce carries our family name and reputation,' says Crosby.

The power of people

Grand Rapids Label's second pillar, a people-centric business approach, is as crucial as its focus on innovation. The company views its employees not merely as workers but as family members. This family culture fosters a strong sense of pride, loyalty, and commitment to excellence, both personally and professionally.

'We were focusing on culture before we even knew what we were focusing on,' notes Muir, explaining that the company has long valued creating a positive, supportive environment.

This has translated into high employee retention, with an average tenure of between 10 to 15 years. Some employees have been with the company for more than 40 years, reflecting the strong bonds between the company and its workforce.



Grand Rapids Label's people-centric business approach is as crucial to its talent retention

"We're building a long-lasting business, not through ruthlessness or unbridled competition, but through an underlying value system that makes it endure"

Crosby adds: 'If people don't feel like they're appreciated and part of the family, why would they care? Why would they take care of the customers? Why would they stay?'

This commitment to fostering long-term relationships isn't just about retention, though — it's also about creating an environment where employees feel empowered to contribute to the company's ongoing success.

Part of the reason Grand Rapids Label has been so successful in retaining talent is its investment in people. Employees at all levels have opportunities for growth, continuous learning and access to the tools needed for success.

According to Muir, this is a key differentiator: 'At Grand Rapids Label, employees aren't just a number; they are integral to our success and treated with respect, appreciation and care.'

This long-term focus on people has paid off not only in employee satisfaction but also in the quality of their work. The company believes that when employees feel supported, they are more likely to go the extra mile for customers, ensuring that the labels they create meet the highest standards of quality.

Pioneering sustainability

Grand Rapids Label has always believed in doing the right thing, and in recent decades, this has increasingly meant embracing sustainability. As a longtime member of the Tag and Label Manufacturers Institute (TLMI), the company has played a critical role in driving environmental initiatives across the industry.

In 2020, Grand Rapids Label received TLMI's Journey Award

for its exceptional achievements in sustainability, including maintaining an 80 percent landfill-free operation.

But the company didn't stop there. Crosby, who co-chaired TLMI's environmental committee, proudly reports that by the end of 2022, Grand Rapids Label had achieved its ambitious goal of becoming fully landfill-free.

'The family put a line in the sand in 2012 that we would be landfill-free. Over 10 years, we overcame many roadblocks — from finding recycling outlets to managing waste streams,' explains Crosby.

Achieving landfill-free operation did not cost the company additional cash, demonstrating that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand.

One of the most significant accomplishments on this journey was getting employees on board with the program. Far from being resistant to change, Grand Rapids Label's employees were eager to participate in the company's environmental initiatives.

'This was one of the most successful areas — the employees were anxious to be a part of the program,' says Crosby.

Environmental leadership

The company measures its environmental impact rigorously through ISO 14001 certification, aligning its efforts with TLMI's sustainability goals.

By 2022, the company had reduced its waste to zero by ensuring all byproducts were repurposed or recycled. In doing so, Grand Rapids Label not only eliminated its contribution to landfills but also played a part in reducing methane emissions—one of the most harmful greenhouse gases contributing to climate change.

According to the EPA, landfills account for 16 percent of the



Founded in 1884, Grand Rapids Label evolved from a small print shop to a cutting-edge leader in the label industry

methane emissions in the US.

Crosby notes: 'By being landfill-free, we've eliminated our contribution to methane releases from landfills, which is highly consequential in improving our current climate warming predicament.'

The company's environmental leadership extends beyond its operations. Through its involvement with TLMI, Grand Rapids Label has worked on initiatives to reduce matrix waste across the industry.

Crosby and TLMI's environmental committee have set ambitious goals to reduce matrix waste by 30 percent, further reflecting the company's commitment to sustainability.

For Grand Rapids Label, sustainability isn't just about compliance or profitability — it's about doing what's right.



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"The shortest answer to why we pursue eco-conscious business operations is that it's the right thing to do"

'The shortest answer to why we pursue eco-conscious business operations is because it's the right thing to do,' says Crosby. 'But the deeper answer lies in the company's DNA. The family has always believed in making decisions with future generations in mind, and this ethos has been passed down from one generation to the next.'

'There were two keys to the start of our process that we recommend emulating,' he continues. 'Firstly, make a declaration from the top of the organization what our goal is and explain why to everyone. Secondly, reach out to peers who have been on this journey and ask how they accomplished what they did and what challenges they had. We met with a converter in Rochester, NY, that we met through TLMI. Their advice shortened our journey by years and provided a picture of how our goal could be accomplished. We didn't end up deploying the same solutions that they had, but they gave us great inspiration and wisdom. We're forever grateful.'

Crosby recently spoke at Labelexpo Americas 2024 at TLMI's EcoStage, sharing the company's sustainability journey and offering advice to others in the industry who may be a few steps behind.

His message was simple: 'Make a declaration from the top of the organization about your goal and reach out to peers who have been

on this journey. Their advice can shorten your journey by years.'

Environmental partnerships

As Grand Rapids Label continues to lead the way in sustainability, it is actively seeking partnerships with like-minded companies.

Crosby extends an open invitation to collaborate on environmental initiatives: 'If you want to drive solvents out of your adhesives, use materials with recycled content, or talk waste to energy, we're all in. Let's see how we can merge our efforts and your environmental goals into success.'

Grand Rapids Label is a company that stands out not only for its long and storied history but also for its commitment to innovation, people and sustainability. From surviving the industrial revolution to leading the charge in the current environmental revolution, the company has consistently adapted while staying true to its core values.

By investing in its people, pushing the boundaries of what's possible in label manufacturing, and leading the way in environmental stewardship, Grand Rapids Label has cemented its place in the industry.

And with its sights set on the future, the company shows no signs of slowing down. There is no doubt that the three pillars of innovation, people-centric operations and sustainability will continue to guide its path for the next 140 years and beyond.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Grand Rapids Label Company



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Features

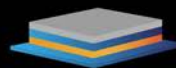
Mono-materialized labelstock (same material) as the polyester container.

Designed for application to polyester surfaces, the material is constructed using the same material for the face film and the ADHESIVE.

Due to the unique surface treatment, the ink layer can be easily removed during the PET container recycling washing phase (warm alkaline water wash).

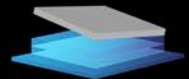
Advantages of mono-material labelstock compared to conventional labelstock

Conventional labelstock



Ink layer is difficult to remove, and different materials are present so recycling efficiency decreases.

Mono-material labelstock



Ink layer can be removed during recycling washing phase and all materials originate from the same chemical components so recycling efficiency increases.

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AGH Labels targets US market

The Mexican converter has opened a site in Texas amid ambitious plans for growth in the US market. James Quirk reports

Label converters in Mexico are increasingly targeting the enormous and lucrative consumer market to the country's north, but few can be doing so with the foresight and ambition of AGH Labels.

The company, which earlier this year received investment from Latin American packaging conglomerate Sigma Q, has opened a sales and distribution facility in Laredo, a suburb of Dallas, Texas, and appointed a team of experienced industry experts – including former TLMi president Dan Muenzer – to spearhead the initiative. Furthermore, it is focusing initially on offset-printed cut and stack labels, a product the company believes is under-represented in the US market.

Headquartered in León, Guanajuato, and with an additional facility in Tlalnepantla, Estado de México, AGH Labels specializes in cut and stack and roll-fed label production, with an emphasis on HD printing, UV graphic enhancements and metalized finishes. With more than 425 employees, it also produces roll-to-roll, shrink sleeves and pressure-sensitive labels, and can call on a printing technology portfolio that includes flexo, offset and gravure.

AGH Labels produces more than 14 billion labels a year, 95 percent of which is for the food and beverage sector, and estimates that it holds two-thirds of the Mexican cut and stack label market. It is the number one label supplier to Nestlé in Mexico.

The project is already bearing dividends, with 15 percent of production now exported to the US and large accounts in place, including beer and soft drink producer Southwest Beverage and bottled water giant Niagara Bottling Group. 'This strategic move will enhance our operational capabilities and allow us to better serve our clients across the region,' says Rogelio Barba, AGH Labels' business development director for North America, a 22-year veteran of the company who has relocated to Dallas to run the operation. 'Our aim is to be the most respected and trusted supplier in the United States.'

Production

In Mexico, AGH Labels' production is split between two plants: the site in Tlalnepantla, Estado de México, is dedicated to flexo and gravure printing. It houses two gravure presses from French manufacturer DCM and one from India-based Kohli, while flexo printing – for applications such as water bottles, soft drinks, home care and personal care labels – is handled by two Nilpeter presses and two from Comexi.

The relationship with Comexi is growing. A third press is already on order and will be installed later this year, while AGH Labels plans to install further machines from the press manufacturer at a new plant next year. 'Gravure is very good for long runs but less suitable for shorter runs, which is why we have been adding more flexo capacity with Comexi,' explains Barba, who has spent time in various leadership roles at AGH Labels, including running its operations, sales and finance departments.

AGH Labels' plant in León, Guanajuato, is dedicated to offset printing, with four Heidelberg presses working alongside one from Mitsubishi. According to Barba, the Heidelberg presses handle most of the value-added work – jobs with different varnishes and finishes.

AGH Labels sources materials from a wide range of international suppliers, including Brigl & Bergmeister, Cosmo Films, Innovia Films, Lecta, Nissha, Pixelle, Sappi and Taghleef.

'We focus on very fast production and turnaround,' says Barba. 'We offer face lifts to labels through embellishment. When printing



L-R: Rogelio Barba, Chad Brewer and Dan Muenzer

"The project is already bearing dividends, with 15 percent of production now exported to the US and large accounts in place"

on metalized paper, a non-absorbent material, most companies do two passes – laying a base color first and then printing again. We can do that in one pass.'

The company has been certified to ISO 9001:20000 and awarded an EcoVadis Silver rating, among other certifications, something which Barba describes as an 'advantage' for prospective clients.

According to Barba, AGH Labels aims to double production capacity and revenue every three to five years and is currently achieving double-digit annual growth. Further expansion is already planned. AGH Labels aims to open a third plant in 2025, dedicated to producing labels for export to the US, and equipped with wide web flexo presses from Comexi.

A partnership agreed earlier this year with Sigma Q is a further boost to the company's growth plans. Sigma Q was founded in El Salvador in 1969, and has since grown into a multinational group of packaging companies covering corrugated, folding carton, flexible packaging, plastic containers, displays, design and pre-press, and a paper mill. Most of its 12 production sites are in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, but there is a flexible packaging plant in Toluca, Mexico, which can provide AGH Labels with additional capacity. It also runs eight sales, sourcing and distribution offices in the Americas and Asia. 'It is a strategic advantage for AGH Labels to have the backing of Sigma Q,' says Barba. 'This collaboration marks a significant milestone for the company. We are at the early stages of our relationship, but this will be ramped up significantly in the near future.'

United States

The new US-based team includes director of client solutions Chad Brewer, who brings more than 25 years of experience in the



A Kohli gravure press at AGH Labels' site in Tlalnepantla, Estado de México

“When printing on metalized paper, most companies do two passes – laying a base color first and then printing again. We can do that in one pass”



AGH Labels' site in León, Mexico

Tuna success

One target market for AGH Labels' cut & stack technology in the US is canned tuna. In Mexico, the company 'has earned the lion's share of the industry's label supply,' according to Rogelio Barba. 'Few applications are as demanding as tuna labels. The industry frequently uses metallic substrates, which present a unique set of printing and label performance challenges. However, the real difficulty lies in cutting precision and high-speed application of labels that are very short in height but extremely long in length.'

'AGH is Mexico's largest supplier of paper metallic labels and has perfected the art of printing these labels in a single pass, regardless of the print process or varnish effects. This capability allows AGH to achieve optimal graphic registration and minimize production handling marks. AGH's industry-leading cutting registration ensures near-perfect label sizing, which enhances the handling and application of these uniquely challenging labels.'

printing equipment industry, having spent a significant portion of his career at Konica Minolta and who most recently worked for a start-up label sales company in Kansas City. Doug Hesche, whose experience includes a variety of roles at Spear, Konica Minolta and Avery Dennison, is providing input into AGH Labels' sales strategy.

Dan Muenzer, who brings more than 25 years of experience in senior leadership roles within the label industry, joined in June as director of market intelligence for the US operation.

'Our US team is growing,' says Barba. 'In a market with such volume, you need to keep expanding. We know that the United States is a different market. We needed someone to help teach us how to deal with customers in the US. We are gaining a lot of knowledge from Dan.'

Previously VP of marketing for Spear and Constantia Flexibles' label division and a former president of the US association TLMI, Muenzer had spent the last three years semi-retired and coaching cross-country and track at St Xavier High School in Cincinnati. He left the sector in 2020 following his stint as TLMI president but stayed engaged and in contact with former colleagues. 'Late last year, I had begun to think it was maybe time to look for a new opportunity,' recalls Muenzer. 'AGH Labels knew it was moving into the US market, and the opportunity arose to help them with strategy and networking and branding. We had an initial talk and I was blown away – I was so impressed with the people; I felt the energy hit and the light bulb go off.'

'What appealed to me most was that they weren't asking me to help move into pressure-sensitive labels, but rather focus on cut and stack. I had never been exposed to that side of the industry, and it was an advantage that I wouldn't be taking business away from my industry friends, who are all involved in pressure-sensitive. We are going after existing cut and stack business, not trying to convince brands using PS labels to move to our technology.'

'AGH has continued to invest in a technology in which the US has stopped investing. They believe in a technology that the US market has set to the side. This excited me. I thought, I love these guys, they are young and enthusiastic, this could be a lot of fun. So it was a match made in heaven. I couldn't pass up the opportunity.'

Muenzer believes there is a trend toward brand owners returning to paper labels from filmic, which gives a strategic advantage to AGH Labels' cut and stack expertise.

'Pressure-sensitive labels used to be growing at 5-6 percent a year, while cut and stack was flatlining,' he says. 'But cut and stack is now growing again and in the last three years PS labels have declined.'

'I understand the US market, so I'm helping to position the company in a way that makes sense in the US, identify what customers make sense, what kinds of systems and organization do we need to have in place to serve them, and how to communicate what we are doing in the market.'

'I am a huge believer in the power of the network – not only do you need to talk to your potential customers, but also material manufacturers, press manufacturers, and your fellow converters.'

With this philosophy in mind, AGH Labels has joined TLMI as a converter member and wants to explore potential partnerships with US converters who don't offer cut and stack technology. 'The concept is there, and we are having discussions,' says Muenzer.

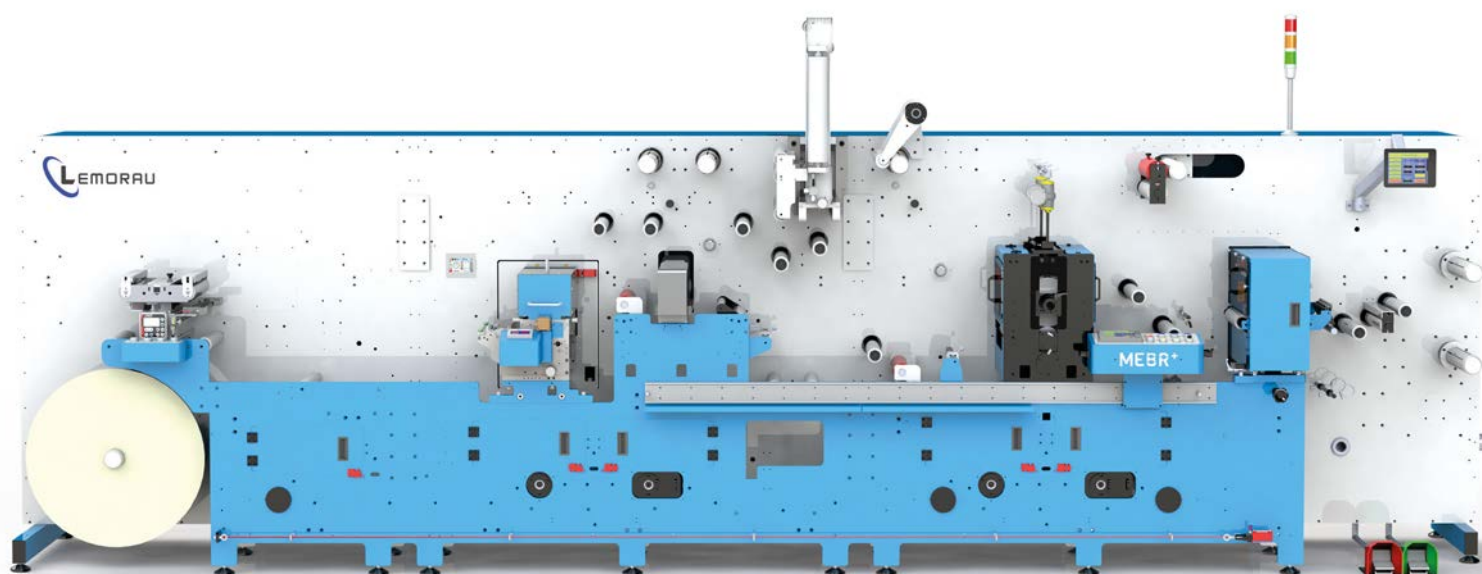
The company recently won a Best in Class prize for its De La Viuda hot sauce label in the Food Industry category at the TLMI Printing Excellence Awards. 'We are very proud of this achievement at our first attempt,' says Muenzer.



Scan the QR code to learn more about AGH Labels



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TPH Orient group establishes itself in labels and packaging

TPH Orient Group has expanded its portfolio to include flexo and digital presses for the growing demands of the labels and packaging industry, Akanksha Meena reports

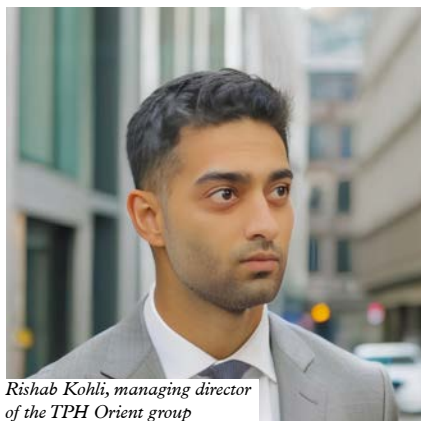
Labels & Labeling sat down with Rishab Kohli, managing director of the TPH Orient group, at the company's 20-acre facility in Faridabad, Delhi NCR. Founded in 1946 as a newspaper printing machine supplier, India-based The Printers House (TPH), better known by its brand name Orient, has evolved significantly over the years.

The company was originally founded by Rishab Kohli's grandfather, KD Kohli, as a newspaper printing press provider, and over time, the elder Kohli began importing the latest printing equipment, providing qualified engineers for installation and training the crew for operations and maintenance. KD Kohli then began manufacturing small offset presses and Rishab Kohli emphasizes that in doing so, his grandfather became the first person in India to produce a letterpresses domestically.

Later, Rishab Kohli's father took over the company and led it into manufacturing web offset printing machines for commercial print applications.

When Rishab Kohli took over the business in 2020 due to the unfortunate illness and subsequent death of his father, it was already thriving. Before stepping into his current role, he had worked as an investment banker in New York.

Today, TPH Orient has become a diversified group of companies, operating in six different industries including printing



Rishab Kohli, managing director of the TPH Orient group

and packaging, defense and aerospace, chemicals, inverters and batteries, with solar energy being its largest vertical.

Rishab Kohli explains that while his father focused solely on web offset printing, Rishab Kohli, along with his board of directors, took the company in a new direction. One of Kohli's key collaborators was a former CEO for a large multinational and an executive for Cargill Foods, who is now a director on the board. Together, they expanded the business tenfold, which gave the company free cashflow to enter new market segments. With this growth, Kohli and his team analyzed new opportunities, leading to a decision to enter the labels and packaging segment.

He highlights that the technology for producing labels and packaging is

“This presented a clear gap in the Indian market in the in-line flexo market, which has very few flexo providers and relies heavily on imports”

familiar territory for the company, thanks to its long-standing expertise in press manufacturing.

Bridging the gap

The company entered the labels and packaging market with two technologies – flexo and digital. Kohli claims that Orient is the only company in India to manufacture in-line flexo technology with sleeves. The X-Press Flex Series flexo press offers web widths ranging from 330mm to 1,500mm. The company's unique selling point is its faster, wider presses and sleeve technology.

“This was significant because, after a certain width, cylinders are no longer viable, and even label printers are transitioning to wider formats such as 650mm and 670mm. This presented a clear



TPH Orient factory in Faridabad, Delhi NCR, India



The Orient Jet L&P Series digital press comes in both UV LED and water-based technologies

“The goal was to provide an Indian solution to the flexo and digital printing market, matching the quality of international competitors while maintaining self-sufficiency in service and production”

gap in the Indian market in the in-line flexo market, which has very few (domestic) flexo providers and relies heavily on imports. We saw the potential in meeting this demand with high-quality service support, as the sector requires significant investment in service engineers and infrastructure,’ he explains.

The second technology Orient developed for the label market was a digital inkjet machine, which took time to perfect. The digital inkjet machine is branded as the Orient Jet L&P Series and comes in both UV LED and water-based technologies.

‘Digital printing requires significant capital investment and expertise, and building this capacity takes time. Fortunately, India’s vast pool of talent, particularly from trading backgrounds, offers access to skilled professionals. We are optimistic about developing a company that can scale this technology effectively in the near future,’ Kohli says.

The digital presses web width ranges from 270mm, 330mm and


can go as wide as 1,000mm and 2,000mm. The presses handle a wide range of substrates, including paper, film and labelstock. With a UV LED press, customers can print on several substrates, while water-based presses limit the substrate options but are becoming increasingly important due to food safety regulations.

‘Many in the industry are shifting from UV LED to water-based printing because UV LED is not food-safe. We are currently investing heavily in developing water-based, high-resolution (1,200 DPI) packaging machines that can print on film and labels, which could be a game-changer in the market,’ Kohli notes.

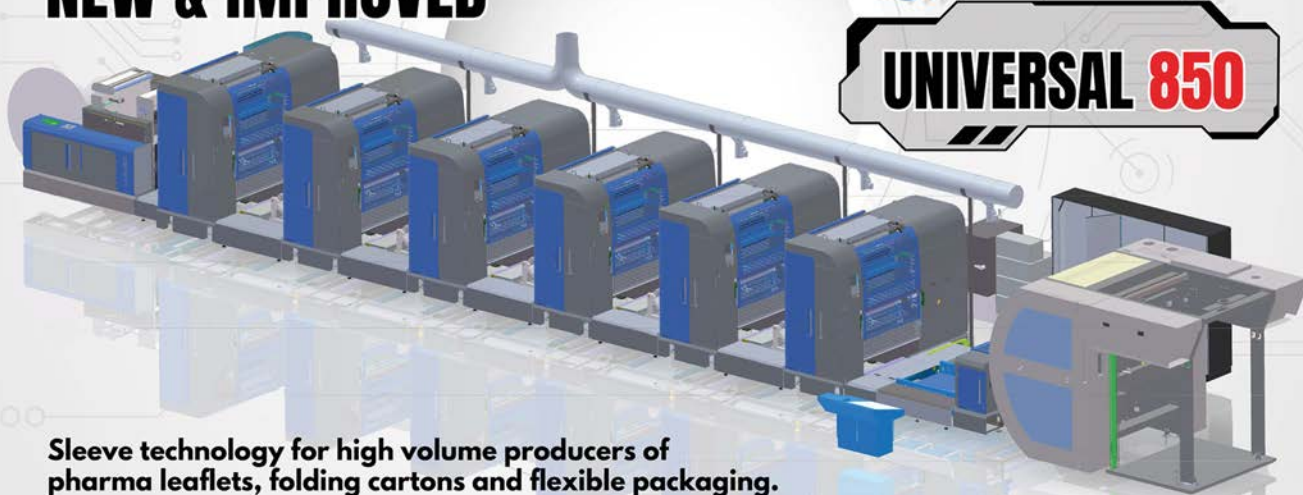
Orient has partnered with two UK-based firms to develop the software and hardware for the ink delivery system. Kohli underlines that the company was able to create India’s first fully homegrown ink delivery system.

The company manages both waveform matching and ink delivery system creation in-house, supported by a dedicated lab






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at its factory. This allows Orient to control both the production and servicing of its presses without relying on external vendors, providing a major advantage.

The company developed a digital press specifically for labels and packaging, aiming to compete with global leaders. Kohli's strategy focuses on import substitution, aiming to offer domestic alternatives to major European and Chinese brands.

'The specifications of our presses are comparable to other brands, with similar speeds and materials. The goal was to provide an Indian solution to the flexo and digital printing market, matching the quality of international competitors while maintaining self-sufficiency in service and production,' he says.

Expanding global footprint

Orient has an extensive global network of 60 agents. This presence gives the company a significant advantage, as many of its agents have longstanding relationships in the printing industry. For example, his agent in Europe has previously represented several American and Chinese brands, giving it a solid foothold in the market. The company has sold machines to over 40 countries worldwide.

Kohli aims to expand India's market share for its presses, as the majority of sales currently come from international markets. He emphasized that his target market is global, with strong representation in Europe, where Orient has an office.

Each technology—flexo and digital—has its own dedicated team. Kohli notes that established agents have shown a keen interest in promoting both of his flexo and digital offerings.

He mentions that by this time next year, Orient also anticipates making significant strides in the US market with a new agent.

Although he already has an agent in the US, this new partnership would further strengthen the company's presence in the region.

Fostering innovation

Kohli explained that his initial passion within the business came from digital printing, which was the first area he delved into.

Growing up, he was surrounded by industry experts owing to his father's extensive network in the industry.

He recalls how these industry connections shaped his understanding, as he often socialized with these professionals, learning firsthand about the nuances of digital printing and the intricacies of the trade. His deep-rooted exposure allowed him to grasp essential concepts in printing early on.

He described his management style as hands-off when it comes to the day-to-day operations of the individual teams. Revenue targets are set by Kohli, but the team is responsible for managing its own sales and marketing strategies. Meanwhile, his focus is on exploring innovative aspects of the business and keeping up with new trends.

At the upcoming Labelexpo India 2024 and Labelexpo Europe 2025, Orient will showcase Orient X-Press flex 450mm 8-10-color dual servo flexo press, which he described as the most advanced machine ever made by an Indian manufacturer. Also running live will be the Orient Jet L&P series 7-color 330mm digital label press.



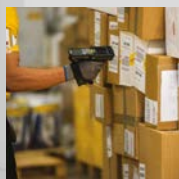
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Avery Dennison drives innovation with AD InsightX

Avery Dennison has launched AD InsightX studio as a co-creation platform and an experience center for the packaging industry in Pune, India, Akanksha Meena reports

AD InsightX was formally launched in May 2024 in Pune. Industry-leading packaging designers, recyclers and label industry stakeholders attended the inauguration.

Avery Dennison embarked on the Make in India journey in 1997. It has operations in Pune, Greater Noida, Kolkata and Bengaluru. The event took place in its Pune facility, which also houses its R&D and Innovation Lab, Converting College and Knowledge Centre, I-Lab, Graphics Lab and now, AD InsightX.

Avery Dennison created this facility as a way to tap into the fast and continuously evolving brand and consumer preferences led by the Millennials and Gen Zs. Now, more than ever, there is a thriving market to introduce new, innovative functional packaging formats.

AD InsightX also aims to address the unmet needs and challenges of the fast-growing premium packaging, security and anti-counterfeit products market. Additionally, through this studio, Avery Dennison wants to enable brands and customers to achieve their sustainability goals.

With the tagline 'Unlock your imagination', AD InsightX has been designed as a facility where customers, brands, ecosystem enablers, industry experts, partners and thought leaders can ideate together and solve some of the biggest challenges in the market.

'This facility embodies our commitment to innovation, leadership and collaboration,' says Saurabh Agarwal, vice president and general manager, Avery Dennison, South Asia. 'AD InsightX is not just Avery Dennison's achievement, but it is a thriving opportunity for the industry and partners involved to meet and co-create. Together, we look forward to setting new benchmarks for the industry and contributing to innovative and sustainable advancements.'

'We were lacking a platform to integrate these efforts of industry partners and create something transformative. Today, we aim to establish an inclusive industry platform accessible to all. It is a secure, collaborative space for ideation, prototyping, continuous learning, mutual challenge and heightened expectations. Why now? Because this space is rapidly evolving,' Agarwal adds.

The facility has been developed with technical and digital capabilities, including neuromarketing, to enable the shift from reactive to proactive strategies. This will facilitate the rapid creation of minimum viable products and enable swift progression from problem identification to solution generation.

Visitors can walk into the 'zen-like' spaces in AD InsightX and see, touch and feel several 'live' and 'ideated' concepts across aesthetically curated zones. Another experience will be the journey of how the physical world connects with the digital world. A team of Avery Dennison experts has been trained to lead curated workshops or collaborative sessions.

Priyanka Singla, director of segment development and head of sustainability, Avery Dennison South Asia, says: 'We are industry forerunners in pressure-sensitive labels (PSL) and our endeavor is to continuously elevate the humble label into a problem solver. The PSL label has been a catalyst in many industry segments such as food, liquor, pharma, personal care, e-commerce, home care, retail and industrial, where we have partnered with brands to solve their business challenges. From enabling reuse of bottles, to making products counterfeit-proof, helping launch premium



Avery Dennison launches AD InsightX studio in Pune, Maharashtra, India

"Open collaboration is essential, especially for sustainability, as it requires collective effort. This initiative is a good start"

products with textured substrates, or co-creating new packaging formats, we have done it all. We remain cognizant of the fast-evolving Indian consumer. Through AD InsightX, we aspire to partner with brands and the packaging ecosystem to offer world-class packaging experiences.'

AD InsightX

Visitors were invited to tour AD InsightX, which is divided into four zones – sustainability, functional labels, premiumization and brand protection.

Avery Dennison's sustainability zones highlight innovative products focusing on sustainable sourcing and practices like reducing, reusing and recycling. Visitors witnessed live demonstrations of the company's new wash-off labels, enabling liquor brands to reuse glass packaging. Linerless labels were also demonstrated as sustainable products.

The functional labels zone highlights products designed to enhance usability and convenience. Attendees viewed examples such as hanging labels, wraparound labels with micro-perforations for multi-unit packs, layered labels for additional information and resealable labels for food applications.

The premiumization zone demonstrates how brands can distinguish themselves by creating labels that enhance the visual and sensory experience of their products. Visitors discovered how textures and special effects on labels can elevate brand impressions.

The zone includes a testing shelf that simulates a supermarket experience, complete with an eyeball tracker. This device monitors the eye movements of 'consumers' standing in front of the shelf, providing valuable data on which designs or packaging styles capture attention.

The data enables brands to analyze consumers' subconscious gaze. By placing various designs on the shelf, valuable insights are



The inauguration event was attended by industry-leading packaging designers, recyclers and label industry stakeholders

"I think this is a great initiative from Avery Dennison. It brings valuable insights and ideas from people with diverse backgrounds"

generated to help brands determine which design attracts the most attention. This product is currently in development and aims to empower brands to make more informed decisions about their packaging.

Brand protection zone features anti-tampering and anti-counterfeiting products. For example, attendees witnessed multiple anti-counterfeiting technologies, including film that shows 'OK' when shone a light on, otherwise invisible to the naked eye.

AD InsightX includes Esko's 3D visualizer, a virtual reality packaging software helping brands assess their design's visual impact in a simulated supermarket environment. The software permits the customization of supermarket layouts and offers multiple lighting options. It also replicates special effects, materials and finishes on labels, including glossy or matte textures.

The setup includes a screen, on which decision-makers can view digital and physical prototypes, along with database analysis to craft distinctive packaging designs.

Attendees also visited I-Lab, an intelligent laboratory, where Avery Dennison showcased multiple applications of RFID inlays, including supply chain, warehouse and retail applications.

Ashwini Deshpande, co-founder Elephant Design, says: 'I believe that when we consider innovation, technology, or substrates in the print and packaging industry, it must ultimately benefit the end consumers. And it must benefit the Earth that we want to last for a long time. I saw a lot of innovations today that are going to do just that. I believe we all come with the small pieces of jigsaw puzzle, and together we can make the big picture. And that's the story of Elephant Design as well. And I think that's what I saw today. And I'm very excited about the future possibilities.'

Rajay Rasaikar, founder of Trash Co, comments: 'It is important for a

company to spearhead collaborative events. Currently, everyone works in isolation within their own facilities. Open collaboration is essential, especially for sustainability, as it requires collective effort. This initiative is a good start. Moving forward, it will encourage more collaboration and serve as a platform for sharing ideas and launching new projects.'

Hardik Walia, co-founder and head of R&D at Lucro Plastecycle, adds: 'I think this is a great initiative from Avery Dennison. It brings valuable insights and ideas from people with diverse backgrounds. For example, we don't always understand designers' perspectives, and designers may not know what recyclers consider important. Bringing everyone together on one platform is a fantastic step. More initiatives like this are needed to create meaningful products.'

Harveer Sahni, chairman Weldon Celloplast, summarizes the event: 'I have visited many global plants, and this one is way ahead. There is a need to bring more stakeholders and educate and inform on what a fantastic facility we have here. A very informative and satisfying visit. Kudos to Avery Dennison team for handling this visit well.'

The day ended with curated sessions on topics such as sustainability, brand protection and premiumization. L&L attended the sustainability session with representatives from the packaging recycling industry.

Participants discussed the current issues the industry is facing, such as difficulty in removing adhesive, multi-layer packaging and matrix recycling.



Avery Dennison
will be exhibiting
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News in Brief

Avery Dennison launches Ingede12-certified paper label materials

The new range of paper label materials uses a newly developed adhesive technology that cleanly screens out from pulp during the recycling screening process, resulting in higher quality output for new cardboard and paper production.

Products within the range include rVellum, coated paper, thermal eco and thermal top facestock combinations for both decorative labeling and variable information/barcode labeling options.

In addition, rVellum facestock is made from 100 percent recycled materials, offering sustainable advantages such as reducing CO₂.

Soy Silvestre chooses compostable flex pack for wheatgrass beverage

Chilean health food producer Soy Silvestre has adopted compostable flexible packaging to protect its wheatgrass beverage product and its nutritional content. Liquid products are notoriously difficult to pack, particularly in compostable packaging.

The packaging structure is provided by Green Heart Solutions, a Chilean packaging converter that offers a range of compostable packaging products. The structure includes a high-barrier cellulose NatureFlex film layer sourced from Futamura, laminated to another biofilm for hermeticity.

UPM Specialty Papers and Unipaco create salad pot wrapper

UPM Specialty Papers partnered with a Polish converter to create a recyclable, heat-sealable salad and herb pot wrapper that guarantees product safety. The structure also meets German 95/5 mono-material requirements, with single-component materials accounting for 95 percent of the packaging mass.

The first is based on barrier base paper UPM Solide Lucent 78 g/m² with a 4 g/m² PE coating. This barrier base paper offers a natural look and feel. UPM SolideLucent provides a surface for further converting and printing, including rotogravure. The thin 4 g/m² PE layer delivers the required moisture resistance and heat-sealable properties.

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Swizett Packaging embarks on digital journey

The Indian converter meets the ever-increasing need for shorter-run jobs with its new Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230.
Adyasha Sinha reports

Established in 2021, Swizett Packaging is one of the leading Ahmedabad-based packaging companies with deep roots dating back to 1990. Founded by Jiteen Vadgama, the company initially started as a graphic design venture.

Over the years, Vadgama's vision evolved into a thriving packaging enterprise, employing approximately 50 individuals and operating from a modern 10,000sqft facility divided into a carton manufacturing and digital label units.

“We keep adapting to the changing needs of our clients, which is key to maintaining strong relationships”

Reflecting on the company's growth, Vadgama, director at Swizett Packaging, explains: 'Our commitment to quality and precision has been instrumental in carving out a niche in the competitive packaging industry.'

With a long-standing history in pharmaceutical packaging Swizett has a unique understanding of its unique requirements which has paved the way for expansion into other sectors, including nutraceuticals, cosmetics, pesticides and perfumes.

Investment for greater efficiency and precision

A significant milestone for Swizett Packaging was the acquisition of the Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230. In response to the growing demand for smaller, more personalized orders, especially in the pharmaceutical, nutraceutical and cosmetic sectors, Swizett chose this machines for high-quality print and efficient operation.

Vijay Kamat, national product manager for industrial print at Konica Minolta, shares: 'Designed to meet the growing demand for smaller, medium-sized print jobs with rapid turnaround times, the AccurioLabel 230 offers on-demand full-color printing, sampling capabilities, variable data and graphics customization, fixed-price printing and compatibility with a wide range of substrates. Additionally, it comes equipped with software packages for color management and job composition.'

The label line, installed at Swizett, is a 4-color narrow web digital press with 330mm maximum width printing. With a speed of 23.4m/min, it accommodates most coated and uncoated papers as well as PP and PET media. It also features text thinning for small fonts, especially useful in pharma labels. Additionally, the machine is capable of printing pre-printed media, including overprinting flexo white pre-printed on clear PP labels.

Changing market dynamics

Swizett Packaging can now offer its customers greater flexibility in order volumes, allowing brands to experiment with seasonal promotions, limited editions and product variations.

'With the rise in small and medium businesses, boost in the start-up ecosystem and the popularity of "Make in India" initiative, smaller runs are increasing,' explains Vadgama, adding that larger SKUs are also on the rise, driven by brand owners expanding their presence in rural India and boosting exports.



Jiteen Vadgama with a new Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230 digital press

'When quality customization is the only challenge left, the AccurioLabel 230 is the perfect answer,' says Vadgama.

Kamat agrees: 'Digital printing's flexibility and efficiency make it a natural fit for start-ups and smaller businesses, enabling them to quickly produce a variety of SKUs in smaller quantities. In the world of luxury packaging, start-ups are increasingly embracing Konica Minolta's products, driven by the need for digital features like variable data printing, security elements, track-and-trace capabilities and augmented reality.'

Expanding product portfolio

Vadgama explains that the AccurioLabel 230 has enabled Swizett to expand its product offering and has allowed it to serve a wider range of clients.

'We're now equipped to handle orders of all sizes, offering unmatched flexibility,' he shares. 'One notable area of growth has been the roll label segment, which has flourished thanks to this technological investment. To complement our expanding product line, we have also invested in finishing equipment from India-based RK Label Printing Machinery. Its RK-IFP 350 model features an intermittent rotary flexo coater with die-cutter, a flatbed hot foil stamper and a slitter rewinder with visual inspection.'

These additions have boosted Swizett's production capacity and further reaffirmed its commitment to quality and precision.

Keeping an eye on the future

Looking to the future, Vadgama reveals that the company is actively exploring new technologies that would further reduce the carbon footprint of its operations.

'Sustainability is the new mantra at Swizett. We believe that it's our responsibility to minimize our environmental impact while providing exceptional products and services. And we believe we will be able to deliver on both the parameters with our investment in our new AccurioLabel 230,' concludes Vadgama.



Scan the QR code to read more about the Indian market





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Ramco Industries ramps up production with Webtech

With over two decades of experience, India-based converter Ramco Industries chooses Webtech's full servo flexo machine to keep pace with the market demands. Adyasha Sinha reports

Ramco Industries, one of the leading manufacturers and suppliers of high-quality packaging, has taken a significant leap forward in its production capabilities by installing Webtech International Machineries' full servo flexo ELS machine. This move is set to enhance Ramco's operational efficiency and market competitiveness in the ever-demanding packaging industry.

Addressing challenges

Founded in 1993 and based in Nagpur, Maharashtra, Ramco Industries has built a strong reputation in the packaging sector. Its product portfolio includes laminated pouches, packaging pouches and promotional labels, catering to clients from a variety of sectors, especially the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) and pharmaceutical industries. Despite its established presence and wide client base, Ramco faced challenges in keeping up with the market's increasing demand.

As orders grew in complexity and volume, Ramco's existing equipment began to fall short, particularly in handling intricate packaging designs. Narendra Mishra, managing director Ramco Industries, says: 'Maintaining high-quality print standards while speeding up production proved difficult, resulting in the need for a more advanced option to ensure consistent output and faster turnaround times.'

Ramco turned to Webtech International Machineries after receiving positive industry feedback on its machines.

Initially, Ramco opted for a semi-servo press, but after further evaluation, the decision was made to upgrade to a full servo ELS flexo press—a decision that has since proven highly beneficial for the company. 'We were confident that Webtech's full servo flexo ELS machine would be the right fit for our operational needs,' comments Mishra.

'The flexo ELS machine was installed at Ramco's facility in September 2024,' adds Shiv Nandan Singh, director Webtech. 'We customized it specifically to meet the client's requirements. With its 450mm width and 8-color printing capability, the machine is designed to handle a broad range of substrates, offering the flexibility and precision that Ramco needed to diversify its product offerings. The machine's advanced features, including single servo technology on each printing station, ensure precise color registration, minimize waste and streamline production processes.'

Webtech at Labelexpo India 2024

Webtech International Machineries will launch two innovations at Labelexpo India 2024. The company will reveal its latest developments: a full servo 10-color flexo label press with a 340mm working width, tailored specifically for the lamitube substrate and another full servo flexo label press featuring a 450mm working width.

The machines are equipped with dual servo motors on each printing station and boast auto registration technology, offering unmatched precision and performance.

Visitors to Labelexpo India in November 2024 will get the opportunity to experience the machines firsthand.



Webtech team with Narendra Mishra, managing director at Ramco Industries

“With the demand for high-quality, sustainable packaging on the rise, the ability to scale operations efficiently without compromising on quality has become crucial for packaging companies”

Webtech also enhanced the tension control system to manage even wider range of materials and made sure the machine was up and running within the expected time frame.

'We are proud to partner with Ramco Industries. We're pleased to see how it has helped the company to meet its production challenges head-on with our full servo flexo ELS machine,' adds Singh.

Immediate impact

Since the installation of the machine, Ramco Industries has witnessed an increase in its production capacity by over 40 percent. The enhanced automation and precision delivered by the machine have significantly reduced waste and operational downtime, leading to higher profitability. Ramco is now able to fulfill larger orders with shorter lead times and expand its offering to cater to an even broader range of packaging options.

By choosing an advanced flexographic press, Ramco is better equipped to handle the increasing complexity of customer demands while remaining competitive.

'We are thrilled with the performance of the ELS flexo press. The machine's advanced features have significantly boosted our production efficiency, allowing us to offer our clients superior quality packaging with faster turnaround times. It has been a game-changer for us in the highly competitive packaging industry,' concludes Mishra.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Ramco Industries



GREEN NEW WORLD

In the growing cannabis label and packaging market, label converters must balance design, regulatory compliance and pricing pressure. In this article, Labels & Labeling dives into the latest trends, challenges and innovations shaping the future of cannabis packaging.
Selah Zighelboim and Chelsea McDougall report

As the cannabis industry continues its rapid expansion in the US, the importance of labels and packaging for this growing market is also in the spotlight.

According to Grand View Research, the US cannabis packaging market was valued at 1.4 billion USD in 2023 and is expected to grow at a staggering 28.9 percent CAGR through 2030 as more US states legalize cannabis for recreation and medical uses. The rising demand for cannabis in the US has been a boon for converters who see opportunities and new products emerge overnight.

But this so-called 'green rush' comes with its own set of unique challenges.

For converters and brand owners, navigating the complexities of this sector requires an understanding of the regulatory environment and balancing that with an eye for design and shelf appeal.

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

In the US, federal law prohibits cannabis use and sale, which means that the states with legal cannabis laws on the books are largely left to take the lead in crafting their own set of rules. Currently, recreational cannabis is legal in 24 states, plus Washington, DC, with medical cannabis, including low THC products, legal in an additional 23 states. This, in turn, creates a patchwork of regulations that can be dramatically different between neighboring states.

When it comes to cannabis packaging, state lawmakers have limits on a range of factors, such as a package's opacity and thickness, the color and images, as well as rules designed to keep children from ingesting the product.

**"THE SAME
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SO CLOSE TO
EACH OTHER"**

Because the regulations can vary from state to state, cannabis market experts have likened selling products in different states to going into business in 47 different countries.

Take Alaska, for example. There, cannabis packaging must be resealable. In California, the labeling must not include any likeness to candy. In Colorado, the required labeling text must be at least 1/16in in size. Some states, like New Mexico and Nevada, have requirements for using post-consumer recycled content in their packaging. Many states share certain requirements; many don't.

Regulations can also change rapidly, meaning cannabis brands often need small quantities of 'just in time' labels and packaging, or they risk the laws changing, and their packaging becoming outdated and non-compliant.

Many US cannabis brands start by ordering their packaging from China, mostly for a perceived savings on cost. However, they may quickly realize the benefits of working with a domestic packaging supplier.

'Being nimble is really important,' says Willy Vlasic, CEO and co-founder of Vlasic Bioscience, a cannabis company in Michigan. 'While you may be able to get packaging cheaper from China, you have to buy packaging in much larger quantities. It can be risky to get them in massive quantities depending on the state you're working in because you don't want to be stuck with packaging that becomes non-compliant.'

That nimbleness is one of the benefits Vlasic gets from working with Barbara Fox, founder and owner of Cannabiz Supply. Because Cannabiz Supply is a US company, Vlasic Bioscience can pivot quickly if and when the laws change.

Ultimately, packaging compliance is the responsibility of brands, says Fox. But by specializing in labeling for cannabis products, she can provide a level of expertise that's helpful to brands, especially in such a young and dynamic industry.

Fox has an interesting foray into the cannabis space. She was a medical student in Nevada when her father called her with an interesting proposition. He was working with a cannabis cultivator and said, 'You're creative, can you help us with the packaging?'

From there, Fox eyed the opportunity in this new frontier. She soon moved from helping with packaging designs to helming Cannabiz Supply, today a 6M USD business in Las Vegas, Nevada. All this before Fox turns 30.

Fox offered advice to those entering the cannabis market during a conference

Differences across North America

As one of only two countries in the world where recreational cannabis can legally be sold, Canada has some of the clearest — and strictest — regulations when it comes to labeling and packaging.

Compared to many states in the US, Canada has 'similar requirements like how much THC there is, how much CBD there is, health warnings,' says Daniel Kruger, an associate professor at the University at Buffalo, in New York state, who researches cannabis. 'But they also have more restrictive packaging requirements, so for example, plain packaging, restrictions on logos, colors and branding. So, it kind of looks like a generic bag. It's not supposed to be visually appealing.'

In Canada, cannabis packaging looks more like what you'd get at a pharmacy versus the colorful packaging of its southern neighbor. Cannabis packaging in Canada cannot include metallic or fluorescent colors; it must be a single, uniform color that contrasts with the yellow health warning message and the red standardized cannabis symbol; it can have no embossing, engravings or other raised features; no brand elements; and no images other than the required cannabis symbol and single barcode. It must be child-resistant and not appealing to young people. It must have a security feature such as a security seal.

'In the US, there's lots of different brands, and they all want your business, so they might try to use packaging that's really catchy,' Kruger says.

session at Labelexpo Americas 2024, where she discussed the challenges of understanding the ever-changing regulations.

'The same product that a cannabis brand brings to market in Ohio is treated differently in Illinois, even though these states are so close to each other,' she explains. 'This is where

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Labeling and packaging possibilities

Cannabis comes in many forms that go beyond the 'flower,' or the actual plant itself, which is most often smoked.

Consumers and brands create demand for a great diversity of cannabis products, and these different forms offer a range of possibilities for packaging and labeling.

Cannabis products can come as edibles, such as gummies or baked goods that are eaten; tinctures that can be used topically or swallowed directly; and extracts, which can be used in a variety of ways.

According to Massachusetts-based Flexible Pack, flexible packaging works well for flowers, tablets, seeds, edibles and gummies. This option keeps products fresh, and its light weight helps with shipping costs. Hard plastic or glass packaging, with either roll-fed or shrink sleeve labels, is a good option for extracts, oils, tinctures and pre-rolled cones.

There are also cannabis drinks, which are sold in cans or bottles.

In the US, these different options for labeling and packaging provide opportunities for creativity and eye-catching designs. But brand owners must also comply with stringent regulations, including requirements for child resistance, that vary across the country, creating a complicated and often confusing maze of laws.

having to be an expert in compliance, in packaging, in materials is extremely important.

We often need to educate cannabis cultivators and processors on the latest packaging regulations.'

While the rules vary from state to state, there's one nearly universal packaging regulation: child safety.

Child safety regulations are designed to help protect children from accidentally ingesting cannabis products, which means brands are required to make sure children are unable to get into the product. On flexible packaging, this can be done with specialty zippers or thick 4mil films. The idea is to keep children out while still being accessible to adult consumers.

Child-resistant packaging is increasingly important as the products expand beyond the flower, or cannabis plant, to include topicals, concentrates, edibles and more. Lawmakers tend to focus child safety legislation on edibles since children may confuse them for candy.

SHELF APPEAL

Much like wine and spirits verticals, research shows that over one-third of consumer purchase choices are based on packaging alone. Cannabis packaging is no stranger to this. However, there are rules to the images printed on the packaging (see boxout on page 61).

Customers in cannabis dispensaries looking to purchase products can't touch the packaging until they leave the store and are often required to have the products in a separate sealed bag when they exit the store. That means that tactile effects, like

embellishments, may not be as impactful, but visually

appealing features, such as metallics and holographics, can help a product stand out.

'The only way for these brands to be able to shine is to see how pretty it is,' Fox says. 'And that's why you'll see quite a bit of labels and packaging with holographic and metallics. It's because it needs to shine.'

Ed Wiegand is CEO of JetFX, a digital embellishment print bar that's the choice of some cannabis label packaging manufacturers for its ability to achieve digital spot coating, screen, foils, cast and cure, holograms and more.

Wiegand says: 'The beauty of the JetFX digital embellishment system is that printers or brands can innovate their graphic designs with almost endless combinations of the embellishments to achieve special packaging not easily accomplished with analog embellishments.'

'I believe the opportunity for US printers in the cannabis space is in unique capability printing. Digital embellishments can differentiate the packaging for brands. China will have difficulty meeting these aesthetics,' he says.

A DIFFERENT FUTURE?

For now, the legal landscape in the US is challenging to navigate. But that could change in the future.

Currently, cannabis on the federal level in the US is classified as a Schedule I drug, defined as having no known potential

"WE HAVE TO EDUCATE THEM ON WHAT EMBOSSING IS, WHAT UV PRINTING IS, WHAT'S POSSIBLE WITH THEIR PACKAGING. THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW"



Photos courtesy of Vlasic Bioscience

"IN THE US, THERE'S LOTS OF DIFFERENT BRANDS, AND THEY ALL WANT YOUR BUSINESS, SO THEY MIGHT TRY TO USE PACKAGING THAT'S REALLY CATCHY"

A global perspective

Recreational cannabis remains illegal in most of the world.

It can only be legally sold in two countries at the federal level: Uruguay and Canada. In 2013, Uruguay became the first country to legalize recreational cannabis, and in general, has lax laws on personal drug use. Canada legalized recreational cannabis in 2018.

Beyond those two countries, the law is far from straightforward.

There are countries where recreational cannabis is illegal but decriminalized, such as Austria and Brazil, or where the law is not enforced. Thailand, for example, decriminalized recreational cannabis in 2022, and there are thousands of stores selling cannabis across the country — though that could be changing as the government looks at reversing its decriminalization law.

There are also countries where personal possession of cannabis is legal, but selling it is not. In Germany, for example, possession of cannabis is legal, though buying it is difficult. The law allows individuals to cultivate their own cannabis, as well as for non-commercial cannabis social clubs, where a group of people cultivate cannabis for the use of club members.

Contrary to popular belief, recreational cannabis is not legal in the Netherlands. That might be surprising to hear. But while the country, particularly the capital city of Amsterdam, has no shortage of licensed 'coffee shops' and other places where cannabis and cannabis-infused goods are sold, the drug is not actually legal. Rather, these coffee shops are actually just tolerated so long as they follow strict criteria.

There are additional countries all over the world that have legalized some amount of medical cannabis.

The story behind a brand

For some cannabis brands, success comes from pushing the limits on packaging and finding creative ways to stay compliant with regulations.

When cannabis products with some unique images on the labels — like a man with a muffin for a head standing over a pile of poker chips or an orange driving an orange-colored convertible — started getting sold in Nevada, Vlasic Bioscience CEO Willy Vlasic said people asked how he had managed to get them approved.

Cartoons are prohibited on cannabis packaging in Nevada — it's one of the many laws that regulate cannabis packaging and labeling throughout the US. But by using AI to create photorealistic images that resembled cartoon-like animations, Vlasic succeeded in getting the branding he wanted while being compliant.

'They're technically photorealistic AI,' Vlasic says. 'They're not animations, and I ended up submitting everything exactly as I wanted it, and it all got approved immediately.'

'Part of it is shooting for the moon, but then knowing that you might have to add some things, and your exact dream for your package might not be what it ends up at,' he adds. 'But if you don't try, you'll never know.'

medical use and a high risk of abuse, putting it in the same class as heroin and LSD.

However, cannabis market watchdogs in the US are waiting until after the 2024 presidential election to see whether the Drug Enforcement Administration, under either a Harris or Trump administration, will reclassify cannabis from Schedule I to a lesser Schedule III drug. A Schedule III designation would put cannabis into the same category as drugs such as acetaminophen with codeine and anabolic steroids, enabling more universal standards for the cannabis market — including its packaging. This change could bring a flood of businesses and opportunities into the market.

The DEA will hold a hearing before an administrative law judge by the end of 2024, but a final decision to reclassify cannabis could take years.

'If the DEA (changes the cannabis designation), then we're going to see a lot of universal standards and packaging compliance being implemented,' says label converter Fox. 'That's what I hope. It will allow for a lot of big businesses and more private equity investors to enter the market. They've traditionally been afraid to touch cannabis.'

A GREEN RUSH?

Because cannabis is a federally prohibited drug, banking in the cannabis industry is one of the more complex challenges, as these brands don't have access to traditional banking services, like checking accounts, credit cards or business loans. Many US brands are hesitant to work with cannabis businesses until cannabis reforms are passed at the federal level.

The result is a cannabis market that's largely a cash-based business, a challenge that stifles the wider market growth.

'The way the cannabis industry is right now, it's not a gold rush of money. These brands have extremely strict budgets,' Fox says. 'When you have a very strict budget like the cannabis industry does, the packaging needs to be low-cost. We need to balance that value with top-shelf appeal.'

Further, Fox adds cannabis brands are seen as professional, legitimate businesses.

'They have very professional artwork, established corporate marketing teams behind them,' she says. 'But there are still some mom-and-pop brands where they really expect us as converters and operators to guide them in decision-making of what their packaging ends up looking like.'

'They're not experts with print backgrounds. We have to educate them on what embossing is, what UV printing is, and what's possible with their packaging. They don't know what they don't know.'



Scan the QR code to learn more about cannabis laws across the US



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Skanem Interlabels Nairobi enhances quality, sustainability

The Bobst Master M5 press is the machine of choice for the leading multinational label provider, when it comes to sustainable flexo printing. Adyasha Sinha reports

Skanem Interlabels Nairobi, one of the leading multinational label converters, has taken a significant step forward in enhancing its production capabilities in Nairobi, Kenya, with the installation of a new Bobst Master M5 machine. The decision to install the Bobst Master M5 is part of Skanem's broader vision to be a leader in label manufacturing by investing in technologies that deliver superior products and meet the evolving needs of its clients.

'Today, Skanem labels are seen on millions of products every day and pretty much everywhere whether you are at home, office or at a grocery store. We create labels to help brands make their products look beautiful, stay secure, share information with end users and at the same time be kind to the environment,' says Sachen Gudka, managing director of Skanem Interlabels Nairobi. 'But it wasn't always the same.'

History

It was 1905 in Norway. The thriving canned fish industry in the Stavanger region, with over 60 canning factories, presented a lucrative opportunity for three enterprising individuals: Albert L Barstad, Halfdan Abel Lunde and Robert Paul Richard Scholz. They seized this chance and established a tin can manufacturing company, Stavanger Bliktrykkeri og Maskinverksted.

The company's journey was marked by both triumphs and challenges, culminating in its rebranding as Skanem in 1973 under the ownership of the French packaging conglomerate, Cebal. A subsequent acquisition by an Oslo-based investor group led to the appointment of Ole Rugland as the new managing director.

In 2003, Rugland astutely observed that the market for metal packaging was nearing saturation. He made the strategic decision to invest in the burgeoning segment of the packaging industry: self-adhesive labels. This marked the beginning of Skanem's ascent as one of the leading multinational label providers.

The company's expansion continued in 2012 with the acquisition of Interlabels in India and Africa. This strategic move granted Skanem entry into the African market and solidified its presence in the region. The synergy between Skanem's global expertise and Interlabels' local knowledge and experience positioned the company as a formidable force in the African label industry.

'At Skanem Interlabels Nairobi, our people are our most important asset. Today, we have over 400 employees, serving a diverse clientele in the beverage, food, personal care, household maintenance, pharmaceutical, automotive and industrial packaging sectors, across 13 countries in Africa,' says Gudka. 'This is a testament to our belief that when people thrive, the business flourishes.'

However, the company recognizes that a trusted technology partner is essential to accelerate its growth journey, which is firmly rooted in three pillars—quality, sustainability and efficiency.

Love thy quality

'For us, everything revolves around quality,' emphasizes Gudka. 'Our customers rightly demand excellence, and we strive to provide them with the finest labels available on the market. And, Bobst is the only name that comes to mind when we talk about quality.'



Fully operational Bobst Master M5 at Skanem Nairobi

"We create labels to help brands make their products look beautiful, stay secure, share information with end users and at the same time be kind to the environment"

The proof?

Skanem Interlabels' journey with Bobst (Gidue at the time) began in 2011-12 when it installed an M1 10-color press with a 370mm web width. Since then, Bobst has been the company's technology partner. Twelve years and three Bobst machines later, when the time came for further expansion, Skanem again chose Bobst. This time, the company invested in the Bobst Master M5 in-line UV flexo press, which was installed at its Nairobi facility in December 2023.

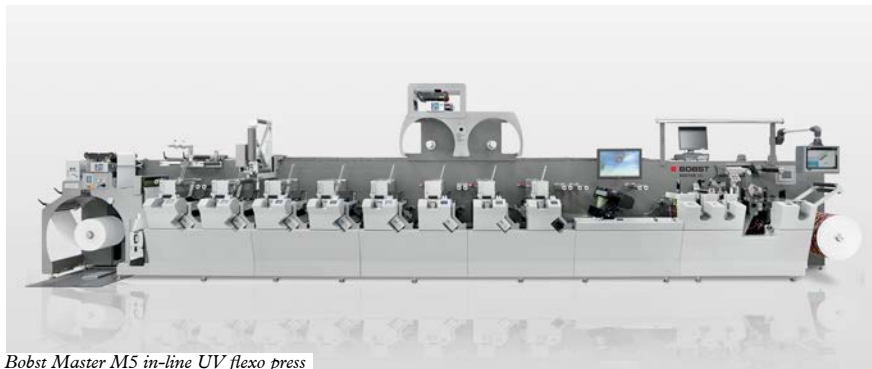
'With the Master M5, we can confidently deliver exactly what our customers want: quality,' shares Gudka.

This advanced press is designed for rapid job changeovers, minimal waste and reduced downtime, which are crucial factors for a busy label converter like Skanem. Its integration of digital control and flexo technology ensures that every print run, regardless of size, meets the highest quality standards while maintaining cost efficiency.

Eric Pavone, business director of the web-fed business unit at Bobst in Africa, Middle East and Turkey, emphasizes: 'Skanem's top priority is ensuring the highest quality labels. The Master M5 shines on this front, delivering exceptional consistency at remarkably low operating costs while catering to a diverse range of substrates, including adhesive labels, pressure-sensitive labels, BOPP wraparound labels, shrink sleeves and in-mold labels.'

Championing sustainability

Sustainability is another cornerstone of Skanem's strategy. The company is committed to fostering growth for its customers by providing sustainable labels and packaging options. The decision to install the Bobst Master M5 was driven by its ability to enhance efficiency while promoting sustainability.



Bobst Master M5 in-line UV flexo press

“The Master M5 is ideal for converters seeking to automate their production lines”

As businesses worldwide seek to reduce their environmental footprint, the Master M5's low-waste production and energy-efficient operations align with Skanem's green initiatives.

Gudka comments: 'Our aim is to create sustainable growth for our customers. The Master M5 aligns perfectly with this goal by minimizing downtime and waste, which are crucial factors in today's evolving markets. This press empowers us to reduce waste while maintaining top-notch quality, making it a win-win for both our customers and the environment.'

With the Master M5, Skanem can achieve faster production times while significantly reducing material waste, ink usage and energy consumption. This focus on sustainability not only meets the growing demand for eco-friendly products and technologies but also supports Kenya's national goals of promoting green industrialization.

The key features of the machine that skewed Skanem's decision toward it include high-speed printing (up to 200m/min) and rapid setup times, allowing multiple print jobs to be completed within a single shift.

Also, the machine can produce labels for a variety of applications, from self-adhesive to shrink-sleeve and in-mold labels as well as flexible packaging.

There's also an option to equip the machine with oneECG technology, which digitalizes color matching with an extended 7-color gamut.

Digital workflows with integrated printing and converting technologies, such as DigiFlexo auto-registration with the PrintTutor intelligent camera system, help reduce operating costs and maximize machine uptime.

These capabilities have enabled Skanem Interlabels Nairobi to significantly increase its output, effectively meeting the growing demand for labels in the Kenyan market.

In this context, Gudka emphasizes: 'Since installing the Master M5, we've

witnessed substantial improvements in our production workflow.

'With the current trends in packaging, shorter runs and a proliferation of SKUs are becoming commonplace. This is where the Master M5's ease of use, reliability, and speed are crucial factors that enable us to meet tight deadlines and exceed customer expectations.'

Future outlook

The installation of the Bobst Master M5 at Skanem Interlabels Nairobi marks a significant milestone not only for the company, but also for the broader African label printing industry. As the continent continues its industrialization and modernization, investments in advanced machinery and technology are crucial for fostering economic growth and global competitiveness.

Skanem's strategic decision to upgrade its capabilities reflects a growing trend in the African manufacturing sector, where businesses are increasingly prioritizing efficiency, quality and sustainability. By staying at the forefront of technological innovation, companies like Skanem are instrumental in elevating Africa's position as one of the key players in the global supply chain for high-quality label production.

Moreover, with more international companies seeking to source their labeling and packaging needs from African manufacturers, Skanem is ideally positioned to capitalize on this growing demand.

With the installation of the Bobst Master M5, the company is looking to increase its market share in Kenya and neighboring countries, while developing strategic partnerships with regional businesses. It also aims to expand its customer base across various industries.

Gudka adds: 'This investment underscores our unwavering commitment to delivering top-notch labels, meeting the

Skanem's expansion continues in Africa

Skanem Africa has launched a new labeling factory in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, aiming to enhance service delivery and expand market reach within the East African region. Officially operational since late July 2024, this new plant brings Skanem closer to its existing customers and opens the door to fresh market opportunities.

The Tanzanian facility complements Skanem's existing operations in Kenya, focusing on increasing production capacity, boosting output and significantly reducing lead times. By establishing a local manufacturing base, Skanem aims to provide more efficient service to its clients while attracting new business in the region.

Located in the commercial hub of Dar es Salaam, the factory is strategically positioned to serve markets in seven East African countries: Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This expansion marks a significant milestone in Skanem Africa's regional growth.

The facility is equipped to produce self-adhesive labels, BOPP wrap-around labels and shrink sleeves, ensuring high-quality labeling options for businesses in Tanzania and beyond.

evolving demands of our customers and expanding our presence in the East African market.'

The installation of the Bobst Master M5 at Skanem Interlabels Nairobi is more than just a machinery upgrade; it's a strategic move toward Industry 4.0, where automation, data exchange and smart manufacturing systems define the future of production. This investment positions Skanem at the cutting edge of the label printing industry, empowering the company to confidently and innovatively navigate the challenges of the future.

By incorporating this technology into its operations, Skanem Interlabels Nairobi is not only strengthening its position as a market leader but also contributing to a more sustainable and prosperous future for the African label industry.



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Hexie embraces end-to-end digital for wine industry

Wine label specialist Hexie has invested in an HP Indigo press as part of a fully digital production line. Yolanda Wang reports

Chinese converter Hexie has established an end-to-end digital production line, investing in digital printing, digital finishing and digital die-cutting equipment - and now discovering how to use this equipment to develop new value-added label products for the local red wine industry.

Founded in 2007, Hexie is located in Changli County, Qinhuangdao City, one of the birthplaces of China's red wine industry. The company focuses on producing labels, folding cartons and promotional paper bags for wine producers.

Hexie founder Sun Wanjiang started his career in a local wine producer, specifying and ordering labels and packaging.

At that time in Qinghuangdao, these products were provided by outside suppliers. Wanjiang saw a great opportunity to fill that gap.

He founded Hexie in 2001. 'At that time, wine labels were mainly wet glue, printed on sheet offset presses,' Wanjiang says.

The company's first investment, therefore, was in sheet offset printing equipment used to produce folding cartons, promotional paper bags and wet glue labels for wine brands.

But as self-adhesive label technology progressed, an increasing number of wine brands began to replace wet glue with PS labels. At the same time, the higher efficiency of inline printing equipment attracted Wanjiang's attention, so the company invested in a Weigang intermittent offset press in 2014.

Starting from a small workshop with one small press and a few workers, Hexie has undergone a rapid expansion driven by the demand for labels and packaging in the region. 'Our main customers are local red wine brand enterprises, and our turnover and revenue are both very good,' Wanjiang says.

However, at some point the rapid development of the red wine industry began to slow down as consumer habits changed. This was felt by Hexie as the company reached its 10th anniversary.

'As Chinese consumers changed their wine drinking habits, wine brand owners used labels and packaging as a way of promoting their products, enhancing brand image and optimizing inventory management, all of which placed more



Hexie finds variable print capabilities meet wine industry needs

“As Chinese consumers changed their wine drinking habits, wine brand owners used labels and packaging as a way of promoting their products, enhancing brand image and optimizing inventory management”

demands on label and package printing enterprises,' Wanjiang shares. 'Especially for label products, which account for a quarter of our business, there is an increasing demand for personalized, small batch, interaction with end-users, anti-counterfeiting traceability, etc. from our customers. If we use our existing conventional printing equipment, the production of such labels will be time- and material- intensive, also reducing the efficiency of our service to customers.'

These considerations led Wanjiang to make his first move into digital printing.

'With no plates and no minimum run length, digital technology saved on setup time, workload and material costs. The production cost of digital printing is superior to traditional printing for short-run orders,' adds Wanjiang.

The first step in Hexie's digital transformation was investing in DMS

330W digital embellishment equipment at the end of 2023. In April 2024, they installed an HP Indigo 6K and Vorey digital die-cutting equipment.

Says Wanjiang, 'Before formally investing in digital printing equipment, we examined a lot of suppliers, and finally chose the HP Indigo 6K. The thing that struck me the most is its printing performance. HP Indigo electronic ink technology is the closest one to match the quality of offset printing which we use mostly now.'

'After detailed analysis, we find that in addition to solving our current small-run and medium-run orders, multi-SKUs and personalized label orders, this device can also handle anti-counterfeiting printing and variable data printing, helping improve the added value of label products.'

Now, Hexie has set up a complete digital printing and finishing line covering the whole process of label production, including automatic inspection equipment from Luster.

Open house

Following the completion of this investment program, Hexie held an Open Day at the Huaxia Winery in Qinhuangdao to showcase its digital solutions to wine brand customers.

Wang Tangyan, industrial sales manager at HP Indigo China, comments, 'We not only supply the digital press for converters, but also special applications such as fluorescent inks and variable data printing.'

Wanjiang adds, 'We do notice that there are differences between conventional printing and digital printing in design and performance. We suggest brand owners should accept such differences for the advantages they can realize with digital printing like shorter run lengths and a short delivery cycle.'

Hexie's future development plan sees conventional and digital printing technology continue to complement each other while digital continues to transform Hexie's operations.



The equipment and suppliers mentioned in this article can be seen at Labelexpo South China 2024



LABELEXPO AMERICAS 2024 REVIEW

Labelexpo Americas 2024 showcased the latest advancements in label and packaging technology, drawing in industry leaders from around the globe.

This year, the event highlighted several emerging trends reshaping the future of label printing and converting and the entire value chain.

Sustainability remained at the forefront, with innovations in eco-friendly materials and processes taking center stage. Digital printing continued to gain momentum, offering greater flexibility and customization, while flexo made unprecedented gains in automation and efficiency. Smart technologies like RFID and NFC also played a significant role at this year's show, with converters exploring new business markets.

Continue reading for our full review of Labelexpo Americas 2024

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SHOWFLOOR SALES

Labelexpo Americas 2024 proved to be a key venue for advancing partnerships, securing major sales and showcasing cutting-edge technology in the label and packaging industry. Piotr Wnuk reports

Labelexpo Americas 2024 not only underscored the resilience and adaptability of the printing sector but also highlighted the growing demand across all printing technologies as converters seek to navigate a dynamic market.

Connecticut-headquartered converter Brook + Whittle entered a new partnership with **Bobst** at Labelexpo Americas. The company finalized the purchase of the Bobst Digital Master 340 All-In-One press.

'We are excited about the partnership with Bobst and the acquisition of the Digital Master 340 with enhanced connectivity,' says Jeremy Letterman, COO at Brook + Whittle. 'This collaboration underscores our shared values of innovation and quality, and we are confident that it will bring significant benefits to our label printing services.'

Matt Bennett, general manager of Bobst North America for narrow and mid-web business, adds: 'The opportunity to partner with Brook + Whittle, one of the largest and prestigious label and packaging converters in the world, fits in perfectly with Bobst's business strategy of supporting the most innovative packaging converters in the label, flexible packaging, folding carton and corrugated packaging segments.'

Labelexpo Americas 2024 also saw the NextGen Label Group investing in the first hybrid **Gallus One** in the US, a 15-color machine with eight flexo and seven digital colors, built on the new, wider 17in Gallus One platform.

For **Mark Andy**, which presented an array of new technologies in Chicago, this year's show reset the clock for the manufacturer, whose new digital and flexo technology 'raised the bar for productivity by combining high quality and high speed.'

'We had an incredible response at Labelexpo this year,' says Duane Pekar, CEO of Mark Andy. 'We saw across-the-board interest in our presses and finishing equipment, and particular interest in the new Digital Series HD HighSpeed 1200 inkjet/flexo hybrid line and the S9 sleeve press. We've closed multiple press deals since the show and are supporting a high number of requests for samples and demos at our technology center - it's been pretty much nonstop and we're grateful.'

Labelexpo Americas was also massively successful for **Durst**. With two years passing since the last Labelexpo in America, there was high interest and a substantial amount of booth traffic to see the latest innovations the company had to offer.

'The KJet hybrid machine shown was the first in the country and was purchased by Century Printing and Packaging. We look forward to working with this converter and seeing how the KJet helps its business,' says Steve Lynn, director of sales for labels and packaging at Durst North America. 'We also showcased our Tau RSCi with Hawk AI technology, which received a high level of interest in anticipation for the future of the labels and flexible packaging segment. We were also happy to help TexTape and three other converters invest in Durst innovation while at the show. Overall, we couldn't be more pleased with the show, with interest in our technology, and the partnerships we established while there.'

Atlantic Packaging has acquired an **HP Indigo 200K Digital Press** to support its expansion into labels and flexible packaging. This strategic acquisition enables Atlantic Packaging to enhance its wide-web flexible packaging portfolio with more agile, short-run capabilities.



L-R: Mike Bacon, Grafotronic, Rami Akhras, Labels Unlimited Company

"WE'VE CLOSED MULTIPLE PRESS DEALS SINCE THE SHOW AND ARE SUPPORTING A HIGH NUMBER OF REQUESTS FOR SAMPLES AND DEMOS AT OUR TECHNOLOGY CENTER"

Nilpeter has been flooded with inquiries from customers eager to see its machines in action. 'The response has been so positive that many are scheduling demos at our Technology Center in Ohio, where they can experience firsthand the capabilities of our presses,' notes Lenny DeGirolmo, Nilpeter's president in the US. 'One of the key talking points at the event was Nilpeter's ongoing campaign, which has evolved from "The Future of Flexo" to a stronger message: "The Future is Flexo." This shift signifies the company's confidence in flexo technology's role in shaping the future of the printing industry.'

Martin Teilberg, Nilpeter's global marketing manager at Nilpeter, adds: 'Our message at Labelexpo was clear—Flexo is our core product. Nilpeter returned as an exhibitor at Labelexpo Americas for the first time in six years, and we have truly missed having such a visible presence in the US market, which is among our most important. With our flexo technology, we can address many of our customers' challenges, especially with our increased focus on digitalization and automation in our machines. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and we are excited to follow the developments and continue the dialogue with our many customers over the coming months. We are also pleased to see flexo making a comeback at exhibitions worldwide—it's something both we and our customers have missed.'

At Labelexpo Americas 2024, **Pulisi's** debut of its Aobead hybrid press DPIM-330F made a significant impact, resulting in five confirmed orders right on the show floor. This moment marks the company's growing presence in the US market.

Olive Liu, general manager of Pulisi, says: 'With over 11 years of experience, we understand what label converters truly need: consistency, color accuracy and product stability. During the pandemic, many of our customers encouraged us to develop a digital press that could help them transform faster—something with quick setup, high performance, and less manual intervention.'



L-R: Kristof Dekeukelaere, Bobst; Jeremy Letterman, Mitch Morgan, Matthew Shannon, Brook + Whittle; Matt Bennett, Bobst



L-R: Pj Smith, Print Services GPG; Mike Bacon, Grafotronic

“WE SOLD ALL THE MACHINES. THEY WERE NOT PRE-ARRANGED DEALS, BUT ACTUAL CONVERTERS COMING TO OUR STAND, SEEING THE MACHINERY IN ACTION AND PURCHASING THE EQUIPMENT”

The Aobead digital press has already been installed in multiple countries, including the US, Russia, Mexico, India, South Korea and Malaysia, with repeat orders from satisfied converters.

‘The Labelexpo Americas audience showed big interest in our equipment, the price advantage of Chinese products, but most importantly the continuous improvements, our product and service quality. Our onsite machine has been sold to a converter in Mexico and we received four further orders for DSMART and DPIM series right on the showfloor. We also returned home delighted to have received 10 very strong sales leads this time, so the conversation with potential new customers will continue,’ adds Liu.

It wasn’t just Pulisi making waves at Labelexpo this year. Italian converting and finishing specialist **Cartes** sold most of its showcased machines directly from the show floor. Among them, Label Solutions, a Mendoza-based converter from Argentina, is set to install its newly purchased Cartes equipment, signaling continued growth in the Latin American market.

ETI Converting Equipment had a standout experience at Labelexpo Americas 2024, creating valuable new opportunities and strengthening relationships with key clients. A major highlight was the live demonstration it held in partnership with Martin Automatic, Lemu Group and Lundberg Tech, showcasing seamless in-line coating and converting capabilities.

One of the most memorable moments of the event was the official sale of the Cohesio line to a customer from Spain. Watching the machine in action on the show floor reaffirmed the company’s

decision, solidifying its confidence in its advanced capabilities. With delivery in progress, the company is eager to integrate this technology into its operations.

Labelexpo also provided a platform for ETI to engage in meaningful conversations with converters throughout North America, generating strong interest in its customized equipment.

Grafisk Maskinfabrik (GM) had a standout performance, finalizing a deal with Canadian converter Cambridge Label for its GM LC350 automated laser label finishing machine.

Meanwhile, **Grafotronic** started the event on a high note with a significant sale to Graphic Packaging Group (GPG) on the first morning. The DCL System purchase, completed within hours of the show’s opening, was a major milestone for the company. Morten Toksværd, business development director at Grafotronic, states: ‘We always look forward to exhibiting at Labelexpo Americas, and this year has exceeded our expectations. Securing a major sale like this on day one is the perfect start.’

That momentum carried forward when Chicago-based Labels Unlimited Company invested in the Grafotronic CF2 Compact Digital Finishing machine with JetFX 3D digital embellishment—its third major purchase from Grafotronic, solidifying a long-standing partnership.

For Portuguese equipment manufacturer **Lemorau**, the response at Labelexpo was nothing short of impressive. Every machine the company showcased was sold at the event, generating buzz among both new and returning customers.

Sales director Susana Teixeira remarks:

‘Indeed, we sold all the machines. They were not pre-arranged deals which we closed at the show, they were actual converters coming to our stand, seeing the machinery in action and purchasing the equipment. Some of them are our new customers, some of them are already operating our machines in their facilities. Our success is only because of their success, so we are thankful for their trust in our brand and our equipment.’

Similarly, **Bar Graphic Machinery (BGM)**, in partnership with its American distributor J&J Converting Machinery, showcased a range of new innovations, including the Label-i Automatic inspection slitter rewinder. With seven machines sold during the event, Daniel Carr, sales manager at BGM, highlights the diversity of the purchases: ‘We signed contracts for two 18-inch BGM Elite iSR inspection slitter rewinders, three BGM Elite eDSRT high-speed die-cutting semi-automatic turret rewinders, and two Label-i automatic inspection slitter rewinders. All of these will be installed across the US.’

Brotech introduced its newly developed SpeedMaster at Labelexpo Americas 2024, highlighting the machine’s semi-rotary flexo printing capabilities. The SpeedMaster reaches up to 100m/min in both semi-rotary print and die-cutting modes, providing high efficiency in label finishing.

‘Our cutting-edge finishing and integrated solutions deliver flexible, high-quality production, combining speed, modularity, platform integration, and versatility,’ says Ramon Lee, managing director of Brotech.

He also introduced a new digital embellishment unit integrated with their digital IML and label finishing systems.

Lee reported that the company has secured 10 orders from customers in the US, Mexico and Argentina, with ongoing conversations from the event.



Continue reading for coverage of the Global Label Awards

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LABEL INDUSTRY GLOBAL AWARDS HONOR NEW AND FAMILIAR NAMES

Ceremony hosted during the first night of Labelexpo Americas 2024 recognizes industry achievements. Selah Zighelboim reports

After accepting the R Stanton Avery Special Recognition Award on stage, Ferdinand Rüesch IV made his way back through the audience at the outdoor event venue. Attendees stopped him numerous times to greet him and take photos with him. He could hardly walk a foot before being stopped for a hug or a handshake.

Rüesch — known throughout the industry as Ferdi — has become a popular figure in the labeling industry over the decades of his career. He took over the Gallus Group business from his father in the 1990s, accelerating Gallus' growth globally, founding subsidiaries in the US, Australia, Germany, Denmark and the UK.

On the first evening of Labelexpo Americas 2024, he was one of four award recipients to be honored at the Label Industry Global Awards ceremony.

The first award of the evening, the Label Industry Global Achievement award, went to Paul Teachout, technical marketing and content specialist at Harper Corporation of America and chair of the FTA. The Rising Star award recognized Alex Abbott, the chief revenue officer at SmartSolve, while NextGen Label Group received the Converter of the Year award.

The judging panel for the Label Industry Global Awards 2024 was chaired by Andy Thomas-Emans, strategic director of Labelexpo Global Series. The judges included Chelsea McDougall, group managing editor of Labels & Labeling; Tim McDonough, chairman of TLMI; Greg Hrinia, editor of Label & Narrow Web and Lisa McTigue Pierce, executive editor of Packaging Digest.

The judging panel voted unanimously for Teachout to win the Global Achievement award, which celebrates individuals who have made significant lifetime contributions to the label industry on the national and

international stages.

Teachout has worked in the industry for more than 40 years. He started out as a commercial offset print apprentice, and he worked at Webtron and Aquaflex during the early days of the narrow web flexo industry.

'As a development engineer at these two iconic press manufacturers, Paul had a front-row seat to driving technical excellence and continued advancement in the label industry,' said Tim McDonough, Flexo Graphics president, TLMI chairman and a member of the judging panel, who presented the award to Teachout. 'Many of those presses still live on shop floors across the world today. And much like those iconic machines, Paul's legacy will live on well beyond his time in the industry.'

The judges highlighted Teachout's role as a mentor and the work he has done promoting the industry to students and young professionals.

Teachout also sits on the boards of multiple educational institutions. He has actively supported the Phoenix Challenge High School competition since 2008 and is chair of the TLMI label awards competition.

'What a journey it's been,' Teachout





Ferdinand Rüesch IV, Gallus Group and Next Gen Label Group celebrate at the Global Label Award

“THE BOND, SIMILAR TO THE STICKY ADHESIVE OF SELF-ADHESIVE LABELS, REMAINS — A LASTING CONNECTION THAT HAS NOT ONLY SHAPED STAN AVERY’S LIFE BUT ALSO MANY IN OUR INDUSTRY”

said in his acceptance speech. ‘When I first started, I was running industrial labels on chrome anilox rollers and rubber plates. Yesterday, I had the opportunity to moderate a session at the AWA and TLMI PrintThink on artificial intelligence for the label business. To say we all haven’t experienced the rise of an industry would be an understatement.’

NEW NAMES IN THE INDUSTRY

While the first and last awards of the evening went to well-known professionals who have served the labeling industry for decades, the second and third awards recognized some new talent.

Abbott won the Rising Star award, which recognizes someone new in the industry who represents the next generation of labeling and packaging leadership.

Prior to working at SmartSolve, Abbott served as a sales director at Indiana-based Berry Global Group, a plastic packaging product manufacturer.

SmartSolve is a sustainable materials company. Since joining last year, Abbott has led the company in obtaining APR Design for Recyclability Recognition.

‘I would encourage any young professional – the labeling industry is a great place to be,’ Abbott said in an interview at the awards ceremony.

‘But come into the industry with a presupposition of sustainability. It’s not a part of what we do. It’s not an add-on. Be sustainable in your thought process and your product offering and let that guide you.’

Dan Rosenbaum, chief financial officer at NextGen Label Group, and Jessica McCarthy, vice president of human resources, accepted the Converter of the Year award on behalf of NextGen. This award recognizes a company that has built an inclusive work culture that encourages employees’ development, contributes to community and has high levels of customer satisfaction.

NextGen was formed in 2022. The company is the result of a merger of three employee-owned companies — Syracuse Label, Macaran Printed Products and Van Alstine.

‘We did that because we thought we would be better together and we could accomplish great things together, and this,’ Rosenbaum said, holding up the award, ‘is just a byproduct of that decision to merge back in June of 2022.’

A NEW CHAPTER

The final award given out that evening was a special recognition for Rüesch. After 45 years of working in labels, Rüesch, senior

vice president of global key accounts at Gallus, will start his retirement at the end of this year.

The award he received recognizes outstanding individuals who reflect the key values and vision of Stan Avery and his innovative breakthroughs that founded the label industry.

Ryan Yost, global president of Avery Dennison Materials Group, presented the award.

‘When this award was created, it was important to us that the recipient of this award embodied the same qualities as Stan,’ Yost said. ‘Someone who not only contributes to the success of their business but drives the industry forward, all the while maintaining a strong character and demonstrating what it means to be a great leader.’

Rüesch represents those qualities, not only through his work at Gallus but also through his reputation as a ‘warm-hearted and inspiring leader and mentor,’ Yost said.

Rüesch noted that his father received this same award decades ago.

‘Receiving this award now is a significant milestone at the end of my professional career and, at the same time, the beginning of a wonderful new chapter in my life,’ Rüesch said.

‘Nevertheless, I will remain closely connected to our industry. The bond, similar to the sticky adhesive of self-adhesive labels, remains — a lasting connection that has not only shaped Stan Avery’s life but also many in our industry.’



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PRESS TECHNOLOGY

Flexo bounced back and new digital and hybrid presses were launched onto the North American market at Labelexpo Americas 2024. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

Labelexpo Americas 2024 set new records for narrow-web UV inkjet speed and print resolution, saw an exhilarating display of mid-web flexographic potential and witnessed all-round progress towards integration of digital (and digitized) printing systems into Cloud-based factory networks.

Mark Andy appeared as a different company from the last Americas show. The stand was bursting with innovation, including the global launch of a new 26in-wide Performance press, the fastest UV inkjet press on the market, as well as new hybrid press configurations developed with longtime partner Domino.

Let's start with the mid-web Performance Series S9, a press available in 17in as well as the 26in-wide version shown at Labelexpo Americas.

“MARK ANDY CUSTOMERS ARE ASKING FOR A WIDER WEB FOR PS LABELS. AND A LOT OF CUSTOMERS WHO WANT TO GET INTO FLEXIBLE PACKAGING, AND THIS IS THE PERFECT WIDTH. IT ALSO MAKES A LOT OF SENSE FOR IML AND WRAPAROUND LABELS”

'The Performance S9 is the first time we've integrated sleeve technology and automation and proprietary drying technology in a Mark Andy press,' says Duane Pekar, recently appointed CEO of Mark Andy. 'There are a lot of cost pressures out there, so our customers are asking for a wider web for PS labels. Also, we have a lot of customers who want to get into flexible packaging, and this is the perfect width. It also makes a lot of sense for IML and wraparound labels.'

Next up, the Mark Andy Digital Series HD HighSpeed 1200 press launched at the show reached an unprecedented speed of 480ft/min (146m/min) – the fastest UV inkjet press on the market today, and printing at 1200 DPI resolution.

The press was developed by Mark Andy's in-house digital team based in San Diego.

Mark Andy recently extended its partnership with Global Graphics to integrate the company's SmartDFE digital front end into the Highspeed 1200. Printhead electronics are provided by Meteor Inkjet, another Hybrid Software company, with full integration into the SmartDFE.

Digital print bars and heads

Press-wide mono digital print bars are proving a major area for development, adding enormous versatility to not just flexo presses but to finishing/converting systems and even to laminators. Applications can range from variable data – typically 2D and QR codes – to digital embellishments with tactile effects.

JetFX promoted digital embellishments on several machines throughout the show, with its new Solo Fusion 13in/330mm-wide print bar and Solo FlexPack 30in wide printbar specially formulated for eBeam and UV inkjet coating for full FDA compliance. A Solo Flexpack was incorporated into a Gonderflex laminator, allowing tactile embellishment effects to be added to flexible packaging. Both GM and Prati also incorporated Solo Fusion units onto their converting equipment.

Digital Print, Inc introduced its M7 13in-wide digital print bar, operating at up to 800ft/min (243m/min) at 600 DPI for applications including variable barcodes, text and graphics.

The system can be scaled up to print widths of 26in/670mm and can be configured to print duplex. It also comes in a double bar configuration that can run twice the speed and resolution of a standard single bar system.

Fujifilm's specialist inkjet division demonstrated its 46kUV print bar operating at speeds up to 500ft/min (152m/min) at 1,200 x 600 DPI. The 46kUV uses the Samba printhead and is available in 13, 17, and 20in print widths. The company also displayed the DE1024 digital embellishment system, which is able to add gloss or tactile effects to existing analog or digital print production.

General Inkjet Technology showed its modular Label Smart 330HD digital press printing at 1,200 x 1,200 DPI resolution with the capability to scale up to nine color channels printing at speeds up to 230ft/min (70m/min). Its modular design allows for several optional equipment configurations, including coating, printing, varnishing, foil-stamping and cold-stamping.

Domino showed its K600i print bar and K300 module integrated on a Mark Andy Pro Series flexo press, with Domino-owned Lake Image Systems providing inline vision inspection.

The company also demonstrated its new K300 VDP unit printing at 410 fpm (125m/min) at 600 DPI, or 820 fpm (250m/min) at 300 DPI. Each K300 module is 2.1in (54.1mm) wide with one print station, or 4.26in (108.2mm) with two print stations.

Labelexpo Americas 2024 also highlighted Mark Andy's developing partnership with **Domino**. An N610i Domino integration module was running on a shaft-drive Mark Andy 2200 press, demonstrating an upgrade path for the legion of legacy MA2200 presses installed worldwide. The N610i can also be retrofitted to Performance and Evolution presses.

New at the show was the announcement that Domino's latest 13in/330mm-wide N710i press is now available as an integration module, using 1200x1200 DPI Bitstar inkjet heads developed by Brother, Domino's Japan-based parent company. Mark Andy is currently working with Domino to develop a 17in-wide version.

At the entry level, Mark Andy demonstrated a standalone digital presses developed in partnership with Konica Minolta, most recently integrating the Accuriolabel 400 toner engine, which increases the speed over the AL230 and adds white to the CMYK toner engine.

The company further announced the Mark Andy 360 support service, which runs alongside the company's growing supplies business.

The highlight of the **Nilpeter** stand was the first North American showing of the FA-26 mid-web press launched last year at Labelexpo Europe.

The 26in/670mm-wide FA-26 is designed for packaging formats that benefit from a wider web width – primarily flexible packaging, shrink sleeves and IML, as well as high-volume PS label and wraparound label production.

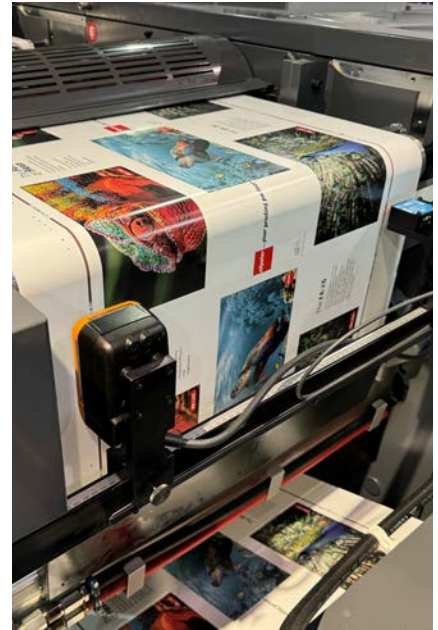
To handle extensible and heat-sensitive materials, the landscape print groups include large chill drums on each station and the press is fitted throughout with GEW's LeoLED2 water-cooled LED-UV lamps. The press can be configured for reverse-side printing, and inline lamination can be added. Fast tool loading and substrate-specific job recall are key features.

The FA-26 press was shown with Nilpeter's new camera-based vision technology, developed in conjunction with B&R Industrial Automation, which maintains color registration when working with flexible and extensible materials.

Nilpeter demonstrated ramping the press speed up and down, and even deliberately putting the press out of registration, to demonstrate how effective the vision system is in automatically bringing the press back into register during both acceleration and deceleration, with automated dynamic adjustment of print pressure and web tension. The press was set up and run by a single operator.

The camera reads color-on-color marks

“PRESS-WIDE MONO DIGITAL PRINT BARS ARE PROVING A MAJOR AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT, ADDING ENORMOUS VERSATILITY TO NOT JUST FLEXO PRESSES, BUT TO FINISHING/ CONVERTING SYSTEMS AND EVEN TO LAMINATORS”



and compares them to a master mark, carrying out image processing in real-time and adjusting for any variation in print alignment.

The camera system will not currently work with clear materials, but Nilpeter is working to solve that issue. For these cases, the press uses the backup register mark sensor. The vision system is fully integrated with data collection capabilities for production monitoring.

The camera registration can also be retrofitted to all FA-line presses.

The show floor FA-26 also demonstrated Nilpeter's Digital Shadow technology, which creates a real-time digital twin of the physical press. Its primary uses are to track, measure and optimize printing operations, and it is a powerful training tool.

The press was printing an Actega extended color gamut ink set, with a complete sleeve job change carried out in two minutes.

Bobst demonstrated the latest version

of its Accucheck inline inspection and calibration system on a Digital Master 340 'All-in-One' hybrid press.

New Accucheck features include an automated quality inspection setup for every job, synchronized to the job queue. A full printhead calibration checking for alignment and density across the web is achieved in just 15 minutes. Another improvement is the upgraded automatic nozzle compensation system, which now also accounts for deviated nozzles in addition to missing nozzles.

'We now have a fully closed loop and automated setup, so the output of the press is no longer impacted by the skill of the operator,' explains Patrick Graber, marketing director narrow-mid web printing & converting at Bobst.

'And with our oneECG extended gamut system, we are digitalizing color, so our conventional and digital equipment use the same color data.'

Graber also previewed Bobst's

Heidelberg promotes sheetfed IML and wet glue

For the first time at a Labelexpo show, Heidelberg was promoting its sheetfed cut-and-stack and IML print and converting equipment alongside Gallus roll-fed equipment.

Clarence Penge, EVP for sales, product management, and marketing for Heidelberg US, introduced the next generation Speedmaster XL106, which prints at 21,000 sheets per hour on a 41 x 29in sheet size – ‘an in-mold label and wet glue label powerhouse.’

Penge said Heidelberg US is seeing consistent annual growth in IML volumes and has adapted the press for the lighter grammages specific to that market.

Recently, Moquin Press, one of the West Coast’s leading label and packaging providers, set a new world record, producing 452,755 net sellable sheets on its Peak Performance Speedmaster XL106 in 24 hours. Moquin’s press is the first from Heidelberg specially designed for label

production – featuring modifications like special sheet travel adjustments in the units and delivery and the new fourth-generation CutStar, all optimized for high-speed production of thin materials.

More sheetfed label converters are using extended color gamut inks – a well-established technology in the offset industry – saving five to 10 minutes in washup time. ‘And with digital now also offering ECG, it is becoming more accepted by brands. We are using our Prinect software to maximize the number of colors you can match to delta 2.0.’

Penge also listed developments on the finishing side, including the Kawahara blanking system for in-mold labels and increasingly automated Polar wet glue label equipment. ‘The latest Polar SC21 produces 3,000 bundles an hour, and as a bundle could be 50 or 100 labels, that equates to 1.5 -3m labels an hour, and in a very compact footprint.’

inkjet to play in the wine and spirits sector. Without a matte overcoat, UV inkjet inks have a glossy finish, which is not generally welcomed in the more traditional wine and spirits market.

Gallus has now developed a method of modifying the surface of an inkjet drop to change the way light is reflected, creating a matte look.

‘This we believe will be a game changer for UV inkjet,’ says Urbinati. ‘It works with open, structured, non-coated papers. It is the same ink and the same machine and the same dots. We are simply modifying that dot. And this is available at the touch of a button. Up to now, you could only achieve this matte effect with a varnish, but that impacts the paper itself.’

HP Indigo showed for the first time in North America its 200k mid-web press. Although designed primarily for unsupported film materials like flexible packaging and shrink sleeves, the 200k press is now fitted with a slitter that allows printing of self-adhesive labels. Slit rolls can be converted on standard 13in/330mm offline finishing machines.

‘This time, with the 200k, we opted to show the labels option so customers can move very quickly – in less than an hour – from labels printing into flexible packaging and vice versa,’ explains Noam Zilberstein, vice president and general manager, HP Indigo. ‘We already have labels customers who are moving into flexible packaging for the first time, and the other way around. For us, while the labels market is growing at 10 percent, the digital flexible packaging market is growing at 20 percent.’

Also on stand was a 6k press, where HP Indigo was demonstrating its Intelligent Automation (IA) workflow launched at drupa, which ultimately aims to connect everything from on-press workflow to live production data and to the final customer via PrintOS.

Durst Group marked the North American launch of its Kjet hybrid press, integrating a fully loaded Tau RSCi 1200 x 1200 DPI print engine with components from Omet’s KFlex dual servo flexo press platform.

Steve Lynn, director labels and packaging at Durst North America, stressed that this is very much a Durst-led project. It is now part of Durst’s product catalog and will be sold and supported by the company globally. The configuration of the Kjet can be tailored to the specific requirements of each customer.

Also on the stand was a Tau RSCi press incorporating Durst’s new Hawk AI quality control system, which automates print quality adjustments in real-time at full press speed, resulting in significantly reduced waste and overall improved print quality.

“NILPETER DEMONSTRATED RAMPING PRESS SPEED UP AND DOWN, AND EVEN DELIBERATELY PUTTING THE PRESS OUT OF REGISTRATION, TO DEMONSTRATE HOW EFFECTIVE THE VISION SYSTEM IS IN AUTOMATICALLY BRINGING THE PRESS BACK INTO REGISTER”

forthcoming Digital Front End (DFE) 3.0, which will be commercially available in early 2025. This Cloud-based system will enable users across a network to access real-time data, resources, and workflow templates. Color management can be centralized and shared as needed, with the web-based interface supporting multiple users across multiple sites.

Other announcements included the release of Thalia UV digital inks, which are Swiss Ordinance-compliant and deliver a wider color gamut, and a certified substrate database. Graber also highlighted Bobst’s close cooperation with Avery Dennison, developing an inline silicone coating module for Avery’s LinrSave linerless system.

Gallus CEO Dario Urbinati gave an update on the Gallus One digital press shown on the company’s stand. The first Gallus One in the US went to PrintFlex Graphics (which interestingly further invested in a Labelmaster flexo press). At

the show, NextGen Label Group announced the purchase of the first hybrid Gallus One in the US, a 15-color machine (8x flexo and 7x digital colors) built on the new, wider 17in/430mm Gallus One platform. The press will include the ability to cold foil, spot varnish and add tactile lamination.

The 13in and 17in web widths for the Gallus One now match the modular Labelmaster platform, and under Gallus’ newly announced ‘System to Compose,’ any Labelmaster flexo, decoration or converting unit can be added to the Gallus One. Conversely, a Gallus One can be retrofitted into an existing Labelmaster press to turn it into a hybrid press.

Additionally, Gallus has added orange and violet to the Gallus One’s print engine to further extend the color gamut.

Gallus One is now fully integrated into Heidelberg’s Prinect Cloud-based workflow automation system.

Another key announcement was the launch of Gallus MatteJet, which allows UV



“GALLUS HAS NOW DEVELOPED A METHOD OF MODIFYING THE SURFACE OF AN INKJET DROP TO CHANGE THE WAY LIGHT IS REFLECTED, CREATING A MATTE LOOK. THIS, WE BELIEVE WILL BE A GAME CHANGER FOR UV INKJET”



Direct to shape

Direct-to-shape labeling is a fast-growing sector. While it will not threaten the substrate-based label industry any time soon, it will certainly continue to develop a niche in the short run/personalized fast-moving commercial goods product sector.

Velox demonstrated its IDS-NC 500 machine for digital printing directly on necked beverage cans, running at up to 500 cans a minute. Velox says its technology of proprietary inks and system architecture features a wide color gamut, photorealistic imagery, opaque selective white, matte and gloss finish, smooth gradients and end-to-end decoration with no seam or overlap.

Hinterkopf was meanwhile testing the market with a dummy version of its D120 direct-to-shape system, also for on-demand printing of cans.

‘The Durst Hawk AI is both an inspection system and a correction system, correcting print issues without any setup needed and without any operator intervention,’ says Lynn.

Dantex showed its latest PicoJet UV inkjet press, which uses the company's new Digital Resolution System (DRS) technology to achieve 1700-2,400 DPI (at eight gray levels) at a speed of 246ft/min (75m/min). Dot size is variable between 2.5 and 21pl.

Dantex says it exclusively owns the proprietary DRS technology, which was developed in partnership with Ricoh, which supplies the inkjet heads.

At the same time, Dantex says it has increased the color gamut of the press to hit 99 percent of Pantone shades at a DeltaE of 3, and 97.5 percent at a DeltaE of 2. The press' SuperWhite mode offers inkjet White at an opacity of 92 percent in a single pass.

New for the PicoJet is an inline semi-rotary die-cut unit, along with the SuperTactile digital embellishment module.

Dantex also used Labelexpo Americas to announce a strategic partnership with Global Graphics, a Hybrid Software company. The collaboration will see Global Graphics' SmartDFE technology integrated into Dantex's PicoJet presses. SmartDFE components include job creation, prepress workflow and color management. The PicoJet already uses printhead drive electronics from Meteor Inkjet, another Hybrid Software company.

Canon promoted its prototype water-based label press, the LabelStream LS2000.

The LS2000 prints at 131ft/min (40m/min) in CMYK + double white at 2400 x 1200 DPI with ink recirculation to help eliminate nozzle clogging and extend printhead life. Food-safe polymer water-based inks were developed by Canon specifically for these printheads. Canon says the inks contain highly saturated pigments, which produce a wide color gamut.

The press has a unique configuration. The web is first printed with a primer, which aids ink adherence, followed by a double white, after which the web is dried on an extended web path, followed by CMYK printing and drying.

Printhead maintenance, along with color measurement and adjustment, is fully automated. Qualified substrates for the LabelStream LS2000 currently include coated, synthetic and textured papers and even some heat-sensitive films.

The LabelStream LS2000 will be commercially available in 2025.

Also on the Canon stand was the Colorado M-series large format printer, along with LX benchtop printers for asset management, retail and barcode printing applications.

And for the first time since its acquisition by Canon, Edale had a significant presence demonstrating inline flexo folding carton samples.

China-based **Hontec** was present with its new Flexicon flexo press, developed together with international press design consultant Ibrahim Mesinovic.

The Flexicon press has a vertically adjustable (as well as front-to-back adjustable) plate cylinder to allow for different material thicknesses. A 21.5in chill drum allows a wide range of temperature-sensitive materials to be handled. A removable idler impression roller means the chill drum does not have to be cleaned of ink residues between jobs.

The FlexiCon press operates at speeds up to 150m/min (492ft/min) with Industry 4.0 connectivity.

Mesinovic is now working with Hontec CEO Leo Zhang to develop a new generation of flexo press technology. An 850mm-wide mid-web press is expected to be launched at Labelexpo Europe in Barcelona next year.



Continue reading for a review of finishing and converting equipment at Labelexpo Americas 2024

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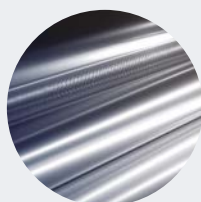
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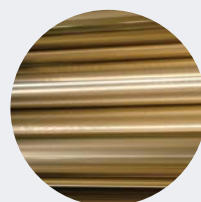
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FINISHING AND CONVERTING

Faster die-cutting, cutting-edge digital embellishments, enhanced automation, interactive technologies and strategic collaborations dominated the finishing and converting section of Labelexpo Americas 2024. Piotr Wnuk reports

Since Labelexpo Americas 2022, both digital and flexo printing presses have undergone significant advancements—digital presses have surged in speed, while flexo presses have embraced greater automation and efficiency. Mirroring these developments, finishing and converting equipment has evolved to keep pace, ensuring seamless integration and enhanced production capabilities.

“WE ARE EXCITED WE WERE ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE THE SYNERGIES BETWEEN OUR TECHNOLOGIES AND HOW THEY CAN DELIVER UNPARALLELED VALUE TO OUR CUSTOMERS IN TODAY’S EXTREMELY COMPETITIVE MARKET”

One of this year's standout innovations was the introduction of much faster die-cutting systems. These advanced systems are engineered to handle the escalating speeds of modern printing presses, ensuring that finishing processes remain equally efficient and automated. This enhancement allows flexo technology to stay competitive with digital printing, especially in the production of shorter runs.

In addition to die-cutting advancements, there have been significant strides in digital embellishment techniques. Innovations such as inkjet varnishing, various digital metalization options and laser die-cutting are contributing to more streamlined and efficient production workflows. Other notable highlights included inspection rewind units, shrink sleeve converting equipment and specialized machines for RFID label production, all underscoring the ongoing technological progress in the industry.

INNOVATION THROUGH COLLABORATION

Facing rising costs and a shortage of skilled labor, converters are under immense pressure to boost productivity. In response, **Martin Automatic** partnered with **ETI Converting**, **Lemu Group** and **Lundberg Tech** to showcase an integrated production line across four stands and over one walking aisle at the convention center in Rosemont.

Unlike a mere simulation, this live production run manufactured labels for Channeled Resources, demonstrating the efficiency and cost-saving benefits of an integrated production line. The process showcased the transformation of raw materials into finished labels in a single pass, in real-time.

Gavin Rittmeyer, vice president of sales and marketing at Martin

Automatic, remarks: 'It required all of us to lower our guard and put aside our native caution so that we could make the line work seamlessly. I see it as a forerunner of the way things will develop in the market going forward.'

Maxime Bayzelon, president of ETI Converting, adds: 'We demonstrated the synergies between our technologies and how they deliver unparalleled value in today's competitive market. This collaboration aims to set new standards for efficiency, sustainability and overall production capabilities.'

Rittmeyer emphasized the importance of understanding end-user requirements and supporting them to maximize technological benefits without risk, highlighting the unique nature of their live demonstration.

ENHANCING SPEED AND AUTOMATION

A B Graphic International (ABG) presented 12 machines from its global manufacturing sites, showcasing a portfolio focused on speed and automation. Central to its display was ABG Connect, an automated workflow technology featured on the flagship Digicon Series 3. This system offers automated job changeovers, revolutionizing production processes.

The Digicon Series 3 also debuted a new semi-rotary flexo head, capable of utilizing either a sleeve system or a cylinder with fully motorized impression settings.

Mark Hyde, sales manager at ABG, highlights: 'One major benefit of this new head is the very quick makeready, running in semi-rotary mode at 305ft/min (93m/min) and up to 590ft/min (180m/min) in rotary mode, perfectly complementing the latest HP Indigo V12 digital press.'

AstroNova, alongside its subsidiary **MTEX NS**, showcased the TrojanLabel T2-PRO and Atom 3 + Cutmaster. Mike Natalizia, CTO of AstroNova, confirmed that after active beta trials in early 2024, the company has already begun booking and shipping commercial units to early customers.

Cartes, an Italian manufacturer, launched the compact GE261L Star Line laser converting machine and the Gemini Series GE363WJL. This combination with Jet D-Screen offers a semi-rotary flexo and laser converting system for no-tooling operations. Additionally, **Grafisk Maskinfabrik (GM)** premiered its high-speed single anvil die-cutter integrated into the DC350 finishing line, boasting a rotary die-cutting speed of 120m/min (400ft/min) in semi-rotary mode.

Matthew Gindele, vice president of sales for North America at GM, comments: 'Our new die-cutter sets a new industry standard, delivering high-speed performance without the complexities and costs of traditional systems while offering maximum customization.'

ADVANCED FINISHING TECHNOLOGIES

Grafotronic showcased four machines, including its flagship DCL2, in two configurations and two versions of the CF2. The CF2 in a HAPTIC configuration features flatbed screen printing and a

hot stamping module with ultra-high stamping pressure control, enabling multi-stroke foiling and embossing.

The company also introduced Infinity, an automatic turret designed for producing a wide range of labels, including those on delicate, heat-sensitive substrates. Infinity offers numerous automatic changeover capabilities, ensuring clean label separation, automatic core positioning and finished roll ejection.

Karlville presented its post-print flexible packaging machinery for pouch production, lamination, and slitting. The compact KS-SUP-400-D pouch machine is engineered for short to medium runs, offering low power consumption, minimal waste, reduced maintenance costs and quick setup. Additionally, the Karlville Swiss Compact D Model facilitates rapid changes for standup pouches using Charter MDO PE Mono Material.

Gonderflex showcased its GFXL 3000 finisher in the dedicated FlexPack Factory area, demonstrating in-line thermal lamination, flexo printing and varnish, digital embellishment by **JetFX**, cold foil, cast and cure, and slitting. This multi-process platform is designed to finish rolls of digitally printed 30in wide web, alongside the R330 digital finishing machine and GFSRE-1300 compact label slitting machine.

Lemorau featured the Smart-L Premium compact machine, which includes a flexo unit in semi-rotary mode for an extra color or varnish. It also promoted the MEBr+, with its modular configuration for optional equipment like embellishment modules, and the MICR inspection slitter rewinder with variable data printing and video inspection for quality control.

Prati introduced the Digi Compact with the JetFx digital embellishment unit, combining analog and digital technologies for a wide range of materials. This machine offers an ergonomic, compact design with reduced paper passage and a focus on environmental sustainability by minimizing waste during setup.

Rhyguan Machinery presented the Top-Plus series, which connects with digital presses to enable spot varnish and semi-rotary die-cutting. Equipped with a fully automatic knife positioning system and various optional modules, the Top-Plus can achieve semi-rotary die-cutting speeds of up to 295ft/min (90m/min).

THE ART OF EMBELLISHMENT

Nobelus demonstrated how tactile finishes can elevate prime labels through unsupported films and wet lamination. Featuring Karess Film for a luxurious soft finish and FineGrit Film for a rugged, durable texture, Nobelus teamed up with Applied Molecules and GM to showcase the DC330Mini compact finishing system. This collaboration allowed visitors to experience premium

haptic labels firsthand.

Angie Mohni, vice president of marketing at Nobelus, says: 'Through our collaboration with GM, we introduced label converters to a finishing method that opens up cost-saving opportunities through higher margins and greater market opportunities.'

Dragan Nikolic, manager of business development at Nobelus, added that these special effects greatly enhance the consumer experience and help drive sales in promising markets that might otherwise be inaccessible to label converters.

JetFx promoted its digital embellishments across several machines, including the newly launched Solo Fusion, 13in wide print bar, and Solo FlexPack 30in wide, specially formulated for eBeam and UV inkjet coating for full FDA compliance.

Mike Ferrari, marketing director at JetFx, emphasized that the FDA compliance of Solo FlexPack is immensely important, especially since most flexible packaging is used in the food sector.

EMBRACING RFID TECHNOLOGY

Labelexpo Americas 2024 highlighted RFID technology as a key focus area, driven by expanding mandates from major retailers like Walmart and others. The event featured dedicated areas where converters could experience the entire RFID production process, including live demonstrations of smart label production and data management.

Delta ModTech conducted RFID tag insertion demonstrations using its patented Island Transfer module and Delta Crusader platform, inserting RFID tags into pre-printed, die-cut labels.

Graphimecc Group showcased its expertise in automated machines for RFID serialization, precision converting, and mass encoding, presenting a new generation of entry-level converting and encoding machines tailored for high productivity without compromising automation or error rates.

Rosas Maschinenbau demonstrated the Leopard 300, a bidirectional tabletop rewinder with advanced RFID serialization and coding capabilities. David Rosas Wolf, managing partner at Rosas Maschinenbau, noted that with this new product, the company offers a powerful full suite for RFID label serialization and testing.

LemuGroup presented its LI220 RFID machine, capable of inserting RFID and NFC labels between the front label and the liner, equipped with a **Voyantic** system for real-time inspection. Tamarack Products introduced its versatile RFID inlay insertion equipment, available as standalone systems or integrated with flexo presses, designed for scalability and precision in high-volume production environments.

“ONE OF THE MAJOR BENEFITS OF THE NEW EQUIPMENT IS A VERY QUICK MAKEREADY AND ROTARY MODE SPEED TO COMPLEMENT THE LATEST HP INDIGO V12 DIGITAL PRESS”



HIGHLIGHTS AROUND THE SHOW FLOOR

Actega promoted its low-migration inks and specialty coatings for labels and flexible packaging, announcing expanded cooperation with All4Labels Packaging Group to extend the use of Signite technology to more geographies.

Arrow Systems debuted the ArrowJet 330R M Series in the US, featuring a modular design that allows integration of various in-line technologies like priming, varnish, lamination and slitting. They also showcased the upgraded EZCut digital knife-finishing equipment with auto knife adjustment, roll-to-part options, and auto-job change features.

Ashe Converting Machinery demonstrated the Opal glueless turret rewinder with patented cut and transfer technology, including the Opal ISR full 100 percent label inspection slitter rewinder and a range of converting lines with full rotary die-cutting and wide web equipment.

Daco Solutions, in collaboration with **Flexo Export**, exhibited the Daco PLD-430M semi-automatic turret rewinder, featuring a 17in web, 40in unwind with roll lift, laminating station, two die-cut to register rotary die stations, auto-set slitting, and a three-spindle semi-automatic turret rewinder with roll closure.

DMS presented its latest innovations in hot stamping and foil-saving technology, including the FV-Series hot stamping system and advanced foil handling technologies.

D.P.R. Labeling showcased its Taurus system, a laser cutting and laminating machine that eliminates the need for pre-die cut labels and die tools. The Aries semi-rotary label finishing machine was also promoted, combining multiple finishing processes in a single pass with a touchscreen PC interface and flexible magnetic die plate.



“SPECIAL EFFECTS AND EMBELLISHMENTS GREATLY ENHANCE THE CONSUMER EXPERIENCE AND HELP DRIVE SALES IN ALL SORTS OF PROMISING MARKETS THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE BE INACCESSIBLE TO LABEL CONVERTERS”

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A QUANTUM DESIGN PRODUCT LINE

EMT introduced its **Rotocontrol** portfolio of finishing machines, featuring integrated vision inspection, semi-automatic turrets, multiple slitting options, counting, and product detection technologies. They also promoted the Rotocontrol DT 2.0 modular hybrid digital finishing line, compatible with all major digital printing presses.

GPPE Automation Group promoted its range of roll converting and packaging products, including fully automatic thermal roll slitting, self-adhesive slitting, flexographic, and digital printing machines, serving various sectors like thermal paper, POS, ATM and logistics.

Jennerjahn featured its line of slitter rewinders designed for liner-less print and stick POS rolls, eliminating the need for traditional release liners and reducing waste and costs. Its machines cater to applications such as retail receipts, food and beverage labels, pharmacy, healthcare, logistics and hospitality.

Kampf and **Atlas** showcased their slitting and rewinding products, including the Unicon spindle machine, Unislit CS station machine, Kampf ConSlitter, and Atlas TitanSlitter series.

Kroenert highlighted its coating and laminating technologies for materials like paper, foil, film, cardboard and non-woven fabrics. The company promoted high-performance systems with web widths up to 3,300 mm, coating thicknesses from 100 nanometers to over 1 mm, and processing speeds up to 1,600m/min.

Mühlbauer presented an entry-level equipment package featuring the IL 30000 delam/relam unit and the PL light R2R, capable of handling multiple jobs within a single batch with a small footprint and high speeds.

Ningbo Jingwei Systemtechnik showcased its R-Cutter series, an all-in-one label cutting technology concept leveraging

smart systems for quick setup and seamless integration into existing workflows.

Schober exhibited high-performance finishing technologies for in-mold labels, folding cartons, and technical products, promoting rotary cutting, creasing, punching equipment and the RSM stacking machine.

Shandong Hoaco Automation Technology presented its motion-controlled die-cutting, web converting and packaging systems, including multi-station rotary die-cutting machines for diverse markets such as electronics, medical, cosmetics, printing, packaging and automotive.

Tectuprint showcased a wide range of finishing equipment, including die-cutters, cutters, robinators, coil elevators, punching units, perforators, stackers, rewinders, unwinders and roll lifters.

Wuhan Golden Laser highlighted its high-speed laser die-cutting machines, including the LC350, a fully digital and automated system for roll-to-roll, roll-to-sheet, and roll-to-part applications with a maximum web width of 13.7in and operating speeds up to 393ft/min (120m/min). They also featured the LC230 die-cutter for digital short-run finishing, offering zero pattern changeover time and no tooling costs, operating with web widths up to 9 inches and speeds up to 60m/min.

Zhejiang GaoBao Machinery showcased its slitting/rewinding and sheet cutting machines for processing various materials, including paper, adhesive paper, plastic film, aluminum foil and non-woven fabrics.



Continue reading for a full review of materials at Labelexpo Americas 2024

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MATERIALS

Innovations presented by materials suppliers at Labelexpo Americas 2024 offered products for brand owners seeking a strong market presence while prioritizing packaging circularity in light of evolving sustainability regulations. Akanksha Meena reports

Brand owners are constantly innovating packaging formats not just to improve shelf appeal and consumer experience but also to enhance packaging circularity. These innovations are driven by increasing pressure from fast-approaching and evolving packaging regulations.

Sustainability regulations are broadening to include recycling rates and the use of recycled content. Though the specifics vary by region, these regulations are no longer confined to select countries.

Packaging material manufacturers are developing products to provide converters and brands with sustainable alternatives. Recyclable materials, removable components and recycled content were among the standout trends at this year's Labelexpo Americas. Inks, coatings and adhesives with reduced reliance on natural resources and enabling the adoption of UV LED were also on display. In particular, RFID took center stage with an RFID experience center and an array of developments for RFID applications.

Underlining overall trends that could be seen at the show, Randy Scott, vice president of sales for labels and specialty films at Cosmo Films, says: 'When it comes to trends, we're seeing a strong shift toward digital printing, with many presses now combining digital and traditional flexo. The two biggest trends we're seeing are digital printing advancements and the growing emphasis on recyclability, which is what many customers are asking about.'

RECYCLABLE MATERIALS

Plastic recycling is a global goal and essential to the circular economy. Labels are crucial for determining the recyclability of packaging. To enhance recyclability, manufacturers are creating label materials that can be easily separated during recycling, leading to higher quality recycled plastic yields.

Innovia Films showcased Rayofloat shrink sleeve film for PET, HDPE and PP recycling, along with thinner Rayoface CPE and WPE

label films with a reduced carbon footprint and Rayoface JBD, a semi-solid film offering improved yield and opacity over solid white films.

Yupo introduced CleanSort, a next-generation in-mold label that fully detaches during recycling, allowing bottles to be recycled back to polymer form. It is compatible with HDPE, PP and PET resins.

Beontag launched its new Wash-Off portfolio for PET bottles. When immersed during the PET recycling process, Wash-Off labels peel off easily, preventing contamination and allowing a second or third generation of PET to be repackaged and reused.

Fedrigoni also focused on wash-off labels for glass bottles. This label can withstand ice buckets and refrigeration, but when it's time to reuse the bottle, the label can be easily removed with a 2 percent caustic bath.

Cosmo Films launched shrink sleeve label films that can be recycled with PET bottles. The company also highlighted its BOPP heat-resistant film that is well suited for both adhesive and extrusion lamination.

On show was also a range of Cosmo synthetic paper (CSP), an alternative to traditional paper. The company also displayed its high-barrier label films, high gloss films, matte-coated films and PVC-free films for graphic applications.

The company is undergoing significant expansion and will launch one of the largest BOPP production lines in India in March 2025. This new facility will produce 200 tons per day, totaling around 6,000 tons per month and 72,000 tons annually.

Cosmo is also expanding its manufacturing capabilities in the Chicago headquarters, where it is building a new warehouse. It will house a new 120-inch slitter for large and small rolls. One of the biggest challenges with producing products far away is ensuring timely delivery to customers. To address this, Cosmo is investing to bring material closer to customers.

Sandeep Dutta, president of overseas operations at Cosmo

"CUSTOMERS WERE EXCITED TO SEE NEW OPTIONS AND MODERN EQUIPMENT, AS IT MEANS MORE SUPPLY AND A GREATER VARIETY OF PRODUCTS, WHICH FOSTERS HEALTHY COMPETITION AND BENEFITS EVERYONE"



Barriers to adoption

The products showcased at Labelexpo Americas 2024 demonstrate that sustainable solutions are readily available and brand owners are showing interest in them. However, what's holding them back from fully embracing these options?

Lauren Beck, key accounts manager, wine market specialist, North America, Fedrigoni, says: 'I'm noticing a significant shift towards using recycled content paper. There's growing interest, but also a lot of misunderstanding around it. People don't always realize that with recycled content, you're not going to get a perfectly white label—there will be imperfections, and that's just natural.'

Another misconception, she highlights, is that sustainability always comes with a higher price tag. While that may have been true in the past, especially with FSC-certified materials, where higher costs were due to certifications, that's not always the case now, particularly in the wine and spirits industry.

'As long as you understand your marketing goals, we can guide you to sustainable options that may not necessarily be more expensive. And education is key. Many people don't fully understand what they're asking for, or why certain products cost more. For example, a compostable adhesive is pricier because

it's designed to degrade faster and has different qualities from a regular adhesive. But FSC-certified material is essentially the same as its non-certified counterpart, with the added benefit of traceability. It's not always about needing a compostable solution—sometimes it's just about choosing something made in a more sustainable way,' Beck explains.

Dan Riendeau, strategic business unit, director, packaging at Flexcon, adds that the company's research shows that consumers struggle with convenience, education, and a basic understanding of recycling.

'It's crucial for the industry – label suppliers, converters and brands – to provide better education throughout the value chain. While 70 percent of consumers base packaging decisions on sustainability, there's a lack of trust due to overstated claims.

'We focus on educating both internal and external stakeholders through presentations and promoting sustainable practices. Sustainability has three key pillars: social, environmental, and product circularity. Companies must reduce waste, manage resources responsibly, and build strong community ties, emphasizing the 3Ps: people, planet and profit,' he says.

Films, says: 'Labelexpo Americas provides a platform for showcasing innovation and fostering industry connections. Our presence here highlights Cosmo Films' commitment to the Americas market, where we have a strong presence with local warehousing and distribution and continue to innovate to meet evolving market demands.'

Another significant trend highlighted at the show was the emphasis on minimizing material consumption in label production. Products like thinner labels, linerless labels and materials made from alternate resources were seen at the show.

Armor limak introduced new ribbons on a 4-micron PET base, cutting plastic use by up to 12 percent per roll. It also highlighted its SolFree product, a 100 percent solvent-free thermal transfer ribbon process with reduced CO2 emissions.

Wacker focused on its silicone release coatings for labels and liner applications. The biggest focus for Wacker at the show was linerless.

Timothy Rummel, technical manager performance chemicals at Wacker, says: 'Linerless labeling is steadily growing, and we believe it's the future of the industry. However, due to the equipment changes required across the value chain, the transition will likely take many years, if not decades. As new and improved products enter the market, we expect the growth rate to accelerate.'

PCR CONTENT AND COMPOSTABLE MATERIALS

Attendees at the show saw label materials made from recycled content. These eco-friendly materials demonstrate a shift toward reducing environmental impact by repurposing waste.

UPM Raflatac showcased its new portfolio of UPM Raflatac Carbon Action plastic labels.

UPM Raflatac also promoted UPM Raflatac Forest Film, a 100 percent wood-based plastic face material that's ISCC Plus-certified bio-circular on a mass-balance basis; UPM Raflatac Ocean Action, the ISCC Plus-certified label material designed to combat ocean-bound plastic pollution; UPM Raflatac RAFNXT+, a labeling material verified by the Carbon Trust to reduce carbon footprint and help mitigate climate change.

Finally, UPM Raflatac highlighted the RafCycle Partner Program, enabling converters to offer to their customers label release liner collection and recycling services.

Clöckner Pentaplast featured its SmartCycle range of

heat shrink sleeve label films, including SmartCycle Plus, manufactured with up to 30 percent PCR. Also on show was the SmartCycle Pro line recyclable heat shrink sleeve label film featuring a 30 percent PCR.

Polyart Group launched r-Polyart, which claims to be the first synthetic paper made of 30 percent post-consumer recycled material. Another new product, Fiberskin Tag, is a tear- and water-resistant 100 percent paper that is recyclable, biodegradable and compostable. It is suitable for food contact and printable by thermal transfer for sustainable tags, wristbands, and water-resistant labels.

Lecta showed its range of facestock and release liner products for the pressure-sensitive label market, including one-side coated Creaset, cast-coated Eurokote, release liner Linerset, metalized Metalvac, thermal Termax, and new 'Recy' papers made from recycled fibers.

Innovia Films showcased its latest portfolio, including sustainable films, label and packaging films with recycled content and barrier functions and PVC-free graphic arts films made from polypropylene.

In the wine and spirits segment, **Fedrigoni** showcased alternative fibers, including a 100 percent cotton product line and a 100 percent sugarcane labels line. The company also showed fiber blends, where only a portion is made from alternative fibers, such as cotton, to improve sustainability.

Lauren Beck, key accounts manager, wine market specialist, North America, Fedrigoni, comments: 'A major highlight in the US is our 100 percent recycled content labelstock, made from a 50-50 blend of pre- and post-consumer waste. There's a known shortage of these materials, and their quality degrades with each recycling cycle. Additionally, factors such as inks and oils can further reduce quality and affect the visual appeal. To address this, we use pre-consumer waste from our paper production for a higher-quality recycled blend, ensuring a visually appealing and supply-stable product.'

Elevate Packaging showed its range of compostable labels. Richard Cohen, president and CEO, says: 'Founded in 2000, we were the first company to establish a fully sustainably focused packaging company with the mission to eliminate plastic waste and to restore the planet. We initially launched our PSA label line at Labelexpo Americas in 2008. The market has been slow to

A close-up, low-angle shot of a man's face, looking upwards and to the left with a slight smile. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, with a greenish-blue glow on his face. In the upper left corner, a portion of a computer screen is visible, showing a software interface with a grid and some text.

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“EDUCATION IS KEY. MANY PEOPLE DON’T FULLY UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY’RE ASKING FOR, OR WHY CERTAIN PRODUCTS COST MORE. A COMPOSTABLE ADHESIVE IS PRICIER BECAUSE IT’S DESIGNED TO DEGRADE FASTER AND HAS DIFFERENT QUALITIES FROM A REGULAR ADHESIVE”

adopt sustainability because of a lack of understanding despite a rapidly growing opportunity. We have been working with converters to reduce their risk and improve their profitability by providing them with a turnkey system to use compostable materials, either in flexible films or PSA label stock.

‘All the materials we use are backed by the Compost Stewardship Institute’s circular take-back program, which has certified our packaging, labels, and materials as compostable. Additionally, it facilitates the collection, sorting, and composting of all materials, providing the end customer with a completely circular compostable system.’

DURABILITY AND AESTHETICS

While sustainability is essential, product appeal remains the top priority on supermarket shelves. At the show, label materials that can withstand harsh conditions while preserving their visual appeal were prominently featured.

Aluminium Féron, a first-time exhibitor, showcased synthetic paper Monotex for digital printing as well as substrates for durable applications such as tear resistance, high-temperature resistance, metal detectability or RFID protection.

PPG Teslin showcased Teslin, a synthetic material offering durability and performance in challenging environments.

Showcasing products for enhanced shelf appeal, **Mactac** showcased its new Vivid chrome film labels developed for improved printability and barrier resistance to moisture and oil migration to prevent label staining. Mactac partnered with Fortis Solutions Group for a live demo applying Vivid film labels at its booth.

Also on show was the new direct thermal portfolio without bisphenols developed to comply with regulations limiting exposure to bisphenols, including the new logistics grade direct thermal material, MacScript 2 prescription grade and non-top coated grade.

Wausau Coated Products promoted pressure-sensitive adhesive label materials, custom-engineered coating equipment

for quick changeovers and flexible coating technologies. They offer top coating options like flexo, indigo, aqueous inkjet and other digital.

Nobelus showcased tactile finishes for prime labels using unsupported films and wet lamination. Highlights included Kares Film, with a velvety soft finish for luxury brands, and FineGrit Film, offering a durable, sandpaper-like texture.

Brand protection is another area where material exhibitors were able to show their innovations for anti-counterfeiting.

Astron Packaging introduced its Tackify pressure-sensitive labelstock from the new Coated Products Division. It promoted Dry Feek Void, a brand protection technology that leaves a dry adhesive residue in a VOID pattern when the label is removed. Additionally, it showcased Customized Void, which allows for personalized artwork and colors in place of the standard VOID pattern.

Ultra Destructible Vinyl, an overt brand protection product was also shown. Due to its ‘eggshell-like’ face construction, it is almost impossible to scrape off from the substrate. VeilReveal, also promoted at the show, is a covert product where a customized artwork printed on a residual face layer is revealed on the substrate upon label tampering.

Astron also showcased hybrid acrylic adhesives for challenging applications like in-line molded containers and corrugated boxes and PCR PET Films with eight to 40 percent PCR waste.

Digimarc showcased its smart label technology with digital watermarking, which is widely used for identifying and authenticating physical and digital items, including a notable partnership with a consortium of global central banks.

RFID

The array of RFID technology at Labelexpo Americas 2024 demonstrated that RFID is now revolutionizing the label industry. Exhibitors showcased innovative applications that connect the physical and digital worlds. With rising demand for connected packaging, RFID technology



offers brands valuable insights, enhances supply chain management, and can deliver personalized consumer experiences.

Beontag showed its latest innovation, Eco tags and the range of ARC-certified products that form a key enabler of all UHF and RFID services.

A major highlight at the show was the announcement of its new factory in Dayton, Ohio. The factory marks an 80M USD investment. The factory, still in its first phase, will eventually expand to include three phases and feature extensive RFID capabilities.

Ricardo Lobo, CEO of Beontag, comments: ‘We’re really hopeful that a lot of US growth will come from the introduction of new products and technologies, which was a big focus at Labelexpo Americas 2024. Customers were excited to see new options and modern equipment, as it means more supply and a greater variety of products, which fosters healthy competition and benefits everyone. There’s also a lot of excitement around our expansion into RFID, especially with our first North American factory now up and running. This adds to our global presence with facilities in Guangzhou, Bologna, Campo Morão, and our new R&D center in Tampa.’

The company’s paper-based Eco Tags are designed for intelligent packaging functionalities in the supply chain, retail and e-commerce applications. The technology enables paper-based RFID tags, providing a plastic-free and recyclable solution for packaging authentication.

Lobo added: ‘We’re in the process of completing the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) on this product, but we already know from its design that it will reduce the carbon footprint by 30, 40, or even 50 percent. We’ve already produced millions of units, which means we’ve prevented the use of thousands, if not millions, of plastic bottles. It’s an exciting development.’

Avery Dennison promoted its RFID capabilities for warehouse and supply chain applications. Booth visitors also discovered products that enable recycling or reuse and learned how they can contribute to a more

sustainable future.

Anh Marella, vice president of marketing at Avery Dennison, says: 'We are seeing a lot of interest in connected packaging and how can the technologies of RFID drive and transform new industries and revolutions and how they work giving enhanced visibility to supply chain, logistics as well as inventory management. And how do our consumers engage better with brands and intelligent products?'

'I'm really excited about the show. Just two years ago, we were dealing with Covid-19, and now it's amazing to see all the energy and excitement from everyone around. It's great to talk about the innovations we can achieve together as an industry, partner up, and truly make a positive impact on the world.'

Boingtech showcased a range of RFID products, including inlays, labels and tags. Visitors saw PET-free, paper-only options and RFID products for metal and wash-resistant applications.

The RFID Experience at Labelexpo Americas 2024 was a major highlight, drawing strong interest as attendees explored the potential of RFID and smart labels. Avery Dennison showcased RFID inlay tech, Delta ModTech demonstrated high-speed tag insertion, and Voyantic displayed RFID chip programming. The event also featured a 4.5-hour workshop by the Label Academy, offering an in-depth look at RFID tag production and applications.

INKS AND COATINGS

Packaging cannot be considered truly sustainable unless the inks, coatings and adhesives used in its design are also contributing to that goal. To address this, ink and coatings manufacturers are developing products that are water-based and washable in the recycling stream, ensuring that the material yield remains pure and uncontaminated. In addition, inks and coatings made from carbon-neutral resources were a major highlight at the show.

Another noteworthy trend was the shift toward low-migration LED UV inks and coatings. Label converters around the world transition from traditional mercury UV lamps to more energy-efficient and safer LED UV lamps.

Sun Chemical showcased SolarFlex CRCL inks for increased recyclability in labeling, high-adhesion SolarFlex UV flexo inks, SunCure Mono-web Coatings for reduced carbon footprint, SunVisto AquaGreen renewable inks, and MX12 ink dispensing technology for precise, waste-minimizing color mixing. Also featured are energy-efficient UV-LED inks, SunEvo digital technologies.

Actega promoted its low-migration inks and specialty coating effects for labels and flexible packaging, along with its Signite and Ecoleaf technologies.

Ink and coatings developed for the labels and flexible packaging industry include Actexact Safeshield inks for low-migration applications, LED-UV inks and coatings, haptic and optical effect coatings and opaque whites for labels, shrink sleeves and pouches.

Flint Group presented its Evolution de-inking primer and caustic-resistant Overprint Varnish (OPV), which enhance sustainability in packaging by improving material yield during the PET bottle recycling process.

The company also promoted the dual-curing EkoCure ink series, which eases the transition from UV mercury to UV LED curing and Ultra Clear Dual Cure Coatings, which can cure under UV LED lamps and UV lamps containing mercury.

HB Fuller showed Gel-Tac microsphere PSA for ultra-removable and highly repositionable labels. Gel-Tac utilizes water-based acrylic and pressure-sensitive microsphere technology for linerless self-wound labels. The company also presented its Swift melt Earthic 9010E, a near-carbon-neutral hot melt adhesive made from a high percentage of fossil-free and sustainable raw materials.

Interactive Inks & Coatings showcased its customizable UV adhesives for various applications, including lamination, PSAs, and glass and wallpaper release. Their water-based flexo inks and



“LABELXPO AMERICAS PROVIDES A PLATFORM FOR SHOWCASING INNOVATION AND FOSTERING INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS”

coatings provide sustainable printing alternatives, while UV inks and coatings offer durability and performance.

Henkel showed Technomelt PS 5052 Eco pressure-sensitive adhesive that has 52 percent bio-based content and Aquence PS 5500 RE pressure-sensitive adhesive for compostable labels.

INX International showed Genesis washable, INXFlex Contour and VerifyInk inks. Genesis is a recycle-friendly ink system that meets PET-CG-02 Critical Guidance Protocol for washable ink recyclable PET shrink sleeves. Genesis curable primer makes INXFlex Contour inks washable as well. This UV and LED dual cure flexographic ink system eliminates post-shrink adhesion loss and ink flaking. VerifyInk is a covert taggant technology that can be printed on paper, flexible packaging and shrink labels to combat counterfeiting using time-sensitive logistics, authentication, supply chain monitoring, and data-rich customer engagement features with unique smartphone readable codes on their products.

Natural Ink showcased a dual-cure ink series suitable for the LED transition. The inks cure under both light spectrums, LED and mercury lamps, allowing for a smooth transition to LED.

Nazdar Ink Technologies launched the W181 series water-based inks that offer bio and renewable resource benefits and the new 68500 LED flexo series, offering improved economics of the dual cure product.

Siegwerk marked its 200th anniversary and showed the FastMatch Cloud, a cloud-based color management system, and APR-certified inks for sustainable recycling. Siegwerk also promoted Nutriflex Orbis DC inks for UV/LED printing in the food, pharma, cosmetic and tobacco industries; Apex for basic stick and shine coating; and Sicura DGT for digital printing technologies.

Zeller+Gmelin exhibited Nuvaflex energy-curable ink series and the new EarthPrint UV recycle primer. The Nuvaflex 17 series is formulated for shelf stability and complete curing under LED systems. The new EarthPrint product line is designed to combat raw materials shortages and product recyclability through enhanced wash-off capabilities.

Lastly, there was a significant focus on reducing plastic usage and waste at Labelexpo Americas 2024. Convergen Energy, in partnership with TLMI and Rosemont Exposition Services, collected waste at the event to convert label byproducts into feedstock, which replaces fossil fuels in power plants and industrial facilities.



Continue reading for more on workflow and inspection at Labelexpo Americas 2024

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WORKFLOW AND INSPECTION

New developments in workflow and inspection technology show increasing integration of AI. James Quirk reports

Developments in workflow and inspection technology at Labelexpo Americas 2024 showed leading vendors responding to converters' desire to maximize productivity, increase efficiency and reduce waste. While AI has in recent years been integrated into inspection systems to optimize defect detection, it is increasingly being further deployed in other areas of workflow, as evidenced by Cerm's new AI-based Scheduling Optimizer.

"VENDORS ARE RESPONDING TO CONVERTERS' DESIRE TO MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY, INCREASE EFFICIENCY AND REDUCE WASTE"

Consolidation among workflow companies – as outlined in these pages following Labelexpo Europe last year – continues, with Label Traxx acquired by Amtech Software earlier this year, following its acquisition of partner companies Batched and Sitaline in 2023. Increasingly, label converters can turn to a single supplier for a multitude of workflow solutions.

L&L rounds up what was on display at Labelexpo Americas 2024.

Baldwin Vision Systems, on the stand of parent company BW Converting, demonstrated its range of inspection, LED curing and corona treatment technologies for the narrow web flexo market.

Baldwin's new PQV 4.0 process-optimization tool has been developed to enhance the inspection process, reducing the risk of human error and improving accuracy. PQV 4.0 can detect errors and faults with micrometer precision and provides a detailed report for correcting mistakes.

At Labelexpo, Baldwin presented the Corona SlimLine surface treatment, which bonds ink onto plastics, making it suitable for label printing and narrow web applications. The compact system provides power, electrode settings, and comfortable and ergonomic handling, operation and cleaning.

BST introduced SmartData QLink, a system enabling integration into existing workflows to automate label printing, from pre-press to finishing, packaging and dispatch.

In the pre-press workflow, job data is generated via interfaces to common ERP and MIS systems and sent to the print department via the customer network. Connecting to popular software packages such as Esko and Hybrid enables smooth integration into existing workflows.

The pre-press workflow includes defining the artwork in the layout program, whereby inspection zones are already defined, e.g., for variable barcodes or alphanumeric sequences. The pre-press software then automatically generates the step-and-repeat.

During the printing process, TubeScan monitors the results, including variable data and image finishing inspection. Reference images can be derived from the PDF or validated by comparison

with the first printed repeat.

With SmartData QLink, the roll log can be edited during printing. The 'good' count is displayed in real-time – per roll or cumulated over the entire job.

The new BST Dynamic Job Change technology enables a job change without stopping the machine. The TubeScan system automatically recognizes the new job and retrieves the corresponding master in real time for comparison during the inspection, saving time and reducing waste.

The QLink data from the printing process is used for further processing to rectify defects. In the post-press area, SmartData QLink provides the error logs via the lead-out barcode. Based on the roll map of the job, stored defects are processed efficiently, with the TubeScan placement function controlling the converting machine and enabling precise positioning of the faulty repeat. The rewinder can also be controlled with QLink Rewinder for automatic defect positioning.

Cerm unveiled its new AI-based Scheduling Optimizer. Powered by advanced AI algorithms, the Scheduling Optimizer streamlines long-term planning while allowing planners to focus on short-term adjustments tailored to specific production needs. This innovation is designed to improve efficiency, reduce costs and prepare businesses for the future of production management.

During live demonstrations, attendees saw how the tool simplifies production planning by handling long-term scheduling and allowing planners to focus on a 'frozen window' of short-term tasks adjusted to pre-defined parameters. The AI capabilities of the Scheduling Optimizer enable it to adapt to a wide range of production scenarios.

Also new was an AI-powered support assistant, Lumi, which offers Cerm MIS users immediate, 24/7, intelligent assistance. Lumi's capabilities promise to reduce downtime and improve operational efficiency by delivering precise, on-demand assistance that helps users maximize the potential of Cerm MIS. According to marketing manager Sebastiaan Hermans, the project was born from Cerm's own need to boost efficiency during the onboarding process of new team members and will 'transform how our clients experience support.'

Decosystem showcased Sentinel, an inspection technology developed for the label industry in different versions: silver, palladium, gold and platinum. Sentinel includes 100 percent print inspection control, color control, 2D and 3D code reading and grading and variable data verification. The optional Sentinel Workflow enables linking the printing machine and rewinder flow to save waste and keep production under control.

eProductivity Software showed the rearchitected Radius ERP and ePS Packaging Suite, featuring intuitive workflows, advanced integrations and automation with technology partners like HP Indigo PrintOS and Esko Automation Engine. Key highlights include full digital workflow automation and real-time visibility and traceability for packaging converters.

Esko showcased innovations in cloud technology, estimating software and in-line inspection hardware. The new Esko S2 platform is a cloud-based platform based on cloud computing, data sharing



“CONSOLIDATION AMONG WORKFLOW COMPANIES CONTINUES, WITH LABEL TRAXX ACQUIRED BY AMTECH SOFTWARE EARLIER THIS YEAR”

and AI. Esko's marketing director Jan De Roeck says: 'All Esko applications connect to the new platform, giving all stakeholders in the value chain 24/7 real-time access to live data and identical resources, wherever in the world they reside. Moreover, Esko S2 is an open platform supporting connectivity with partners.'

Also on show was Esko's new varnish inspection module for the Esko AVT Helios system, which facilitates viewing and inspection of varnish and coating on various substrates simultaneously with print inspection.

EyeC showed live demonstrations of the new EyeC ProofRunner options for AI-based defect classification and the improved EyeC Proofifier DT series. The company's newest in-line inspection system – the EyeC ProofRunner Highlight – was shown on a Prati rewinder.

The in-line inspection system offers 100 percent print inspection for labels and flexible packaging with web widths of up to 1,700mm. New options for the ProofRunner line include AI-based defect classification. With precise defect classification based on the image content, relevant defects can be identified more clearly and brought to the operator's attention.

The EyeC Proofifier 1200 DT, for quality control of large-format print samples, featured improved speed, handling and ease of maintenance. There were also demonstrations of EyeC Proofifier Graphic, an artwork proofreading software for automatically comparing print-ready or step-and-repeat files with approved artwork.

EyeC also showed its inspection technology for RFID labels. The software conducts precise measurements and comparisons to maintain quality control by identifying deviations from the original PDF.

Formic promoted its robotics-as-a-service product to help factories start automating. The company delivers customized robot systems from leading vendors at hourly rates with no upfront investments, guaranteed uptime, and full service, including everything from planning and deployment to maintenance and upgrades.

GlobalVision featured products for proofreading, quality assurance and requirements for regulated industries with capabilities including braille height inspection, print inspection, text inspection, barcode inspection, cloud PDF and proof inspection, large-format scanners for full press sheet inspection, and counting systems for inserts, cartons and vials.

GMG Americas highlighted four technologies at the show.

ColorFarm, distributed by GMG, is a production cockpit for GMG technologies that streamlines processes, integrates preflighting, and centralizes information management between GMG software. With its easy job quoting and production control, ColorFarm adds cost-saving potential to industrial digital printing.

Also on show was GMG ColorProof, designed specifically for HP Indigo. It delivers predictability and cost-effective proofs, freeing up press capacity and enabling integration of proofing without disrupting press schedules.

The company also promoted its Proofing Calculator Tool, which demonstrates cost savings possible with GMG ColorProof for HP Indigo; and GMG ColorPlugin for Adobe Illustrator, offering a vector conversion.

GSE Dispensing, on the stand of its North American distributor UPrint Technologies, introduced the redesign of its software program, GSE Advanced reporting. The new version automatically sends reports from the dispensing machine, giving businesses deeper insights into ink consumption.

In the fourth quarter of 2024, GSE will introduce a service to upgrade its global installed base of Colorsat ink dispensing systems and Ink manager software to Windows 11. The initiative will ensure GSE's customers benefit from the enhanced security and performance of the latest Windows operating system.

GTI Graphic Technology presented its new D50 LED product portfolio, including desktop systems, floor stand models, large format viewing systems and press console viewing stations. The LED lamps used in these products have a CRI that is greater than 98, are environmentally friendly, offer compliance to ISO 3664:2009 for 7,500 hours of use, are EU RoHS compliant, require no warm-up time, and are available in lengths of 24in, 36in, 48in, and 60in.

Hybrid Software showcased its product portfolio, including the new PackZ10, CloudFlow, ColorLogic's color management software, SmartDFE and iC3D. Hybrid PackZ10 is the latest version of the company's all-in-one PDF editor. It adds new capabilities for both digital and conventional printing, including enhanced 3D visualization and ray tracing for shrink sleeves and die-formed metal cans. The product utilizes a tight integration of two Hybrid Software products, iC3D and Capture 3D. PackZ10 supports the direct interface to the new LabelStream LS2000 digital press.

Hybrid Software's auto layout and step-and-repeat technology for roll-fed digital labels and stack offset printers, Packimizer, includes new features to manage short print runs and smaller quantities. It analyzes order data to optimize the layout and repetitions of labels on a roll based on quantity, offering maximum substrate usage and press uptime.

Hybrid CloudFlow is a configurable enterprise production workflow system that automates pre-press tasks. MyCloudFlow is a 100 percent cloud-based SaaS technology running in a dedicated Amazon Web Services (AWS) cluster and supported by Hybrid's IT team, with strong data protection and immutable backups.

CloudFlow's ProofScope tool for artwork viewing and approval now includes a 3D approval system based on iC3D technology. Users can visualize product labels as well as embellishments like glitter and varnishes applied directly to three-dimensional shapes, including cartons and bottles.

ColorSpace offers optimized color matching for digital and conventional printing to all users of PackZ and CloudFlow. It supports different color spaces, from process color and extended gamut printing to specific brand color inks. It offers an automatic selection of the best ink configuration for each job on a given printing press based on the slightest deviation from the desired spectral color (ΔE), with reporting to MIS/ERP for accurate quoting.

SmartDFE is an intelligent digital front end (DFE) targeted at high-speed, single-pass digital presses printing variable data. It is built upon Harlequin Direct, providing rasterization and inkjet

“AI HAS IN RECENT YEARS BEEN INTEGRATED INTO INSPECTION SYSTEMS TO OPTIMIZE DEFECT DETECTION, IT IS INCREASINGLY BEING FURTHER DEPLOYED IN OTHER AREAS OF WORKFLOW”

drop generation. It offers independence from third-party core RIP technologies, relying on Hybrid's own Harlequin Core as well as workflow technology based on CloudFlow, and color management from ColorLogic. SmartDFE is used to power several digital label presses that are displayed at Labelexpo, although it is often marketed and sold under Hybrid Software OEM customers' brand names.

Infigo demonstrated its web-to-label platform, which can easily integrate with other software and hardware to create a seamless workflow. New Connect modules allow integration with Label Traxx and Cerm MIS systems, while the Infigo Label Factory allows the user to build their own web-to-label business by creating a storefront in minutes.

Infinity ID promoted its integrated IOT software, developed to optimize and simplify the value chain's operations and processes. Based on RFID technology, it offers modular products for every sector that connect every item and communicate with management systems.

Label Traxx exhibited at Labelexpo Americas for the first time as part of Amtech Software following its acquisition earlier this year. The combined company provides software to more than 750 customers and 1,200 manufacturing sites across the globe. At the show, the company demonstrated new product enhancements for Label Traxx, including updates to its core ERP as well as Batched and Sitrine. New developments include the Lead Time Manager and Automatic Stock Planning tool for Batched, Automated Order Entry for Sitrine, and multi-site Enterprise Edition of Label Traxx.

MicroDynamics carried out live demos of the Veritas and MicroScan3 anilox inspection systems. With +/- 1 percent repeatability and scans in less than 10 seconds, users can inspect a wide variety of engraving depths, shapes and sizes, quickly and accurately. Also on show was a newly released wide field mode which doubles the field of view to inspect a wider range of rolls without the risks or downtime of lens changes.

OneVision Software showcased its Label Automation Suite, which combines production planning with print file optimization. Digital printers can control and monitor label production with all steps mapped transparently in the software as a digital job bag. The modular structure of the software enables individual configurations tailored to specific requirements.

OneVision is a technology partner for Canon's new LabelStream LS2000 inkjet press, and the company focused on how users of the press can benefit from its process automation and end-to-end workflow.

Priber promoted the SQ Label software suite for efficient and reliable barcode and label printing. It features specialized tools for cable and wire marking, double-sided printing and an integrated product catalog.

Re promoted ReVision Net, an integrated web viewing and control system. From a single control point, with up to two touch displays, operators have access to any number of ultra-compact, high-quality cameras. The system offers a large field of view and captures still details with 16 times zoom even at high web speeds.

Seradex demonstrated its ERP manufacturing software, which includes MIS systems for label and package printing. The company has created an ERP program that automates leads, opportunities, quotes, orders, sales, manufacturing, scheduling, purchasing, inventory and financials into one application, eliminating information silos.

Among the options offered by Seradex's software, Powerful

Product Configuration allows the generation of accurate estimates for any job, CRM tools allow sales reps to manage their pipeline and repeat orders, Shop Floor tools enable scheduling and management of personnel, machines, inks and substrates, and Workflow tools manage artwork, dies, production and purchasing.

TR Electronics demonstrated measuring and positioning technologies specifically designed to optimize label manufacturing operations. They ensure precise label detection and positioning, even at high belt speeds. TR Electronics products are calibrated for a wide range of label materials, including paper, metallic, transparent, and both thin and thick labels.

Troika Systems presented its AniCAM HD Plus and focused its Labelexpo presence on topics such as 3D anilox measurement, the importance of precision roll, cylinder and plate inspection, as well as sustainability goals. Troika's 3D scanning microscopes measure anilox and gravure cylinder volumes, as well as flexo plate dot, and by recording the data into the inventory management software, enables improvements of internal processes.

Canada-based **Ultimate Tech**, making its Labelexpo Americas debut, launched a fully automated and optimized label production software for Canon's LabelStream LS2000 inkjet label press, which was unveiled at the show and will be available next year.

Unilux featured the new UniPrint monitoring system, developed in partnership with GlobalVision, which gives operators the ability to correct defects through touch-screen controls and provides access to features like split-screen and programmable web positions.

High-definition images captured by UniPrint are transferred to GlobalVision press proofing software for analysis on-demand. Operators are alerted of changes in quality in real-time and empowered to make corrections before the run is complete.

UPrint Technologies launched Strobbox, a developed by award-winning AI specialist NoLix. The device automates the comparison of an original PDF design with the printed output, ensuring quality control. It uses an advanced AI engine capable of non-boundary self-learning, which means the system continuously improves and adapts without predefined limits. This allows the technology to detect defects in 15 different classes, ranging from color inconsistencies and mis-registration to subtle print anomalies that might otherwise go unnoticed.

The system's ability to learn and evolve with each print run ensures that defect detection becomes increasingly precise and reliable. 'The Strobbox represents a significant leap forward in quality assurance,' said Edward Scheppink, CEO of UPrint Technologies.

Voyantic showed test and quality inspection systems for high-speed Rain RFID and NFC label converting lines and processing machines. It demonstrated the Voyantic Tagsurance 3, which can ensure the quality and performance of every RFID label on the production line while giving real-time visibility into the machine operation. The modular and scalable system is easy to integrate into a wide range of machines.

X-Rite showed its latest color measurement, color specification, and quality control technology, including the eXact 2 handheld spectrophotometer with the ability to measure color across various substrates, including flexible film and paper while also verifying customer standards.



Continue reading to learn more about plates and platemaking exhibitors at Labelexpo Americas 2024

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Pouch Making Equipment

PLATES AND PLATEMAKING

From self-adhesive sleeves to automatic plate-mounters, exhibitors showcased products that addressed industry challenges. Selah Zighelboim reports

Sustainability and automation were on display in the plate and platemaking sector as exhibitors showed off their products' abilities to address environmental and workforce challenges.

Polymount US showcased its self-adhesive sleeves, which allow plates to be mounted without tape or sticky back. Not using tape to mount plates saves companies time and money while reducing waste, says Alan Rogers, vice president of sales at Polymount US.

In addition, Polymount partnered with **Mark Andy Print Products** to showcase a self-contained plate cleaner for narrow web machines. Polymount has been making this plate-cleaner for the wide-web market for 20 years, but it is new this year for narrow web. Mark Andy Print Products also showcased the VPM400 video plate-mounter, which enables increased productivity.

Tesa Tapes showed Twinlock technology, a self-adhesive sleeve for flexographic printing, eliminating the need for additional adhesive tapes. The foam surface can be activated with a solvent activator, which turns the surface tacky for mounting plates without tape. The foam can last up to five years. The company also displayed a new flexo tape for easy mounting and demounting of plates from the sleeves.

Luminite Products Corporation exhibited an alternative to plate-mounting tape by applying the engraved rubber directly onto cylinders, eliminating the need for sleeves and tape. While a less wasteful alternative to traditional plates, this product comes with the setback that a specific cylinder can only be used for one pattern. Luminite also produces continuous plates that can slide onto cylinders.

AV Flexologic offered increased automation with its SAMM USD 800 plate-mounter. The plate-mounter has been on the market for 15 years but has seen a surge in popularity since the pandemic.

Xsys and **Anderson & Vreeland** partnered to showcase several technologies. This included the Orbital XP, a water-wash system launched at the event. This system processes flexographic plates and is more automated and ergonomic than the Orbital X that Anderson & Vreeland has had on the market for 20 years.

The booth also showcased the nyloflex Xpress Thermal Processor. Thermal plate processing is not only more environmentally friendly than solvent wash – it is faster, says James Van Buskirk, technical director at Xsys. With thermal processing, a plate can be made in 50 minutes rather than three hours. Compared to water-wash, thermal can be used to process a larger range of plate materials.

Xsys' software on display, the ThermoFlexX EcoFill and Catena ProServX, offer environmental benefits and improved efficiency. EcoFill reduces the washout solvent needed for ThermoFlexX imagers, while Catena ProServX is a cloud-based tool that helps with maintenance and quality control.

DuPont Cyrel exhibited several new products, including the Fast 1000 TD. This thermal processor is more user-friendly and sustainable than its previous iteration. It can process plates up to 35.4x47.2in in less than an hour with either an LED-based XPS exposure unit or the Cyrel 1000 ECLF. DuPont also has promoted a new East Fast EFM photopolymer plate designed for recycled and rough paper substrates.



“YEARS AGO, WATER-WASH DID NOT NECESSARILY HAVE A GREAT NAME. TECHNOLOGY HAS CHANGED RAPIDLY. IT HAS REALLY COME A LONG WAY. IT WILL COMPETE NOW WITH THERMAL. IT WILL COMPETE NOW WITH A SOLVENT-WASH PLATE”

CrownFlex, a Hong Kong-based company exhibiting at Labelexpo Americas for the first time, promoted a thermal processor as part of its platemaking system. CrownFlex's system provides all parts of the platemaking process, a fast and environmentally-friendly option that produces no water or chemical waste and processes plates in 45 minutes.

Asahi Photoproducts continued to advocate for water-wash technology with its AWP-CleanFlat and AWP-DEW flexo plates. Asahi also showcased AFP-R, a low-solvent-consuming plate to help companies make the transition away from solvent.

In addition, Asahi promoted its AWP-Loop, a wastewater recycling system based on Asahi Kasei microza technology. The system reuses 70 percent of the 10 liters of water needed to produce a water-wash flexo plate.

Fujifilm showcased an updated version of its water-wash Flenex plates, in addition to two different sizes of water-wash processors.

The updated Flenex plate is more durable, with a reduced plate swell, and has a higher resolution. It can achieve a 200lpi at 4000dpi, with a 1 percent process dot, with a platemaking time of less than 40 min.



Continue reading for a full review of dies and tooling at Labelexpo Americas 2024



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DIES AND TOOLING

Dies and tooling suppliers are increasingly adopting automation to shorten setup times, reduce human error and improve waste management, streamlining production processes for label converters. Piotr Wnuk reports

In recent years, the printing industry has seen a growing emphasis on automation, efficiency and waste reduction. After reaching record flexo and digital printing speeds, the focus has shifted to dies and tooling manufacturers, who are responding with improvements in setup time, ease of use and faster cleaning to contribute to overall productivity gains.

Apex International showcased the GTT 2.0 anilox technology. This product, developed over nearly 10 years, is specifically engineered to mitigate liquid turbulence, resulting in a calm liquid surface that increases quality and performance at high press speeds. According to Apex, it reduces ink spitting, mottling, pinholing, plugging and dot gain. The company states that the GTT 2.0's improved engraving ensures up to a 50 percent reduction in cell wall surface area across the anilox while also decreasing the required channel depth by an average of 25 percent. Additionally, the company introduced ultra-shallow Apex UltraCell engravings, designed for greater ink release and easy cleaning.

CTS Industries promoted the Pro-Lite HD laser-engraved ceramic anilox roller, developed for ease of care and cleaning. Dubbed as an 'operator-friendly anilox,' this product is up to 76 percent lighter than conventional bases, resulting in lower shipping costs, easier lifting, and less susceptibility to damage. The company also showcased its EZ View Pro engraving specs, which help operators easily view details such as LPI, BCM, and serial ID to better identify and protect anilox inventory.

One of the highlights of the **Kocher + Beck** stand was the GapMaster EM (Electronic Move), a servo-driven adjustable anvil system that allows users to adjust increments as small as 0.25 microns using a rotary dial and digital input with haptic feedback for the operator. The GapMaster EM also features user-friendly calibration, a home/start function, job history storage, and limits on adjustments if needed. The EM Retrofit, with the same capabilities, can be retrofitted to all existing Kocher + Beck GapMaster units on-site by replacing the mechanical handle with an electrical drive unit.

Kocher + Beck also showcased its latest innovations in die-cutting with the new Industry 4.0-ready digital KMS Pressure Gauge System, equipped with various sensors and offering greater stability under load changes.

Maxcess introduced RotoMetrics' new flexible die portfolio, re-engineered with automated manufacturing processes for enhanced precision and reliability. Additionally, chrome coating processes double the lifespan and durability of the dies. Maxcess promoted its award-winning RotoRepel anti-adhesive performance coating, which provides comprehensive adhesive control benefits and improves overall die and press performance by reducing adhesive buildup and minimizing die wear and damage.

RotoMetrics' intelligent adjustable anvils offer the reliability of AccuAdjust, which can be upgraded with RotoAdjust for additional features such as job recall and operator interface. The company also showcased RotoScan, an intelligent die station providing fully automated anvil adjustments to cut perfect labels while delivering Industry 4.0 analytics for smarter operations. RotoScan will be available commercially in 2025.

Maxcess also introduced the Fife guiding systems, featuring the new Fife SmartDrive Actuator and GuideLine Digital Sensor for maintaining precise web alignment. Webex tension control



“DIES AND TOOLING MANUFACTURERS INTRODUCE IMPROVEMENTS IN SETUP TIME, EASE OF USE AND FASTER CLEANING TO CONTRIBUTE TO OVERALL PRODUCTIVITY GAINS”

products, with advanced Magpowr technology, allow press operators to monitor and control web tension, ensuring consistent material handling and waste reduction. Additionally, Maxcess launched Tidland SmartSlit, an automated slitting system designed to minimize manual adjustments.

Rotometal showcased its AluLite Magnetic Cylinders, manufactured from aerospace-grade aluminum, offering up to a 50 percent weight reduction. This translates to time savings and improved ergonomics. The company also promoted its Antifriction Print Cylinders, which undergo a unique surface treatment that allows tape to be peeled off in one piece. This treatment simplifies preparation and changeovers, enables quicker tape changes, and enhances durability, adhesion, and scratch resistance.

Rotometal also introduced ultra-lightweight rotoSleeves made from composite materials or aluminum.

Wilson Manufacturing highlighted its expanded line of accessories, including the Cylinder Inspection Tool, which accurately measures the undercut in magnetic cylinders and assesses cylinder surfaces for wear and irregularities. The company also presented newly designed magnetic-base bearer wipers.

Wink unveiled its latest developments in SuperCut flexible dies, including advanced coatings and optimized cutting angles designed for various label applications. The company also demonstrated its SmartGap system, featuring the newly developed SmartGap Advance. All SmartGap versions utilize extra-wide bearing rings to support the anvil cylinder body. While the Advance version is controlled mechanically using adjustment knobs, the Touch digital version is managed through a control unit and display that provides several powerful functions.



Continue reading for a review of ancillary technology at Labelexpo Americas 2024

ANCILLARY TECHNOLOGY

Ancillary exhibitors at Labelexpo Americas 2024 showcased RFID equipment, sustainability and much more. Crystal Lindell reports

New and improved RFID labeling equipment, small-batch printing tools and sustainable technology were among the trends for ancillary technology exhibitors at this year's Labelexpo Americas 2024.

Ancillary suppliers also were focused on offering increased operator friendliness and improved software capabilities at the show, as well as stronger hardware upgrades.

“ALTHOUGH RFID TECHNOLOGY HAS BEEN AROUND FOR MANY YEARS, THE RECENT USE OF RFID FOR INVENTORY TRACKING AND SECURITY ON A LARGE SCALE IS RELATIVELY NEW”

SUPPLIERS RESPOND TO RFID

Walmart has been leading the push for companies to include RFID in its labeling. The move could revolutionize both the checkout process and inventory management, but it also requires big changes from its suppliers.

Many of the ancillary exhibitors at this year's show offered innovative technologies to companies looking to integrate RFID tags into their labeling.

Buskro showed RFID-DLP1085, which integrates printing, personalization and tracking in a single seamless process. Engineered for fast, reliable label production to meet demanding schedules, it includes built-in RFID capabilities to enhance tracking and inventory management.

BW Papersystems highlighted multiple manufacturing technologies for the RFID industry with its T-165 manufacturing platform, which is made for the entire value chain of RFID production. The highly modular system ensures accurate RFID inlay placement, register lamination of multiple layers of paper or foil, rotary die cutting and other relevant supplementary processes. The available features also include chip data encoding and tag personalization.

EAM featured Wipe-on RFID labeling machines, which included custom labeling and part handling, high-speed application rate capability and a small integration footprint.

‘Although RFID technology has been around for many years, the recent use of RFID for inventory tracking and security on a large scale is relatively new,’ the company says. ‘We work directly and cooperatively with EAS and RFID label manufacturers to improve our equipment and their label manufacturing processes to bring the end customer the best EAS and RFID solutions.’

Kirk-Rudy showed multiple RFID technologies as well, one of which was the KR 519 label and encoding RFID system, able to apply RFID labels and encode them in one machine. Offering UHF Gen II RFID chip pipeline coding, its high-reliability camera reads 1D, 2D barcodes and OCR.

Rosas Maschinenbau, which exhibited with Graph-Tech USA, showed RFID label converting on the Leopard 300 rewinder. The equipment is a bidirectional tabletop rewinder that features an advanced RFID HF and UHF tag serialization module with code verifier and backside serialization and a TIJ printer for numbering and coding. This technology encodes and verifies RFID tags at high speeds.

Voyantic showed Tagsurance 3 quality control system. Both modular and scalable, it's a complete system for measuring the performance of UHF and HF RFID inlays, tags and labels in different stages of the production process, from chip attachment to label converting and incoming inspection.

SUSTAINABLE, ENERGY-EFFICIENT PRODUCTS

Sustainable and energy-efficient products were also popular at this year's Labelexpo Americas, as exhibitors showed off both the environmental benefits and the potential for cost savings.

Coast Controls featured a pneumatic all-air system web guide. Based on a proportional All-Air Servo Control, which operates entirely on low-pressure plant air, the Servo Controller works with an Airflow sensor, so it uses no electricity and offers pinpoint accuracy as well as dependability.

Flexo Wash highlighted anilox laser cleaning machines under its FW 850 line. The waste-free systems clean the rolls without water or chemicals. And the company has made improvements to the system that makes it faster.

Eaglewood Technologies showcased Bella - Model DC-1300, certified for HP Indigo digital presses. The company says it's the most thorough, environmentally-friendly and cost-effective method for cleaning all critical press components. Ink tanks, application rollers, etc are cleaned efficiently with HP specific imaging oil. The integrated recycling system continuously removes the HP imaging oil from ink particles. As a result, operating costs and the volume of hazardous waste are reduced to a minimum.

Excelitas featured Phoseon Nexus One UV LED curing systems with an expanded UV LED curing platform for flexographic printing. The company highlighted the fact that the Nexus One water-cooled products are now available in six sizes, including 300mm, 375mm, 450mm, 525mm, 600mm and 675mm. According to the company, the new systems deliver 38 percent more energy with 90 Watts per 25mm LED array segment.

GEW launched AeroLED2 at the show, which features an efficient optical design that enables the lowest energy usage of all GEW products.

AeroLED2 is a next-generation, higher-power UV LED system for full cure, printing, coating and converting applications up to 70cm wide; AeroLED2 offers a 30 percent increase in electrical power (70W/cm), a 30 percent increase in UV dose (170mJ/cm²) and a 40 percent increase in UV irradiance (26W/cm²) compared to its predecessor, AeroLED.

AeroLED2 is also ArcLED compatible. Using the same fan and ducting arrangement as the industry standard E2C, customers have total flexibility to switch between UV arc and AeroLED2 on any station. This delivers energy savings of up to 55 percent compared to a conventional UV arc system. In fact, two AeroLED2



“OUR GOAL IS TO MINIMIZE DOWNTIME AND ENSURE THAT YOUR OPERATIONS RUN SMOOTHLY AND EFFICIENTLY”

systems have a lower electrical supply requirement than just one conventional arc UV system.

Kongskilde Industries showed a live set-up of its Kongskilde CUB All-in-One Unit trimmer. Tailored for label converting, film extrusion, coating and lamination, slitting and rewinding, printing, and packaging production lines, the versatile, compact unit handles various types of waste, including adhesive and non-adhesive trim, easily moving between machines. It transports trim up to 35m and disposes of it into a 900-liter bag. The machine's energy-efficient radial ventilator means it also has low energy consumption.

LaserClean showcased sustainable anilox cleaning machines at this year's show. The company launched ALCS800 machine, equipped with the latest laser cleaning technology for narrow and mid-web. The machine offers an eco-friendly alternative to traditional anilox cleaning methods, reducing waste and minimizing environmental impact.

Lundberg Tech showcased MatrixCompactor 200, a waste-capturing system designed specifically for label matrix handling. This system helps to reduce the use of virgin materials and lower the CO2 footprint associated with the transport of waste. Additionally, it minimizes the unnecessary disposal of paper cores and alleviates the physical strain on press operators by reducing heavy lifting requirements.

Ox Industries showcased a selection of 100 percent uncoated, recycled paperboard and customer-converted paper products, including tube and core grades. The company originally purchased recycled material from nearby paper mills, but in 2007 it opened its own paper mills across the United States so that it could control the entire process. Now, with five paper mills across the country, they offer their paper products from 100 percent recycled materials.

Tootech featured a laser label printer, TTE-72FK. Printing underneath the laminated layer onto the middle layer prevents erasing from wear or friction. And it's designed to create no-ribbon waste, making it eco-friendly.

Meanwhile, **Tower Products**, a manufacturer of environmentally sensitive pressroom chemistry for the offset and flexographic printing industry, launched a new adhesive cleaning product, SmartFlex Adhesive Remover.

Developed for use on plate cylinders in the flexographic and offset pressroom, it features a low-odor formula that cleans the adhesive without any damage to the photopolymer plate, plate cylinder or any machinery. The formula also does not contain any toxic ingredients and has a very high flashpoint to enhance workplace safety. Further solidifying its eco-friendly status, it's also sold in an easy-to-use recyclable quart container.

INSPECTION EQUIPMENT

Inspection equipment continues to improve as companies make faster, more precise machines that also make it easier to identify mistakes before they spin out of control.

Erhard + Leimer showcased a web monitoring system, ELScan OMS5. Featuring DualView technology with 2 x 18 megapixels for magnificent image quality, it also has a motorized crossbeam with precise, high-speed control.

The unique LED-based flash concept works for all types of printing, and it offers straightforward system integration due to the new quick alignment function.

It has Autoscan functions, digital repeat overview with fast navigation and a position gallery with 21 saved positions. It also offers master image comparison in different variants, DeltaE color monitoring, detection of stripe defects, image stabilization, automatic job change detection and the ability to archive repeat orders.

E+L also featured 200 percent inspection system, Smartscan, designed for printing and finishing machines for narrow-web applications. It offers continuous double inspection of the entire width and length of the web, and can detect print defects, missing labels, unremoved matrices, splice points, flags, color defects, damage and more.

Re USA showcased ReVision Net, an integrated web viewing and control system. From a single control point, with up to two touch displays, operators have access to any number of ultra-compact, high-quality cameras. The system offers a large field of view and captures still details with 16 times zoom, even at high web speeds.

TKM showed Enpurex Ecoline Cleaning Wipes, which can be used for hand and surface cleaning. They can remove even coarse soiling such as paint, varnish, grease, oil, glue, wax, soot, permanent markers, ballpoint pens, grease and board markers. The wipes are also characterized by their skin-friendly and moisturizing effect and are pH-neutral.

Unilux unveiled a collaboration with GlobalVision to provide on-demand press proofing. It will provide the printers with the ability to compare the print quality to a master proof on-press using industry standards for barcode grading and delta color.

High-definition images captured by UniPrint are transferred to GlobalVision press proofing software for analysis on-demand. Operators are alerted of changes in quality in real time and empowered to make corrections before the run is complete.

ADVANCES IN SOFTWARE

Ease-of-use was also a theme at this year's expo. Several ancillary exhibitors showcased new, more operator-friendly equipment,

software upgrades and machines.

Brodbeck Maschinenbau featured Multi ID Core Cutter UNI 1000, a machine with the patent-pending design of a single-cutting mandrel suitable for all core diameters between 25 and 180 mm.

Once the desired cutting length and quantities are keyed in and the parent tubes fed in, the machine cuts and discharges cores without additional setup, making it operator friendly.

Digital Print introduced the M7, a 13-in variable system operating at speeds over 800ft/min with a resolution of up to 600 DPI, printing variable barcodes, text and graphics.

The M7 is designed for efficiency and precision, optimizing ink usage and minimizing downtime.

The M713-in system offers user-friendly operation and maintenance. The system can print widths of over 26in and be configured to print duplex jobs. It also comes in a double-bar configuration that can run twice the speed and resolution of a standard single-bar system.

Double E Group was exhibiting with its partner Dotec Roll Handling, showing equipment that was sure to make a lot of operators' lives easier. The company's roll handlers mean that operators no longer have to manually lift large, heavy rolls. Instead, its machines can lift it for them. Designed for control, easy operation, and optimal ergonomic use, the line makes work both easier and more enjoyable.

GoDEX International unveiled thermal printing technologies, which integrate with popular printer languages such as EZPL, GEPL, GZPL, GDPL and come with free label and tag design software that supports database integration. GoDEX's showcase is headlined by the GX4600i, a 600 DPI thermal printer boasting a 5in video touchscreen LCD with built-in video-assisted guidance, as well as a one-touch calibration button.

Graymills featured Printclean HP Indigo edition parts washer, which was designed with assistance from experts at HP. Built to operate with HP's imaging oil, it features an extra-long, stay-put flexible metal flush hose for directed hands-free flushing action. It also has a permanently mounted flow-thru brush for detailed cleaning and adjustable bi-level work shelves. There's also a safety lid that closes to reduce fluid evaporation and shuts automatically in case of fire.

MFT Automation showcased a 12in Impresso Labeler and Feeder System featuring 300-millimeter width capability. Its three-piece shaft allows for easy belt changeover, and its brushless servo motor allows for accurate placement.

The self-contained computer controls

“MANY OF THE ANCILLARY EXHIBITORS AT THIS YEAR'S SHOW OFFERED INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMPANIES LOOKING TO INTEGRATE RFID TAGS INTO THEIR LABELING”

offer an on-board panel designed to easily interface with existing computers, PLC, or other host machinery.

MoistTech featured moisture measurement sensors, which provide an accurate and reliable near-infrared system, increasing efficiency, quality control and consistency while eliminating rework, waste and human error from time-consuming lab methods. The result is an almost instant ROI.

QC Electronics launched newly redesigned electrode assemblies designed to make operation, maintenance, and service more straightforward. New features include lifting shroud covers on both ceramic and metal assemblies, optimized electrode keys on our metal assemblies, fresh new features on the controls, and more, all designed with the end user in mind.

Rigaku Technologies presented the NEX LS, an in-line silicone coatings analyzer for real-time process control. NEX LS serves roll-to-roll applications and allows continuous monitoring of the process from start to finish without stopping production. NEX LS software features an analytical head that sweeps back and forth across a moving web, as real-time data displays as a graphical cross-direction and machine-direction profile. This helps silicone coaters make immediate quality control decisions to achieve a targeted laydown and ensure release properties or barriers are not compromised.

Sonic Solutions showcased Phoenix Line of equipment, which features the company's traditional systems but is upgraded with several enhancements that make it easier to use. Featuring a safer level of ultrasonics, it uses 68 kHz to allow smaller bubbles to get into the smaller cells of the higher line count rolls.

It also has modified power generators, which are now external, interchangeable and easily replaceable.

Start International showed LR4500 bidirectional label rewinder, which rolls labels onto a roll core as they are dispensed from a thermal transfer printer or reel. The label rewinder operates in two directions, forward and backward. It also has two speeds, slow and fast. Two LR4500 label rewinders can be used to unwind and rewind labels for the proper orientation of labels.

DOCTOR BLADES AND ANILOX ROLLS

Exhibitors at this year's show also highlighted advances in hardware, including doctor blades, anilox rolls and engraving equipment.

Flexon featured Swed/Cut highly refined, micro structured carbon, stainless, and coated steel doctor blades. They eliminate print defects, minimize waste and downtime, boost production speeds, and enhance performance, all while protecting your bottom line. The range of high-quality carbon, stainless and coated steels known for its micro-refined structures and slow, even edge wear.

Fuji Shoko featured ceramic doctor blades, which last longer, meaning they don't have to be changed as often. That results in less downtime. Ceramic Doctor Hi-Blade is the company's highest-quality ceramic-coated model, offering excellent resistance against wear and abrasion. Our special ceramic coating improves the wiping quality and blade life.

Harper Corporation featured its Xtreme Channeled Application Technology (XCAT).

The XCAT engraving has a combination of consistent pocket structures that create a channel flow, acting like a closed cell channel without ink sag. It also makes the anilox easier to clean and can reduce or eliminate scoring by allowing particles to pass through rather than being trapped behind the blade.

The XCAT has been designed to maintain the optimization in artwork running on traditional 60-degree engravings and is suitable for ink spitting, ghosting, scoring, foaming, ink re-solubility at high speeds, and maintaining plate angles and speed.

Interflex Laser Engravers featured Blömker Hybrid Sleeves that use the same technology as the original sleeve design; they also feature a stronger-than-steel, carbon-fiber technology inner cord that makes them 20-25 percent lighter than the standard sleeve. It also allows for tighter tolerances and less deflection.

They work best with wide web applications where high-speed printing requires improved rigidity and balances tolerances together.



Continue reading to learn more about Chinese exhibitors at Labelexpo Americas 2024



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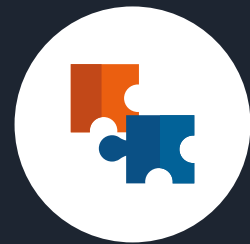
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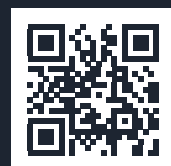
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CHINESE SUPPLIERS EXPLORE US MARKET

*There were more Chinese exhibitors at Labelexpo Americas 2024 than ever before.
L&L China editor Yolanda Wang asks whether their expectations were met*

In the past, 'Made in China' was the equivalent to 'low price, poor quality and less innovation'. But after 10 years of development, Chinese brands are now being recognized by more and more international clients. This phenomenon also exists in the label printing industry.

During the 18th edition of Labelexpo Americas, 92 Chinese exhibitors took part and showcased their latest products at this, the largest dedicated trade show for the Americas label and packaging industry.

PRINTING TECHNOLOGY

At Labelexpo Americas 2024, digital was a key trend.

Runtinazhi launched its Flora J-350 P8 HD UV inkjet label press, printing at 1,200x1,200 DPI resolution at speeds up to 100m/min (328ft/min).

'The machine on our stand is a hybrid configured especially for the America market,' says Sunny Yu, vice-general manager of Flora. This is the second time Runtinazhi has taken part in Americas show, the first being before Covid.

'The results of the show have been beyond our expectations,' says Yu. 'But printers want to have local service. So we were also looking to contact distributors to provide after-sale service for our press.'

GIP, exhibiting for the first time at this show, debuted its Label Modular 330HD with 1,200 x 1,200 DPI printhead and up to 9-color channels with a printing speed of 70m/min.

'GIP is a new face in the label digital press area,' says Jason Ge, deputy general manager. 'We launched our digital press in 2023 and now have over 50 installations in China, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Italy, South Africa, Brazil, Russia, Vietnam, Singapore and Canada. America is an important region with big potential. During this show, we did gain many leads and we have booked the next Americas show.'

Pulisi showed its 520mm-wide Aobead DPIM-330F hybrid press for the first time in the US. Modules include pre-digital flexo printing, flexo cold stamping, digital cold foil or digital varnish, slitting, laminating and defect quality management.

Olive Liu, general manager of Pulisi, shares that, 'There are 200 Aobead presses installed now, of which 40 are overseas. The press on our stand was sold to a Mexican converter and we received four other orders at the show.'

For conventional presses, **Hontec** showcased its FlexiCon modular, servo-driven press, 350mm wide and printing at speeds up to 150m/min. Features included cold foil, delam/relam, lamination, double-side printing and more.

Hontec is a loyal follower of Labelexpo Global Series. The company launched its first flexo press at Labelexpo Europe 2023. During this show, Hontec also promoted its LS-350 laser die-cutter, operating in-line with a flexo unit for cold foil, register printing, lamination and a semi-rotary die-cutter for longer runs.

Other press suppliers like **Weigang**, **Zonten**, **Bengraphic** and **Jingle**, also promoted their flexo presses.



"BUT AFTER 10 YEARS OF DEVELOPMENT, CHINESE BRANDS ARE NOW BEING RECOGNIZED BY MORE AND MORE INTERNATIONAL CLIENTS. THIS PHENOMENON ALSO EXISTS IN THE LABEL PRINTING INDUSTRY"

In addition to flexo printing equipment, **Wanjie** showed its intermittent offset technology, which has been very successful in countries like Canada, Mexico, Brazil and Latin America.

FINISHING TECHNOLOGY

AKO showcased its Alpha series finishing line, with two flexo units, rotary die-cutting unit and non-stop turret rewinding. The machine operates at speeds up to 120m/min.

'The machine is modular in design and can be equipped with an automatic packaging module, going from printed material to finished product, all in one line,' says Arrie Han, sales manager of AKO.

Brotech, a loyal follower of Labelexpo Global Series, showcased its SDF Plus 370 finishing system, which features a new modular platform-based design and can switch workflow direction according to the application. Brotech also launched a varnish embellishment module powered by five Xaar 2002 printheads enabling high-build tactile effects (over 100 microns) and digital cold foiling.

Ramon Lee, general manager of Brotech, shared that the company took 10 orders during the show. 'We are looking forward to the next Labelexpo in Barcelona.'

Rhyguan introduced its Top-Plus series label converting and finishing machine, which adds spot varnish and semi-rotary



die-cutting to digitally printed labels. Rhyguan recently acquired the Smag Group and works with distributors in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. Half its machines are exported.

First time exhibitor **lecho**, showed its 350mm-wide LCT350 laser die-cutting machine.

Finishing machine supplier **Daba** is also a new face to Labelexpo Americas. The company showed its automatic 4-spindle turret rewinder, die-cutting and slitting machines. Alex Xu, general manager of Daba, says '80-90 percent of our business comes from outside China. We received many leads during this show.'

Darui launched its K1 Toner label printer, with 1200x1200 DPI resolution and S5 modular digital die-cutting line. The company was also looking for agents. 'This is our first time attending the Americas show and we are very optimistic about the potential of this area,' says Alice Yang, general manager for overseas sales at Darui.

Golden Laser showed its LC-230/350 laser die cutting system, which can process a wide range of materials including PP, BOPP, synthetic paper, PET and coated paper. 'It's our second time taking part in this show. Half our business now comes from overseas,' says Rita Hu, Americas sales manager of Golden Laser.

Hoaco showed its RFID label processing system, which integrates die cutting, laminating, waste removal, CCD registration and inspection into a single, streamlined process.

MATERIALS

Among the Chinese exhibitors at Labelexpo Americas, material suppliers accounted for the largest proportion.

Fangda promoted its range of adhesives, functional coatings and self-adhesive laminates.

'This is our fourth time taking part in this show,' says Richard Wang, overseas sales manager of Fangda. 'The Americas market is very important for us. Of our overseas sales, one third are in the US.' Fangda has a joint venture company in Canada.

Another loyal follower of Labelexpo, **Jinda**, is focused on materials with FSC and GRS certifications, including recyclable, biodegradable and compostable materials.

'Every two years, we meet here in Chicago with old and new clients,' says Leo Deng, market director of Jinda. 'After Covid-19, we clearly feel the change in this market. It's a challenge for us but with good opportunities at the same time.'

Dawnsens is a specialist materials supplier. It showed its flash-spun nonwoven materials - 100 percent high density polyethylene (HDPE), which is used in printed labels, wristband and sport bib numbering.

'We started to follow Labelexpo from Europe 2023, then the Asia show, then this Americas show. Every time, the effect is fantastic,' says Bill Lian, sales manager.

Yuehele showed a variety of label materials including linerless thermal paper, coated paper, PP, PE, PET and PVC.

Jinwanzheng showed a range of products including prime labels, blood bag labels, and washable/removable labels.

'During the past three days, we received hundreds of leads. The results were beyond our expectations,' Sebastian Li, general manager of Jinwanzheng tells L&L.

Ink supplier **Super Color** promoted its UV flexo inks, including

"THIS IS OUR FOURTH TIME TAKING PART IN THIS SHOW. THE AMERICAS MARKET IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR US. OF OUR OVERSEAS SALES, ONE THIRD ARE IN THE US"

products for self-adhesive labels, shrink sleeves and tubes, low-migration inks, low-halogen inks and lightfast inks. Andy Liu, overseas sales manager, shares, 'it's our first time to attend Labelexpo Americas. We already have clients in Europe, Southeast Asia, Canada and Mexico and we want to explore the Americas market as part of our development plan. We have booked a bigger booth in the next Americas show in 2026.'

Another Chinese ink supplier is **BIC**. 'We are exploring overseas business with Labelexpo and now 20 percent of our business is exports,' shares Nancy Zhang, general manager of BIC.

Yozho is a silicone supplier with a 20-year history. 'Our customers are going out to explore business all over the world, and we want to keep up with them,' says Angela Wang, overseas sales manager of Yozho. Their first overseas step was taking part in Labelexpo Europe last year.

Nexqo, founded in 2010, provides one-stop RFID and NFC solutions for applications in the hospitality, warehouse management, transportation and retail sectors.

Tysin is a specially RFID/NFC label and tag supplier, with 50 percent of its business overseas.

While feedback from the show was good, Chinese exhibitors say they are worried about the possible impact of a trade war, as well as delivery problems. Seeking an agent to provide after sales service or establish a distribution center is a key part of their future plans.

CHINESE BUYERS VISIT LABELEXPO AMERICAS

The Chinese Packaging Federation (CPF) organized a group of over 30 buyers from China to visit the 18th edition of Labelexpo Americas. The group focused on digital and flexo printing technologies and RFID and flexible packaging features at the show.

Xu Wencai, chairman of CPF, says: 'More and more Chinese businesses have a strong interest in the American market, not only the industry suppliers, but also label converters.'

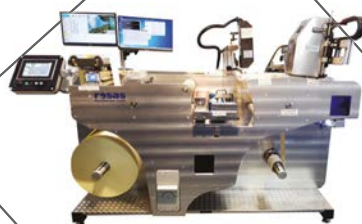
David Dai, general manager of Super Labeling, a Chinese label converter, adds: 'This is my second visit to this show. I came here for the first time six years ago before the pandemic. This exhibition features some key trends like RFID, flexible packaging and automation, which are the potential growth points for the industry.'

First time visitor Che Hongxia of Beijing Chaohong, comments: 'I'm interested in flexo printing technology. I know that in the American market, flexo has a very high market share, which is completely different than in China. I want to learn why flexo printing technology is so popular here and what are the differences in customer requirements. During this visit, I'm deeply impressed by the high efficiency and automation of flexo presses, especially Mark Andy technology.' This delegation also visited two local flexible packaging converters before arriving at the show, and they showed a strong interest in automation and cost control of local enterprises.



These Chinese manufacturers will be exhibiting at Labelexpo South China in December





Gazelle III digital
imprinting machine



Cheetah 500 with
AI technology



Leopard 300
with label
inspection

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Label trends

Labelexpo Americas 2024 closed on a high note with 450 exhibitors taking part in the event that took place between September 10-12 in Rosemont, Illinois. Spread across five halls, the top trends included RFID technology, flexible packaging, sustainability and automation.



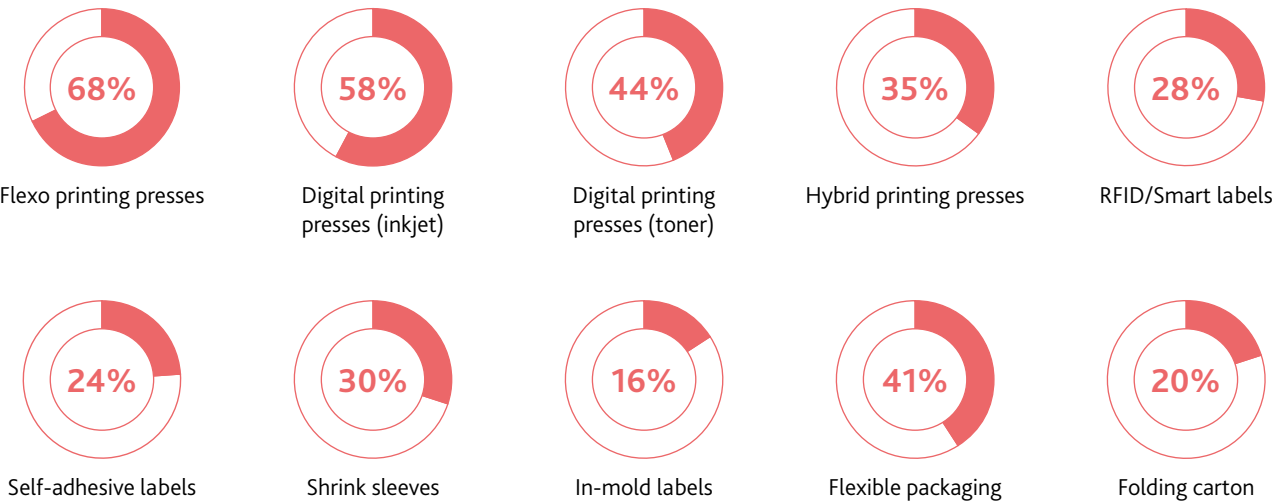
Top 10 visiting countries



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from the last edition

86%
of attendees are involved in
the purchasing decision

Visitor profile: Areas of interest




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