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FOLDING CARTON EVOLUTION

Label converters embrace cartons to serve a broader base

SUNRISE 2027 ON THE HORIZON

A label converter's roadmap to barcode compliance

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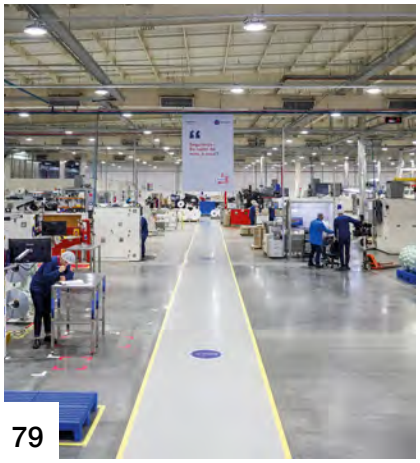
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Labelexpo Mexico 2025 (video)

Join Chelsea McDougall for an exclusive look inside the show



Read L&L Issue 1 online (magazine)

The previous issue of L&L magazine is now available to read online



Sheet-Fed developments (feature)

The technology has developed in terms of automation and efficiency



Enabling liner material circularity (Label Academy)

Ophélie Gourdou, project manager at CELAB Europe about opportunities

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L&L looks back (L&L issue 6, 2013)



P21 Danielle Jerschefske attended Sustainable Brands 2012, where global companies discussed enhancing supply chain transparency for sustainability. Despite challenges in scaling sustainable packaging processes, bioplastics were growing rapidly. Materials innovation firms were developing renewable resources, requiring industry-wide collaboration to achieve commercial viability.



P38 In Belgium, Mike Fairley visited Reynders Label Printing to examine the industry's first Domino N600i inkjet press installation results. This family-run business has evolved into a European digital printing pioneer with multiple technologies, including Xeikon, HP Indigo, Agfa Dotrix and Domino operating together to meet increasing demands for faster turnaround and personalization.



P40 Andy Thomas wrote about South African converter First Impression Labels & Films, which installed the 150th Mark Andy Performance press, becoming the only company worldwide with all three Performance Series models (P3, P5, P7). The family-owned business has installed nine Mark Andy presses since 1997, specializing in quality labels for food and home care markets.



P66 James Quirk visited Colombian converter Etiflex, which expanded beyond its established flexo and offset label production by adding shrink sleeve capabilities and opening an RFID Innovation Center with partner Kereon RFID Solutions. Founded in 1983, the company operated multiple Mark Andy presses for food, home care and textile applications, with 30 percent of the textile market's output.

Cartons coming into the fold

Editor's note

The label industry's latest plot twist isn't one about labels at all. The next chapter in the label market evolution focuses on the rise of folding carton and flexible packaging production. And industry insiders are taking note.

Labels & Labeling is happy to be the first to report on Labelexpo's moves to embrace folding carton. As the lines between packaging formats continue to blur, Labelexpo appears primed to capture an emerging audience, as Andy Thomas-Emans writes on page 46.

Like any good journalist, I was skeptical at first. For the label converter, the learning curve to enter a new market is steep. It involves learning new equipment, materials and post-press converting. But wasn't that the same story when flexible packaging disrupted the label industry a decade ago? And shrink sleeve before that?

"Label converters are no strangers to identifying opportunities for diversification, learning new processes, and benefiting from a changing marketplace"

Label converters are no strangers to identifying opportunities for diversification, learning new processes, and benefiting from a changing marketplace.

This move to embrace folding cartons makes sense to me, considering the audience Labelexpo is reaching and the equipment on display at Labelexpo events. Edale has confirmed it is bringing a FL5 carton production line to the European show. Actega will demonstrate its barrier coating technology, Tec-ni-Fold will launch an in-line creasing module, and Rotatek will show a print station from its rotary offset press specified for folding cartons. There is also a wide range of existing exhibitors like Omet, Bobst, Sappi and more who already showcase at Labelexpo and supply to the folding carton market.

It's clear that the show is not trying to be all things to all people, but rather, is a natural reflection of where the market is already headed.

Our labels industry doesn't have to be an 'either or'; it can be an 'also and'. The label industry thrives on versatility, not limitations, and forward-thinking companies already leverage all three packaging formats. By integrating labels, folding cartons, and flexible packaging, converters can create strategies that best serve their customers' printed label and packaging needs.

The label landscape is evolving quickly, and Labelexpo is at the forefront of those changes. Its core audience is changing, and Labelexpo needs to evolve with it.



Chelsea McDougall
Group managing editor

Installations



Nilpeter FB-Line

Aztec Label, UK

The Kidderminster-based converter installed a new Nilpeter FB-3300 flexo press — its tenth FB-Line machine — as part of a long-term strategy to increase production, support customer growth, and prepare for the future of label printing. Aztec's relationship with Nilpeter spans decades, encompassing multiple site relocations, press installations, and now, generational change. 'We've worked with Nilpeter for many years, and the relationship has always been built on trust and shared values,' owner and managing director Colin Le Gresley added. 'They've supported us every step of the way, and not just in terms of machinery, but in helping us plan and scale the right way.'

Mark Andy 2200 and Mark Andy Evolution Series E5

MBR Flexibles, India

Ahmedabad-based MBR Flexibles enhanced its printing and production of labels and flexible packaging with an investment in two Mark Andy 2200 and Mark Andy Evolution Series E5 for label printing. The new equipment was provided by Flexo Image Graphics (FIG). Sahil Chopra, director of MBR Flexibles, said: 'Over the years, or say decades, we have carved out a reputation for ourselves in the industry as a provider of quality products printed and produced using best-in-class machines and equipment. In this, the Mark Andy machines meet our standards. The two Mark Andy presses in our facility are ideal for handling all kinds of high-end labels of all standards which we produce for our highly quality-conscious clients from different sectors.'





Bobst Digital Master 340

etic.a, Italy

Italian printer etic.a installed a Bobst Digital Master 340 all-in-one label press to better meet its customers' needs for speed, agility, quality and sustainability. Vito Di Martino, operational director at etic.a, commented: 'When we decided to purchase a hybrid printing machine, we already had an inkjet printer, but we were looking for a system that could handle all labels, finished and embellished, in one step. After conducting market research, we chose Bobst for the technological value and the quality and size of the digital system. The integration of traditional technologies with digital from a single manufacturer is, from our point of view, an added benefit because we only need one point of contact for installation and long-term maintenance.'

MPS EFS-430

Kien Label, Netherlands

The Dutch producer of complex multi-layer labels, part of the Asteria Group, further enhanced its production capabilities by adding an MPS EFS-430 8-color flexo press. This marks the company's fifth MPS press and demonstrates its ongoing commitment to innovation, efficiency and sustainability. 'We're excited to introduce this advanced 8-color press to our operations,' said Renier Simons, manager of operations at Kien Label. 'This investment allows us to boost our production capacity for standard self-adhesive labels and enhance our sustainability with the latest LED drying technology.' The EFS-430 replaces an older EC 330 model and features a wider format and additional flexo stations, giving Kien Label the flexibility to produce a wider variety of labels.





HP Indigo 6K

Ecco Print, Netherlands

Danish label converter invested in a new HP Indigo 6K to enhance its digital label production capacity, reliability, efficiency and high-quality output. The machinery was purchased via Visutech, one of the leading digital production suppliers in the Nordic market. Following the successful installation of its Bobst Master M5 flexo press, the new HP Indigo 6K marks the company's second HP machine is joining the already operating HP Indigo 6800. With this new addition, Ecco Print ensures continued reliability, efficiency and high-quality output in its digital printing operations. 'We see great potential with the HP Indigo 6K, which will give us increased flexibility and seamless integration with our existing digital workflow,' said Jan Viberg Elleriis, owner of Ecco Print.

Screen Truepress L350UV

Abel Labels, Australia

Australian converter invested in a Screen Truepress L350UV inkjet press to strengthen its digital printing capabilities and deliver high-quality labels with faster turnaround times, meeting the increasing demands of its customers across Tasmania. 'Having reliable support is just as important as having the right technology,' said Trent Cowen, managing director at Abel Labels. 'Jet Technologies and Screen have provided exceptional guidance and service, ensuring we can maximize the potential of our new press. Knowing we have expert backup whenever needed is invaluable.' In addition to supplying the new press, Jet Technologies' training specialists also provided training to ensure a smooth transition to the new machine and ongoing support for seamless operations.





Hontec FlexiCon 460-8C

Escala Impresores, Colombia

One of Colombia's leading narrow web converters has invested in a Hontec FlexiCon 460-8C flexo press to enhance its printing capabilities and quality. The new press complements the company's label printing section, helping Escala better serve its existing customer base. The FlexiCon 460-8C features a full-color UV dryer and hot air dryer, ensuring rapid, high-quality curing for diverse labels. Additionally, it incorporates a multi-layer label system, providing flexibility and accuracy for intricate, multi-layered designs. With the new press, Escala will be able to improve production speed and quality, meeting the growing demand for high-performance labels. 'We are proud to continue our partnership with Escala Impresores and look forward to supporting them as they expand their production capabilities,' commented Hontec's spokesperson.

Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 400

Etiquetas Guimarães (Etigui), Portugal

One of the leading label and tag manufacturers based in Portugal installed the first Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 400 with white toner in the Iberian Peninsula. The installation, carried out by Anassisgraf, a long-time Konica Minolta partner, marks a significant milestone in Etigui's continued investment in digital label printing. By upgrading from the AccurioLabel 230 to the new AccurioLabel 400, the company has enhanced its production capabilities and reinforced its position in the market. Designed for medium and high-volume label production, the AccurioLabel 400 delivers up to 40m/min speeds. 'This deal was the perfect way to close 2024, and now, with thousands and thousands of meters already produced, we proudly announce this installation,' commented José Leite, general manager of Anassisgraf.



Label & packaging showcase

01



02



03



04



05



FPA 2025 Flexible Packaging Achievement Award winners

01 Aara Basmati Rice 5-panel Pouch with Pocket Zipper and C-cut Handle, 10 lbs

Award: Gold Award – Shelf Impact

Manufacturer: Paharpur 3P

End User/Customer: Shakti Group USA, Hamilton, New Jersey, US

Designer/Design Firms: Paharpur 3P and Star Rice Land

Key Suppliers: CK Zipper; Dow; Ester Industries; ExxonMobil Product Solutions; Henkel Adhesive Technologies India; Reliance Industries; Sakata Ink (India); Siegwerk India; and Toppan Specialty Films

02 PRO-EVO Recyclable FL

Awards: Highest Achievement Award

Gold – Packaging Excellence

Gold – Technical Innovation

Silver – Sustainability

Manufacturer: ProAmpac

End User/Customer: Nestlé Purina PetCare Company

Plant: White House, Tennessee, US

Designer/Design Firm: ProAmpac

03 Hippie Organics Organic Asparagus

Awards: Gold Award – Sustainability

Silver Award – Expanding the Use of Flexible Packaging

Silver Award – Packaging Excellence

Silver Award – Technical Innovation

Manufacturer: PPC Flex

End User/Customer: Hippie Organics/Alpine Fresh

Plant: Payson, Utah, US

Key Suppliers: Futamura USA; INX International Ink; Miraclon; PPC Flex; and TIPA

04 Frito-Lay Super Bowl LVIII Commercially Compostable Package

Awards: Gold Award – Packaging Excellence

Gold Award – Technical Innovation

Silver Award – Sustainability

Manufacturer: Printpack

End User/Customer: Frito-Lay North America, a division of PepsiCo

Plant: Villa Rica, Georgia, US

Designer/Design Firm: PepsiCo Design + Innovation

05 Goldfish Crisps, 6.25 oz.

Award: Gold Award – Shelf Impact

Manufacturer: Printpack

End User/Customer: Campbell's Snacks/Pepperidge Farm

06



07



08



09



10



Incorporated
Plant: Villa Rica, Georgia, US
Designer/Design Firm: Sterling Design – NY

06 Indi Grand Balti Curry Sauce
Award: Gold Award – Printing
Manufacturer: Integrated Plastics Packaging
End User/Customer: Panesar Foods

07 PepsiCo Smartfood White Cheddar Popcorn Packaging
Awards: Gold Award – Printing
Silver Award – Shelf Impact
Manufacturer: Bryce Corporation
End User/Customer: Frito-Lay North America, a division of PepsiCo
Plant: Searcy, Arkansas, US
Key Supplier: Sun Chemical Corporation (inks)

08 Preserve Toothbrush Pouches
Award: Gold Award – Expanding the Use of Flexible Packaging
Manufacturer: Nosco
End User/Customer: Preserve
Plant: Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, US
Key Suppliers: Film Suppliers: Charter Next Generation and Inteplast Group (Nosco built custom construction); Laminate Supplier: Inteplast Group; Ink Supplier: HP Indigo ElectroInk; Printing Press: HP Indigo 20000; Laminator Supplier: Karlville Solventless Laminator; and Nosco Packaging Advisor: Bill Nimmer

09 ProAmpac Spouted Pouch for Ortho Home Defense
Award: Gold Award – Expanding the Use of Flexible Packaging
Manufacturer: ProAmpac
End User/Customer: The Scotts Company
Plant: Hanover Park, Illinois, US
Designer/Design Firm: ProAmpac

10 TerreGloss / Terrecote Compostable Butter Wrap
Award: Gold Award – Sustainability
Manufacturer: Novolex
End User/Customer: Various
Designer/Design Firm: Novolex

This regular feature is dedicated to the best designed printed packaging from around the world. If you would like your product featured here, email editorial@labelsandlabeling.com. We require a high resolution photograph and supporting text.



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Andy Thomas-Emans: Finding new customers in the TikTok age

As the consumer landscape evolves, label converters are turning to creative outlets to meet customers where they are and secure new business, writes Andy-Thomas Emans

Back in the days of consumer brand loyalty, dominant global brands and long runs (broadly 1970s to the early 2000s), the relationship between label converter and customer was straightforward.

The global brands, or major regional brands, had their own packaging specification departments. They worked either with outside specialist design agencies or their own internal design teams on the final approved design.

The role of label converters was essentially passive. They were sent the final artwork, materials and finishing specifications, delivery times, locations and scheduled the job into their work plans.

Everyone knew where the brands 'lived', and for sales teams, it was a question of arranging face-to-face meetings to sell the company's capabilities and understand the customer's price, lead time and delivery requirements.

What then happened was an extraordinary and rapid deconstruction of this whole ecosystem.

Consumers fell out of love with mass-market products, and an entirely new generation of start-ups arrived to satisfy the demand for more customized products that reflected different aspects of consumers' lifestyles. Consumers liked the idea that they were at the center of new product design and marketing rather than buying standardized products from impersonal corporate entities.

The problem for label converters was that nobody knew where these new challenger brands lived. They did not have packaging specification departments and did not work with the big packaging design agencies.

The first thought for the challenger brand owner was, not surprisingly, on their product. They developed new marketing channels reflecting their social media habits, using apps and influencers to promote their products. This bypassed traditional advertising and promotional channels and bypassed the usual ways of buying print.

When challenger brands look for packaging printers, it is generally the last step in their product launch process, and it generally involves typing 'Label Printer Near Me' into a search engine.

This requires label printers to adopt a new approach to finding customers. Where do these start-ups, and the next start-ups down the road, 'live'? What communication channels do they use?

Short video approach

In the current edition of Labels & Labeling, our China editor Yolanda Wang interviews Jiang Herun, founder of Kaidun Printing, who tells the story of how he found new business by working up a presence on the major e-commerce platforms and embracing a 'short video' marketing approach.

Kaidun Printing established a video team and a customer acquisition matrix determined by where a desired customer might 'live' in a different online space. From 2022 to 2024, 1,200 customers were brought on board to Kaidun Printing, generating an additional 2.88m USD of new business and accounting for 12.5 percent of total turnover in 2024.

"The problem for label converters was that nobody knew where these new challenger brands lived. They did not have packaging specification departments and did not work with the big packaging design agencies"

Herun's experience is important not only in the innovative way he brought in new challenger brand customers, but in how those customers were sold new added-value services. Working with customers who have little or no idea about packaging specification, but very clear ideas on how to market their product, gives a 'clean sheet' opportunity to discuss innovative and added-value format and decoration approaches.

This is where digital, hybrid and automated flexo can really mesh. Herun relates how customers moved quickly from marketing samples to multiple variants, then to serial production of successful ranges, with each stage exploiting the capabilities of different kinds of equipment.

Going forward, the ability to offer different labeling and packaging formats will increase value to this kind of customer. Not only labels, but also short runs of embellished single-pass folding cartons and stand-up pouches. Or combinations of all these products, like resealable labels on pouches, security and track and trace labels, or booklet labels on folding cartons.

New channels

Application and packaging equipment could provide another avenue for growth. Hiring label applicators with operators for labeling seasonal products, pouch-making machinery and folder-gluer equipment to capture more value and offer a true 'one-stop' service that keeps the new buyer engaged.

The success of the challengers has pushed the big brands to adopt many of the same attributes: develop new marketing channels, bring to market mass customized or short-run promotional items, multiple variants and innovative packaging formats. The move by big brands to become small brands, rewards the converter's investments in flexible print, converting and packaging systems.

The good news is that Labelexpo is also moving in this direction. From Labelexpo Europe 2025 onward, you will see these disruptive converting systems on show, from labels to short-run value-added flexible packaging and folding cartons, and the way these products interact. The 'challenger brand' future will bring significant challenges and equally big rewards.

Turn to page 44 to read more about label converters embracing folding carton.



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Smarter selling: How to leverage AI to win more



AI-powered tools can revolutionize sales processes to boost conversion rates, personalize customer interactions and drive revenue growth, writes Lois Ritarossi

In today's competitive and ever-changing sales environment, the pressure is always on to move faster, respond smarter, and deliver more value to customers. Customers expect tailored solutions from suppliers that are easy to work with. Artificial intelligence (AI) isn't just hype; it's becoming a vital tool that B2B sales professionals can use to sharpen their strategy, focus their efforts, and accelerate results. Forward-thinking sales teams are using AI to work smarter and faster and deliver better results.

Here are five AI strategies to improve sales effectiveness.

1. Know your buyers' motivations

Great salespeople sell solutions, not products, and that starts with understanding what your buyers truly care about. AI research can help you uncover those motivations more quickly and accurately.

- **Use AI-powered intent data** to track which companies are actively researching sustainability, speed-to-market, cost efficiency or other key drivers in the labeling and packaging space.
- **Segment your customers with AI tools** that analyze purchase patterns, vertical-specific challenges or trigger events like product launches.

Buyers' motivations are changing quickly. When you understand what's driving the buyer and key influencers for a project, you can align your message with what matters most.

2. Create compelling sales content

Your emails, presentations and proposals need to break through the clutter and content overload. Buyers expect highly personalized and relevant content. Your content must resonate and demonstrate how your solution will impact their goals. AI can help you generate, edit and improve content quickly.

- **Use generative AI platforms** like ChatGPT and Gemini to improve emails and proposals tailored to customer concerns or buyer personas.

> **"Sales professionals who embrace AI are better equipped to deliver personalized experiences, build trust faster, and win more deals"**

- **Optimize your sales materials** with AI-driven writing tools that enhance clarity and engagement.

Better content that is relevant, anticipates objections, gets noticed, and generates a better response. By making content specific and concise, you improve the odds of breaking through and sparking meaningful conversations with prospects and decision makers. Always validate, proofread and edit before sending.

3. Summarize content to save time

Sales professionals are bombarded with RFPs, call notes and technical specs. AI can do the heavy lifting, giving you more time to sell.

- **Use AI tools to summarize lengthy documents** like RFPs or product compliance sheets.
- **Automate meeting summaries** with platforms like Teams, Zoom, Gong or Fireflies that capture key takeaways, objections and action items from calls.
- **Translate technical product data into business-friendly language** using AI, making it easier to engage non-technical decision-makers.

With AI as your note taker and assistant, you'll spend less time digging through documents and more time moving deals forward.

4. Make better data-driven decisions

Gut instinct has its place, but smart sales teams are supplementing intuition with insights from AI.

- **Forecast pipeline health** using AI-enhanced CRMs that consider trends, deal velocity and historical close rates.
- **Rank deals** with AI tools that calculate lead and opportunity scoring.

AI turns your sales data into actionable information. Many tools like Salesforce and HubSpot have built-in AI functions that help sales teams prioritize which deals are most likely to close.

5. Free up time for high-value activities

Perhaps the biggest benefit of AI is giving sales team more time. It handles the tasks that distract from selling, so you can focus on strategy, relationships and closing.

- **Automate early-stage lead nurturing** with AI-based email workflows that educate and warm up prospects.
- **Delegate scheduling, data entry and follow-ups** to virtual AI assistants integrated into your CRM.

The result? More conversations, better pipeline momentum and stronger customer relationships.

The bottom line

In Issue 1 of Labels & Labeling, I wrote about sales success by knowing each customers' 'why'. AI isn't about replacing salespeople; it's about amplifying their value. In the label and packaging space, where every order is unique and the stakes are high, sales professionals who embrace AI are better equipped to deliver personalized experiences, build trust faster and win more deals.

The tools are here, and the time is now. Smart sellers are already making the shift. Are you?



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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The state of sustainability in second Trump administration



TLMI's Rosalyn Bandy, explores the policy changes in a second Trump adminstration that will impact the future of sustainability

The second Trump administration marks a return to power for a president whose previous term was characterized by sweeping environmental deregulation and climate change skepticism. Donald Trump re-entered the Oval Office with familiar rhetoric and a renewed promise to prioritize 'American energy dominance' over what he often derides as 'climate alarmism'.

"Ignoring climate risks may reduce costs on paper today, but it raises the national tab for tomorrow"

Several months into his second term, the trajectory of sustainability in the US appears again tilted toward deregulation, fossil fuel expansion, and a rollback of climate-related initiatives enacted during the Biden years. While Trump's supporters herald his administration as a corrective to what they view as costly overregulation, critics warn that the environmental and social consequences could be severe, with long-term sustainability sacrificed for short-term political wins.

Regulatory repeal round two

The second Trump administration wasted little time launching its version of 'The Great Undoing 2.0'. Executive orders have targeted key Biden-era climate policies, including restoring methane regulations, implementing stricter vehicle emissions standards, and reinforcing protections for wetlands under the Clean Water Act. Once again led by an administrator with deep industry ties, the US Environmental Protection Agency has begun rolling back enforcement and narrowing the scope of environmental oversight, indicating a return to the agency's earlier four-year period as a glorified fossil fuel concierge service.

Climate change skepticism

In his second term, Trump has doubled down on his climate change skepticism, now with more experience and fewer guardrails. The administration has halted federal participation in climate risk assessments, removed the social cost of carbon from regulatory calculations, and promoted fossil fuels as not just essential, but patriotic. Trump's decision to officially withdraw, again, from international climate agreements further isolated the US from global climate leadership. In a move that baffled scientists and diplomats alike, the administration even suggested launching a commission to 'investigate' the science behind climate change.

Drill, baby, rebooted

The administration's America First Energy Plan 2.0 is a love letter to coal, oil and natural gas. The White House has greenlit projects previously denied due to environmental concerns, including controversial offshore drilling operations, and expanded fracking on public lands. Renewable energy, while not outright banned, has seen a dramatic drop in federal support, tax incentives and research funding.

Trump officials frame this pro-fossil fuel stance as a defense against 'radical environmental socialism'. Despite significant market momentum behind renewables, federal policy now clearly favors traditional energy industries.

Social and environmental justice

One of the most conspicuous absences in Trump's sustainability agenda is any serious attention to environmental justice. The Justice40 initiative, which aimed to direct 40 percent of climate and clean energy investments to disadvantaged communities, has been scrapped. Protections for communities disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change have been weakened, and the administration has shown little interest in engaging with Indigenous groups or environmental advocates. Critics argue this exacerbates existing inequalities, leaving marginalized communities more vulnerable to environmental degradation and economic displacement.

The short-term economic wins

The Trump administration continues to frame sustainability through a narrow economic lens, prioritizing job growth, energy independence and deregulation. To be fair, the energy sector, particularly oil and gas, has seen short-term job gains. But this short-term economic boost masks deeper concerns. Climate-related disasters continue to inflict massive costs on infrastructure, agriculture and public health. Ignoring climate risks may reduce costs on paper today, but it raises the national tab for tomorrow.

Déjà Vu or decline?

The second Trump administration's sustainability policy can best be described as a reboot of its first-season script. While supporters praise the emphasis on deregulation and domestic energy, the broader sustainability outlook is grim: climate action has stalled, environmental protections are in retreat, and the US is once again estranged from global efforts to confront the threat of climate change.

Still, as was the case in Trump's first term, states, cities, private companies and individuals are stepping up to fill the federal void. Grassroots climate action is gaining momentum, and courts are already bracing for a new wave of litigation to block the administration's more aggressive rollbacks.

In the end, sustainability in the second Trump administration may not be dead, but it's certainly being held hostage in a coal-powered bunker.

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 or scan the QR code

Scoot over, digital. Physical is making a comeback

As brands look for ways to create deeper connections with customers and more authentic real-life experiences, physical and tactile touchpoints are witnessing a resurgence, writes branding & design columnist Vicki Strull



When it comes to digital and physical brand experiences, it's not either-or. As I've written about many times, a brand's best approach is an integrated, multi-platform, multi-sensory strategy. That said, we are absolutely seeing a resurgence of physical, tactile touchpoints, particularly in packaging.

Now, those of us in the industry know that packaging has never actually gone away. After all, you can't sell a product without packaging. But resources for print and packaging ebb and flow, and right now, marketers are going with the flow. The packaging industry is increasing at a compound annual growth rate of 3.89 percent, and its worth is predicted to reach 1.43 trillion USD by 2030 (up from 1.18 trillion USD in 2025), according to Modor Intelligence. Brands are rediscovering the power of touch, tactile engagement, premium packaging and haptic finishes to create deeper connections with customers and more authentic real-life experiences. While the blending of online and offline channels will continue to evolve and vie for our attention, here are a few of the top reasons that I believe physical is making a comeback.

1. Engaging physical senses creates a strong emotional connection. The physicality of paper, packaging and print media offers a distinct advantage: It can be touched, felt, shared and experienced in real life, forming strong connections that digital interactions often lack. Moreover, the sense of touch is fundamental to human experience and emotion. For years, studies have shown the impact of sensory engagement on increasing the emotional component of consumers' buying decisions. When you think about it, packaging is often the first physical touchpoint a consumer has with a brand, whether seeing its product on the shelf or receiving the delivery of an online order. Tactile finishes on packaging, such as foil stamping, embossing, metallic inks and any type of premium substrate, hyper-activate our sense of touch, help a brand stand out, and create human and emotional experiences that we just can't get from online experiences. To hammer this point home even further, a research article in the Journal of Management Information Systems testifies to the importance of recognizing that consumers are physical beings first. Digital-only approaches cannot achieve the same results in building emotional connections and meaningful consumer relationships as approaches that also incorporate physical elements. In fact, there's a word for it: Phygital, which means combining strategies in both the physical and digital worlds.

"Digital-only approaches cannot achieve the same results in building emotional connections and meaningful consumer relationships as approaches that also incorporate physical elements"

2. The physical creates deep memory associations and helps build trust. Research shows that sensory experiences involving touch are more likely to be remembered and associated with positive emotions. You touch or feel something, remember it, connect with it, and then trust it — in that order. High levels of trust translate into more products sold, followed by a greater willingness to recommend a brand or product. Over the past decade, we've seen the growth of the 'unboxing experience' streamed online. That's a great example of how positive, memorable experiences with a brand's packaging or print materials foster the trust that drives word-of-mouth endorsements and brand advocacy (see my next point for more on that). And while YouTube videos with the word 'unboxing' in the title were viewed more than 25 billion times in 2023, allowing us to momentarily live vicariously through others, there is still nothing online that can replicate the feel, the sturdiness, the texture and the experience of interacting with packaging in real life.

But we can't just create pretty packaging; the product inside has to meet or exceed customers' expectations. If it doesn't, then no matter how engaging the packaging is, someone's not going to buy it a second time. And it goes both ways. Suppose you have an awesome online experience when purchasing a product, and then it comes in a generic brown box, or the carton feels flimsy, or the label printing is low-quality, you're disappointed by it before you've even used the product.

Done thoughtfully and intentionally, packaging is much more than a container designed to protect or carry a product. It is the bridge that builds connection, confidence, excitement and loyalty. It can demonstrate and reinforce a brand's attention to detail and quality. That, in turn, influences credibility and trust. We might not realize it, but when we physically interact with a product or packaging, we form subconscious judgments about that brand's value, reliability, authenticity and other qualities. When the paperboard feels substantial, or the texture feels luxurious, or the embossing or spot UV adds an element of delight, they enhance our positive perceptions of the product and the brand. We feel that the brand cares about the product and about us. The sensory cues embedded in these physical touchpoints can't be conveyed solely through digital channels.

And the thing is, none of it feels like direct advertising. It's subtle, and it's happening subconsciously. We are emotionally connecting to the physical



"As digital channels get noisier and more saturated, brands are turning to print and packaging and other physical touchpoints"

element, and most of us don't even know we're doing it. It doesn't feel like we're being sold; it just feels like it's part of the product. According to Gerald Zaltman, a Harvard Business School professor, 95 percent of our decisions are made from our subconscious. Sensory marketing and sensory materials leverage this by using textures and tactile effects that influence us without feeling like traditional advertising. Today's consumers don't like to feel as if they're being pitched to, because they don't trust that. So brands can use tactile engagement, real-life physical elements, to promote a product's quality without saying it's high quality. That makes us love them all the more. And that leads me to my next point: brand advocacy.

3. Consumers who feel a strong bond with a brand are more likely to become brand advocates. Building on the points I've described above, the message here is that emotional connections and memorable experiences are at the heart of brand advocacy. Packaging and print materials that incorporate tactile elements have been shown to evoke a range of emotions, from excitement and hope to trust and confidence. These emotional cues are not just design elements; they are part of the measurable impact on consumer behavior. Studies by Nielsen and McKinsey & Company, among others, show that brands that invest in tactile packaging report higher levels of customer satisfaction, purchasing decisions, brand attachment and loyalty.

And those feelings you have about a brand? They begin as soon as you start researching. Then, when you purchase the item online or buy it at a store, and its physical presence lives up to your expectations, it makes you even more excited to tell someone about it. For a brand, that sharing is gold, because you've just become a brand advocate. The people who post about their purchase, its packaging and how the product works? They're doing the brand's job for them. Their value as a customer is extremely high, precisely because of their sharing. If you're a marketer for a brand, you don't know if your customer tells five people, 500 people, or 5,000 people. So brands have to assume that everyone receiving their product has that potential, and we marketers and designers need to do everything we can to turn customers into advocates. High-quality, tactile packaging that engages the senses and makes this deep connection is a secret weapon for building brand advocates. In fact, my colleague, Dr Andrew Hurley, associate professor of packaging science at Clemson University, refers to packaging as 'the silent salesman.'

Taking these three key points into consideration, it's understandable why physical touchpoints are seeing a resurgence alongside, and in some cases, ahead of, digital.

The act of physically engaging with a product creates a sense of intimacy and emotional connection. It builds in-real-life trust, creates positive and memorable experiences, and deepens the consumer-brand relationship.

As digital channels get noisier and more saturated, brands are turning to print and packaging and other physical touchpoints as integrated, powerful tools for engagement and for influencing consumers' perceptions, beliefs and brand advocacy. By incorporating haptics into packaging and print, brands can create consumer experiences that resonate on a deeper level than digital alone.



Vicki Strull has over 25 years of experience in the marketing and design industry as a brand strategist, creative director, and packaging designer. She is recognized for her expertise in brand positioning, creative leadership, and consulting with organizations on leveraging design to drive sales and build brand loyalty. In addition to her innovative approach to branding and packaging, she serves as an adjunct professor at Tulane University and frequently speaks at industry conferences in the US and internationally. Join fellow trendsetters at vickistrull.com or follow Vicki on LinkedIn @vickistrull.

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Three Mark Andy hybrid presses fuel MD Labels' explosive growth

As the first company in Europe to install three Mark Andy Digital Series presses, the Polish converter has leveraged the power of hybrid printing to drive explosive growth, expand capacity and push the boundaries of label production. Piotr Wnuk reports

MD Labels began its journey in 2016 in one of Poland's oldest cities, Kalisz, with a simple but ambitious goal: combining traditional craftsmanship with the latest digital technology to create high-quality labels. What started as a small business producing self-adhesive labels for local customers quickly grew into something much bigger.

'We started out with standard blank, white self-adhesive labels, but we knew that wasn't where we wanted to stop,' says Marcin Jasiński, co-owner of MD Labels. 'Not long after, we invested in our first flexo press for full-color work, but we also closely watched what was happening in the market. We listened to our customers and watched demand grow. Before we knew it, we'd reached the point where we needed to take the next step — going digital.'

That next step came unexpectedly, through social media. Jasinski first came across Mark Andy's hybrid printing technology in an online ad, which led him to explore the possibilities further.

'At first, we were quite interested in the Digital One press,' Jasiński explains. 'But everything changed when we visited Mark Andy's demo center in Warsaw and saw the machines in action. After learning more about what each press could do, we realized that the Digital Series was the smartest investment possible. It wasn't just about what we needed at that moment. It was about where we wanted to be in the future. And the Digital Series had the flexibility and potential to get there.'

Turbocharged growth with hybrid technology

The first MD Labels' Digital Series press configuration included an extended range of finishing options beyond the basic version. It incorporated varnishing, pattern varnishing, lamination, cold stamping and die-cutting units, all in a single pass. This setup allowed the company to offer a new spectrum of decorative and finishing capabilities without limitations.

'Our customers wanted shorter print runs, multiple SKUs of the same label and more embellishment options, while maintaining top-quality results,' says Jasiński. 'One of the biggest benefits of hybrid technology is its variable data printing (VDP) capability. With the Digital Series press, we could produce around 15 to 20 variations of the same label within a single job. This was previously out of our reach due to high costs. This technology made job changes instant, allowing us to efficiently produce multiple label variations without expensive setup adjustments.'

Dominik Głowacki, co-owner of MD Labels, shares: 'Investing in the first Digital Series press was a game-changer for us. It was one of the first Mark Andy digital presses installed in Poland. It gave us the flexibility and efficiency we needed to take our label production to the next level.'

According to Jasiński, when MD Labels installed the press, the orders started flooding in: 'It was like an avalanche.'

The investment quickly paid off, driving rapid growth. Within a few years, the company nearly doubled its customer base and increased its workforce by 500 percent.

'We've expanded fast, growing our team fivefold in just a few years to keep up with demand,' confirms Głowacki. 'But it wasn't just about the technology and business growth. This investment helped us build a strong partnership with Mark Andy, which has played a huge role in our success. Mark Andy's service team has been a huge support for us, not just during training and after each press purchase, but also in our day-to-day operations with the hybrid presses.'



MD Labels is always looking for new ways to push its digital printing capabilities

"Investing in the first Digital Series press was a game-changer for us. It was one of the first Mark Andy digital presses installed in Poland"

With business booming, expansion was the only way forward for MD Labels. In 2022, the company doubled its production and office space to keep up with demand and make room for another press. For Jasiński and Głowacki, there was never any doubt about which press to choose. It wasn't just about the technology, though that was crucial, but also about the strong partnership they had built with Mark Andy and its team.

'When we started looking for a new press, we knew we needed something that would boost efficiency, quality and profitability, the things every print shop relies on,' recalls Jasiński. 'But we also wanted to create labels that really stand out, with embellishment, die-cutting and laminating all done in one pass. The Mark Andy Digital Series HD checked all the boxes.'

Digital Series HD arrives in Kalisz

The Digital Series HD offered MD Labels expanded production capabilities with a wider color gamut (CMYK + OVG) and a high-pigment white ink that delivered effects similar to rotary screen printing.

According to the company owners, one of the significant advantages of this model is that applying white ink doesn't slow the press down.

Mark Andy notes that its white ink offers three times the opacity of standard flexo ink (at 80 percent coverage), while the 1,200 DPI printhead technology ensures sharp, high-quality results. The press can be configured with five to eight digital inkjet units and upgraded with in-line or near-line finishing and embellishment options.

For its setup, MD Labels went with five digital units (W + CMYK), six flexo stations, two cold foil and lamination units and the ability to print on the adhesive side. This allowed the company to produce peel-off multilayer labels. The system also featured a QCDC die-cutting module, which allowed dies to be loaded, automatically registered with servo technology, and quickly run full production.

'This press has given us so much more flexibility and allowed us to really step up our production capacity, all while cutting delivery times,' says Głowacki. 'Since bringing in the Digital Series HD, we left many of our old production challenges behind. We could run our jobs with much less hassle and get labels out the door twice as fast, without sacrificing quality.'

Łukasz Chruśliński, European sales manager at Mark Andy, adds: 'MD Labels is another great example of a company here in Poland that has embraced the Digital Series HD. In fact, at that time, it was the only one in the country running two Mark Andy hybrid presses in its production hall, which is something we were really proud of. The rapid growth and strong partnership with Mark Andy are incredibly rewarding for us. As a full-service provider, we aim to help our customers thrive in a competitive market. Our press and its capabilities play a key role in that, giving printers the tools they need to stay ahead.

'MD Labels truly understands the market and what its customers want. At the same time, we at Mark Andy are fully committed to supporting the team, helping it bring its vision to life and keep pushing forward.'

Strength in threes

Once again, Mark Andy's hybrid press technology has been a catalyst for MD Labels' rapid success, attracting new business and driving a surge in demand. Growth came so fast that the company had to rethink its production capacity.

Of course, Jasiński and Głowacki returned to their trusted press partner to scale up operations. Just two years after adding a second Mark Andy press, MD Labels made history as the first converter in Europe to install three Digital Series presses.

'These presses are exactly what we need to keep up with the ever-changing market,' says Jasiński. 'Consumers today want high-quality, personalized products at competitive prices. At the same time, there's a growing demand for shorter print runs and multiple label variations for the same product. With Mark Andy presses, we have the right technology to handle these challenges.'

Jasiński highlights the versatility of the Mark Andy Digital Series, emphasizing its ability to handle multicolor printing, including white, along with VDP and versioning. This flexibility allows MD Labels to produce premium labels with intricate embellishments, metallic finishes, transparency effects and decorative paper applications. Whether it's a single copy or a short- to mid-run job, the press delivers high-quality results tailored to the evolving market needs.



MD Labels has significantly expanded its production capabilities with three Mark Andy hybrid presses now in operation

"When MD Labels installed the press, the orders started flooding in: It was like an avalanche"

Chruśliński emphasizes the impact of digital technology in label production: 'Digital technology in label production brings huge opportunities for food and other industries, especially in a rapidly evolving market environment. MD Labels is a prime example of how investing in the right equipment can drive success.'

With three hybrid presses in operation, MD Labels has expanded its ability to produce high-quality labels with intricate embellishments while improving efficiency and cutting setup times. This has made handling complex designs and shorter production runs easier without compromising on quality. The added capabilities also position the company to serve premium markets such as cosmetics, spirits and high-end specialty foods, where standout packaging plays a key role in brand recognition.

Staying ahead of the curve

Despite economic uncertainties in Europe, MD Labels remains optimistic about the future.

'We're always prepared to tackle complex jobs, whether short-run for a niche brand or a high-end, embellished label for the premium sector,' says Jasinski. 'Our success is tied to the success of our customers, and we're committed to providing them with the best possible product.'

MD Labels is always looking for new ways to expand its digital printing capabilities. It is experimenting with high-end decorative labels that feature textured varnishes, metallic effects and multilayer designs. At the same time, the team is expanding into new areas like flexible packaging and sustainable labeling, responding to the changing needs of customers and the market.

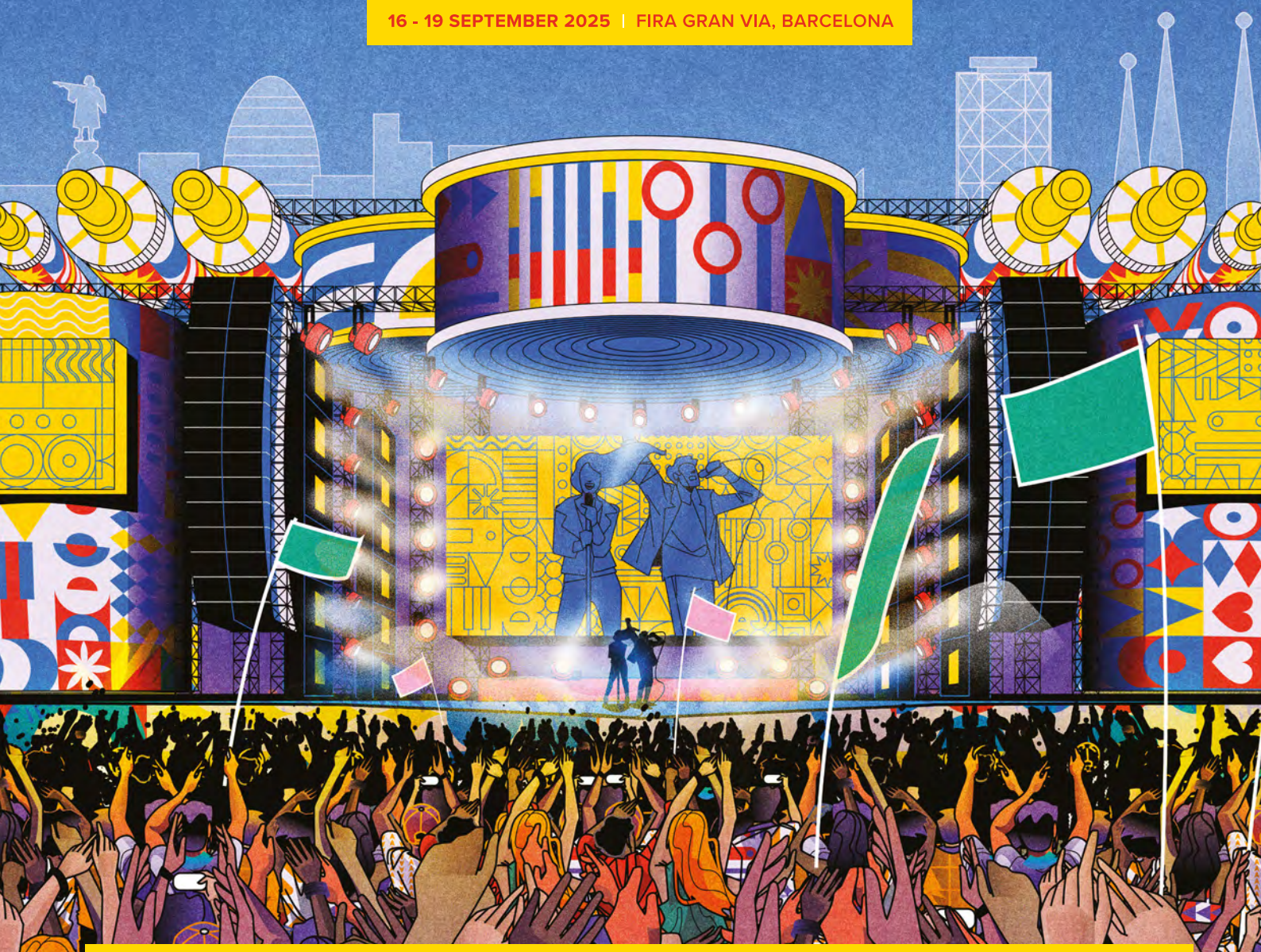
With digital printing technology evolving, MD Labels is closely monitoring improvements in ink formulations, faster printing speeds and more sustainable production methods. As demand for eco-friendly packaging grows, the company is making it a priority to offer labels that align with these expectations, ensuring it stays ahead of industry trends.

Tom Cavalco, executive vice president of Mark Andy, has seen firsthand how MD Labels has grown and adapted. 'It's always great to see a company with a strong vision take off. As an equipment provider, we naturally become part of our customers' journey, and watching MD Labels expand so quickly has been incredibly rewarding. Having the right tools and a clear direction makes all the difference in a competitive market.'

Scan the QR code to learn more about MD Labels

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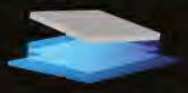
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Gallus launches MatteJet for premium products

Gallus MatteJet technology is now commercially available and opens up new markets for UV inkjet in the premium wine and spirits sector. Andy Thomas-Emans reports



Gallus MatteJet module



Gallus MatteJet sample

"In the second stage, a proprietary GEW light source modifies the surface texture of the printed dot so it scatters light rather than reflects it back"

Gallus has announced the commercial launch of its MatteJet technology, which allows a UV inkjet press to print matte by altering the surface texture of the printed dot.

This development is expected to open up new markets for UV inkjet in the premium food and drinks segment, and particularly for short run premium wine and spirits where a sophisticated matte finish is traditionally expected.

Available as an option for the Gallus One digital press, MatteJet involves a three-stage process developed by Gallus and Heidelberg in partnership with GEW.

Inks are first pinned using LED lamps to stop the dots spreading on structured papers. In the second stage, a proprietary GEW light source modifies the surface texture of the printed dot so it scatters light rather than reflects it back. The third stage is overall arc-UV curing of the shaped dot.

The LED pinning is a critical step. Offset is traditionally used for structured label materials because it uses pressure to 'iron' inks into substrate. The Gallus MatteJet technology relies on pinning to hold the inkjet dot and stop it spreading. MatteJet does not impact the tactile feel of the substrate - and indeed creates its own unique haptic effect.

MatteJet can be turned on and off at the touch of a button, allowing users to instantly switch between matte and gloss. Previously this workflow for UV inkjet required the addition of integrated flexo varnish units or offline varnishing, both involving additional plate and makeready costs.

The Gallus One with MatteJet engaged currently operates at speeds up to 54m/min.

Gallus Experience Center project

The original idea for what eventually became MatteJet came from a challenge identified by Gallus CEO Dario Urbinati. 'We knew the inherent glossiness of UV inkjet inks needed a solution to open up more premium applications like wine labels, but didn't want to go back to the old solutions involving varnish plates, which means more downtime, manual labor and so increased TCO. When we presented the idea to GEW, they were immediately interested to work with us in finding a solution – and through our close partnership, our team worked alongside theirs to transform the idea into a working solution.'

Urbinati explains that UV inkjet produces an inherently glossy dot because it is shaped like a perfectly smooth dome which reflects light back to the viewer from all angles. By changing the surface texture of the dot using the specific light source in the MatteJet unit, light is scattered, which gives a matte finish similar to using a matte varnish or overlaminate.

The innovation was developed using Heidelberg's UV inkjet inks as part of an intensive development process – with these proving to be ideally compatible with MatteJet for optimal performance and print quality.

The MatteJet solution was brought together at the Gallus Experience Center in St Gallen, where GEW is a key technology partner. The Center was built specifically for collaborative cross-industry projects like this one.

During Gallus' Wine Label Days event, an impressive demonstration was carried out at the Experience Center. A MatteJet-equipped Gallus One matched a high-end spirits label printed years before on a Gallus RCS430, on a job which included hot foil stamping and embossing. The new MatteJet label was printed on Fedrigoni Waterproof White FSC material, while the original was produced on a similarly structured paper, allowing for a direct visual comparison.

The MatteJet module was integrated into a Gallus One hybrid press with downstream flexo and screen-printing units, Pantec Rhino for hot foil stamping, and a die cutting module.

Gallus calls this hybrid approach 'System To Compose'. It allows users to match the 340mm or 430mm-wide Gallus One with any module from the Gallus Labelmaster press platform.

Urbinati sees the Gallus One with integrated MatteJet technology as a replacement, not for high end presses like the Gallus RCS, but for the highly successful Gallus TCS250 intermittent offset press. Now discontinued by Gallus, this press was extremely popular in the sectors now being targeted by the Gallus MatteJet system – short run premium food, wine, spirits and toiletries & cosmetics.

Gallus demonstrates its MatteJet technology at Labelexpo Europe 2025. Scan the QR code to learn more

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WE KNOW THE GRAPHICS INDUSTRY

Bobst closes gravure color loop

Bobst has launched an ECG technology which automates closed-loop color control of gravure printing. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

Bobst has unveiled its smartGravure technology, which brings digitized and automated closed-loop color control to the gravure process for the first time.

Bobst's smartGravure-equipped Master RS 6003 press is the first gravure press on the market to be Pantone-certified.

At the heart of the smartGravure process is the oneECG extended color gamut system, which Bobst first developed for its digital and flexo presses. Pantone colors are matched from a fixed set of seven color inks (CMYK+OGV).

The exciting development is the ability to measure and adjust color automatically on the fly.

The process colors are continuously monitored using an Esko-AVT in-line spectrophotometer measuring optical density 9,500 times a second.

Measurement information is passed to the Bobst onePrint ink control system, which adjusts between base and color extenders to bring color to the target density. Ink temperature is maintained at a consistent 18-22 degrees C to keep ink viscosity stable.

The onePrint workflow starts from a color target derived from a press fingerprint. If the in-line color reading is out of tolerance, a color management algorithm is activated and passed to the low-ink pan and formulation device, from where the adjusted colors are sent to the press.

If the next in-line color reading is within tolerance, a new color recipe is generated and stored. This is an important step that shows how to repeat the correct color.

OnePrint limits the amount of ink in the color circuit to the necessary minimum, reducing ink in the press by over 50 percent compared to a typical conventional gravure press. A standard gravure inking tank has 23L in the ink supply circuit, compared to 9L for this low ink technology.

This also means less solvent evaporation, which, according to Bobst, leads to over 20 percent savings in ink and solvent management costs.

The smartGravure setup process is fully automated through Bobst's oneSet system.

After analyzing the PDF data, oneSet suggests optimal machine settings for the job. One click transfers the recipes to the press' print queue.

Bobst says job changeover downtime is reduced by up to 70 percent compared with a traditional gravure press, with full job repeatability and color consistency.

Short runs

SmartGravure opens up new opportunities for gravure to compete in medium and short-run jobs, with Bobst estimating the crossover point at 5,000 sqm.

A demonstration job run during a recent open house in Italy showed the smartGravure Master RS 6003 press printing four different SKUs with multiple Pantones across the same web.

To print the same four jobs in a non-ECG workflow would require five printing units per color, plus white, along with the associated makeready and washdown waste.

Davide Rossello, Competence Center manager at Bobst Italia, states that extended color gamut printing is technically far easier to achieve with gravure than flexo because there are fewer variables: the engraved cylinder, doctor blade angle and ink viscosity.

Rossello says smartGravure is particularly effective where jobs are repeated more than twice.

'The gravure process is more stable than flexo, so if you reach the target today, you can reach it in three weeks, as there are no additional variables in between. Cylinder costs can be divided by the number of repeat jobs. Flexo plates are generally not usable after two repeat jobs.'

In makeready mode, it takes less than eight minutes to measure a color, correct it, and be ready for production.

'Compare this to a traditional gravure press, where it takes skilled operators a minimum of 15 minutes per print unit to bring color to target,' says Rossello. The smartGravure system cuts in half the number of operators required for a gravure press.

Bobst estimates that ink costs are reduced by 11 percent due to using 1000L compared to 50L buckets, reflecting the fact that ink can be purchased in bulk and there is no handling of ink leftovers.



Bobst onePrint workflow closes the loop between in-line color measurement and color adjustment by altering the balance between color and color extender

"Measurement information is passed to the Bobst onePrint ink control system, which adjusts between base and color extenders to bring color to the target density"

Esko input

Esko provided the color management expertise at the center of the smartGravure system.

Esko's AVT SpectraLab XF is connected to X-Rite ColorCert in the Esko S2 cloud. Specific job color target information is sent to the press, automatically setting up the SpectraLab XF with the correct values for each printing unit.

Bobst reports that 94.6 percent of the extended color gamut has been achieved using smartGravure. In one run on the RS 6003 press, 2,369 colors were achieved with a 92.1 percent rating.

Bobst will promote its smartGravure technology along with in-line flexo, digital and hybrid at Labelexpo Europe 2025. Scan the QR code to learn more



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Connect to Grow

Prime Packaging overcomes operational hurdles with new MIS

Prime Packaging revamped its operations by upgrading to HiFlow Solutions MIS, streamlining workflows and boosting efficiency across production. Piotr Wnuk reports

Prime Packaging is an award-winning packaging provider, conveniently located just minutes from O'Hare International Airport near Chicago. Founded in 1980, the company initially focused on narrow web-printed roll stock. Now, it works with Fortune 500 companies in the food, beverage, personal care, household and pharmaceutical sectors.

The company operates roll-fed flexo presses that offer up to 11 colors using water-based and UV inks. Kevin Kollman acquired Prime Graphics in February 2010 and formed Prime Packaging. The company produces various labels and flexible packaging, including shrink sleeves, pouches for seasonings and spices and more.

Prime Packaging has been operating for many years but has faced significant operational challenges as it tries to keep pace with the evolving market demands.

Its legacy systems had become outdated and inefficient, leaving the company struggling with manual processes and siloed data. Recognizing the need for a change, Kollman realized the time had come to find a new technology to streamline operations and unlock Prime Packaging's full potential.

'We had an older MIS whose supplier had discontinued support some time ago, and the system ran on Windows 7,' says Kollman. 'We finally decided it was time to find a better technology.'

Prime Packaging's struggles included slow, cumbersome reporting through Crystal Reports and a lack of integration between systems, which created inefficiencies in everything from inventory management to production scheduling.

Kollman adds: 'We had no inventory system, that was all manual; nor did we have any shop floor data collection. It was time to step up a few levels.'

The company's reliance on manual processes was a major roadblock, and decision-making was delayed without the ability to access real-time data. Prime Packaging needed to overhaul its systems to continue to grow and improve operational efficiency.

Outdated systems stifling growth

The company's legacy systems caused inefficiencies at every turn. Daily operations involved manually inputting data into third-party systems like QuickBooks, which consumed significant time and left room for human error.



Kevin Kollman, owner of Prime Packaging, and Mariusz Sosnowski, CEO and president of HiFlow Solutions

"Without real-time data, we were unable to optimize our processes or make informed decisions quickly, which meant we were missing opportunities"

'Our estimating system didn't really work for us. We were using convoluted Excel spreadsheets, and the process wasn't accurate,' Kollman recalls. 'As a result, estimates were slow to go out, frustrating both the team and customers.'

On top of that, Prime Packaging lacked a warehouse management system (WMS), meaning inventory tracking was entirely manual and prone to errors.

'Our inventory system had been a manual one, so a warehouse management system was definitely on the radar,' Kollman points out.

This lack of automation and real-time data was causing more delays, impacting the company's ability to grow.

'We were really struggling with integrating different systems,' he adds. 'Without real-time data, we were unable to optimize our processes or make informed decisions quickly, which meant we were missing opportunities.'

Overhauling systems

To tackle these operational inefficiencies, Prime Packaging turned to HiFlow Solutions, a software provider with a reputation for offering comprehensive and fully customizable systems. Kollman appreciated the flexibility of HiFlow's offering, which allowed him to configure the system according to his specific needs.

'I like the fact that the HiFlow system was very comprehensive, yet I could configure just what I needed for my company,' he says.

The HiFlow system provided Prime Packaging with the tools it needed to streamline operations, improve data accuracy, and integrate the production process. With modules covering inventory management, production planning, and reporting, Prime Packaging eliminated its manual inventory system and gained real-time data to improve its decision-making.

Kollman explains: 'With HiFlow, the inventory management and other modules in its WMS offered substantial functionality. And I had access to reports from any of the WMS modules right from HiFlow's dashboards.'

This shift allowed for better tracking of raw materials, work-in-progress and finished goods, making inventory management much more efficient.

Connecting machines and systems for real-time data

Integrating machines into HiFlow's system was Prime Packaging's biggest challenge.

'It was a bit of a challenge finding the correct hardware to connect our machines to HiFlow's data collection system,' Kollman admits. 'However, with support from HiFlow's team, the integration was smooth, ensuring that data flowed seamlessly in real-time.'

This integration allowed for continuous operational monitoring and optimization.

'Through collecting data from machines and production processes, our production process is optimized using the tools from HiFlow's Production Planning and Production Preparation modules,' Kollman says.

The result was improved visibility into production status, resource utilization and labor productivity, empowering Prime Packaging to stay on top of every stage of the process.

HiFlow's integration with QuickBooks also proved to be a big advantage for the company.

'Integration with QuickBooks was fast and seamless, with bi-directional communication,' Kollman notes. 'With this integration, financial data was always up-to-date, making accounting and financial reporting much more efficient.'

Before the upgrade, Prime Packaging's estimating process relied on outdated Excel spreadsheets, leading to inaccuracies and delays.

Kollman notes: 'We had been doing estimating with Excel spreadsheets; PSI just was not working. I found HiFlow's estimating modules easy and fast, and easy to compare estimates to actuals.'

This streamlined the process, making it faster and more accurate, ultimately improving customer service. The new system's flexibility also allowed for customized reporting.

'We like the flexibility of the reports we can generate and our ability to access real-time data and information across the entire operation,' Kollman says. 'This ability to create tailored reports gave us more control over our operations, allowing us to identify inefficiencies and improve processes across the board.'

Improved customer service

HiFlow's impact wasn't just felt internally; it also enhanced Prime Packaging's customer service.

'Our customer service now has the ability to immediately access information when a customer calls for a status update,' Kollman says.

With a centralized database, customer service representatives can easily find job status updates, reducing the time spent looking for information and providing customers with faster responses.



Prime Packaging is one of the leading converters and printers of heat-shrink PVC, PETG, OPS and PLA (corn) films

Additionally, HiFlow's automation features, such as email triggers, have improved customer communication.

'We can set triggers for automated emails to customers that give them information about production status and shipping,' Kollman explains. 'These automated notifications have enhanced the customer experience, giving clients real-time information about their orders and improving satisfaction.'

Supporting smooth transition

Switching from an older legacy system to a modern software technology came with its challenges, especially for a team that had been using the previous system for 15 years.

'We had been using the older system for 15 years, so there was a lot of change for our employees,' Kollman says. 'HiFlow recorded

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"The new system, because it offers visibility, connectivity, and access to real-time data for our reports, definitely makes us more competitive in our market segment"

all of our training sessions, and we have them in a library for future reference in case someone needs a refresher, or we are onboarding a new employee.'

The in-person support HiFlow's team provided during key implementation stages also helped Prime Packaging's employees better understand and appreciate the new system.

'The HiFlow implementation team was able to take us through our workflow, walk the plant, meet with our team where they work and help with any questions directly at their workstations,' Kollman says. 'This personalized approach made the transition smoother and ensured that the team was confident in using the new system.'

One key reason Prime Packaging chose HiFlow over other software developers was the level of support provided by the team.

Kollman recalls: 'I dealt with the vice president of sales, Jack Lafler, and at every step of the inquiry process. He answered all of my questions and offered as many demos as I needed.'

HiFlow's willingness to go above and beyond to meet Prime Packaging's needs was a deciding factor in choosing the system. Kollman also appreciated that HiFlow's team spoke the same language as his team, which made communication much easier.

'I was impressed with the fact that everyone on the HiFlow team, from sales to the developers, spoke our language; all of the HiFlow team were familiar with the terminology and processes that I use every day, and we felt quite comfortable that our needs were understood,' he says.

A stronger, more competitive Prime Packaging

Prime Packaging's decision to implement HiFlow Solutions has proven to be a turning point for the company. With real-time data, improved reporting, seamless integration and streamlined operations, Prime Packaging has positioned itself for future growth. The company can now make faster decisions, optimize production and offer a higher level of service to its customers.

The successful implementation of HiFlow has made Prime Packaging more agile, data-driven, and competitive in a fast-evolving market.

'The new system, because it offers visibility, connectivity, and access to real-time data for our reports, definitely makes us more competitive in our market segment,' Kollman concludes.

Looking ahead, Prime Packaging is well-equipped to handle new challenges and continue growing in the flexible packaging industry. The company is ready to meet the demands of an ever-changing marketplace.

To learn more about Prime Packaging, please scan this QR code



UPM

Footprint data at your fingertips: a smarter way to choose label materials

Label converters face increasing pressure as corporate sustainability regulations tighten. With raw materials accounting for 70–90% of a converter's environmental impact, access to reliable footprint data is critical for making more sustainable decisions.

UPM Raflatac is the first in the labeling industry to embed product footprint data directly into customer quotes. These product passport prototypes (PPPs) provide label converters with transparent environmental data, helping them to make informed material choices and to reduce Scope 3 emissions at source.

PPPs also give converters a competitive edge by helping them respond quickly to customer inquiries about sustainability and supports alignment with upcoming EU regulations like the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR).

The PPPs featured in quotes are generated by UPM Raflatac's LCA service Label Life, which has been externally validated by DEKRA.

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upmraflatac.com



"Reliable footprint data is essential for making more sustainable material decisions. Our product passport prototypes provide label converters transparent data to make smart choices and gain a competitive edge by advancing their own and their customers' sustainability targets faster.

Flora D'Souza
Manager, Label Life
UPM Raflatac

Women of Flexo convenes 'sisterhood' of professionals

At this year's annual conference, attendees developed workplace skills while fostering professional relationships. Selah Zighelboim reports

The Flexographic Technical Association's Women of Flexo (WoF) committee held its third annual conference at the Bobst Competence Center in Cumming, Georgia, from March 4-5.

The conference theme was 'Art and Science', and the agenda sought to balance 'interpersonal artistry and technical mastery'. Sessions covered practical tips for networking, leadership and negotiation as well as technical topics such as AI.

'We wanted all women to come out of this conference with these skills, things that they can all really apply to their careers,' says Kiersten Borden, sales specialist at Xsys and chair of Women of Flexo's recruitment and engagement committee, which put on the conference.

This year's iteration was the largest yet, with 75 attendees. It attracted participants from a wide range of roles in the labeling industry, including those in customer service and finance roles, in addition to sales, marketing and technical positions.

'Coming here, you see that a lot of us are dealing with a lot of the same things, and we can learn from each other on how to overcome and surpass either the challenges or the opportunities for women in the industry,' says Rachel Acevedo, founder and CEO of Ace Media and Marketing and co-chair of WoF's recruitment and engagement committee.

Beyond the speaker sessions and a tour of the Bobst facility, the conference also offered attendees opportunities to get to know each other.

For example, the first day culminated with an Art and Science Fair, featuring vendors who put on activities. Participants could create a customizable perfume, find out the results of a personality quiz, decorate cannolis, have their headshots taken and get caricatures done.



Women participate in the Art & Science fair

"We wanted all women to come out of this conference with these skills, things that they can all really apply to their careers"

Career development

Most of the conference focused on developing skills for the workplace.

Jennye Scott, vice president of global creative services at Amcor, held the first talk of the conference on networking.

Networking, she emphasized, should be a two-way street.

'Look to help others,' Scott said. 'Consider offering your knowledge and skills. Offer advice, share experience. Develop your help fluency and find ways to be helpful to others. But find people you can learn from as well.'

Scott also had advice for networking at an in-person event like the Women of Flexo conference, specifically, how to approach someone and start a conversation. Scott suggested various open-ended questions, such as 'How did you hear about this event?' or 'Have you come to this thing before?'

Maggie Reed, sales manager at Edale, spoke to the audience about 'turning up the volume'. This talk covered public speaking and being heard in meetings.

'There are real consequences if we're silent or silenced. It definitely can slow our career progress,' Reed said. 'If you're in a room in a meeting, that is really your time to shine. That is when upper management is going to witness how you think and how you work with other people. If you are sitting there quietly, it's not telling them much, and maybe they'll pass you by for somebody who was participating more.'

Her advice included using assertive language and not phrasing comments as questions. For public speaking, Reed recommended finding friendly faces in the audience.

Sarah Groves, vice president of sales at Amcor, spoke about negotiation. Contrary to popular opinion, she said, research shows that women nowadays negotiate just as much as men do. Women are also just as successful as men at negotiating, except when negotiating their own salaries, suggesting the obstacle lies in societal expectations, not in women's negotiating skills.

'What the research tells us is that women do ask, and that women negotiating in every circumstance have equal or greater success compared to men, except when negotiating their own salaries,' she said. 'Wage gaps are not a function of poor negotiating skills, and they never have been.'

The good news, Groves said, is that the situation is improving. Women entering the workforce today are the least likely to face

"Wage gaps are not a function of poor negotiating skills, and they never have been"

bias when negotiating their salary.

'What do world-class negotiators do differently from everyone else? It's four things,' Groves said. 'They prepare exceptionally and consistently, they lead with curiosity, they use radical empathy, and they create thoughtfully framed proposals.'

Tara Halpin, CEO and fourth-generation owner of Steinhauser, shared her personal story to illustrate leadership and resiliency.

Halpin was named president of Steinhauser in 2005, after working at the company for 10 years. Her father became board chair, and she expected to have him by her side as the company transitioned into its fourth generation of leadership.

That didn't happen. A week later, her father, Robert Steinhauser, was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer.

'We were absolutely devastated,' Halpin said. 'He was unable to work from that moment on. Here I was, 31 years old, president of our 100-year-old family business, a young mother of a 3-year-old and a 1-year-old, and my mom needed help caring for my dad, and I was struggling to grasp all that was necessary to run this business.'

Her father died 15 months later.

'I didn't have all the answers when it came to running the company, but I was certain of a few things,' Halpin said. 'I could and would learn whatever I didn't know. I was surrounded by the love and support of my family and friends. The board of directors were there by my side to offer guidance, and as my dad often said, onward and upward, a mantra that fueled my determination to move forward with a positive outlook on our future. And most importantly, I knew I had to carry forward my family's legacy.'

Technical skills

The conference also featured sessions focused on technical skills.

On the first day of the event, a panel highlighted some of the different technical roles in the industry. The panelists: Amira Jyawook, technical sales manager at Coim USA; Allie Ayers, technical application specialist at DuPont; Jennifer Amaral, director of project management at Fortis Solutions Group; and Viviane Ramsey, market manager at Sun Chemical, spoke about their work.

Acevedo gave a presentation on AI, which she described as 'your best assistance ever'. She spoke of different ways to use AI and suggested providing ChatGPT with data to enhance its capabilities. For example, when prompting ChatGPT to write an email, first give it a few emails that you've written in the past, and then ask it to write an email in your writing style.

'It's really something that we can use every day,' Acevedo said of AI. 'The great thing is that it's thousands of times faster than any human.'

Women of Flexo

FTA's Women of Flexo committee emerged from a women's networking event at the 2019 FTA conference. The event drew more than 100 attendees, surpassing expectations.

Women of Flexo held its first conference in 2023. Participants returned to the conference in subsequent years, bringing their colleagues with them and growing the conference through word of mouth.

The Women of Flexo group offers other ways for participants to get involved, such as webinars and a mentorship program. It also has committees for leadership development, recruitment and engagement, marketing and mentoring. It had its first program at Labelexpo Americas last year.

'It's really a sisterhood that we've created,' Acevedo says.



L-R: Rachel Acevedo and Kiersten Borden

More about the venue

One engaging element of the conference was its venue: an open space in the middle of the Bobst Competence Center floor, surrounded by machinery.

The center opened in April of 2024, joining other competence centers Bobst operates around the world.

But unlike those other centers, the one in Georgia does not have an attached facility where the equipment on display is manufactured, and it hosts a wider breadth of technology than most of the others.

'First and foremost, this place exists to help our sales reps sell equipment,' says Michael Cox, competence center manager. 'And beyond that, we want to be a place where the industry can come for education.'

In terms of narrow web label equipment, the center houses three machines: the Digital Expert 340, the Digital Master 340 and the Master M6.

The Digital Expert 340 is a digital roll-to-roll machine that prints at 340mm (14in) wide at 1,200 DPI and 65 m/min, with an option to upgrade the speed to 100 m/min.

The Digital Master 340 is an all-in-one modular hybrid press. Like the Digital Expert, it prints 340mm wide at 1,200 DPI and 100 m/min. It comes in four or six colors and optional digital white.

The Master M6 10-color flexo press features Bobst's V-Flower technology, which enables an operator to change to a second print job with a button. This press can print labels, flexible packaging and folding cartons.

'One of the reasons why we have this Master M6 here is to show a 26in wide in-line flexo press that's been designed for flexible packaging,' Cox says. 'So maybe you're a flexo company that you could only fill up that press 20 percent of the time right now with flexible packaging because of your mix of business. Well, the other 80 percent of the time, you can run label work on it and finish it off-line, and you can grow in the flexible packaging on that asset and then possibly transition over into a CI flexo later.'

The Competence Center also houses flexible packaging technology, such as Bobst's CI Vision machine, an 8-color, 52in wide flexo press, and the NovaLam S 550, a solventless laminator.

Scan the QR code to learn more about Women of Flexo

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TLMI Converter Meeting addresses uncertainty

Claudia St John speaks to the audience at the TLMI Converter Meeting (Photo courtesy of TLMI)

Speakers at the TLMI Converter Meeting discussed tariffs, federal workforce layoffs and changing demographics. Selah Zighelboim reports

"Washington is, the best way to put it, in an unprecedented spot right now"

During her talk on the second full day of the TLMI Converter Meeting, Claudia St John of The Workplace Advisors had a question for the business leaders in the room.

'How many of you are hiring in the same volume, with the same level of intensity, that you were in 2023?' St John asked.

A few people throughout the room raised their hands.

'Maybe five percent of you?' St John said, looking around. 'How many of you are looking to lay off?'

No one raised their hand.

The converter responses in the room exemplify the state of the economy right now, St John said. No one is hiring, and no one is firing. Business owners are in 'wait-and-see' mode, hesitant about tariffs, supply chains and more.

Economic uncertainty was a theme featured throughout several talks at the TLMI Converter Meeting, held at La Cantera Resort and Spa in San Antonio, Texas, from March 9 to 11. The meeting was open almost exclusively to converters, who networked, learned and heard from speakers on a wide range of topics, including the economy, RFID, sustainability and design trends.

Speakers

On the first full day, attendees heard from Alan Beaulieu of ITR Economics, who provided an economic forecast, and Cory Francer of Napco, who spoke about digital printing.

Converters also received information on the TLMI Management Ratio Study, a report comparing the performance of participating converters in the market.

Anne Johnson, principal and vice president of RRS (Resource Recycling Systems), kicked off the second day with an update on TLMI's Liner Recycling Initiative. The initiative has identified a mill, Sustana, to recycle release liner, and now needs silicone-coated release liner generators to participate. Johnson asked for the converters' help connecting with the release liner generators.

Afterward, TLMI's Regulatory Affairs Committee chairs, Tyler Matusevich of Brook + Whittle and Patrick Potter of Flexo Wash, spoke with Bryan Vickers of the lobbying firm Pace about tariffs, the reduction in the federal workforce, Congress' tax bill and environmental regulations.

'Washington is, the best way to put it, in an unprecedented spot right now,' Vickers said.

Vickers started the conversation by depicting the current situation in Washington, describing government agencies as unsure about the future due to DOGE's work.

'Everyone is getting, from the Department of Government Efficiency, anecdotal information about contracts being cut, employee positions being reduced, voluntary buyouts, and this is continuing for the time being into the future,' he said.

Subsequent speakers then veered to covering design for recyclability, RFID and branding. Ruben Nance of the Association of Plastic Recyclers discussed guidelines for receiving Design for Recyclability recognition. Matthew Russell, managing director of retail at the Auburn University RFID Lab, provided an overview of RFID technology. St John spoke next on workforce trends. The final speaker of the day was Matt Tanaka of the Stout Collective, which specializes in branding and design for breweries. Tanaka spoke about trends in branding.

The TLMI Converter Meeting ended with an award ceremony, where converters received Eugene Singer awards recognizing business management practices based on their results in the Management Ratio Study. The results are based on 11 factors and metrics, providing a complete picture of the participating companies' financial standing. There was one winner from each of the four size categories.

CleanMark in Portland, Oregon, won in the small company category. Graphicsland in Tinley Park, Illinois, received the award for the mid-range company category. KDV Label in Waukesha, Wisconsin, won in the medium-sized company category. Inovar Packaging Group in Dallas, Texas, received the Eugene Singer award in the large company category.

Alan Beaulieu's final lap

Beaulieu's talk at this year's Converter Meeting was the 18th time he has spoken at a TLMI event, making him the longest-running speaker in the association's history. This Converter Meeting was also Beaulieu's last time speaking at TLMI, as he would retire shortly after. Converters were eager to hear from him one final time.

Beaulieu said the economic forecast for 2025 looks positive.

However, beyond that, Beaulieu predicted a coming Great Depression in the 2030s, caused by factors such as an aging population, US national debt and increasing health care costs.

Beaulieu also addressed tariffs. Speaking about three weeks before the Trump administration implemented tariffs on goods from almost every country in the world, Beaulieu said that tariffs can be good for some industries and bad for others. They can also cause inflation, which then leads to higher interest rates. High enough interest rates can bring about a recession, which could then, with the right timing, accelerate the depression. However, Beaulieu said high inflation would likely be the worst outcome of the tariffs.

Beaulieu also spoke about DOGE's work reducing the federal workforce. He said the federal workforce does need to be reduced, but that DOGE's work is causing confusion and chaos. Not enough chaos to cause a recession, but enough to cause an economic slowdown. He also said that reducing the federal government will not prevent the coming Great Depression in the 2030s.

Beaulieu said inflation will rise in the coming years for various reasons, including increased electricity and labor costs. He said labor costs are expected to grow 28 percent by the end of the decade. Along with inflation, interest rates will also increase.

Over the next few years, Beaulieu noted, the US GDP will continue to grow, and industrial production, primarily manufacturing, will increase. High-tech industries are expected to be especially lucrative. Real income, meaning income adjusted for inflation, will go up.

'As far as I can tell, you're going to like the second half of the year. You're going to like '26, '27, onto the rest of the decade,' he said. 'You just have to make sure you're planning on inflation and higher interest rates and higher labor rates.'

Beaulieu recommended prioritizing efficiency to deal with these challenges and going beyond AI and automation to do so.

To prepare for the 2030 Great Depression, Beaulieu suggested speaking to wealth advisers about protecting investments from inflation. He advised adopting a wealth preservation strategy in the early years of the 2030s and then switching to an aggressive strategy and making investments around 2035.

'My wish for all of us in this room is that we will not fear the depression,' he said. 'We will prepare successfully for it.'

Workforce changes

In her talk, St John said the job market is strong, and that the current economic uncertainty is caused by policy.

Similar to Beaulieu, she discussed the impact of the aging US population. In 2040, she said, just 15 years from now, there will be more deaths than births in the US. Combined with declining immigration, the coming years will see a tightening labor market, she said.

She also said that deportations would likely include millions of people who are currently working in the US. Employers, she advised, should expect increased enforcement, and they should prepare by ensuring their I-9s on file are filled out correctly, as mistakes in I-9s lead to fines.

The current, frozen labor market is a great opportunity to hire talent, St John said. In a few years, Baby Boomers will leave the workforce, creating more competition for talent. Now is also a good time to upskill staff, she said.

'Your workforce should be a priority because this isn't going away,' she said on the tightening labor market.

TLMI will host its Annual Meeting on Marco Island, Florida, from October 12-14. Scan the QR code to learn more



L-R: Patrick Potter, Bryan Vickers and Tyler Matusevich (Photo courtesy of TLMI)

"You just have to make sure you're planning on inflation and higher interest rates and higher labor rates"

Mark Glendenning takes the reins

This Converter Meeting was the first with Mark Glendenning, CEO of Inland, as board chair. His two-year term started in October 2024. Glendenning has been on the TLMI board for about nine years. He's a familiar face at all TLMI events over the years and has been active in the governance and regulatory affairs committees.

TLMI has seen significant changes since Linnea Keen came on as president in 2020, Glendenning notes. Now, TLMI has more support for members, more inclusive networking and more experts coming in to speak about technical and market trends.

The widespread merger and acquisition activity in the US has affected TLMI. Glendenning has cited this as a top priority for his term as board chair.

'We've got to grow,' he says. 'We've got to get new blood in. We've got to figure out a way of attracting the small converters that we just aren't able to hold on to.'

To achieve this, Glendenning wants to enhance engagement by growing webinars, as well as bolster the association's committees and subcommittees. He is keen on identifying partners and encouraging them to deepen their participation in TLMI. Glendenning supports TLMI expanding its brand presence through media agreements and social media. He also wants to further develop TLMI's Guru program, which gives members direct access to industry subject matter experts.

This is not Glendenning's first time as the board chair of an association. He previously served as a chair for Label Printing Industries of America, an association primarily for cut-and-stack offset printers.

Keen notes that Glendenning's familiarity with different associations gives him a unique perspective on leading TLMI. He has a greater breadth of association experience from which to draw.

'I've seen all kinds of associations take different paths,' Glendenning says. 'I've seen some succeed against all odds, and others falter despite strong foundations. It's perspective. You can never sit back and assume it's going well and that the work is done. You've got to constantly be changing and trying new things.'

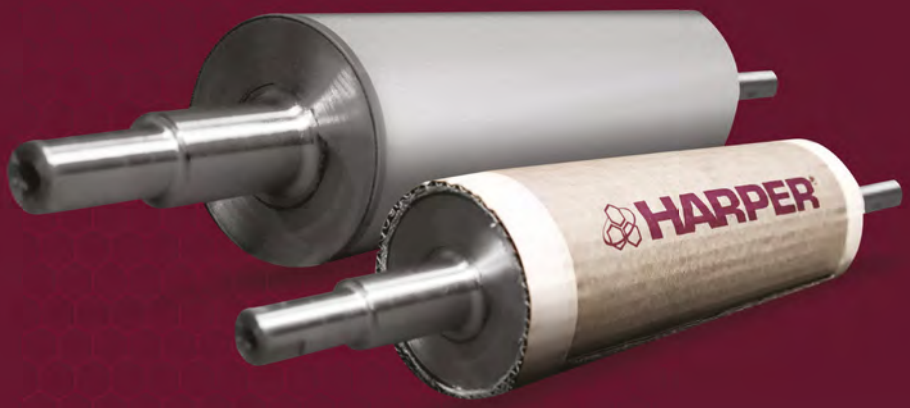
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Wisconsin-based Inland drives growth in label markets

The converter, well-known for its cut-and-stack beer labels, has been branching out into pressure-sensitive, shrink sleeve and other labels. Selah Zighelboim reports

Inland produces tens of billions of labels a year, making it one of the largest label converters in North America and one of the few of that size that's still family-owned.

Headquartered in La Crosse, Wisconsin, Inland employs 400 people across six facilities. The company is known for manufacturing cut-and-stack labels for major beer brands, which has regularly earned them Supplier of the Year awards.

But that's not all it does. Over the past decade, Inland has been diversifying its portfolio, adding flexo, digital, and hybrid equipment to its fleet of gravure and offset machinery, and producing a wider range of label types.

Inland aims to offer customers a high level of technical expertise, an extensive range of products, and a dedication to building relationships.

'In our business, relationships are still key,' says Scott Roob, Inland's chief operating officer. 'Our customers today, between trying to find labor and everyone wearing 10 hats, they need to make sure that the person they're talking to, they can trust wholeheartedly.'



Mark Glendenning with his sons, Brad and Trent

"Our customers today, between trying to find labor and everyone wearing 10 hats, they need to make sure that the person they're talking to, they can trust wholeheartedly"

History

Today, Inland is run by CEO Mark Glendenning, who is the third generation of his family to lead the company. His grandfather, John Glendenning, started Inland in 1944 as a commercial printer of forms and booklets, primarily for the automotive industry. When he retired, John's son and Mark's father, Jack Glendenning, took over.

Under Jack's leadership, the company entered the cut-and-stack label business by becoming a supplier for a major beer brands in the late 1970s. Over time, Inland added other beer companies to its customer base, transforming the company from a commercial printer into a cut-and-stack label converter.

Mark joined the company in 1988, first working in Chicago as a sales representative for Inland. He moved his growing family to La Crosse in 1992 and has run the business from the Wisconsin town ever since. Under Mark's leadership, Inland expanded even further. In 2015, Inland began acquiring companies to manufacture more types of labels, including pressure-sensitive labels.

The fourth generation of Glendennings is now also involved with the business, with Mark's sons Trent and Brad serving in engineering and sales positions, respectively.

When it came to talking to his kids about working in the business, Mark Glendenning didn't insist on his sons working at Inland. He suggested they work elsewhere first, similar to his career path. They could eventually apply for jobs at Inland, but it would be up to their manager to hire them. They would not be getting recommendations from their father. And that's what they did.

'Family' is an important word at Inland, Mark Glendenning says.

'I get to work with my family all day long, and then go home to my other family, and it's just the way I want to do business,' he says. 'I don't want to do it any other way.'

The Glendenning family also has a foundation, started by Jack, through which the Glendennings give back to the community by supporting organizations such as the local United Way and YMCA. The foundation also donated a manufacturing exhibit to the Children's Museum of La Crosse.

Facilities

Inland has six facilities across Wisconsin and Pennsylvania: two for cut and stack; one for in-mold labels; one for digital flexible packaging; and the last two for pressure-sensitive, shrink sleeve and flexible packaging.

The three facilities in La Crosse, Wisconsin, produce cut-and-stack and in-mold labels.

In 2015 and 2016, Inland acquired factories in Neenah, Wisconsin, and in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, adding shrink sleeve, flexible packaging and pressure-sensitive labels to its portfolio.

Inland added these other facilities in order to diversify. It is also beneficial for Inland to offer customers a wide range of products.

'If you're just a one-trick pony, it's tough these days to continue to grow,' Roob says.

Technology

Inland's biggest growth areas are in its flexo and digital technology, with pressure-sensitive labels, shrink sleeves and flexible packaging.

Inland produces labels primarily for the food and beverage industries, but the company also serves the home care and health and beauty industries, as well as other areas like cannabis and pet food.

Inland continually invests back into the company with its newest press being added in 2023.

Cut-and-stack

Across the industry, wet-glue labels, another term for cut-and-stack, are primarily printed on sheet-fed offset presses.

The paper glue-applied label market is expected to reach 19.7bn USD by 2030, with a CAGR of 4.5 percent year over year from 2013, according to Consultancy Research and Markets.

As previously reported by L&L, offset press speeds have increased over the past decade, with machines capable of printing up to 22,000 sheets per hour. Automation has also improved, and more printing steps are carried out in-line than in the past.

The cut-and-stack market is the second-biggest label market for prime labels, after pressure-sensitive, Roob notes. To make a profit in it, though, converters have to produce large volumes of labels, and it's hard for smaller companies to break into, as the equipment is expensive.

In addition, over the years, the cut-and-stack market has been experiencing a slight decline in volume, even as the value of cut-and-stack labels has increased due to the Covid-19 disruption, mill closures and other factors.

This has led to some converters leaving the space, opening up more opportunities for Inland in the cut-and-stack market.

Cut-and-stack machinery also requires more real estate than pressure-sensitive does, creating another barrier to entry.

Compared to pressure-sensitive labels, cut-and-stack labels also make less waste, as they don't require a release liner, produce less matrix and only need a small amount of adhesive.

'From a sustainability standpoint, there's just nothing more sustainable than a cut-and-stack label,' Glendenning says. 'I call it the original linerless.'

Innovative strategies

Like many other manufacturers, Inland has faced workforce challenges in recent years. The company had difficulty recruiting for entry-level positions.

To tackle this, Inland now offers employees diverse shift options and has increased its number of part-time workers. In addition, Inland has implemented a more robust training program. Employees are also cross-trained across different equipment, which enables more scheduling flexibility.

Another challenge Inland faces is that cut-and-stack labels are a lower-cost item compared to many other kinds of labels. However, that just drives Inland to innovate.

'We've got to continue to take non-value-added processes out,' Roob says. 'We've got to continue to get quicker, get our waste down.'

This has spurred automation at Inland. At its La Crosse facilities, new investments are focused on increasing automation. The company has installed machines that can do automatic jogging, cutting and sorting, inspections, and quality control.

'A lot of the automation that has been put in does some part of the process, but it also does some validations, inspections and confirmations,' says Tricia Sime, Inland's director of innovation, compliance and sustainability. 'When you have humans doing processes, we just know that there can be inconsistencies.'

Inland plans to continue to add automation.

'We're going to continue to try to take the less desirable jobs and automate them and then take those people and give them more rewarding jobs, whether it's working with robotics or another position,' Roob concludes.



Inland's gravure press at one of its facilities in La Crosse

"We've got to continue to take non-value-added processes out. We've got to continue to get quicker, get our waste down"

Inland earns EcoVadis Silver Sustainability Rating for 2024

Inland has earned the EcoVadis Silver Sustainability Rating for 2024, highlighting the company's dedication to sustainability and its role as an environmentally-responsible partner in the packaging industry.

EcoVadis, a globally recognized authority on sustainability assessments, evaluates organizations across key areas including environmental impact, labor and human rights, ethics, and sustainable procurement. The Silver Rating places Inland among the top performers in the industry.

The recognition demonstrates Inland's continuous efforts to integrate eco-friendly practices into every aspect of its operations and supply chain. From reducing VOC emissions and waste to implementing energy-efficient initiatives, the company is committed to reducing its environmental footprint. Inland's sustainable packaging also empowers customers to achieve their own environmental goals.

'We are honored to receive the EcoVadis Silver Sustainability Rating for 2024,' says Alana Clements, environmental and sustainability coordinator at Inland. 'This recognition is a direct result of the dedication and hard work of our entire team. At Inland, we take pride in being a packaging partner that prioritizes sustainability, and we are excited to continue developing innovative solutions that positively impact our customers, communities and the planet.'

Scan the QR code to learn more about Inland

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NextGen evolves with new leaders and technology

The employee-owned company has gone through several significant changes since its merger. Selah Zighelboim reports

Over lunch one day in 2021, Kathy Alaimo and Nick Van Alstine decided to explore merging their employee-owned companies.

At the time, Alaimo was the president of Syracuse Label & Surround Printing, a converter just north of the eponymous college town in upstate New York. Van Alstine was the president of Macaran Printed Products and distributor of Van Alstine & Sons, also in upstate New York.

The purpose of the merger was to help their respective companies stay competitive in a consolidating printing industry, preserve their companies' employee-owned business models, and secure the future of their businesses. Because of their commitment to the employee-owned model, they didn't consider selling to private equity or larger competitors.

The merger resulted in NextGen Label Group, a 65m USD label converter with 170 full-time employee-owners and facilities in Syracuse, New York, via Syracuse Label and Cohoes, New York, via Macaran. Both have room for expansion. NextGen also operates a warehouse and office in Syracuse, which houses the Van Alstine division.

Since the merger, NextGen has undergone some major changes. These include new C-Suite leadership, a growing technical team and the installation of a Heidelberg Gallus One hybrid press. NextGen was also recognized as Converter of the Year at Labelexpo Americas 2024.

Dan Rosenbaum, the new CEO, wants the company to keep expanding. By 2030, he hopes that NextGen will be a 100m USD company.

'It'll take a significant amount of investment and commitment toward innovation and excellence,' Rosenbaum says. 'I'm confident that with this leadership team, developing and promoting our employee-owners, and adding additional key talent, we will get there.'

So, what do the company leaders say makes NextGen Label Group stand out?

'It's all about brand custodianship at the end of the day,' Rosenbaum says.

Brand custodianship, how NextGen Label Group describes its philosophy, centers on three core tenets: employee-centric, customer-centric and solutions-centric.

'We're employee-centric, which means we prioritize the well-being, satisfaction and growth of our employee-owners,' says Jessica McCarthy, NextGen's chief HR officer. 'We're customer-centric, so we understand our customers' brand vision and obsess over the details to support it. Quality is super important to us, and so that falls into the customer-centric and solution-centric tenets. Being solution-centric, we provide solutions in material technology, graphics and aesthetics and label application.'

Team changes

NextGen completed its merger in June of 2022.

With that change, Alaimo and Van Alstine became board co-chairs, while a new transitionary leadership team stepped in. This team included Tom Sargent, then CEO; Nick Noyes, chief operating officer; Tom Faugno, chief sales officer; Paul Roux, chief technical officer; and Rosenbaum, chief financial officer.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the leadership team worked to deliver on its brand custodianship philosophy. They hired new talent, upgraded equipment and introduced operational and planning systems.

On April 1 of this year, as part of the planned transition, Rosenbaum became CEO, while Sargent took a new role as a corporate adviser while remaining on the board. Andrew Horvath joined the team as CFO and president of the Van Alstine division, and Faugno became a strategic sales adviser. McCarthy was also promoted from vice president of human resources to chief HR officer.

The company has also expanded its technical and commercial teams. This includes Tom Mason, the vice president of sales, and Anne Ehrenberger, the senior technical project manager.

'The merger allowed for two separate companies to pool their resources and to get top talent, which is paramount to our ability to grow and succeed in the marketplace,' Rosenbaum says.

Technology

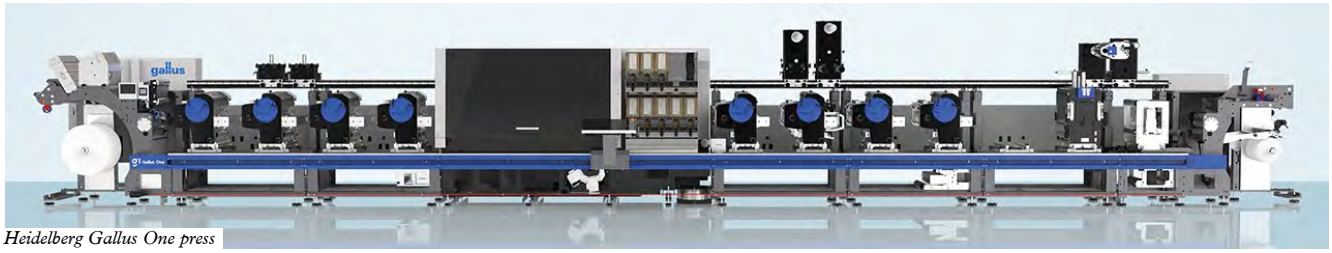
NextGen Label Group produces pressure-sensitive labels, shrink sleeves, extended content labels, flexible packaging and RFID labels for various markets, including wine and spirits, food and beverage, health and beauty, durable and industrials. Materials include single-ply, two-ply, two-ply with variable printing, white film and metalized film.

Finishing capabilities and enhancements include tactile varnishes, embossing, cold

"The merger allowed for two separate companies to pool their resources and to get top talent, which is paramount to our ability to grow and succeed in the marketplace"



L-R: Paul Roux, chief technical officer; Nick Noyes, chief operating officer; Jessica McCarthy, chief HR officer; Tom Sargent, corporate adviser; and Dan Rosenbaum, president and CEO, with the Converter of the Year award



Heidelberg Gallus One press

"When the company succeeds, the employees succeed, and they see that in their employee-ownership accounts"

foil and hot stamping.

NextGen markets the patented TLC (Thicker Label Closure) technology in North America through a licensing agreement with UK-based OPM Group. TLC is proven in the wet wipe and flexible packaging markets worldwide. This semi-rigid, peel-and-reseal label system provides a sustainable, high-performance alternative to traditional rigid flip-top closures. It can be used for food, health and beauty products and more.

NextGen is also the exclusive label and shrink sleeve supplier to Kingston Aluminum Technology (KAT) line of aluminum containers. These infinitely recyclable containers help brand owners stand out from their competition while supporting sustainability initiatives. The KAT containers come in various market-recognizable shapes, or a brand may create its own custom shape.

NextGen has 17 presses, a mix of flexo, digital and hybrid machines from Heidelberg, Nilpeter, HP and Domino.

This past fall, NextGen acquired its first hybrid press, a Heidelberg Gallus One. It can print up to 17in wide, 15 colors and a range of embellishments. It also provides additional capacity to NextGen's 14-color, 17in Gallus Labelmaster, which mirrors the new Gallus One but for the in-line digital capabilities.

'What makes it unique is the press seamlessly blends the best of flexographic and digital printing technologies, which enables an optimized workflow, faster print times, robust automation and impeccable quality, helping us to deliver on our promise of brand custodianship,' Rosenbaum says.

Noyes adds: 'We did a lot of research before we made the Gallus One investment. This press separates us from our competitors, and we're really excited about what this press will be able to do for us in the future.'

McCarthy says the Heidelberg Gallus One press has also been a boon for NextGen Label Group employees-owners, enabling them to develop their skills working with a more advanced machine.

NextGen has also invested significantly in automation. This investment has included an automated plate cutter from Kongsberg, a plate mounter from AV Flexologic, platemaking technology from Esko and DuPont, Rotoflex finishing equipment, and more.

Sustainability goals

NextGen has various sustainability goals, including reducing power usage and electricity, emphasizing recycling and using sustainable materials when appropriate.

In addition, NextGen's Syracuse Label site is a zero-waste-to-landfill facility. Waste that can't be recycled is used in fuel blending instead.

NextGen has also been recognized for its sustainability work. The company is SGP certified, and the Syracuse Label facility obtained the EcoVadis silver medal in 2023. In 2022, the company received the Calvin Frost Champion of Change elevation award.

Converter of the Year

NextGen Label Group accepted the Converter of the Year award at the Label Industry Global Awards ceremony on the first evening of Labelexpo Americas 2024.

To receive the Converter of the Year award at Labelexpo Americas 2024, NextGen Label Group needed to demonstrate how it encourages a diverse and inclusive environment, develops and trains staff, contributes to charitable causes, advances sustainability initiatives and introduces programs or products that contribute to end-user satisfaction.

In its nomination form for the award, NextGen Label Group highlighted over a dozen of its initiatives, investments and programs that meet these criteria, such as its detailed onboarding process and employee training efforts, its fundraising drives to help community members in need and its Gallus One press that enhances end-user satisfaction.

The judging panel was impressed by NextGen's consistency in staff development, local community engagement, sustainability initiatives and customer-focused programs.

NextGen referenced the three tenets of its brand custodianship philosophy in its application.

'Our dedication to these principles is unyielding, and we are confident that they form the foundation of a successful and sustainable business that delivers a level of performance that exceeds our customers' expectations,' the company wrote.

A unique business model

NextGen's employee-owned business model means that each employee owns company shares. Every dollar of revenue made, or every dollar of spending saved, is considered in the annual share price valuation. Upon leaving the company or retiring, employees receive the value of their ESOP (employee stock ownership plan) accounts following established waiting periods.

'When the company succeeds, the employees succeed, and they see that in their employee-ownership accounts,' Rosenbaum says.

This functions simultaneously as a retirement contribution, an employee benefit and a motivator for success.

The model helps shape NextGen in other ways, such as in the company's support for employee training and development. NextGen also offers a performance incentive bonus and peer-to-peer or manager-to-peer employee awards. It also has various committees, such as wellness, charity, safety and ESOP committees, for employees to get more involved.

In addition, the employee-ownership model helps with employee retention, a challenge throughout the labeling industry. Rosenbaum estimates that the average tenure of a NextGen employee is 15 years.

It also affects the company's culture, driving a more collaborative environment and its brand custodianship tenants.

'That collaboration means that employee-owners truly pull in the same direction to not only succeed in their roles individually but to enhance our company as a whole,' Rosenbaum says.

Scan the QR code to learn more about NextGen Label Group

FOLDING CARTONS COME TO LABELEXPO EUROPE

From this year, Labelexpo Europe 2025 will be expanded to include folding carton technology. Andy Thomas-Emans explains how Labelexpo is evolving.



Labelexpo Europe 2025, to be held in Barcelona from September 16-19, will now include folding carton technology alongside labels and flexible packaging.

This looks like a big change for the show, but it is, in fact, more of a natural evolution based on in-line and digital technologies that look to disrupt the traditional folding carton industry in much the same way they did with flexible packaging.

Throughout its history, Labelexpo has constantly adapted to new package printing technologies. The early Labelexpo shows, starting in 1980 in Brussels, focused on new technology for self-adhesive labels converted in-line on narrow web presses.

As labels expanded into new formats, such as shrink sleeves, wraparound and in-mold labels, Labelexpo adapted to showcase these technologies.

The next major evolution for Labelexpo was the addition of flexible packaging, which happened around a decade ago with the launch of the 30in wide HP Indigo 20000 digital press.

Flexo press manufacturers developed wider 'mid-web' presses in the 26-30in (670-800mm) range, better adapted to handling these larger packaging formats.

Label converters who diversified into flexible packaging — typically stand-up pouches —found this opened up new market opportunities, strengthening their label businesses.

We are now seeing a similar convergence of print technologies between labels and folding cartons, which has the potential to open up new markets for label converters and other market disruptors.

CONVERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Today, folding cartons are overwhelmingly printed sheet-fed offset, followed by creasing and die-cutting, hot stamping and embossing. These multiple process steps add lead time and create a lot of work-in-progress (WIP) as pallets are moved between workstations.

Core Labelexpo technologies — in-line flexo, rotary offset, digital and hybrid — could revolutionize this traditional workflow.

In-line flexo, rotary offset and hybrid presses allow the processing of folding cartons in a single pass from printing and coating to cut-crease and sheeting, eliminating the work-in-progress associated with a sheet-fed offset workflow.

Of course, additional process steps can be added in-line, such as screen printing, foiling, embossing and VDP/numbering. The finished cartons are immediately ready for shipping or further processing on folder-gluer machinery.

This workflow will be demonstrated at Labelexpo Europe 2025 by Edale, now owned by Canon. The company will bring an FL5 Carton Production Line to the show, featuring in-line semi-rotary flatbed die-cutting.

In other carton-related developments, Tec-ni-Fold launches an in-line creasing module for in-line presses, and Rotatek shows a print station from its Universal 850 rotary offset press, which is specified for folding cartons.

There is also a wide range of existing exhibitors like Bobst, Omet, Sappi and more, who also supply to the folding carton market.

DIGITAL AND HYBRID

Digital printing has enormous potential for short-run and personalized folding carton production. In 2013, HP Indigo demonstrated a folding carton line built around a Tresu coater and a 30000 digital press (today the 35k), with partner Kama demonstrating half-size die-cut/creasing and Highcon demonstrating laser converting.

Recently, HP announced the sale of an HP Indigo 35k digital press to label converter Altro Industries in Canada. The company can now sell PS and shrink sleeve labels, folding cartons and packaging tapes.

Interesting developments have also been made in water-based inkjet for folding cartons. Mark Andy's executive vice president, Tom Cavalco, says the company is actively considering how to apply its hybrid UV inkjet platform to the folding carton market.

Labelexpo could speed the adoption of digital printing in the folding carton market, just as it did for labels and flexible packaging.

The addition of folding cartons to Labelexpo is also likely to galvanize developments in short-run converting systems and digital embellishment. For example, Prati showed during an open house event in 2022 a Digifast20000 carton converting line that allowed users of HP Indigo's 20000/25k press to switch between flexible packaging and folding carton production on the same finishing machine. The Digifast20000 was fitted

"WE ARE NOW SEEING A SIMILAR CONVERGENCE OF PRINT TECHNOLOGIES BETWEEN LABELS AND FOLDING CARTONS WITH THE POTENTIAL TO OPEN UP NEW MARKETS FOR LABEL CONVERTERS AND OTHER MARKET DISRUPTORS"



Canadian label converter Altro moves into folding cartons with HP Indigo 35k

"AT LABELEXPO EUROPE 2023, OVER 25 PERCENT OF VISITORS REGISTERED EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN FOLDING CARTON TECHNOLOGY. THIS DEMONSTRATES THAT LABELEXPO HAS TRANSFORMED INTO A PACKAGE PRINTING SHOW, ALBEIT WITH LABELS AT ITS CORE"

with a dual UV/hot air drying flexo coating station to handle UV or water-based coatings for the food industry.

We should also not forget that, by far, the biggest volumes of wet glue labels and in-mold labels are printed on sheet-fed offset presses. One result of bringing folding cartons into Labelexpo will be an increased focus on the high levels of automation on these presses and new in-line coating and foiling systems on sheet-fed offset presses.

COMMON THEMES

In addition to overlapping print technologies, wider themes unite labels, flexible packaging and folding carton converters at Labelexpo.

Sustainability is a key one, driven by the EU's looming PPWR initiative. Labelexpo Europe 2025 will examine these trends at a feature area on the show floor, with daily presentations and interactive exhibits.

Sustainability issues are pushing many brands to consider moving from plastics to technical paper and fiberboard-based packaging formats. However, a major issue is barrier protection, which usually means non-recyclable laminations with aluminum or PE. This is addressed by Labelexpo exhibitors such as Actega, which will show samples of its barrier coating technology.

Automation is another common theme. Labelexpo exhibitors already demonstrate process automation software and robotics systems, focusing on end-of-line material handling. The addition of folding cartons will no doubt expand this area of the show.

THE FUTURE

What might persuade a folding carton converter to visit Labelexpo? One would suspect the same reasons flexible packaging converters now visit the show: a general interest in visiting co-suppliers, and a general interest in new print and decorative technologies.

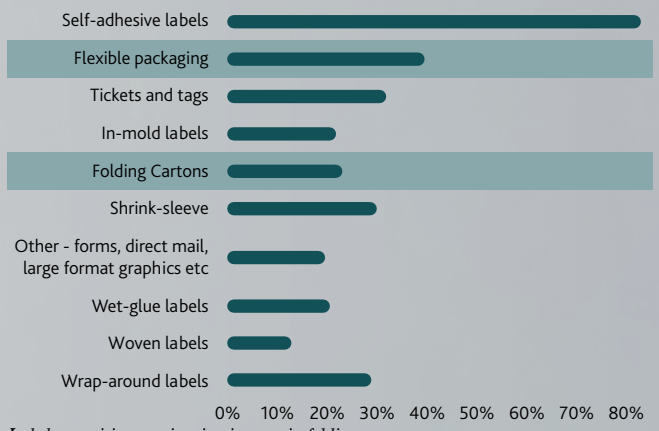
Also, with the entry of private equity finance into the packaging sector, we are seeing more large converting groups that include labels, flexible packaging and folding carton operations.

Minnesota-based Meyers is a recent example of this. The family-owned converter has added to its folding carton capacity with the acquisition of Mankato Packaging.

Michael Dillon, chief revenue officer and co-owner of Meyers, says: 'We've built a strong partnership with Mankato Packaging in recent months, and we're excited to take this next step together. We've long respected their contributions to the packaging industry and see this as a great opportunity to expand the value we deliver—especially in the folding cartons space. It's a meaningful move in our continued commitment to sustainable, high-quality packaging and long-term client partnerships.'

This is reflected in a growing visitor interest in both flexible packaging and folding cartons. At Labelexpo Europe 2023, over 25 percent of visitors registered expressed an interest in folding carton technology and 40 percent in flexible packaging. This demonstrates that Labelexpo has transformed into a package printing show, albeit with labels at its core.

Labelexpo Europe 2025 will be a 'soft launch' for folding cartons. By 2027, we expect folding cartons to be fully integrated into the show.



Labelexpo visitors registering interest in folding cartons



Prati's DigiFast 20000 adapted to handle folding cartons

Folding Carton Master Class at Labelexpo

The Label Academy will host a half-day Master Class at Labelexpo Europe 2025 in Barcelona. The Master Class is targeted at label converters who are looking at diversifying into folding cartons using in-line flexo/rotary offset, digital or hybrid presses.

The class covers an introduction to the folding carton market; production challenges and possibilities with in-line flexo, digital and hybrid presses; developments in materials including barrier coatings; converting technology for cutting and creasing and folder gluers. The Master Class finishes with a case study of a label converter making the transition to folding cartons on an in-line flexo press.

Folding carton technology can be seen at Labelexpo Europe 2025 this September. Scan the QR code to learn more

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RFID Masterclass offers key insights

The Labelexpo Americas RFID Masterclass provided label converters with a key understanding of both converting challenges and new business opportunities. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

The RFID Masterclass at Labelexpo Americas 2024 provided label and packaging converters with a comprehensive insight into the technology, along with an understanding of the challenges and opportunities for building new business.

David Weinhammer, senior global RFID product manager at Zebra Technologies, opened the masterclass by explaining how RFID applications have exploded over the last few years. In 2023, 45 billion tags were sold. The end-use market is growing at a rate of 25 percent year over year, meaning that 90 billion tags will be sold in 2027 alone.

Dr Vlad Sljapic, COO Graphimecc explained, 'RFID is at the core of the modern manufacturing and retail ecosystem: global traceability, the circular economy, tracking carbon footprint, brand protection and regulatory compliance.'

This provides unique opportunities for label converters, but it does require an in-depth understanding of how RFID systems perform, as well as the challenges of converting and how to specify deliverable RFID systems to customers.

Perfect placement

Gary Stegall, an RFID expert at Avery Dennison, emphasized the importance of label converters fully understanding how RFID tags will be used.

He explained how metal surfaces, including foil, and the presence of liquids, can impact the read range of RFID antennae.

'Placement is a critical factor,' Stegall says. 'Walmart, for example, has metal shelving, and a lot of brands want to put the RFID tag on the bottom of the box because it is out of sight. That metal shelf causes the radio signal to bounce off. The antenna never gets a chance to grab the energy from that radio signal and wake up the tag.'

Liquids present another problem, which will likely be exacerbated as Walmart and other retailers move RFID into general merchandise.

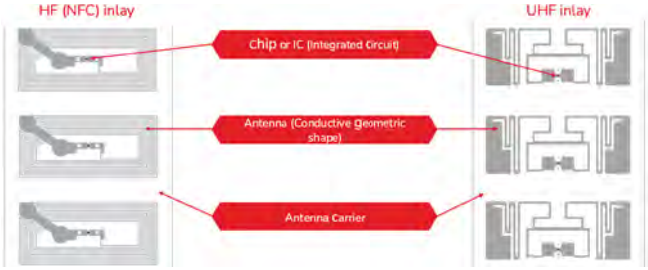
'A regular RFID tag put behind the prime label right in the middle of a bottle of antifreeze just doesn't work,' says Stegall. 'There's too much water in there.'

Stegall mentioned that Avery Dennison has successfully placed a tag in the middle of a prime label for a motor oil. 'It's the makeup of some of the motor oils. I found that (tags) work on kerosene. It's just interesting that on certain products, liquid products, it will work. However, it will not work on anything water-based. What about shampoo? Is it going to work? We hear rumblings and rumors that the next thing that's going to roll out, the next phase is going to be health and beauty and over-the-counter drugs at Walmart.'

Stegall says it is often possible to find a workable location for the RFID tag if the brand owner is flexible.

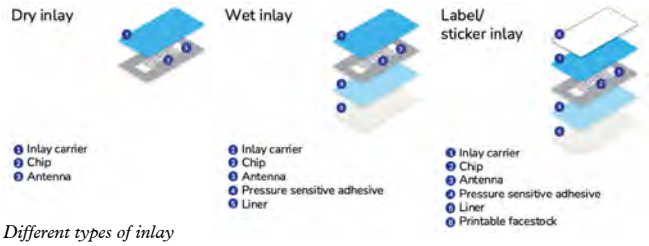
'I've seen somebody with a car wash liquid where they've made a place on their prime label, so the RFID antenna flags off the bottle a little bit, but it still looks like it's part of the prime label,' he says. 'Now that it's off the bottle a little bit, now I can read it with a scanner. And Walmart approved it.'

Stegall says Walmart is happy to work with converters to find solutions. 'They want to work with you, and they want to hear what you have to offer. And they are going to give you ideas. For example, can you get a tag above the fill line on that bottle? Can you put it on the cap, on the trigger assembly? Is it possible? That's not always possible. It's very hard sometimes on the production line to get an RFID tag on a trigger assembly.'



RFID inlay components

"It's interesting that on certain products, liquid products, RFID will work. But anything water-based, it will not work on"



Different types of inlay

In some cases, a hang tag-type assembly may be the answer. 'Because it hangs down over the neck of the cap, that leaves possibly enough air space between the tag antenna and the liquid, so now it can be read.'

QC issues

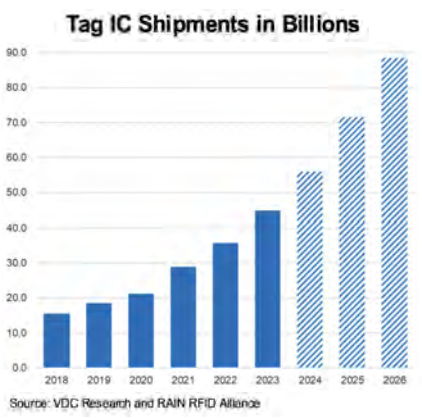
Teemu Ainasoja, sales director from Voyantic, addressed the issue of quality control during RFID production.

Traditional label inspection is based on cameras. However, in RFID, you cannot visually see whether a tag is defective. This needs specialized RF equipment. There also needs to be a way of marking and possibly removing bad tags.

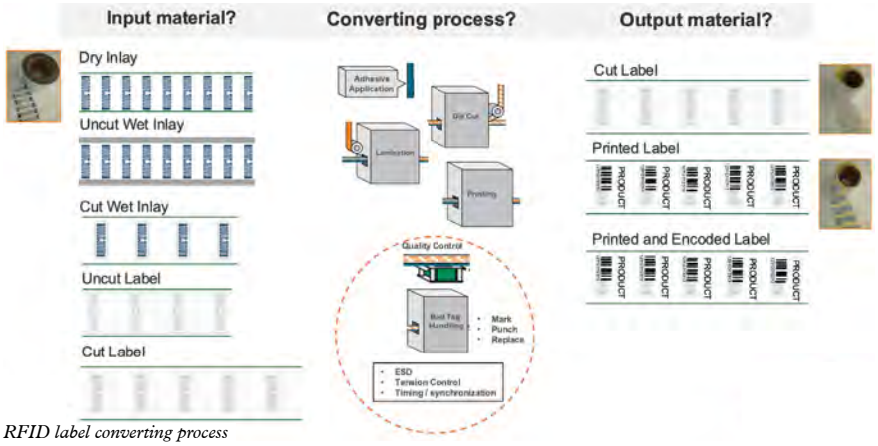
A common practice for tags that fail the QC test is to print a void mark on the labels, or to have imperfect labels punched, 'to somehow physically damage the label', so that it is clear it will not accidentally end up in use.

During initial conversations with the customer, it is essential to specify whether 100 percent good RFID labels are required or if the widespread benchmark of 1 percent scrap is acceptable.

Explains Ainasoja, 'Some customers in the medical field may require 100 percent quality, which means that if there is a failing



Tag shipments in billions



RFID label converting process

"Label converters, with their knowledge of films, face stocks and adhesives are in a unique position to deliver RFID into a wide range of end products"

tag, you need to either stop the line, replace a failing tag with a good one, or do post-processing with this kind of replacement or cutting procedure. So quality control and figuring out what will be done for the failing tags are the biggest changes when you move from traditional printed labels to RFID labels.'

Ainasoja went on to outline other key converting challenges: 'There are a couple of other things to think about, especially when you work with dry inlays, when there is no material on top of the (tag). They are then sensitive to ESD (electrostatic discharge), so ESD protection is essential.

'Tension control is another one, again, especially for dry inlays,' Ainasoja continues. 'If the roll is too tight, the pressure on the IC (integrated circuit) can damage the connection between the integrated circuit and the antenna. Similarly, if the roll is too loose, it can start slipping and scrape off the ICs on the inlays.'

Die-cutting also presents challenges: 'Timing synchronization is something else to watch out for. The dry inlays only appear to be continuous material when, in fact, it is intermittent. So, if the die-cut is not synchronized well, or the inlay insertion is not synchronized well, you can very quickly damage a lot of inlays by cutting the antenna. So, your machinery needs to synchronize things so that you don't cut the antenna, but you cut in between.

'The same with the insertion. The brand customer needs the label to be correctly placed, so the inlays should be in the right position inside the label. This again means that the timing and synchronization of the inlay insertion is critical.'

RFID specification

Voyantic's Ainasoja explained that label converters need to tie down specifications and expectations with their customers before committing to production.

There are two key aspects to correctly specify RFID labels: system design and production quality control. Converters should clarify how the RFID labels will be deployed in practice and ask what kind of read ranges and reading angles will the RFID label be required to provide. For example, in applications where items are passing through a gate scanner, RFID tags with a very short read range will fail to scan.

Production QC covers how the label converter's production department will create consistently performing labels across potentially millions of pieces. In technical terms, we are looking at tag sensitivity, or how much power a reader must provide to 'wake up' a tag.

'There is some variation in any mass production process, and that applies to RFID also. The key is to produce labels within tolerance of the overall target RFID system,' says Ainasoja.

'Dead tags are easy to find. The challenge lies in finding live tags that are outside the read range tolerance for a particular application. The better, or the narrower, your variance is, the less waste is produced, and you keep your yield high. As mentioned, good and bad tags cannot be visually verified unless there is something obvious, like a cut antenna. Typical damage cannot really be seen, even under a microscope.'

One of the most common reasons for variation in performance is micro-fractures on the conductive glue between the connector tags in the IC and the antenna.

Ainasoja says: 'You can only detect through the RF that the connection is good. Therefore, the readability of the tag is good. This is what the quality control system does.'

In most cases, there are no standards or criteria for setting the pass-fail limits or what kind of variance is acceptable.

'How far from the middle point should my acceptance criteria be? That's pretty much always the discussion with the customer: "This would be my normal yield, I propose this to be the cut-off limit". And then if that's good for the customer, you're good,' Ainasoja says. 'If the customer requires better performance, then it's always a discussion, because now my yield probably decreases. It turns into a pricing discussion. The discussion of the quality criteria, I think, is becoming more and more important when you discuss with label buyers.'

Conclusion

Today, RFID is a reliable, cost-effective technology. It provides retailers and brands with significant improvements to their inventory accuracy offering additional tertiary benefits, including supply chain transparency, brand protection and customer interaction.

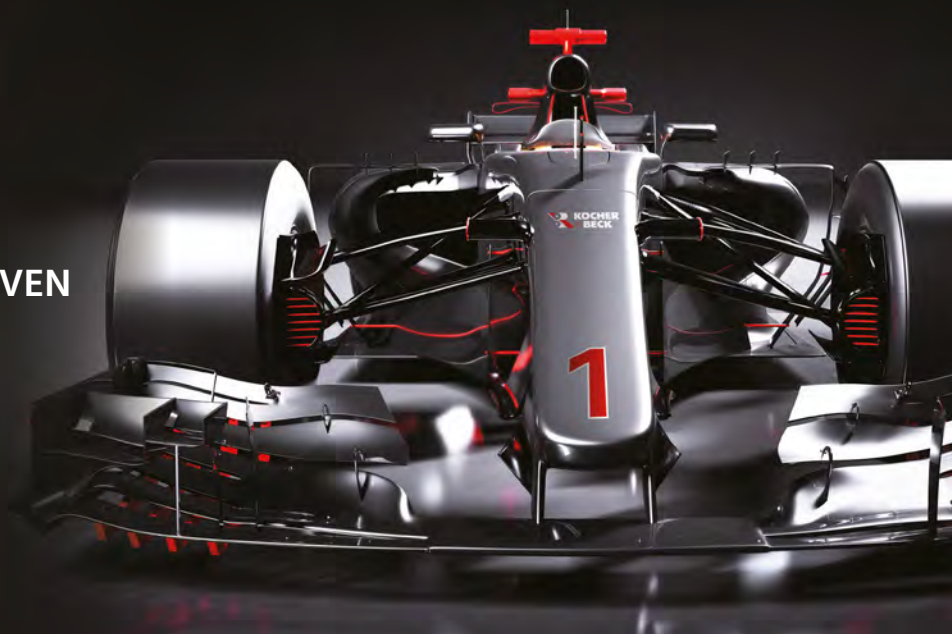
Further, as Graphimecc's Sljapic points out, 'this is not just about the big retail groups who have been very public with their mandates. Many mid-size and smaller size companies are looking at RFID, not only to make their own processes more efficient, but because consumers now expect a higher level of communication and information about the products that they buy.

'Label converters, with their knowledge of films, face stocks and adhesives, are in a unique position to deliver RFID into a wide range of end products,' he says. 'Understanding RFID technology and focusing on quality will be key differentiators, making converters better able to support their customers on the RFID journey.'

The Label Academy book 'RFID: technology and applications' will be published at Labelexpo Europe 2025

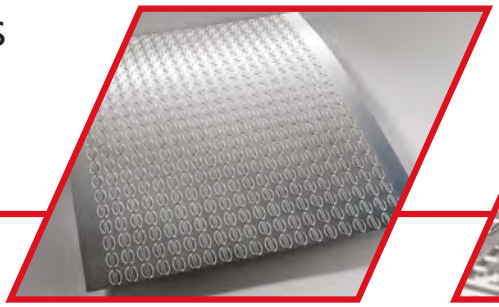
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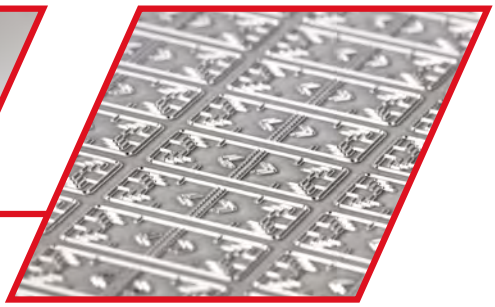
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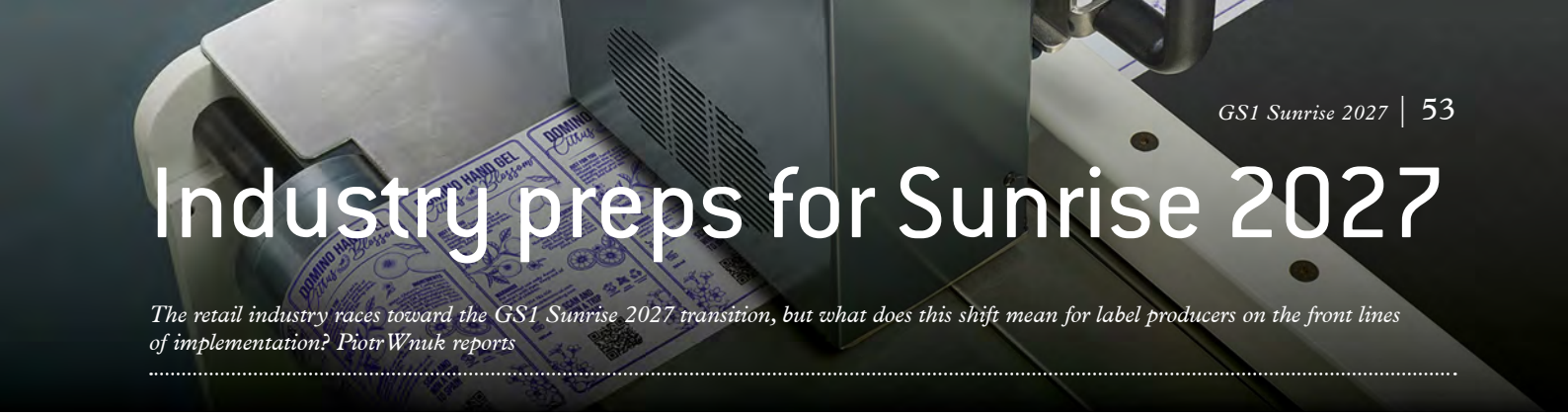
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Industry preps for Sunrise 2027

The retail industry races toward the GS1 Sunrise 2027 transition, but what does this shift mean for label producers on the front lines of implementation? Piotr Wnuk reports

The tiny linear barcode tucked onto every retail product since the 1970s is getting a major upgrade that promises to transform not just how products are scanned, but how they communicate with the entire supply chain. Converters face both unprecedented technical challenges and remarkable business opportunities.

2027: Evolution, not extinction

Contrary to widespread industry anxiety, 2027 is not a hard deadline marking the death of traditional barcodes. 'The most common misconception is that 2027 is a cutoff date, but it's actually the year we expect to reach a critical mass of retailers scanning 2D barcodes at point of sale,' explains Camila Young, program lead at GS1 UK. 'Traditional linear codes will continue to exist alongside their data-rich counterparts.'

This clarification offers converters a more nuanced understanding of the transition period, though preparation remains crucial as major brands and retailers accelerate their adoption strategies. Young emphasizes that converters must 'adhere to GS1 standards for barcode quality, placement and data accuracy,' while staying updated with evolving regulations.

These placement requirements are particularly exacting. Videojet notes that 2D codes should be printed 'within the optimal 50 mm radius from the center of the EAN/UPC' to comply with GS1 standards, a seemingly minor detail with significant production implications.

Static vs dynamic

Perhaps the most consequential decision brands face is whether to implement static 2D codes (containing fixed information similar to current linear barcodes) or dynamic codes that incorporate variable data like expiration dates, batch numbers, or serialized identifiers printed during production.

'The biggest challenges will likely include adapting to new printing technologies for dynamic data, ensuring the accuracy and readability of barcodes, and integrating these changes into existing production workflows,' Young predicts.

For converters, this distinction dramatically impacts necessary equipment investments and production workflows. Lee Metters, group business development director at Domino Printing Sciences, emphasizes that different brand strategies will determine how converters need to adapt: 'There are several implementation strategies for Sunrise 2027, from having a 2D code that only includes the same data as the current barcode, without additional functionality, to serialized codes integrated into the brand's supply chain.'

> **"The most common misconception is that 2027 is a cutoff date, but it's actually the year we expect to reach a critical mass of retailers scanning 2D barcodes at point of sale"**

The relationship between converters and brands must evolve into a more integrated partnership, particularly for products requiring variable data.

'Delivering the right labels with accurate dynamic codes requires unprecedented synchronization between converter production systems and brand data,' Metters notes. 'The stakes are considerably higher. Errors can result in unusable packaging or potentially reputation-damaging recalls.'

Resolution revolution

Resolution becomes the critical factor when it comes to printing reliable, scannable 2D codes. Unlike their linear predecessors, 2D barcodes pack information into intricate patterns that demand precision reproduction, a challenge that's pushing printing technology to new limits.

Konica Minolta's Carsten Bamberg highlights their advanced capabilities: 'We provide advanced toner-based label presses with print resolutions of up to 2,400 DPI to ensure highly accurate print and image quality.'

Similarly, Martin Leitner from Durst Group emphasizes native high-resolution capabilities: 'The complete Tau RSC printer platform is printing with native 1,200 x 1,200 DPI resolution. This ensures that customers can print fine details and excellent quality at a printing speed of up to 80 m/min.'

Alexander Sperling, technical product manager at EyeC, explains the critical factors determining code functionality: 'Our inspection solutions analyze essential scannability elements including print clarity, contrast, alignment, quiet zones and code integrity. Without sufficient resolution, these elements break down and codes become unreliable.'

For converters handling dynamic data, equipment selection becomes pivotal. 'Implementation options range from digital label presses to digital monochrome overprinters integrating with existing lines,' says Metters. 'The key is finding technology that maintains code quality while accommodating production volume requirements.'

While digital printing offers natural advantages for variable data, converters using conventional methods still have viable options for participating in the 2D revolution.

'If it's a simple change of artwork, the challenge for converters is ensuring all codes are printed at the right size to ensure reliable scanning,' Metters explains. 'This path only holds a relatively small learning curve for converters, as these codes can be printed using traditional methods such as flexo, as well as digital printing technology.'

For more complex implementations involving variable data, hybrid systems offer an efficient approach. 'A hybrid solution will be most cost-effective for many,' Metters notes. 'Here, Domino can support converters in identifying the best location to position a monochrome printer and inspection equipment to print and verify a variable 2D code.'

Thermal transfer technology remains viable for the 2D transition. 'Thermal transfer printing is an excellent method for producing the high-quality QR codes needed for reliable scanning,' notes Pierre-Arnaud Hommel, communication manager at Armor-IIMAK. 'It creates crisp, clear images with good contrast, which is essential for scanners to read the codes accurately.'

Zero error tolerance

Unlike traditional barcodes, where occasional scanning issues might be tolerated, 2D codes containing critical product data demand flawless execution,

driving unprecedented focus on verification systems.

'The verification process must be comprehensive and multi-layered,' advises Sperling from EyeC. 'This begins with pre-press file verification, continues with high-resolution inspection of printed samples against ISO standards, and culminates with 100 percent in-line inspection during production runs.'

For variable data applications, verification is non-negotiable. As Metters emphasizes, 'Discovering code failures after products have been shipped to retail creates costly recalls and damages brand reputation. The verification system must match the sophistication of the code production technology.'

Industry experts recommend adopting ISO/IEC 15415 standards as the baseline quality benchmark, with verification systems from companies like EyeC, Axicon, REA Jet, Cognex and Omron providing the necessary compliance validation.

The intelligence behind the codes

Beyond hardware considerations, sophisticated software increasingly plays a crucial role in implementing GS1 Digital Link barcodes effectively. Konica Minolta highlights its software capabilities: 'Our AccurioPro Flux pre-press software with the optional 'Flux Barcode Pro' feature is supporting the major GS1 barcode types, like GS1 QR Code, GS1 DataMatrix, GS1-128, GS1 various DataBar versions and ITF-14,' says Bamberg. 'We create a 'soft proof' of all the generated barcodes, and thereby any errors will be automatically detected, without any human interaction, before the actual print job is sent to the press.'

Serge Clauss from Durst Group notes its workflow technology's variable data capabilities: 'Durst Workflow Label provides two levels of VDP capabilities depending on the customers' requirements. One version is dedicated text and barcodes/QR codes whereas the other version supports variable images and advanced data changes.'

From printer to strategic partner

The 2D barcode transition presents significant business opportunities for converters willing to expand their offerings.

'Converters are well positioned to become technical advisors to brand owners implementing GS1 Digital Link barcodes,' notes Young from GS1 UK. 'GS1 provides extensive resources, standards documentation, and support through our global network of membership organizations. These standards are openly accessible online, giving converters the opportunity to develop specialized expertise that adds value beyond traditional print services.'

Metters identifies several potential growth areas: 'Smaller brands might not know how to create a resolver page to go with their QR codes powered by GS1, so there's an opportunity to support and educate them on the options available. Converters could consider providing an in-house service for resolver pages or collaborating with specialist software providers offering a white-label service.'

He also points to specific sectors with heightened demand: 'We anticipate strong demand for variable data codes in the food and drinks sector, particularly for products with a short shelf-life. Another growth area is high-value products, where serialized 2D codes can be used in the fight against counterfeiting.'

The retail applications extend beyond mere product identification. 'Retailers can benefit from batch and expiry information contained in 2D codes for perishable items, which can be used to support stock rotation with automated discounts as the expiry date nears. Brands can use the additional data capabilities to provide more information to consumers, with the added benefit of gaining consumer insights,' Metters explains.

First movers already in motion

While many converters are still in the planning stages, several major brands are already deploying GS1 Digital Link barcodes ahead of the 2027 transition.



Durst Tau RSC series offers a native 1,200 x 1,200 DPI resolution, ensuring that customers can print fine details needed for the 2D barcodes

"Delivering the right labels with accurate dynamic codes requires unprecedented synchronization"

'Unilever, Procter & Gamble and L'Oreal all have large-scale rollouts of digital link QR codes with static data,' reports Young from GS1 UK. 'When it comes to dynamic data, the retailers are the early adopters. Tesco is currently piloting this in the UK, and Woolworths Australia is the most advanced implementation globally.'

While technology providers actively work with early adopters, many of these implementations remain confidential as brands develop their strategic approaches. Durst mentions they are 'partnering with a couple of early adopters who already started to implement advanced 2D codes. These field tests are highly strategic to us and give us feedback to enhance our technology.'

Preparing for a connected future

The 2D barcode transition represents a pivotal moment for the label and packaging industry, one that transcends mere technical compliance to fundamentally redefine converter business models. Those who recognize this shift as a strategic inflection point stand to emerge as essential partners in the digital product ecosystem.

'Early movers will secure significant competitive advantages,' notes Metters. 'Those developing expertise now in variable data printing, verification systems, and integrated data management will capture the highest-value opportunities as adoption accelerates.'

The most forward-thinking converters are already investing in flexible systems capable of handling both today's static codes and tomorrow's serialized applications. This approach creates scalable solutions that evolve alongside brand requirements, transforming what might be seen as a compliance burden into a catalyst for business transformation.

As Young emphasizes, 'This represents the most significant change in product identification since barcodes first revolutionized retail. The winners will be those who help brands navigate this complexity while unlocking new consumer engagement possibilities.'

With 2027's adoption target approaching rapidly, the window for strategic positioning is narrowing. The converters who thrive will be those who move beyond traditional production roles to become indispensable technology partners in an increasingly connected commercial ecosystem.

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NAVIGATING PPWR:

What it means for label manufacturers

The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) is set to reshape the label industry, pushing the entire supply chain toward stricter sustainability, recyclability and reuse standards. Akanksha Meena reports



The EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) is central to the European Commission's circular economy agenda, impacting the entire packaging supply chain, including labels. Though labels may seem a small part of the entire package, they play a crucial role in determining packaging sustainability.

The regulation is built on five pillars: recyclability, compostability, recycled content, packaging reuse and eco-modulation, commonly known as extended producer responsibility (EPR). These pillars will increasingly shape how packaging is designed, labeled and managed across the EU.

Before diving into the key aspects of PPWR, it is important to consider what is and is not considered packaging under this new regulation. PPWR defines packaging as any tangible item used to contain, protect, handle, deliver or present a product from one economic operator to another, including to consumers.

Pablo Englebienne, regulatory affairs and sustainability manager at Finat, discussed this in a recent Finat webinar.

'It is clear that labels are considered packaging, particularly when they are attached to another product or piece of packaging, such as a PET bottle or a piece of clothing,' he says. 'Sleeves and labels applied directly to products are also classified as packaging, as are the cores used to wind flexible materials when sold as consumer units.'

Englebienne continues: 'However, unprinted labelstock and large cores used in production machinery are not considered packaging, as they serve manufacturing, not consumer functions. RFID tags are explicitly not classified as packaging.'

Some areas remain unclear, particularly regarding release liners. In some EU member states, release liners holding printed labels are considered packaging, but there is no universal agreement yet. Discussions with the European Commission are ongoing to clarify this.

With this understanding, the article examines how PPWR impacts label design, material choices and compliance strategies across the packaging supply chain.

Recyclability by design

At the heart of PPWR is a commitment to design packaging that can be recycled into high-quality secondary raw materials.

PPWR requires all packaging on the market to be recyclable. It must be designed for quality material recycling, and be able to be collected, sorted and recycled at scale without affecting other waste streams.

Starting in 2030, packaging will be evaluated to ensure recycled materials can replace primary raw materials.

Each type of packaging will be judged using specific rules and measurements set by the EU. Based on this, packaging will be given a recyclability grade of A, B or C. Packaging must be at least 95 percent recyclable for Grade A. For Grade B, it must be at least 80 percent recyclable. If the packaging scores below 70 percent, it will be marked as non-recyclable and won't be allowed on the market.

By 2035, the European Commission may review the minimum requirements based on how sorting and recycling technologies have improved. It may also consider updating the recycling thresholds. If necessary, the Commission can suggest a new law to change these thresholds.

From 2038, only packaging with grades A or B will be allowed, further tightening the requirements.

"MATERIAL CHOICES FOR LABELS AND PACKAGING WILL BE KEY FOR COMPLIANCE AND COSTS. THE MOST COMPATIBLE PSL SOLUTIONS ARE THOSE THAT CAN BE REMOVED DURING GRINDING OR WASH-OFF RECYCLING"

This has raised the stakes for label manufacturers, who must now consider how their products influence the recyclability of entire packaging systems.

Englebienne explains: 'The label or sleeve used on packaging, the properties of closures and adhesives, the colors, material composition, presence of barriers, inks, coatings and the printing method, all of these factors will influence the final recyclability performance grade and score.

'Another important point is that EPR fees, which manufacturers must pay to place packaging on the market, will be adjusted based on the packaging's recyclability score. This gives manufacturers a strong incentive to maximize the recyclability of their packaging.'

These changes will have significant implications for most label and packaging types, including shrink sleeves, pressure-sensitive labels (PSL), wraparound labels, in-mold labels and flexible packaging.

Says Suvi Rasa, sustainability manager at UPM Raflatac: 'All packaging in the EU must be designed for recycling. Plastic parts over 5 percent of the total weight must include recycled content. Material choices for labels and packaging will be key for compliance and costs. The most compatible PSL solutions can typically be removed during grinding or wash-off plastic recycling.'

Adds Gabriela Neves Ferri, All4Labels vice president of global R&D and sustainability: 'When designing packaging, brands must ensure that labels do not compromise the recyclability of the bottle, cap or container. As a label converter, All4Labels assists brands in creating labels that adhere to recycling guidelines.'

The PPWR's emphasis on recyclability and reusability will drive innovation in label materials and adhesives. Pressure-sensitive labels must be developed with adhesives that allow for easy removal during recycling. Wash-off labels will gain ground as it becomes crucial to separate labels in the recycling process.

Shrink-sleeve labels may require redesigning to ensure they do not hinder the recyclability of the packaging. By reducing waste, linerless labels align well with the PPWR's goals, and we may see increased adoption as a result.

All4Labels is investing heavily in its Starflake range to ensure label removal in PET recycling, and Starfloat for recyclable shrink sleeves. Similarly, UPM is advancing recyclability and reuse with innovations such as its Carbon Action plastic films and New Wave paper labels, designed to maintain functionality while supporting recycling goals.

Inks and adhesives

Beyond substrates, PPWR is driving a closer examination of inks, coatings and adhesives. These critical components influence the recyclability of packaging and support a circular economy.

'PPWR emphasizes recyclability, which requires inks that can be removed during the processes without compromising the quality of the recycled material,' explains Renee Schouten, vice president of marketing at INX International Ink. 'This requires a balance between strong adhesion during the product's life and easy de-inking during recycling. INX addresses this by formulating inks that adhere well to various substrates during use but can be efficiently removed during the recycling process to support a circular economy.'

The regulation is already inspiring broader innovation in ink systems. 'This includes formulating inks with renewable, natural-based raw materials from ethical and sustainably managed sources and ensuring minimal environmental impact without compromising performance. There is also a focus on creating inks that facilitate recycling processes, such as washable inks which can be easily removed during



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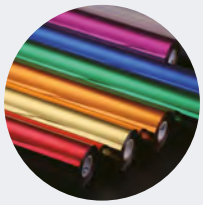
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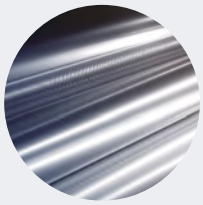
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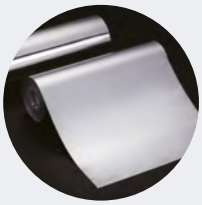
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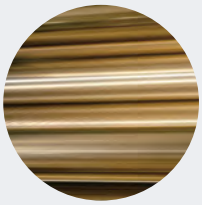
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recycling,' says Schouten.

However, this dual requirement of strong performance and easy recyclability poses technical challenges, particularly in applications such as shrink sleeves.

'With shrink sleeves, the challenge includes creating inks that adhere during use, but also can be efficiently removed during recycling,' Schouten adds.

There is also a growing shift toward water-based and UV inks, which emit fewer volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and better align with PPWR's environmental focus than traditional solvent-based alternatives. This aligns with a mandate to reduce harmful substances that could impact health, the environment or recycling processes, such as microplastics or toxic emissions from disposal.

Minimum recycled content

A major shift under PPWR is the mandated use of recycled plastic content.

Any plastic packaging component should contain a minimum percentage of recycled content recovered from post-consumer plastic waste to reduce dependence on virgin materials and increase demand for high-quality recycled materials.

The minimum recycled content requirement is 30 percent for food contact-sensitive packaging primarily made from PET, excluding single-use plastic beverage bottles; 10 percent for contact-sensitive packaging made from other plastic materials, also excluding single-use plastic beverage bottles; 30 percent for single-use plastic beverage bottles; and 35 percent for all other plastic packaging not covered by the previous categories.

These requirements will increase respectively from 2040.

'This requirement is calculated and reported based on packaging type and format, averaged annually per manufacturing plant. It does not mean that every piece of packaging must meet the threshold. Compliance is assessed annually across the plant's total production,' Englebienne explains.

Exemptions apply to medical, pharmaceutical and infant food packaging, compostable plastics, dangerous goods transport, and small plastic parts under 5 percent of total pack weight.

'This raised questions about labels, which are typically lightweight but can sometimes exceed 5 percent,' Englebienne highlights. 'In a webinar held last December, the European Commission indicated that labels are exempt from recycled content requirements, though the legal basis remains unclear. It is also uncertain whether this exemption extends to sleeves, and further clarification from the Commission is still pending.'



Masterpress' TINE 300g Dairy Cup Sleeve won AWA's Environmental category award for its low-density mono-material like polyolefin shrink sleeve, enabling easier recycling

"WE'RE ALSO SEEING MORE INTEREST IN MONO-MATERIAL FLEXIBLE PACKAGING, LIKE ALL-PE OR ALL-PP LAMINATES, WHICH ARE EASIER TO RECYCLE"

This presents both an opportunity and a challenge for label producers. While it boosts demand for recycled content, the market for high-quality, food-safe PCR (post-consumer recycled) materials is still limited.

'A key challenge is using recycled materials in contact-sensitive applications due to contamination risks,' explains UPM's Rasa. 'Chemical recycling offers a safer option but remains limited and costly. Ensuring a stable supply of high-quality recycled materials and gaining regulatory clarity on acceptance of chemical recycling will be crucial for scaling sustainable solutions.'

Finally, recycled material must be recovered according to EU rules, even if sourced outside the EU. Third-party auditing and full traceability of the chain of custody are required for compliance with recycled content requirements.

Additionally, specific environmental claims related to recycled content must meet separate criteria, detailed in upcoming reports, including for bio-based plastics. An environmental claim under the PPWR can only be made if it exceeds what the law already requires.

'For example, if 30 percent recycled content is the minimum legal requirement, a company cannot promote its packaging as having "30 percent recycled content". Additionally, any claim must clearly state what it applies to, whether it's the entire packaging, just part of it [such as the bottle], or an average across all packaging placed on the market,' Englebienne explains.

Mono-materials

As PPWR pushes for design for recycling, mono-material packaging is gaining momentum. These materials simplify the sorting process and reduce the risk of contamination during recycling. While paper remains a popular choice, especially for its visual and tactile appeal, brands are increasingly turning to mono polyolefin-based materials such as polypropylene (PP) and polyethylene (PE). These substrates are more compatible with existing recycling streams for both rigid and flexible plastics and align closely with design-for-recycling (DfR) guidelines from organizations such as RecyClass.

'Mixed materials can cause contamination and downcycling, whereas mono-material labels enhance sorting and improve the quality of recycled materials,' says Ferri. 'We're also seeing more interest in mono-material flexible packaging, like all-PE or all-PP laminates, which are easier to recycle.'

These mono-materials support closed-loop recycling and perform well in diverse packaging formats.

'These labels can be recycled with the bottles as they are released during the recycling process. We also advocate for mono-materials in laminate tubes and flexible packaging, which improve recycling efficiency while maintaining functionality and shelf life,' adds All4Labels' Ferri.

However, the shift toward mono-materials is complex and application-specific. UPM's Rasa notes that adoption varies across markets and use cases.

'In some applications, a mono-material approach is the preferred solution to improve recyclability. However, there is still demand for paper labels on plastic packaging. According to DfR guidelines and industry experience, recyclers can effectively process plastic packaging with paper labels. Not surprisingly, this means that while mono-materials are gaining traction, paper labels remain a viable option when designed with recycling compatibility in mind. Ultimately, the shift towards mono-material labels will depend on application requirements, the evolving recycling infrastructure and the forthcoming DfR criteria and recyclability grading.'

The transition also faces infrastructural challenges. Flexible packaging still faces collection challenges in many EU countries and often ends up in mixed waste. Without harmonized collection systems, even the most sustainable materials may not be properly recovered.

Compostable materials

While recyclability dominates the regulation, the PPWR does acknowledge compostable labels in specific cases.

"DEMAND FOR COMPOSTABLE LABEL MATERIALS IS LIMITED AND MOSTLY TIED TO SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS. DESIGN FOR RECYCLING GUIDELINES FAVOR RECYCLABLE MONO-MATERIAL LABELS OVER COMPOSTABLES"

One standout example is fresh produce: sticky labels on fruits and vegetables must now be industrially compostable, and possibly home compostable, depending on the member state.

Countries with systems for collecting compostable packaging with food waste may require certain packaging (like non-metallic bags and other pre-approved items) to be compostable.

All other biodegradable packaging must be designed for material recycling, not composting, without affecting the recyclability of the waste stream. The European Commission may later propose adding more packaging types to the compostable list, based on new technologies or regulations.

Still, compostable labels remain a niche and highly application specific. 'Demand for compostable label materials is limited and mostly tied to specific applications,' Ferri says. 'Design for recycling guidelines favor recyclable mono-material labels over compostables. However, compostable labels are useful for organic and fresh food packaging when paired with compostable primary materials like PLA or paper wraps.'

All4Labels provides bio-based materials through its Starnature portfolio, which includes fully compostable options and bio-based materials.

Harmonized labeling

To boost consumer participation in recycling and support more consistent waste management across the EU, the PPWR is introducing harmonized labeling regulations. These labels must present information in a simple and accessible form, ensuring even individuals with disabilities can easily understand disposal instructions.

Labels must clearly indicate if the packaging is home compostable, and in cases where packaging contains substances of concern, standardized markings must be used. Businesses are encouraged to include QR codes or other digital markers to help consumers correctly sort packaging components. These technologies must be robustly applied and remain legible throughout the packaging's lifecycle. These requirements do not apply to transport packaging or items included in a formal deposit return system.

The new harmonized labeling system will use a combination of symbols and color coding to help consumers easily identify how to dispose of or recycle the packaging properly.

'Digital technologies like RFID and intelligent labeling can enhance traceability and transparency in the supply chain, aiding compliance with PPWR mandates,' says Mathieu De Backer, vice president, innovation and sustainability, Avery Dennison Smartrac. 'These technologies enable better tracking of packaging materials, ensuring proper sorting and recycling.'

Packaging minimization and reuse

In line with PPWR's packaging minimization mandate, labels are also being re-evaluated for size and format. The regulation forbids

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Reusable packaging placed on the market must meet specific requirements. It should be designed for maximum use, durable under normal use, safe, hygienic and maintain product quality through reuse. It must also support labels that provide information on the properties of that product and on the packaging itself, including any relevant instructions and information for ensuring safety, adequate use, traceability and shelf-life of the product and safe handling, and be recyclable after final use.

A key point to highlight is the reuse targets for alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (excluding wine and dairy), such as soft drinks and bottled water. These products must meet a 10 percent reuse target by 2030, reaching 40 percent by 2040.

This will impact label requirements for reusable packaging by 2027.

Smart labels play a critical role in implementing deposit return schemes (DRS). Labels equipped with machine-readable barcodes, QR codes or RFID tags allow reverse vending machines (RVMs) and sorting facilities to recognize and process returnable packaging accurately.

For refillable or returnable packaging, such as glass bottles, labels must strike a balance between durability and removability. They need to survive multiple use cycles without compromising the container while leaving zero residue when removed.

Compliance and EPR

Under this legislation, producers are responsible for the entire lifecycle of their packaging, including its design, collection and disposal. This shift is intended to remove some of the burden traditionally placed on consumers and local governments, transferring accountability to those placing packaging on the market.

To demonstrate compliance with the PPWR, responsibilities are divided across the supply chain.

Brand owners must ensure their packaging meets PPWR requirements and must prepare a declaration of conformity detailing the packaging's design, manufacturing and markings.

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"FLOATABLE SHRINK SLEEVES AID PET RECYCLING, BUT REQUIRING PCR CONTENT IN ALL COMPONENTS IS DIFFICULT WHEN SOME POLYMERS LACK FOOD-GRADE PCR VERSIONS"

necessary information and documentation to support this compliance.

This information can be shared either on paper or electronically, with commercially sensitive details remaining confidential.

In addition, EPR rules will be harmonized. Producers must register their packaging in each EU member state where it is placed on the market and may appoint a representative for compliance purposes. Reporting requirements will be streamlined across the 27 member states to simplify the process.

EPR fees may also be adjusted based on the packaging's recyclability performance grade and the amount of recycled content. Producers are urged to develop packaging that is easier to sort, recycle or reuse. Non-compliance with recyclability and sustainability standards may result in penalties, restricted access to markets, or increased EPR fees.

Collaboration

One of the recurring themes from industry leaders is the importance of cross-sector collaboration. Label manufacturers, ink formulators, brands, recyclers and policymakers must all work together to create a compliant, circular economy.

'The biggest challenge in ensuring compliance with the PPWR is that proactive engagement and close collaboration are required across the entire label value chain,' Rasa shares. 'Many critical details, such as the Design for Recycling criteria, the eco-modulation fee calculations, and the verification method of recycled content in plastic packaging, will be defined in secondary legislation.'

The evolving regulations present potential for innovation, but the rapid implementation timeline is a concern.

'Continuous monitoring of secondary legislation development and strong value chain collaboration will be essential to successfully meet the challenges posed by this regulation,' Rasa adds.

The PPWR aims to drive innovation by setting ambitious targets, encouraging material testing and development , and pushing producers to rethink packaging through use of EPR measures. Digital innovation, sustainable materials and circular design will shape the next generation of labels, supporting recyclable packaging and more efficient waste management across Europe.

How does PPWR impact label manufacturers?

Different label types face their own unique challenges under PPWR. The regulation prioritizes design for recycling, with materials minimization and facilitating effective sorting to allow allowing for clean recyclate recovery.

'With PSL, there are two main areas of focus,' explains Gabriel Magdaleno, strategic product management and marketing director, Masterpress. 'One is releasable adhesives. The label should come off so as not to contaminate the recyclate. The second is moving away from fiber loss-based paper labels, which can disrupt recycling. Non-fiber-based labels (such as PP or PE labels) and "non-fiber loss" paper labels are the preferred pressure-sensitive label materials to promote cleaner recycling.'

There is also an increasing focus on minimizing material usage. In the case of PSL, preference might shift to thinner liners and face materials. The key is how the industry can downgauge material as much as possible while maintaining container functionality and efficiency in the production line.

Shrink sleeves also require careful design. A full-body sleeve could contribute to a plastic bottle to be misidentified and improperly sorted into the wrong plastic polymer stream.

For instance, on a polypropylene dairy cup, a PP-based shrink sleeve ensures compatibility with the recycling stream. In contrast, for PET bottles, 'you need a floatable shrink sleeve that allows for label separation and easy identification of the PET substrate. In this case, a partial-body label could help determine that it is a PET bottle,' Magdaleno explains.

PPWR's push for post-consumer recycled (PCR) content adds challenges, as not all plastics, especially polyolefins like PE, have readily available PCR versions.

Magdaleno explains: 'While PET recycling is more advanced, challenges remain. Floatable shrink sleeves aid PET recycling, but requiring PCR content in all components is difficult when some polymers lack food-grade PCR versions. Even for indirect food contact, producers expect labels and inks to meet strict food-contact and low-migration standards.'

This also puts pressure on European plastic suppliers. Many materials currently come from outside the EU, and the proposed 'mirror clause' would require imported plastics to meet EU standards, which could further complicate supply chains.

Another pressing concern is the lack of finalized recycling guidelines under PPWR. While tools like RecyClass exist, they aren't yet formally included in the regulation.

'We're still waiting for the official design-for-recycling criteria, which we expect in 2027. Until then, we have to be ready with multiple solutions, even though we don't know which way the regulation will go,' Magdaleno explains. 'It creates a lot of uncertainty for us and for brand owners.'

This regulatory ambiguity also impacts discussions around whether labels will be considered part of the packaging that must include recycled content, especially since they're often removed during the recycling process.

Magdaleno adds that label specification is often overlooked in early packaging design. 'If we're involved sooner, we can ensure container and label choices align for both compliance and performance.'

PPWR will feature prominently at Labelexpo Europe 2025. Scan the QR code to learn more

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Novicod revolutionizes interactive packaging and labels

In an industry racing to adopt smart packaging technologies, Novicod is working on embedding connectivity directly into the printing process. Piotr Wnuk reports

The packaging industry is at a technological crossroad. While RFID and NFC technologies have long promised to revolutionize supply chains and consumer engagement, their integration has often meant adding separate 'smart' labels to packaging, an inefficient approach that limits scalability. Raviv Banaim, CEO of Novicod, believes there's a better way.

Implementing RF technology as an add-on process has created significant barriers to widespread adoption, Banaim says, adding that the additional production steps, increased costs and logistical complications have prevented smart packaging from reaching its full potential. Banaim became aware of these challenges through his extensive product development and manufacturing optimization work.

'Adding RF smart label stickers to every product was not a realistic or scalable solution: not for brands, manufacturers or the supply chain as a whole,' explains Banaim, whose background in machine and electrical engineering has centered around end-to-end product development and optimizing new technologies for manufacturing processes.

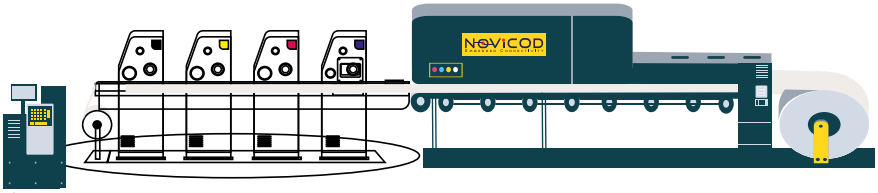
This realization came during his work on a consulting project that explores integrating RFID tag components, conductive paste and microchips within print applications.

Embedding intelligence at the press

What makes Novicod's approach revolutionary is how it transforms printing equipment into machines capable of embedding RF technology. Rather than developing standalone machinery, the company has designed six distinct technology units tailored to integrate with existing systems.

'Novicod's technology units are fully designed and patented, and we are actively engaging with printing and converting machine manufacturers to establish partnerships,' Banaim says. 'These units are designed for seamless incorporation into existing and new printing and converting machines, including PSA and lamination machines, roll-to-roll printing machines and sheet-fed printing machines.'

These partnerships aim to enable machine manufacturers to install and maintain Novicod's technology units for packaging and label producers. This approach ensures that the technology becomes a natural extension of industry-standard production processes rather than a disruptive addition.



At the core of Novicod's offering are patented technology units that embed interactive features directly onto the label

> "Adding RF smart label sticker to every product was not a realistic or scalable solution: not for brands, manufacturers or the supply chain as a whole"

Beyond the barcode

Many converters are already investigating or implementing interactive labels.

Traditional RFID and NFC implementations have primarily relied on inlays — pre-manufactured RF tags incorporated into labels or packaging as separate elements. Banaim says this approach creates production inefficiencies, increases material costs and compromises design flexibility and product performance.

'Novicod offers a one-of-a-kind solution that enables converters, packaging and label printers to seamlessly embed RFID, NFC and Bluetooth communicators just as easily as they currently print barcodes,' Banaim states. 'Unlike other approaches on the market, Novicod's technology fully integrates RF communication capabilities into the existing production process, eliminating the need for separate smart labels or additional manufacturing steps.'

This integration means converters and printers can adopt RF technology without modifying manufacturing workflows. 'The very idea that any packaging and label printing agency can now produce in-line embedded RF communicators opens new possibilities for widespread adoption and innovation of connected products,' adds Banaim.

The technology behind the revolution

At the core of Novicod's offering are patented technology units that enable the embedding of RFID, NFC and Bluetooth communicators directly within printing and converting processes.

Packaging and label producers need a Novicod unit integrated into their existing printing or converting machines to implement this technology. Next, they require the Novicod Components Click Supply, which includes tailored conductive paste, microchips and an embedding tool. Finally, basic operator training is needed, though the system is designed for seamless adoption.

The technical innovation involves precisely applying conductive materials and microchips during the standard printing process. The company has developed specialized conductive pastes that work within existing printing systems while maintaining the electrical properties needed for reliable RF communication.

'Our technology represents years of research and development in materials science and printing process engineering,' Banaim explains. 'We've had to solve complex challenges related to conductivity, adhesion and durability while ensuring the entire system remains compatible with standard production methods.'

The digitalization of item process

Novicod's vision extends beyond smart packaging to what Banaim calls 'The Digitalization Of Item Process'. This concept reflects the company's mission to integrate RF communication capabilities

"This shift is not just an upgrade; it's a fundamental transformation in how physical products interact with digital networks and IT surroundings"

into printed applications, transforming traditional item identification methods into networking, machine-to-machine and Internet of Things capabilities.

While barcodes and QR codes have served as the primary means of item identification for decades, they have significant limitations. They require line-of-sight scanning, provide only static information and offer no real-time communication capabilities.

'By enabling mass adoption of in-line-embedded RF technology, we are driving a future where packaging and labels become part of the digital ecosystem,' Banaim explains. 'This creates a frictionless transition from printed barcodes to fully networked digital identities for every item.'

The approach allows for singular ID assignment to each item, real-time wireless item communication for automating registration, monitoring, tracking, authentication and consumer engagement — all within existing industrial frameworks.

With embedded RF technology, items can actively participate in the digital ecosystem, providing real-time status updates, location data and condition monitoring. This capability opens new possibilities for supply chain visibility, inventory management, anti-counterfeiting and consumer engagement.

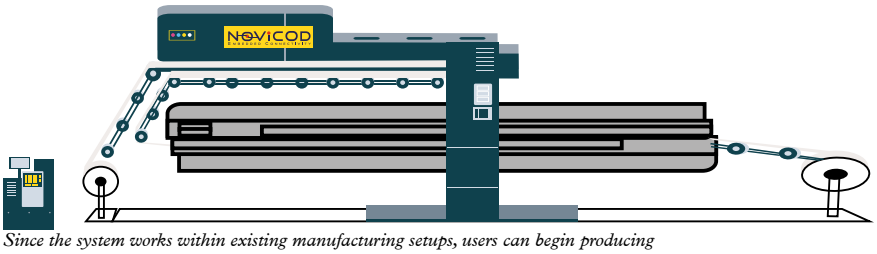
Three-level support model

To ensure successful implementation, Novicod has developed a three-level support model aligned with its business vision. The first level involves technology provision through partnerships with leading machine producers to integrate Novicod technology units into printing and converting machines. 'This ensures that our clients receive efficient, high-performance solutions tailored to their production needs,' Banaim notes.

The second level is the Click Supply Model, in which Novicod remains the exclusive supplier of customized conductive paste, microchips and embedding tools specifically developed for its technology. This approach ensures quality control and continuous technological advancements.

'We've developed proprietary formulations for our conductive pastes that balance conductivity, durability and printability,' Banaim explains. 'These materials are specifically engineered to work within standard printing processes while meeting the electrical requirements for reliable RF communication.'

The third level focuses on physical networking and implementation.



Since the system works within existing manufacturing setups, users can begin producing RF-embedded packaging and labels with minimal disruption to their operations

'Beyond providing the technology and click supply, we support our clients by helping their customers implement RF communication surroundings and item networking,' Banaim says. 'This enables end-to-end item communication and seamless data flow, unlocking new item processes automatization and consumer engagement opportunities.'

The future of packaging

If successful, Novicod's technology could fundamentally reshape smart packaging and interactive labels by making RF communication an integral part of printing and converting processes. Unlike current solutions relying on separate smart label stickers, Novicod's approach allows packaging and labels to be 'born digital'.

'RF communicator provides each package and label with a singular ID. The microchip serial code is an individual ID; there are no two of the same one,' Banaim explains. 'During item filling and branding processes, each item receives its first digital data registration, creating a personalized digital ID available for wireless networking and real-time communication.'

This unique identification capability addresses a critical supply chain management and authentication challenge. While barcodes and QR codes can be easily duplicated or counterfeited, he says, embedded RF technology with individual serial codes creates a secure digital signature.

In an implemented RF environment, each item is connected 24/7 with memory capabilities for further status updates. This constant connectivity enables real-time tracking, condition monitoring and data collection throughout the product lifecycle.

To scale its technology and accelerate industry adoption, Novicod's strategy includes expanding partnerships with leading machine producers, broadening its Click Supply model and supporting brands and their partners to benefit from digital RF networking and automatization.

Industry call to action

As a startup that has developed technology that 'competes with the barcode in the same production machines', Novicod is actively reaching out to innovative packaging and label printers, converters and machine and finishing equipment producers to join what Banaim calls the 'global movement'.

With supply chains under increasing pressure to improve visibility, traceability and efficiency, the demand for smart packaging continues to grow. At the same time, brands seek more sophisticated ways to engage consumers, verify authenticity and demonstrate sustainability commitments.

'We invite brand owners, retailers and logistics companies to take an active role in shaping this transformation,' Banaim states. 'This collaborative approach recognizes that widespread adoption requires participation from all supply chain segments, from manufacturing to retail.'

The company has already begun pilot programs with several packaging producers and brand owners across Europe and North America. These early implementations demonstrate the practical benefits of embedded RF technology in real-world applications.

'The feedback from our early adopters has been extremely positive,' Banaim shares. 'They're seeing reductions in production time compared to traditional smart label applications while also experiencing improved read reliability and greater design flexibility.'

Banaim believes that the technological breakthrough that Novicod represents isn't just about smart labels; it's about reimagining the foundation of how physical products interact with the digital world. By embedding connectivity at the press rather than adding it afterward, he says Novicod may have found the missing piece that allows smart packaging to achieve its long-promised ubiquity in everyday lives.

Scan the QR code to learn more about Novicod

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B.Ready's packaging balances aesthetics, function and sustainability

Today's emerging brands aren't just focused on product; they're making sure their packaging reflects credibility, responsibility and trust. Akanksha Meena reports

When Chrissy Xu, founder of Chicago, Illinois-based b.Ready Gummies, started her gummy supplement brand designed to support recovery after a night of celebration, she knew the product had to do more than work well. It had to look and feel trustworthy, premium and purposeful.

'I wanted the packaging to reflect the brand, minimalist yet scientific, with a sense of precision,' Xu tells L&L. 'The 'post-celebration support' branding was intentional. I avoided using 'hangover support' due to FDA restrictions since they classify hangover as a disease, which I find odd. Post celebration feels more positive and aligns with the idea that drinking isn't inherently bad, it's about moderation and enjoyment with friends.'

From the start, Xu aimed to build a brand that felt caring, reflected in clean, functional packaging. 'It looks like a health product, clean and trustworthy. Bright colors often signal something more recreational, like candy, rather than something designed for healing,' she says.

Originally, b.Ready's branding featured a pouch with bright blue and pink. But Xu quickly realized a cleaner, more minimal look was needed to communicate quality and trust.

Xu chose gummies for the product, a rare format in supplements. 'Capsules aren't ideal when you're unwell, and shots taste bad. Gummies are easy, enjoyable, and feel like a treat,' she says.

That choice came with complexity. 'My product was actually more challenging to make from a product development perspective because I have a lot of herbal ingredients packed in it,' Xu adds. 'And it's made with pectin, not gelatin, so it's vegan. A lot of brands use gelatin because it's cheaper and easier to work with.'

Packaging development

Sustainability was also a key concern. B.Ready's current packaging is recyclable through the How2Recycle store drop-off program. 'I learned so much along the way, especially about packaging materials,'



Chrissy Xu, founder of b.Ready Gummies

"There are different levels of sustainability, and to save costs in the first production round, I opted for a recyclable material that needs to be processed at specific facilities"

she says. 'There are different levels of sustainability, and to save costs in the first production round, I opted for a recyclable material that needs to be processed at specific facilities.'

Xu worked with a consultant on both formulation and to find a packaging converter. Her current format includes two servings per pouch, but she's exploring a single-serving version for future retail. 'Retailers prefer single servings for convenience and a lower price point,' she adds.

Before working with Xu, the converter mainly produced bottle packaging. However, since she wanted pouches, the company invested in a sealing machine to support the demand.

Adding a new machine for pouch sealing came with its challenges. 'At first, they didn't have the right machine, so they had to seal the pouches manually, literally counting out gummies by hand. Eventually, they invested in the right equipment, which added to the cost early on,' she recalls.

Material choices were shaped by manufacturing capabilities. Paper would have required more manual work and added to costs, so decisions were based on what the packaging supplier could support.

The b.Ready pouches are digitally printed. The 12,500 units of pouches are made with Dow's 3.40 MIL white Retain EVOH PE film, a high-barrier, recyclable single-resin PE structure. This is a sustainable, flexible packaging material for customers with access to drop-off centers.

Color consistency was another learning curve for Xu. 'We'd do the design first, send it to the printer, and they'd send back a mockup of just the pouch, no product inside. I was worried about the white, since it's more of a cream color. The digital version looked too bright, and the sample still came out slightly whiter than expected,' Xu explains.

This caused confusion. 'Unlike iconic colors like Coca-Cola red, mine was subtle and looked different on every screen,' Xu says. 'I wasn't even sure what the 'correct' color was.'

Xu also discovered the nuances of printing techniques and the impact of lighting on packaging perception, which might look different under different lighting.

One of the most time-consuming parts of the process was, simply, waiting. 'Sometimes it takes two to three weeks just to get something sent over [to the converter]. There's a lot of back and forth. I have to send the design and guidelines, then wait for them to print and ship. And if I wanted to fix the color, that would mean even more delays. It didn't feel very easy to make changes,' Xu concludes.

Scan the QR code to learn more about b.Ready

Labelexpo Mexico sees a 15 percent increase in attendees

Labelexpo Mexico 2025 was double the size of the previous edition and included more equipment and market optimism. James Quirk, Selah Zighelboim and Chelsea McDougall report

Labelexpo Mexico 2025 welcomed 6,655 people from 52 countries and more than 200 exhibitors to Guadalajara on April 1-3. The show floor was twice the size of the 2023 event in Mexico City, while visitors from Mexico and the wider Latin American region saw cutting-edge equipment demonstrations from national and international exhibitors.

Aside from Mexico, Central America was particularly well-represented among the show visitors, while converters were also in attendance from countries throughout South America, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

Exhibitors said they were delighted with the number and quality of visitors at the show. They were universally enthusiastic about the Mexican label market, despite some political uncertainty caused by elections in both Mexico and the US last year, and the threat of tariffs on Mexican goods exported to the US. Growth in domestic consumption has remained robust, and there has been little slowdown in capital equipment expenditures by Mexican label converters.

There was a significant increase in the number of machines displayed compared to the event two years ago. It was notable that exhibitors largely showed their top-of-the-range equipment. **A B Graphic** demonstrated its flagship Digicon Series 3, for example, and many exhibitors were increasing their presence in the local market, either through distribution deals (in the case of many Chinese exhibitors, for example) or the establishing of dedicated local offices, as was recently announced by Italian converting equipment manufacturer **Cartes**.

Press technology

Digital and flexo technology were on display in abundance at Labelexpo Mexico, with press manufacturers reporting increasing interest from local converters in automation and value-added options.

Domino showed its N610i digital label press and the K600i and K300 monochrome inkjet printbars for variable data and 2D code printing. Both systems are proving popular with Mexican converters, according to Gary Peterson, senior account manager, variable data solutions at Domino. 'The tequila market is booming for us, helped by a government mandate for SAT tax stamps on tequila bottles. Fruit labels, which require variable data, is also a big market.'

Durst showed its Tau 340 RSC E UV inkjet press. Arturo Olaya, business development manager for labels and flexible packaging, said that 2024 was the company's best year in Mexico, with eight presses sold, while 15 sales are forecast for this year. Durst serves the Latin American market through offices in Mexico, Brazil and Chile.

Etirama demonstrated its new SPS4 multi-substrate chill-drum flexo press, which allows production of shrink sleeves as well as in-mold, wraparound and self-adhesive labels. According to CEO Ronnie Schroter, Mexico is the company's second-largest Latin American market outside its native Brazil, with more than 40 presses installed. It began selling to the market directly last year, instead of through an agent, and sales 'have risen strongly since then,' said Schroter. The press on display was sold to a Guatemalan converter on the second day of the show. 'We focus on supplying machines to smaller converters,' said Schroter. 'We're not Ferrari or Mercedes, but more like Toyota — cheaper, lower running costs and good reliability.'

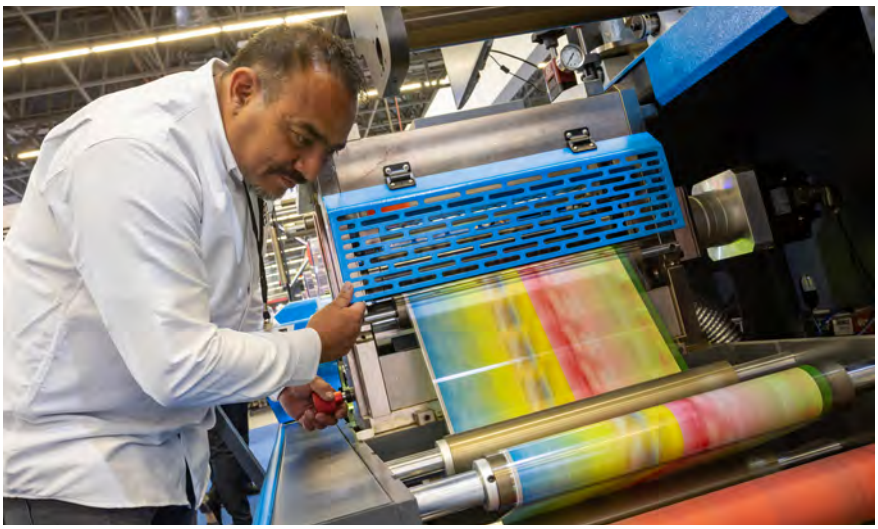
Flexi-Vel showed a flexo press from Chinese manufacturer Hyde, which general director Fernando Trujillo described as 'one of the top two or three flexo presses from China.' The 12-color machine features precise registration, optimized changeover times, digitalized operation and open-access modular design. The press on display was due to be delivered to a converter in Mexico City after the show — the first sale into the country.

Flora, represented in the Mexican market by Banzi, showed the new Flora J-350 P8 HD UV inkjet label press, which prints at a resolution of up to 1,200 x 1,200 DPI at speeds of up to 100m/min.

GBTL showed a variety of equipment from suppliers it represents, such as the Labstar 330S 5-color UV inkjet press from HanGlory Group and Jingwei narrow web slitting systems with laser and knife cutting.

Heidelberg promoted its flexo and digital press portfolio. Head of marketing

"There is a lot more drive to automate processes in Mexico. With such proximity to the US market, converters here are learning quickly that quality and faster turnaround are so important"





"Despite the political uncertainty, we've not really seen a slowdown in Mexico; we are still selling machines"

Fernando Menendez described Mexico 'as a great market for us across all segments, but above all in labels.' The first installation of the recently launched Gallus One digital press took place late last year, and the company installed multiple Gallus Labelmaster flexo presses.

HR Flexo showed Brazilian manufacturer **Kromia**'s KL1 flexo press, while also promoting the KL2, KL3 and Infinity Master models.

HS Machinery showed its RFP 340 flexo press, which was developed in partnership with **Rotocon**. The multi-substrate machine can print labels, shrink sleeves and flexible packaging and runs at up to 200m/min. More than 50 of the presses have been sold in Rotocon's native South Africa and four in Europe by Rotocon's German office. The companies' presence at Labelexpo Mexico represented their first push into the Mexican market, said Rotocon MD Marco Aengenvoort. 'The press is well-positioned for this market,' he said. 'We are looking for a local partner to help with service, but we have 28 engineers spread around the world so are able to offer service already.'

Konica Minolta demonstrated its AccurioLabel 400 for roll-to-roll label production; AccurioPrint 4065 for sheet-fed label production; and AccurioShine 101 for label embellishment. 'The Mexican market is maturing, so digital is of increasing interest to converters,' said Roberto Vázquez, director of indirect sales and digital printing at Konica Minolta Mexico. 'We have high expectations for the Mexican market this year.'

Manroland Latina represented press manufacturers Omet and Miyakoshi and converting equipment suppliers DCM, Pantec and Prati at the show. Hans Ramon Hoffman, head of webfed labels and packaging business unit, said there is increasing demand for higher-quality equipment and added-value embellishment in the local market.

Mark Andy showed its Evolution Series E5 press and Rotoflex VSI-330 converting system. 'Despite the political uncertainty, we've not really seen a slowdown in Mexico; we are still selling machines,' said Latin America sales manager John Vigna. The company announced a partnership with Guadalajara-based service provider Canvitech. The Canvitech team, led by Mark Andy's service director in Mexico, Alfredo Hernandez, will operate as Mark Andy-trained technicians, while the Guadalajara facility will serve as a hub for warehousing and distributing parts and supplies.

Nilpeter has more presses installed in Guadalajara than in any other city worldwide. There are several hundred Nilpeter installations there, according to global sales director Jesper Jørgensen. The company showed its new FB line, available in 14in or 17in web width, which is based on the same platform as its FA line of presses. 'The press has been a huge success throughout Latin America,' said Jørgensen. 'Converters are investing in presses which are wider, more automated and with more added-value options.'

Pulisi, represented in Mexico by Printum Concepts for a year, showed its DSmart 330 inkjet press, for which the Chinese manufacturer also provides in-line and off-line finishing systems. Printum Concepts' director Miguel Guadalajara said the company had recently sold its first three presses in Mexico. 'There is great potential for this brand in Mexico,' he said.

Sun Digital, HP Indigo's representative in Mexico, showed the HP Indigo 6K digital press. Cecilia Palafox, country manager, Mexico for HP and PWP (Page Wide Press), estimates that HP holds a 96 percent digital label market share in Mexico, with 86 presses sold in the past 16 years, including its first V12 installation in the country last year. 'Local converters are increasingly diversifying into different applications such as shrink sleeves, in-mold and flexible packaging,' said Palafox. 'The shrink sleeve market is exploding in Mexico and in Latin America generally. Flexible packaging is also growing strongly, and the HP Indigo 200K, which is 45 percent more productive than the 20K, is selling well.' Palafox cited the example of Bimbo, a massive Latin American bread brand, switching its popular Pan Dulce chocolate-covered bread product to flexible packaging last year. It has made the same move for its Bimbo Galletas biscuit brand this year, too.

Weigang demonstrated its ZJR 5350 Pro hybrid press. The Chinese manufacturer appointed Jetrix as its Mexico distributor in September 2023, and sold four flexo presses in the first year. Emma Ye, sales manager for North America, said: 'The press allows label printing but also diversification into package printing. We see a lot of potential in this market.'

Converting equipment

In a country with a booming tequila sector and a burgeoning wine industry, demand for high-end embellishment is on the rise, according to the finishing and converting equipment manufacturers at the show.

A B Graphic showed its flagship converting system, the Digicon Series 3. Hugo Barranco, director of Renew Solutions, ABG's distributor in Mexico, said: 'There is exponential growth in finishing equipment sales in Mexico. Many offset printers have moved into label production in the last two years.' Since appointing Renew Solutions as its agent three years ago, ABG has installed more than 25 machines in Mexico, around half of which are Digicon Series 3 systems. Barranco cited wine, tequila and craft beers as key growth sectors for converters installing ABG equipment, while RFID is an 'increasingly popular' application. The company sold five machines during the first two days of the show, including the Digicon Series 3 on display.

Brotech demonstrated an array of digital embellishment, pouch making, flexible packaging and converting systems alongside local agent Banzi, including the SDF Plus Speedmaster digital finishing machine. Jonathan Cervantes, sales

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"Local converters are increasingly diversifying into different applications such as shrink sleeves, in-mold and flexible packaging"

manager, graphic arts at Banzi, and a founding partner of the company, said: 'The local market is strong, with good consumption. There has been a surge in artisanal food and beverage products since the pandemic, which has increased demand for digital converting equipment.'

Cartes showed a variety of label converting machines, including the GT365HFSRD finishing line for high-end embellishment labels, configured with flexo coating, conventional screen printing and hot stamping as well as tool-less continuous metallic foil doming applications and semi-rotary die-cutting. The company's first sales in Mexico took place two years ago during the previous Labelexpo Mexico, and the potential it sees in the market has led it to establish an office in Guadalajara for sales, tech support and consumables. 'We see big potential in the Mexican market, particularly in applications such as tequila, which require high-end embellishment,' said Virgilio Micale, global sales director. 'The local wine industry, much of which is based in the north of the country and targets the US market, is also forecast to grow significantly over the next five years.'

Dimatra demonstrated its new Smart Eco inspection slitter rewinder, designed for plastic film and self-adhesive labels. Also on show was the new Dimatra 100 percent Print Inspection System equipped with camera technology. CEO Pablo Orozco said demand for both high-end embellishment systems and inspection technology is rising in Mexico, and that the shrink sleeve market is 'growing strongly'.

ETI Converting, promoting its Cohesio line for linerless label production, was 'testing the potential of the Mexican market' by exhibiting at the show, according to sales director Baudry Bayzelon. 'It's a growing market for us, with real potential,' he said. 'Converters want to learn about linerless technology.'

Golden Laser, represented in the Mexican market by Banzi, presented its latest digital laser die-cutting system, the LC-350.

Hoaco Automation Technology showed an RFID label converting machine. The company's rotary die-cutting equipment is widely used across various industries, including automotive electronics, converting, RFID labels, and more.

Lemorau, which appointed Empackt as its local distributor 18 months before the show, demonstrated its EB die-cutting machine for high-volume production, capable of reaching speeds of up to 200m/min; Lemorau 2F, a versatile fan fold machine; Lemorau CTA1500, an automatic core cutter; and Lemorau RA, a label rewinder. All on-stand machinery was already sold to Mexican converter Grupo de Servicios Gráficos del Centro. 'Mexico is a flourishing market and our presence here is growing,' said sales executive Lara Sousa.

Martin Automatic described Mexico as a 'steady market' for the company, with 'strong growth in the last six months despite the political uncertainty'. Mike Jelinsky, sales engineer for Latin America, Canada and the US West Coast, said: 'Label converters in Mexico are looking to diversify their production, which our equipment allows them to do. The non-stop operation is also good for productivity.'

Rhyguan Machinery demonstrated the Rhyguan Plus digital label converting line. The servo-driven machine features spot varnish, hot stamping and semi-rotary die-cutting. Its modular construction allows new features to be added or existing modules to be rearranged.

Schobertechnologies demonstrated its RSM550 Digi-Varicut with Single Spider, a fully automized system for high-speed die-cutting and stacking of in-mold labels. Gerald Glaas, executive VP and CSO, said: 'This is our first time at Labelexpo Mexico. We saw more and more Mexican converters attending Labelexpo Americas in Chicago, so we decided to exhibit machinery here because it is a growing market.' The company sells directly in Mexico and has 'a number of big local customers'.

Vemax, a Brazilian converting equipment manufacturer, began selling into Mexico and the US five years ago through agents. In September last year, it appointed Francisco Pisano to lead its sales efforts in Mexico, and the new direct approach is paying off with seven sales since then. 'We are increasing our focus on the Mexican market and building local service and support,' he said. The company demonstrated the VRR TA V380 inspection rewinder and the new compact VSM 250.

Workflow

Workflow and software technology took center stage, as converters face increased pressure to optimize operations amid workforce challenges. Experts say the rapid growth of nearshoring from many Asian companies looking to serve the North and South American markets has caused a knock-on effect of fewer skilled workers to operate label printing and converting equipment. This, in turn, pushes converters to look for smarter and more automated ways to run their business.

'This market understands the need to be more efficient to enter the US market,' said Esteban Garcia, business development manager at **Cerm**. 'Everyone wants to know how to get more value out of their equipment and maximize their processes. The Cerm technology gives them the tools so they can strategize

Exhibitors praise event

Héctor Yáñez, director of marketing, graphic arts at Fujifilm de Mexico, said: 'The event has gone very, very well. There have been many more visitors than in the previous edition in Mexico City, with a strong, continuous flow.'

Amir Dekel, vice president of sales at GEW, commented: 'Labelexpo Mexico this year was larger than previous shows in the region and showed the growth of this market in Latin America. We successfully closed a significant amount of business in the booth and opened several new opportunities for the near and far future.'

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Software suppliers like Cerm, **Amtech Software (Labeltraxx)**, **eProductivity**, **SisPro** and **Twist Software** showcased technology designed to streamline production, reduce manual touchpoints and uncover new efficiencies. Each of these companies' respective technologies can help label converters manage everything from estimating and scheduling to inventory, allowing companies to do more and with greater efficiency.

Steffen Haaga, director of global business development at Cerm, said: 'There is a lot more drive to automate processes in Mexico. With such proximity to the US market, converters here are learning quickly that quality and faster turnaround are so important. They are learning quickly that what you cannot measure, you cannot manage. And what you cannot manage, you cannot improve.'

Color management exhibitors and RIP processing companies showed Labelexpo Mexico visitors their technology designed to optimize workflow efficiency and color accuracy across various substrates.

Hybrid Software showed technology that simplifies spot color simulation, extended gamut printing and digital press optimization. Hybrid Software's VDP Execute automates workflows for variable data, and can work well for short runs, personalized packaging and custom labels.

GMG offered its ColorPlugin software for converting spot and process colors within Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, transforming spot colors into 4c and extended gamut process inks.

Materials

Sustainability was a major focus for material and ink suppliers at the show. Customers are interested in materials made from recycled content, exhibitors said. They also want materials that make recycling easier. And these same exhibitors, who came from all over the world, said that Mexico is an attractive market to do business in. The local economy is growing, and it has the second-largest population in Latin America, with a population of nearly 130 million. Bordering the US, Mexico offers substantial nearshoring potential and serves as a gateway to the rest of Latin America.

Arclad, a Colombia-based company with a presence throughout Latin America, showcased sustainable materials, such as its wash-off PET, which enables the recyclability of PET containers; its bio-based hotmelt adhesive, which has at least 60 percent of its raw materials coming from renewable sources; and its new product, a recycled-content polypropylene.

UPM Raflatac focused on sustainability by featuring its Carbon Action plastic label portfolio, its Label Life lifecycle assessment service and its wood-based Forest Film plastic face material.

Avery Dennison also exhibited its sustainable products, such as its linerless labels, and RFID. Avery Dennison has a significant presence in Mexico, with three distribution centers, a factory in Querétaro, and a new RFID facility in Querétaro, which is Avery Dennison's largest RFID facility in the world, as well as additional sales representatives and service teams.

'The trade that we have today with America and Canada makes Mexico an attractive market,' commercial manager Mariana Méndez said. 'Also, we have connections with South America and the Caribbean.'

Cosmo Films exhibited a range of BOPP films for the packaging industry, the thermal lamination and pressure-sensitive segments, and industrial films and synthetic papers. Based in India, the company has warehouses worldwide and plans to open a warehouse in Mexico soon. Latin America, in general, is a growing market for Cosmo Films.

'It's a developing market,' vice president Kapil Anand said. 'It's not yet a mature market, so a lot of new printers are putting up new machines. There are a lot of new customers that are coming to us.'



"We see big potential in the Mexican market, particularly in applications such as tequila, which require high-end embellishment"

India-based **MLJ Industries** showcased film and paper-based labelstock and release liners. The company came to Labelexpo Mexico looking for partners. Director and founder Siddarth Jian said that MLJ exports to the Middle East and Africa but doesn't have much of a presence in the Americas yet and is looking to expand.

Fedrigoni, which showcased self-adhesive label materials and tapes, greatly expanded its presence in Mexico by acquiring Mexico City-based Industrial Papelera Venus in 2020. This decision was driven by an interest in Mexico's export market to the US, as well as Mexico's local, growing demand for labels, said Priscila Azevedo, Latin American marketing manager.

Wausau Coated exhibited products from its new line of materials for wine, beer and spirits. The company highlighted its Hydro Opaque material, a roll labelstock that performs well when wet. To demonstrate this, the company kept a bottle of wine, with a Hydro Opaque label, in an ice bucket full of water at its stand for all three days of the show.

This year was **Chiripal Poly Films**' first time exhibiting at Labelexpo Mexico, where it showcased materials for wraparound labels, in-mold labels, pressure-sensitive labels and release liners. Nitish Verma, general manager of sales and marketing, said Chiripal Poly Films wants to expand its presence in Latin America. South America, in particular, is a large market for in-mold labels, he said.

Garware, another material supplier from India, also exhibited at Labelexpo Mexico for the first time. There, it showcased a range of its proprietary films, including silicone liners, thermal lamination film, PVC film and a new PET-C film.

Canada-based **Hardvogue** showcased in-mold label films, BOPP, metallized paper and shrink PETG/PVC films, among other products.

Yupo showed two new products: the SuperYupo Plus substrate for conventional offset printing, and CleanSort in-mold labels, which detach during recycling, helping with the recycling process.

Other companies at Labelexpo Mexico included **JCR Pack**, which showcased PETG and PVC shrink films; DNP, which showed thermal transfer ribbons; International **Media Products**, which featured wax ribbons and resins; and **Green Bay Packaging**, which showed various materials, including paper, white and transparent BOPP, PVC and more.

M+S exhibited BOPP, PVC and craft tapes, as well as paper and film label materials and ribbon. M+S is based in Mexico

City, with additional distribution points in Guadalajara, León, Aguascalientes, Querétaro and Puebla, with a new office coming to Monterrey.

LBT Ribbons, based in Guadalajara, featured its wax, wax-resin and resin ribbons, which it manufactures.

Overtape, also based in Guadalajara, showcased its matte and bright laminates and BOPP, PETG and PVC films for the labeling industry. Guadalajara is a 'metropolis of labels here in Mexico,' Overtape sales manager Saul Chale said.

There were also companies exhibiting materials for embellishments. **Kurz** showcased hot-stamping foils, cold foils and holographic materials. **K Laser** exhibited its line of cold foil for shrink sleeves and labels. 'Brand owners are looking for ways to make their products stand out in the supermarket,' said Jaime Ancalmo, director of sales for Latin America at K Laser.

Chinese material suppliers had a significant presence at Labelexpo Mexico. These companies included **Jinda Packaging Materials Technology**, **Fangda Packaging**, **Youhua New Material Technology**, **Soontomax Label Material**, **HSF Films**, **Super Color Inks**, **Todaytec Digital** and more.

Inks

Siegwerk showcased environmentally friendly inks, including washable inks and inks made from vegetable oils and soy.

Nazdar exhibited two new products, both launched in Q4 of 2024: its 68500 LED flexo inks, for presses that run 400-500 ft/min, and its W181 water-based ink system.

Natural Inks showed a range of inks, including water-based, solvent-based, UV and UV-LED.

Zeller+Gmelin showcased standard UV and LED inks, as well as coatings, adhesives and primers. It currently has distribution centers in Guadalajara and Querétaro, and it's looking to open a third distribution center in Monterrey. Mexico is its fastest-growing market in the Americas.

Mexico City-based **Azteca Inks** exhibited UV and LED inks, laminates and varnishes.

Plates

Among the companies exhibiting plates, platemaking and plate-mounting equipment at Labelexpo Mexico was **Heaford**, which brought a manual ELS and a semi-automatic FTS plate-mounter to Labelexpo Mexico. Mexico has many converters, many of which are small companies, said Nick Vindel, Latin American sales manager. Vindel said Heaford works to convince these converters to move from mounting plates by eye to using plate-mounting equipment.



"Nilpeter has more presses installed in Guadalajara than any other city worldwide"

Xsys featured its plates, sleeves and platemaking equipment. **Tesa Tapes** exhibited plate-mounting tapes and adhesives, while **Beta Industry** featured the Beta Flex Pro2, a technology that analyzes flexo plates.

Fujifilm showcased various products, including plate processors, offset computer-to-plate technology and Flenex water-wash plates. Fujifilm processed these plates live at its booth to demonstrate the benefits of water-wash plate processing, which is faster and more environmentally friendly than solvent processing.

Dies and tooling

Kocher+Beck showed its GapMaster EM system, which is reverse compatible with any previously installed K+B GapMaster model. The mechanical adjustment handle is replaced with the EM retrofit gearbox, providing digital technology with maximum precision. The company appointed CRD as a local distributor in late 2023, which has allowed it to provide a 'higher level of service' and achieve an 'uptick in sales', according to CEO David Morris. 'Mexico is an important market for us,' he said. 'The recent expansion of our facility in Kansas and the installation of new equipment show the importance of the North and South American markets and help us to support local converters.'

Maxcess, promoting its range of dies and tooling, sees Mexico as 'an excellent market, with lots of growth and lots of machinery being installed,' according to Jackie Ramos, senior technical and sales manager for Latin America. 'Label designs and the materials used are becoming more advanced, which is increasing quality demands in the local market. Guadalajara is an important center of the local print industry, and the quality of visitors to the show has been very high.'

Rotometal was represented at the show by agent **Grupo Sigma**. Director Emma Lozano Valdivia said the year had started slowly, but 'the last couple of months have really picked up'. Representing Rotometal for the past six months, she described it as 'a well-known, high-quality brand'.

Wilson Manufacturing considers Mexico 'an important growth market' according to Mike Devaney, vice president of sales. The company, promoting its range of dies and tooling at the show, 'has invested in serving the local market and this is paying off,' he said.

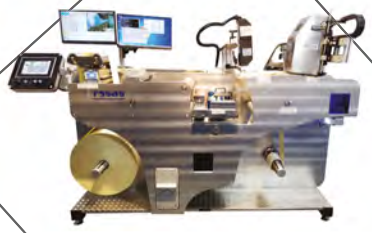
Ancillaries

GEW was promoting two products for LED curing: AeroLED2 and LeoLED2. Company representatives noted a clear shift to LED curing technology among Mexican label converters. Driven by a demand for energy efficiency, faster production speed, improved sustainability and longer lamp life, LED is an attractive upgrade, said Amir Dekel, vice president of sales.

At **Harper**'s booth, Juan Bermudez, executive vice president, saw a lot of interest in the company's X-Cast engraving technology for flexo printing. X-Cat was developed to combat common flexo printing problems: ink spitting, moiré, trail edge voids, ghosting, and ink re-solubility. Bermudez said: 'Mexico is a very dynamic market. People here are not shy about investing in new technology. They are committed to efficiencies and standardization to ensure profitability. Latin America can be price-sensitive. But if there's a correlation between value and the price you're offering, then it's not a difficult decision.'

Labelexpo Mexico will return to Mexico City on May 26-28, 2027, at Centro Banamex

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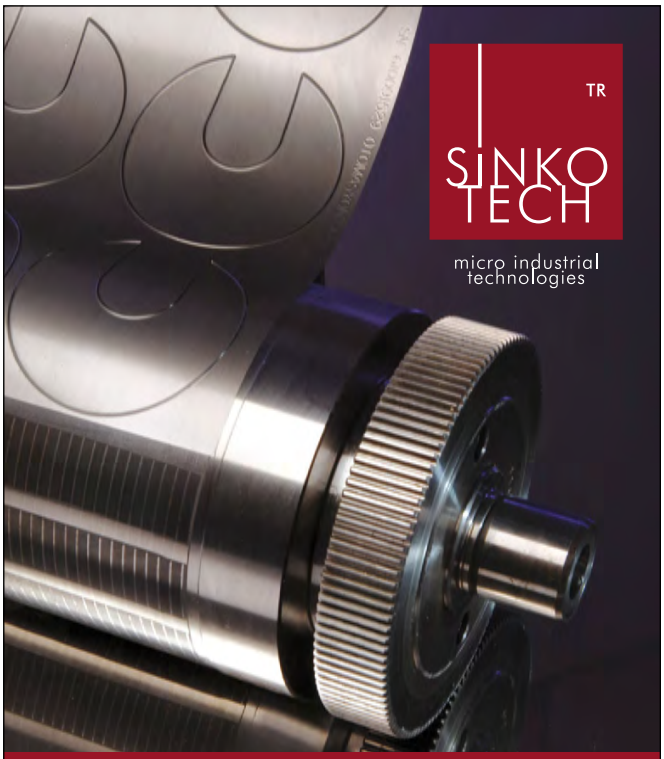
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All4Labels reaps benefits of South American focus

All4Labels' shopfloor in Blumenau, Brazil

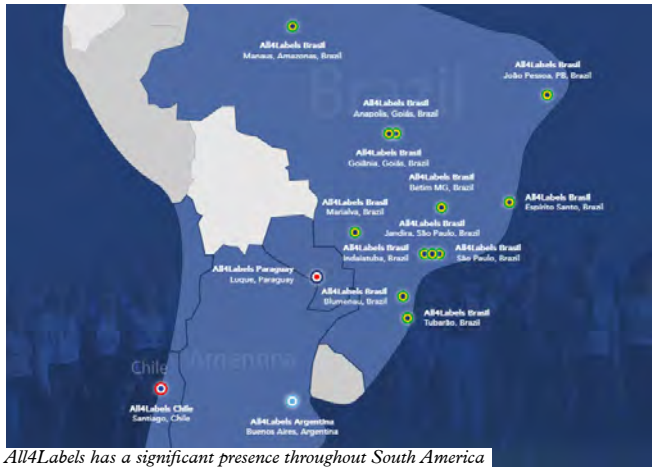
A plethora of M&A activity in South America, particularly in Brazil, has propelled All4Labels into a leading supplier of labels and packaging in the region. James Quirk reports

Over the past two decades, ongoing consolidation among label converters has created a top tier of multi-national groups with dozens of facilities spread around the world. All4Labels, founded in 2016 with the merger of Brazil-based Baumgarten and German companies Rako and X-Label, is one such label and package printing behemoth, with more than 50 production facilities producing more than 80 billion labels a year and an annual revenue of around 1bn USD.

Yet one point of difference comes from All4Labels' unique geographic spread. Its strongest presence, with some two-thirds of its facilities, is in Europe, and it also runs operations in Mexico, China and Africa. But in South America, following a raft of acquisitions over the past two years, it boasts more factories than any other label printing conglomerate.

This greater focus on South America compared to its rivals is partly explained by the extensive local market knowledge brought by one of the three founding members of the converting group. Prior to the creation of All4Labels, Baumgarten, already a leading label printer in Brazil, had acquired Argentina-based Autopack in 2014, as well as expanding into the wider Latin American region with the purchase of Mexican company Etiquetas Rodak in the same year.

"In the South and Central America region, we have seen tremendous growth opportunities arising, especially in Brazil"



All4Labels has a significant presence throughout South America

Yet, it is also a strong vote of confidence in the potential of the South American label industry in general and the Brazilian market in particular, as well as the execution of a strategic plan: to focus on consolidating the company's activities in South America following a period of doing the same in Europe, in order to ensure proximity to its customer base.

Consolidation

Following the formation of All4Labels in 2016, the company swiftly began further expansion in Europe, with the acquisition of leading Italian converter Nuceria Group, just a little more than 18 months later. With external investment from private equity company Triton arriving in 2019, All4Labels ramped up the growth of its European footprint in the following years with deals for more than a dozen companies spread around the continent, including in Denmark, Italy, Romania, Spain and the UK.

'We were consolidated in the European market, but less so in South America,' explains Fernando Gabel, former president of South and Central America for All4Labels, and now responsible for Central Europe and M&A. 'From 2022 onwards, All4Labels drove substantial investments in M&A activities, especially across South America, with our operations in this area experiencing significant growth, counting today more than 15 production sites and entering a new market: Paraguay.

'In the years that followed, we achieved a turnover increase of over 100 million EUR, significantly expanding our portfolio to include key industries such as healthcare, aviation, automotive, agrochemicals and durables.

'Our acquisition of a leading player in Chile further solidified our position as a key partner in the wine and spirits segment as well. By 2023, we strengthened our footprint in São Paulo, an important hub for regional and global customers. Furthermore, from 2022 to 2024, we invested more than 10 million EUR in cutting-edge flexography technology and in our healthcare division, expanding the capabilities of our facilities.'

Extensive M&A activity in Brazil, in particular, has led to All4Labels now running 14 production sites around the country and an additional office in São Paulo.

The expansion began in earnest in early 2022 with the acquisition of Flexoprint, a leading provider of labels and shrink sleeves with three manufacturing sites in Brazil and one in

neighboring Paraguay. The following year, it added Label Press, a durables-focused converter based in the northern city of Manaus, food label converter Visionflex, Uniflexo, pharmaceutical label specialists Involv, Allbox, FaberPrint and Geon, as well as Maxcor, a specialist in the chemical and oil label market with two plants. Also in 2023, All4Labels acquired leading Chilean wine label converter AMF Etiquetas, further enhancing its regional presence in South America. In 2024, it opened a new facility in João Pessoa in northeastern Brazil.

Two key elements behind this focus on the Brazilian market are All4Labels' philosophy of proximity to its clients, and strong growth in the local market. 'We like to be very close to our customers,' the company's CEO, Günther Weymans says.

'The Brazilian label market still has a low per capita pressure-sensitive label consumption, so we are betting on its continued growth,' says Gabel. 'Brazil is a fluctuating market, but in general there is a robust growth rate, driven largely by sectors such as food and beverage, pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. Simultaneously, with the rise of e-commerce, businesses in Brazil are increasingly facing demands for innovative packaging solutions that meet regulatory requirements while also appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

'While Brazil's GDP is expected to grow by 2.2 percent in 2025, experts also foresee important growth in the markets supplied by All4Labels, highlighting the 5 percent GDP growth for the agriculture market this year.'

There has been focused investment in digital technology recently at one of the company's sites in São Paulo, aimed at expanding booklet production capacity, a key application for Brazil's large agriculture and agrochemical market. All4Labels considers itself the leader in various products within these markets. The additional booklet production capacity will also help it expand further in the pharma market, as well as enhance its offering for the cosmetics sector, long a key focus for All4Labels. Further investment has also taken place to expand shrink sleeve production, a fast-growing market in Brazil.

'We have strategically positioned ourselves for anticipated market growth by significantly enhancing our high-tech booklet production capacity, enabling us to meet the industry's rising demands with exceptional quality and innovation,' says Weymans. 'Additionally, in our sleeves division, we have expanded facilities and invested in advanced technologies, ensuring we continue to serve this expanding market while upholding the highest quality standards. These milestones are integral to All4Labels' plan to achieve over 10 percent growth in South and Central America by 2025, solidifying our status as the leading converter in the region.'

Strategy

All4Labels' rapid expansion in South America is an important pillar in the company's principal aim: to become a leading player in the labeling and packaging sector worldwide. 'In recent years, All4Labels has made significant strides in the labeling and packaging industry and undertaken substantial investments in expanding our global capabilities and updating our technology,' says Weymans.

'In the South and Central America region, we have seen tremendous growth opportunities arising, especially in Brazil. Our expansion in the region marks a significant step in our growth, enhancing the existing global presence and our commitment to proximity and customer-centricity. As a result of our investments, we're better equipped to improve service agility and responsiveness, supporting both global and local customers while reinforcing our dedication to exceptional customer service.

'This success is a testament to our overarching global strategy, which aims to establish All4Labels as a leading player in the labeling and packaging sector worldwide. A key facet of this strategy is our commitment to providing proximity and local support to our customers, ensuring they receive the tailored solutions and service they need to thrive in their respective markets.'



Günther Weymans, CEO of All4Labels

"We are continually monitoring global market dynamics and remain open to evaluating potential acquisitions that could enhance our global network"



Fernando Gabel, president of Central Europe and M&A for All4Labels

Scan the QR code for more information on All4Labels

Acquisition strategy

When considering companies for acquisition, All4Labels focuses on the business' culture over aiming to add specific technological capabilities or strengthening particular market sectors. Even the best-laid plans can go awry, admits Fernando Gabel, so maintaining flexibility is key. 'You might be looking at a specific sector but not able to find the right company in that moment. If that's the case, it is better to grow organically than to make the wrong acquisition,' he says.

'We are continually monitoring global market dynamics and remain open to evaluating potential acquisitions that could enhance our global network,' says Günther Weymans, CEO of All4Labels. 'Our focus is on enriching our capabilities and ensuring that we provide our customers with top-tier service and the best labeling options available. That said, while we are assessing new opportunities, we also place significant emphasis on the consolidation and integration of any new entity. It's essential for us to cultivate a unified company culture across our diverse and multicultural workforce.'

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Circular

Kumar Labels expands Greater Noida facility

Indian converter nearly doubles its footprint to 50,000 sqft with a custom-built production facility. Adyasha Sinha reports.

Founded in 2007 by Anuj Bhargava, Kumar Labels has become one of the leading converters in India's label printing sector. Headquartered in Greater Noida, the company expanded to a new, 50,000 sqft facility to consolidate four factories. With two new flexo lines, multiple inspection slitters, a new test lab and all LED UV presses, Kumar Labels' new facility is claimed to be India's largest and most sustainable label production infrastructure under one roof.

The growth journey

Entering a market already populated by established players required a distinct strategy. From the outset, Bhargava recognized that competing on price wouldn't suffice. The focus, therefore, was on building capabilities that could deliver superior products and meet the evolving demands of brand owners, particularly in challenging segments like alcoholic beverages and FMCG.

'In FY24-25, we launched innovations such as raised foil and silk fabric on PS labels for the first time in India to cater to the demands of brand owners,' Bhargava says. 'Our new facility is equipped with machines that enabled us to innovate and produce something new in India.'

The newly expanded facility houses a water-based coater and a hot melt line. Both lines are equipped with a contactless adhesive measurement system from NDC. The factory, which was earlier used as a warehouse, also stores release liners. Currently, the company manufactures 8 million sqm of labelstock, and its total manufacturing capacity stands at 18 million sqm.

Technology that matters

Technology is the cornerstone of Kumar Labels' success. 'We believe in Toyota's principles of "Autonomation". We believe in using simple, quick-to-set-up, flexible capability to do any job without hardware change, easy-to-operate and low-cost machinery for production. This reduces turnaround time and cost of production, enables shorter runs and more value addition, reduces wastage and improves quality,' shares Bhargava. 'Our IT team implemented a new ERP system that enabled monthly reconciliation of materials accurate to 99.6 percent. We also introduced automatic order updates for our customers.



Finished labels at Kumar Labels

"There is considerable demand for premiumization across all categories. With premium packaging, perceptions of a brand are changing and giving a kick to the market"

'Our operations team improved efficiencies from running 280mm wide presses to 410mm ones,' adds Bhargava.

From the outset, Kumar Labels has carefully selected the appropriate technology. Rather than starting small and gradually scaling, the company made significant initial investments in state-of-the-art printing technology, signaling its intent to compete at the higher end of the market from day one.

When Bhargava decided to enter the printing and packaging industry, he identified a gap between customer demand and the technology offered by label converters. Bhargava recalls: 'As I researched, I concluded that major customers demanded short runs regularly. However, the label printers I spoke to suggested investing in a rotary flexo press, which is great for larger volumes, but not for short-run jobs.'

This led Bhargava to decide to invest in an intermittent letterpress from a Korean manufacturer, Bangsung. Having been impressed with the results, he purchased another one in 2009.

The company has consistently invested in advanced printing and finishing equipment, maintaining a modern fleet capable of handling complex requirements and ensuring high-quality output. 'Now is the time for a combination of technologies. The first and last units of my letterpress utilize flexo technology, while the other six units of the machine are letterpress. We customize every machine. In addition, we have a lot of off-line capacity using eight flatbed converting machines,' he explains.

The company also added several silk-screen printing machines, slitting, hologram decorating and inspection machines. It operates an Esko CDI digital imaging and processing system for both pre-press and flexo and letterpress platemaking in-house, which was added in recent years.

Technology is fundamental to Kumar Labels' success and is evident in its daily operations. 'It's not only about what technology we are choosing for printing, but also about choosing the right technology to make our lives and jobs easier and simpler,' comments Bhargava. 'Previously, we handled all the administrative and operational tasks manually. Individuals had to stand in queues to make their requests, and there was no way to track them. We now have



The new NBG flexo machine at Kumar Labels

Kumar Labels orders third Starflex from NBG at Labelexpo India 2024

The Starflex narrow-web flexo press has an in-line gravure station, allowing for high-quality printing with depth and detail. This feature enables Kumar Labels to incorporate intricate designs, special inks, or coatings directly in-line, making it suitable for premium labels. Its LED UV curing system offers faster drying times while reducing energy consumption. LED UV provides consistent curing quality at lower temperatures.

'Our 10-color Starflex meets Kumar Labels' high standards, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness to their clients' needs,' says Nitin Garg of NBG. 'We're grateful for the trust Anuj Bhargava of Kumar Labels has placed in us, inspiring us to continuously elevate our offerings and deliver machines that match the highest print quality and efficiency standards. Here's to a successful partnership that drives innovation and achievements in the label printing industry.'

"Demonstrating our commitment to sustainability and efficiency, we transitioned all our flexo presses from conventional UV to UV LED systems, which resulted in a one-third reduction in power consumption"

automated processes and have trained our personnel to utilize the system. You will see QR codes displayed in all prominent areas for various tasks, including visitor entry forms, finance and HR-related issues such as POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment), among others.

'Initially, the team was reluctant to use the system, but as time passed, the employees figured out the ease of the process, and now everyone is using it,' shares Bhargava.

Sustainable initiatives

Demonstrating a commitment to sustainability and efficiency, Kumar Labels' in-house coating team introduced the rPET-based labels (face and liner) in 2024 to improve the PSA label sustainability quotient by 90 percent and reduce dependence on imports.

The company also transitioned all its flexo presses from conventional UV to UV LED systems. 'This shift resulted in a one-third reduction in power consumption, elimination of ozone emissions, and increased press speeds by at least 20 percent,' notes Bhargava. 'The UV LED systems also feature longer lifespans, reducing maintenance and replacement costs.'

Bhargava's proactive approach included personal evaluations of power consumption, confirming substantial energy savings. The company uses water washable 1.14 plate system from Japan, further aligning with its sustainability goals.

To ensure impeccable print quality, Kumar Labels installed the Guardian OLP off-line proofing and inspection system from Baldwin Technology. This system enables the detection of pre-press defects, reducing waste and enhancing productivity.

The company also develops recyclable barrier-coated and poly-coated liners, aiming to improve recyclability and reduce costs. These initiatives demonstrate Kumar Labels' dedication to environmental responsibility.

Future forward

With a significant involvement in manufacturing alcoholic beverage labels, Bhargava observes that a considerable demand for premiumization across all categories, and there is a clear trend to 'stand out' rather than appear as a 'me too' brand. With premium packaging, perceptions of a brand are changing and giving a kick to the market.

Kumar Labels is a one-stop shop for its customers, producing materials, labelstocks and label applicators. Bhargava summarizes, 'Therefore, we can offer our customers a better price. Our focus on innovation, fast and agile presses and ancillary equipment, reliable service, price and our family history of working in the industry differentiate the company.'

The company adds value to its luxury liquor labels with embossing effects created using foils and coatings. These are made with UV coatings on its flexo presses and automated silk-screen machines.

The company also employs a graining machine to add unique textures to paper labels for an engaging tactile experience. It devises every new visual and haptic possibility to set luxury brands apart from their competitors. The company's alcoholic beverage clients include Beam Suntory India, Jim Beam and Teacher's whiskey makers, Captain Morgan, Oak Smith, Indri, Camikara, to name just a few.

Being in the labels industry for over 15 years has given the company the advantage of understanding the needs of the competitive alcoholic beverage industry. This, in turn, helps it guide its customers about legal mandates for approvals, trade requirements for labels and more.

Workforce development

Bhargava believes in continuously training employees. He trained over 1,200 people in label converting, but acknowledges that skilled employee retention is a problem in this industry.

'Since lack of skilled workforce is a major challenge in our industry, people who have attained competence get poached very easily,' says Bhargava.

He plans to create a relative surplus of skilled resources through a structured label training program. It will be available at three levels of competence, combining course materials and hands-on training on modern equipment at his plant.

Designed for operators, senior operators and label production management, each level will be priced nominally. The plan is to attract young resources from ITIs (Industrial Training Institutes) needing employment at the most basic level.

Kumar Labels exemplifies how strategic foresight, technological innovation and a commitment to sustainability can drive success in the label printing industry.

By continuously adapting to market demands and investing in infrastructure and human resources, the company has led the sector toward a more sustainable and efficient future.

Scan the QR code to read about patents filed by Kumar Labels



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Acme Rolltech expands capacity

Founded six years ago, Acme Rolltech has experienced substantial growth, expanding its global presence and production capacity, Akanksha Meena reports

Acme Rolltech, an India-based manufacturer of flexo anilox rolls and sleeves, has strengthened its global brand recognition and introduced many new innovative products.

Founded in 2019, the company has developed new products in the last year. For the label industry, it has introduced ATAC (Acme TACtile) roll. The first version was launched in 2019, and the second version, ATAC 2.0, debuted at Labelexpo Europe 2023. This product allows converters to achieve a screen-type raised effect through anilox in a single pass.

The company has sold over 350 rolls of ATAC and ATAC 2.0 rolls combined.

Other products for the label industry are AHDW and AHDW 2.0 (Acme High Density White), which have gained significant traction for its high-opacity white printing and text matter in a single pass.

With higher LPI values, its Advanced Channel Engraving (ACE) reduces ink consumption, attracting wide web, mid web, and narrow web customers. The company has already started selling ACE in India and is set to expand its customer base further.

Another significant development is its CI flexo analog sleeves for the wide web industry. These lightweight, durable sleeves are now made in India. The new product was introduced in December 2023.

New partnerships

To enhance its global presence, Acme has appointed agent partners in specific regions around the world. Acme formed strong collaborations in key areas, particularly in European countries such as Italy, France and Germany, as well as in Latin America and North America.

Currently, Acme has around 12 agent partners, covering regions such as South Africa, East Africa, the Middle East and Turkey. During drupa, its director Shandeep Sharma met with potential partners and successfully appointed three new agents for additional regions, two in Latin America, one in Europe. The partner in Italy will handle Italy, Germany, and France, while it also has representatives in Brazil and Colombia.

Sharma says: 'We are aware of gaps in our presence, particularly in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Europe, where we aim to expand. North America, Latin America and Europe are our primary targets for growth, and we plan to establish a stronger footprint in these regions by next year.'



Sandeep Sharma, director of Acme Rolltech

"North America, Latin America and Europe are our primary targets for growth"

Rapid time to market

The manufacturer has found its niche, enabling it to expand in the global market rapidly.

'We are a six-year-old company competing with established players who've been in the market for over 50 years. We face competition wherever we go, whether in China, Europe, the US, or locally in India where we manufacture. Our mark of distinction lies in our agility to adapt to local customer needs in India and globally,' Sharma says.

'Beyond just selling standard anilox rolls, we listen to our customers, understand their challenges, and tailor our products with the latest technologies to meet their specific requirements. This approach earns us recognition for tackling even the most challenging tasks.'

While others may focus on standard anilox jobs, Acme prioritizes customization, value-added services, quality, and competitive pricing. Sharma says that Acme can match or exceed European and US standards in quality and the company's market responsiveness exceeds competitors from Europe and the US.

The company's biggest strength is its rapid time to market.

'For example, while sitting in a customer's office in the Middle East, I provided a quotation instantly when asked. The customer was impressed by our quick response. We commit to delivering rolls within 20 to 25 days for narrow web customers, achieving a 98 to 99 percent success rate each month,' Sharma notes.

Capacity expansion

Maintaining this unique selling proposition is crucial for Acme. That is why it has invested in a third engraving machine to further enhance its market speed and capabilities.

The company's ability to deliver rolls and sleeves fast to customers is crucial, especially as it expands into export markets where orders are significantly larger, often 30 to 40 rolls at once. Unlike domestic orders that can be fulfilled in batches, export orders require Acme to dispatch entire orders in one shipment to maintain efficiency.

'We are committed to preserving our unique selling proposition of speed to market, which is why we're investing not only in new machinery but also in improving our entire production process, from pre-production to post-production,' Sharma highlights.

The manufacturer has also added the capability to manufacture base rolls and sleeves in-house, making investments totaling over 1m USD for this purpose.

Previously, Acme relied on two or three trusted partners in the industry for manufacturing base rolls. However, with increased quantity, delivery times have become a concern.

'While we can manufacture everything in-house, we will continue collaborating with our partners to maintain consistent timelines for our customers. If we receive a large volume of orders, we may split them between our internal production and our partners to ensure efficient delivery without compromising on customer service.'

The new setup will be operational by August 2025.

With this expansion, the capacity will increase significantly. Currently, Acme produces about 300 to 350 rolls per month, including both large and small rolls. With the additional capabilities, it is expected to reach approximately 550 to 600 rolls per month. This represents nearly a doubling of its current production capacity.

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Konica Minolta transforms Winways Digitech

The Mumbai-based converter has marked a significant milestone in its label printing journey by installing a second Konica Minolta press, which was secured during Labelexpo India 2024. Adyasha Sinha reports

Winways Digitech has installed a second Konica Minolta press, the AccurioLabel 400. This strategic investment aims to meet the growing demand for customized labels and short-run jobs while expanding the company's market footprint and enhancing operational efficiency. The deal was sealed on the show floor of Labelexpo India in 2024.

Navigating the pandemic

Established in 2016, Winways began as a wide-format printing provider, offering services on diverse substrates such as vinyl, flex, glass and wood, operating from a 5,000 sqft facility equipped with a locally manufactured flatbed press. However, the unforeseen arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted business.

'Everything was going smoothly until COVID-19 hit,' recalls Kartik Shah, founder of Winways Digitech. 'During that period, interest in home decor and interior beautification declined drastically.'

Facing a steep drop in sales, the company's future looked uncertain. 'We realized we couldn't sustain ourselves in the long run without pivoting,' Shah says. 'By 2021, we decided to enter the label printing segment.'

As luck would have it, a major order came from a large government-affiliated organization seeking label supply. It was a breakthrough that validated the company's new direction.

Embracing digital

Winways started its label journey with the Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230. Shah recalls, 'We knew we had to take the digital route for our label business. When we were scouting for a digital label machine, we came across a couple of names, and Konica Minolta was one of them. We were satisfied with the way the company carried forward our conversation. It arranged visits and demos, and was always prompt in its responses.'

The investment significantly enhanced its label printing capabilities. Shah shares: 'With the Konica Minolta Accuriolabel 230, we boosted our printing capabilities and started producing self-adhesive labels.'

The decision to go digital proved beneficial for Winways. Many brands preferred digital technology for its flexibility and ability to accommodate small quantities, allowing them to test the market before committing to larger volumes. It also met brands' increasing demand for customization.

The AccurioLabel 230, Konica Minolta's third-generation toner-based press, features four-color printing, dual print widths (250 mm and 330 mm), and a speed of 18 m/min. The machine's performance and Konica Minolta's dedicated after-sales service convinced Winways to invest in the next-level AccurioLabel 400 in 2024.

Adding value in a startup-driven market

With an ever-burgeoning startup culture, investing in the AccurioLabel 400 was well-timed. However, it was not before Winways tried its hand at flexo. 'After our first machine, we bought a flexo press. But it didn't help us much as we were targeting new customers who were just entering the market or had entered in the past couple of years,' notes Shah.



Kartik Shah, founder of Winways Digitech

"The startup culture has helped digital converters like us a lot. They prefer digital because pricing is competitive, and the deliveries are quicker and more flexible"

'New entrants and startups tend to seek converters who can handle short-run jobs. For them, digital is the best bet,' Shah says. 'The startup culture has helped digital converters like us a lot. Startups prefer digital because pricing is competitive, and the deliveries are quicker and more flexible.'

Winways today caters to brands from the beauty, food and beverage industries.

Talking more about the press, Vijay Kamat, product manager of IP business development department at Konica Minolta, shares: 'The acquisition of Konica Minolta's AccurioLabel 400 by Winways Digitech at Labelexpo India 2024 is a strategic move to boost its digital label printing capabilities. This press is known for its efficiency and high-quality output, making it suitable for producing customized, short-run labels quickly and reliably.

'This investment will likely give Winways a competitive edge in meeting diverse client demands with greater flexibility and speed. The AccurioLabel 400 is a 4-color plus white machine with a web width of 320 mm. It runs at 40 m/min for a CMYK and about 30 m/min for a CMYK plus white printing.'

With the new Konica Minolta in the house, Winways anticipates strong growth in the digital label printing sector in the upcoming years.

Scan the QR code to read about Konica Minolta's latest awards and recognition

Nilpeter plans India expansion with new technology center

With a dedicated innovation and customer engagement hub, Nilpeter's strategic move underscores its deep commitment to the Indian label market. Adyasha Sinha reports

In a significant move underscoring its commitment to the rapidly growing Indian label and packaging market, Nilpeter India has substantially enhanced its operational footprint with a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility and a dedicated Technology Center in Mahindra World City (MWC), Chennai. The expanded 7,000sqm facility (approximately 75,347sqft) more than doubles the company's production capacity. It establishes Chennai as the global manufacturing hub for Nilpeter's FB line of flexographic presses, positioning the company to better serve domestic and international customers with increased efficiency and innovation.

> "Over the years, we have built a highly competent organization in India, a vital asset supporting our global manufacturing and development activities"

Doubling down in Chennai

The enhanced setup at MWC houses advanced manufacturing and assembly lines inspired by the open-layout design of Nilpeter's global headquarters in Denmark. It also includes comprehensive R&D capabilities, a dedicated customer care center, and the new Technology Center.

Alan Barretto, managing director of Nilpeter India, highlights the strategic importance of the expansion. 'The expansion and the decision to build a larger, newer technology center was pivotal for Nilpeter India's growth,' he states. 'This expansion has allowed us to double our press manufacturing capacity, almost to 48 to 50 machines a year. Initially serving India and neighboring countries, our Chennai plant has become a global supplier. With the corporate decision to consolidate all FB line production here, we are now exporting presses manufactured in Chennai to markets across the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.'

This consolidation makes Chennai the exclusive global production site for the FB line, including the now dormant FB-350 and FB-430 models and the recently launched, technologically advanced FB-14 and FB-17 presses. The decision streamlines Nilpeter's global production, with the FA line manufactured in Denmark and the US.

A hub for innovation

The dedicated Technology Center facilitates live demonstrations, showcasing the capabilities of the locally manufactured FB line variants FB-14 and FB-17. While specific demo models may rotate, the focus remains on illustrating practical applications and performance. Customers can see standard jobs run or arrange to test their particular job requirements.

'Our Technology Center is a place where ideas, technological advances, and the benefits they bring are presented in an organized, end-user-friendly environment,' Barretto states. It allows visitors to 'get behind the ropes and get hands-on experience.'

The center can also be used for training and education. Barretto adds, 'We organize comprehensive training programs for press operators and production managers at our Tech Center to enhance their skills and operational efficiency.' It also has a well-equipped prepress area to demonstrate workflow integration.

The FB line advantage

The launch of the FB-14 and FB-17 models in August 2024 represents a significant leap forward. These presses bridge the gap between the classic FB line's (FB-350 and FB-430) robustness and the high-end automation of the FA line.



The newly expanded Technology Center at Nilpeter India.



Nilpeter India facility at Mahindra World City, Chennai, India.

"We saw the demand from the market for a product positioned between our popular FB classic workhorse and our highly advanced FA line"

Barretto notes, 'We saw the demand from the market for a product positioned between our popular FB classic workhorse and our highly advanced FA line. People were looking for something more aspirational. And that's how the FB-14 and 17 were born. With these new FB line presses, printers receive a very high level of automation and operator friendliness, but at an investment level accessible to a broader segment.'

The new FB-17 press, constructed on the advanced Nilpeter B&R control system, represents a significant leap in Nilpeter's journey towards 'The Future of Flexo'. Barretto adds that the FB-17 was developed in response to customer requests for a press adept at labels and flexible packaging, incorporating features like dual servo technology for thin film handling.

These machines integrate with the Nilpeter PowerLink control system, enabling features like Job Data Save, automatic register control and a pre-register system for faster setup and reduced waste.

Its new dual servo print head allows for full 360-degree automatic register adjustment. Its gearless design is capable of handling a wide range of substrates ranging from 15 to 300 microns, making it suitable for pressure-sensitive labels, unsupported films, shrink sleeves and light carton boards.

Barretto shares, 'An interesting feature of these machines is the adaptation kit that allows using tools from the older FB-350 and FB-430 presses in the newer FB machines, protecting existing investments.'

Future outlook

With its expanded manufacturing capacity, state-of-the-art Technology Center, and strategic position as the global hub for the versatile FB line, Nilpeter India is firmly poised for continued growth. The Chennai facility not only strengthens Nilpeter's ability to serve the burgeoning Indian market but also enhances its global competitiveness by leveraging local expertise and infrastructure for worldwide exports.

Scan the QR code to read about Nilpeter's showcase at Labelexpo Southeast Asia 2025

India News Roundup

JPFL Films expands flexible packaging production in India

JPFL Films, a subsidiary of flexible packaging giant Jindal Poly Films, has confirmed a capacity expansion with new BOPP, PET and CPP lines in Nashik, Maharashtra. The new lines, expected to be commissioned in the next 2-3 years' time, will see a capex commitment of above INR 700 Crore (approximately 82m USD).

Avery Dennison opens its first RFID production facility in India

Avery Dennison has opened its first RFID inlays and labels production site in Pune, India. The plant's opening marks a pivotal step in the company's long-term commitment to supporting RFID technology growth in South Asia under the 'Make in India' initiative. Avery Dennison has introduced AD Cobra, an RFID inlay designed exclusively for the Indian market. The inlay is tailored to meet the unique environmental and operational challenges faced by Indian businesses.

Holostik strengthens sustainability commitment with solar panel installation

Holostik has installed a solar power plant with a capacity of approximately 500 kWp at its manufacturing facility in Greater Noida, India. This renewable energy initiative will provide more than 25 percent of the plant's power needs, substantially contributing to the company's sustainability goals. This installation of solar panels reflects Holostik's alignment with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Atmanirbhar Bharat 2047 vision and India's renewable energy goals.

Chiripal Polyfilms sets up production facility in Jammu

Chiripal Polyfilms, one of India's leading flexible packaging materials manufacturers, has opened a new plant in Kathua, Jammu. The company makes its foray into the aluminum foil business with the new facility. It will also manufacture rPET chips in the facility.

Bapuji Surgicals invests in Webtech's fully servo flexo machine

India-based Bapuji Surgicals, offering barcode labels along with surgical dressings, disposable drapes and gowns, sterilization reels and pouches, has invested in Webtech's latest-generation Labeltech S3 Series fully servo flexo machine with a working width of 450mm.

Print Panache installs first Lombardi Smartline press in India

Print Panache has installed the country's first Lombardi Smartline press. Vinsak, the distributor of Lombardi presses in the region, installed the press. The new Smartline press, on the heels of Lombardi Synchroline platform offers a robust solution for producing precision pressure sensitive paper and film labels, the press accommodates up to 450mm web width, with a printing width of 430mm.

Holosafe enhances label production capabilities with Jetsci

Holosafe Security Labels has expanded its production capabilities by installing Jetsci's KolorSmart+ UV inkjet press that supports 6-colors and substrates upto 350mm width. Monotech Systems developed the press in India.

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Polilux is the youngest player of BOPP production industry. The company was established in 2018 and its main purpose has been to focus special products such as IML, PSL so far. Polilux has been performing production with specially designed Brückner Technology in order to produce the highest quality of label materials.

Polilux today exports material to 26 countries and this number reached in only 3 years after establishment. The company has only one purpose as to be a leading producer of special products. As a consequence Polilux launched its first BML (Blow-Moulding Label) product in 2022 and the company is producing high quality of PSL Facestock material which can serve high end market since January 2023. Polilux invested the first of its kind investment which will be the only one in the World. The main purpose of this investment is to match with company's objectives as to be leading special product supplier.

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Synergia Pac transforms with HP Indigo 6K digital press

The India-based converter is set to become the country's premier innovation lab by installing an HP Indigo digital press. Adyasha Sinha reports.

Established in February 2024, Synergia Pac made a significant leap in the printing and packaging industry by installing the advanced HP Indigo 6K digital press at its Udyog Vihar facility in Gurugram. This strategic investment highlights the company's dedication to innovation, sustainability and delivering high value to its clientele.

The story of Synergia Pac is as compelling as its name.

The company was founded by Saqib Jamshed, Raman Anandchahl and Deepak Nargis and was born out of a shared vision for innovation. One evening, a mentor, a mentee and a visionary leader gathered over dinner to discuss the industry's pressing needs, emerging trends and the future of business. That night, their shared passion for innovation materialized into an 'innovation lab' equipped with the kind of technology that would redefine the printing and packaging landscape.

Reflecting on that moment, Saqib Jamshed, co-founder of Synergia Pac, recalls: 'In this story, I am the mentee, with Raman Anandchahl being the mentor and Deepak Nargis as the visionary leader. Even the name Synergia Pac is a tribute to the synergy we developed together.'

Jamshed brings a wealth of experience, having worked with IFFCO Group UAE and TechNova, a key distributor of HP's printing presses in India. Together, the trio set out to establish Synergia Pac as an innovation lab that seamlessly integrates design, printing and packaging.

Synergia Pac's mission is clear: to redefine the possibilities in packaging by marrying cutting-edge technology with a profound understanding of design and market trends. This approach enables brands to elevate their packaging, enhance visibility and forge deeper connections with customers.

'Innovation labs are still a relatively new concept in India,' says Jamshed. 'The market is gradually embracing the idea of a one-stop platform where designing and printing coexist. Most companies in this space are either converters or service providers, but we aim to deliver something more for enhanced and impactful outcomes. Our focus is always on improving the final product.'

In just a year, Synergia Pac has emerged as a one-stop shop for designing, printing and packaging diverse products, including coffee table books, luxury packaging, code cards, labels, pouches and single-layer folding cartons. The company specializes in small, incremental innovations that build on existing concepts to deliver unique options.

Synergia Pac caters to quick commerce platforms, production houses, ad agencies, institutions and FMCG companies. It has a presence in major Indian metros such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. Additionally, the company is extending its reach to evolving markets like Jaipur, Shimla, Chandigarh, Bhopal and Indore. These regions are poised to become future hubs for packaging innovation.

Innovation at the core

The co-founders of Synergia Pac meticulously evaluated digital technologies, comparing digital toner and liquid electrography (LEP) technology. Their search culminated in selecting the HP Indigo 6K, which aligned perfectly with their vision for an innovation lab.



Saqib Jamshed, Deepak Nargis and Raman Anandchahl with the HP Indigo 6K digital press

"There is a need for an 'innovation lab' with state-of-the-art technology for the printing and packaging market and outcomes"

Jamshed reflects: 'HP is a market leader in digital printing technology, and I had the privilege of experiencing its high-quality service during my time at TechNova. We are thrilled to collaborate with HP to revolutionize the printing and packaging sector. Our goal is to create a one-of-a-kind innovation lab in India, driving groundbreaking advancements to market. The versatility of HP Indigo technology is a simple match for our objectives.'

Installed in February 2024, Synergia Pac's HP Indigo 6K digital press has already achieved an impressive milestone. It has produced four million impressions within its first year, averaging 700,000 impressions monthly. The press offers flexibility, enabling printing on various substrates, including PET, polyester and paper. This versatility opens up diverse product avenues and opportunities.

'The HP Indigo 6K delivers the adaptability to cater to multiple substrate requirements, making it a perfect choice for our expansive portfolio,' Jamshed explains. 'While offset and gravure printing have long been considered the gold standard for quality, HP has successfully bridged that gap with its advanced digital printing technology.'

With the HP Indigo 6K at its core, Synergia Pac is venturing into uncharted territories, including hybrid printing, security printing applications and other roll-format innovations. Co-founder and director Deepak Nargis emphasizes: 'This new technology empowers us to tackle various business challenges with a one-stop-shop approach, ensuring we never have to say "no" to our customers. Our focus on proof-of-concept development and challenging the status quo allows us to consistently replace existing products with superior, innovative solutions.'

The HP Indigo 6K acquisition was expedited with the support of HP Financial Services, which provided an operating lease option. This financing arrangement enabled Synergia Pac to integrate the technology swiftly, ensuring a faster turnaround time and immediate operational benefits.

Harnessing Indigo excellence

Highlighting the transformative potential of the HP Indigo press,



Samples from Synergia Pac

"The startups prefer printing partners who can offer a comprehensive range of applications – labels, flexible pouches, and folding cartons – all under one roof"

A Appadurai, country manager, Indigo and inkjet business solutions at HP India, shares: 'With the rise of startups in the food and beverage, nutraceutical and cosmetics sectors, the demand for short-run quantities and a high number of SKUs has surged. These startups seek printing partners who can deliver diverse applications — labels, flexible pouches, and folding cartons — all under one roof. By investing in HP Indigo technology, print service providers can meet these varied needs using a single, versatile platform instead of multiple technologies. This makes HP Indigo suitable for those looking to stay competitive in a dynamic market.'

The HP Indigo 6K digital press can print on substrates ranging from 12 microns to 450 microns, including materials like LDP, MDP, BOPP and PET. This flexibility allows brands to reduce setup costs, minimize material waste and eliminate the need for complex color calibration.

Anand Ray, India marketing lead for labels and packaging at HP, elaborates: 'The HP Indigo 6K integrates advanced capabilities into product packaging seamlessly. From labels to flexible pouches and cartons, the press can incorporate essential security features like QR codes, variable data or invisible ink in a single pass, eliminating additional printing units. This technology strengthens brand identity and boosts customer recall by allowing labels to embody the product's essence fully.'

He adds: 'The simplicity of operation mirrors that of a home printer, enabling the production of diverse SKUs without prepress elements like plates or cylinders. It's as easy as pressing print.'

Indigo 6K prints at speeds of up to 30 m/min in 4-color mode, up to 40 m/min in enhanced productivity mode, and up to 60 m/min in 1- or 2-color mode. Its color palette includes premium White for sleeves, spot colors, Silver, fluorescent Pink, Green, Yellow, Orange, transparent, digital matte, invisible Yellow and Red, and dual White ink cans.

Advanced features such as an in-line priming unit, intelligent color automation (in-line spectrophotometer), HP Indigo One Shot Color technology, HP Indigo GEM connectivity, and PrintOSX Production Pro enhance productivity and output quality.

The press empowers Synergia Pac to streamline production, save resources, and elevate its packaging to create a lasting impression.

'Every print is flawless from the start, saving time and reducing costs amidst rising material prices,' explains Ray. 'The press even enables personalized packaging for events or celebrations, where each item can be custom-printed within days.'

The HP Indigo 6K aligns seamlessly with Synergia Pac's sustainability goals, supporting the company's vision of transforming the packaging industry into one that maximizes value while minimizing environmental impact.

The press reduces production waste, whether from overproduction, setup or changeovers, contributing significantly to a sustainable future.

'Brands today demand faster turnaround times and innovative, eco-friendly alternatives to meet their sustainability goals. HP presses are CO2-neutral, and their inks comply with stringent sustainability guidelines. With the HP Indigo 6K, we are perfectly positioned to meet these demands and set new benchmarks in the market,' remarks Raman Anandchahl, co-founder of Synergia Pac.

In addition to the HP Indigo 6K, Synergia Pac has invested in a VIS 370 semi-rotary flexo and die-cutting station and a flatbed die-cutter LFD350 from Vinsak.

These machines enhance quality and optimize costs in post-press operations, reinforcing the company's commitment to delivering superior services.

As Synergia Pac continues to innovate and lead the printing and packaging sector, installing the HP Indigo 6K firmly positions the company at the forefront of digital transformation, paving the way for a more sustainable and efficient future.

Pushing the HP Indigo envelope at TechNova's Touch Center

Inaugurated in January 2023 at Turbhe, Navi Mumbai, TechNova's Touch Center has an HP Indigo 6K digital press running live, offering a complete experience of HP Indigo digital printing technology. Customers can explore interesting applications and business growth opportunities for print service providers and brand owners.

Touch is an acronym for TechNova Open University for Change, a knowledge-sharing center launched by TechNova in 1996.

An extension of HP's Graphic Experience centers in Alpharetta, Barcelona and Singapore, TechNova Touch Center provides services such as demonstration of HP Indigo technology and performance, new application development for PSPs and brands, educational sessions for the latest generation coming to the print business and for print-packaging students.

The Touch Center will also provide learning initiatives and training programs.

A Appadurai, country business manager – Indigo and inkjet business solutions at HP said at the time of its opening: 'Our mission is to provide a level playing field for the startups and SMBs in high-quality world-class printed packaging. Today HP Indigo converters cater to about 10,000 such startups.'

Launching the Touch Center with the HP Indigo 6K machine running live demos so customers can experience firsthand the power of digital print applications is a milestone in the TechNova-HP journey.

Scan the QR code to read more from the region in the Labelexpo India 2024 review

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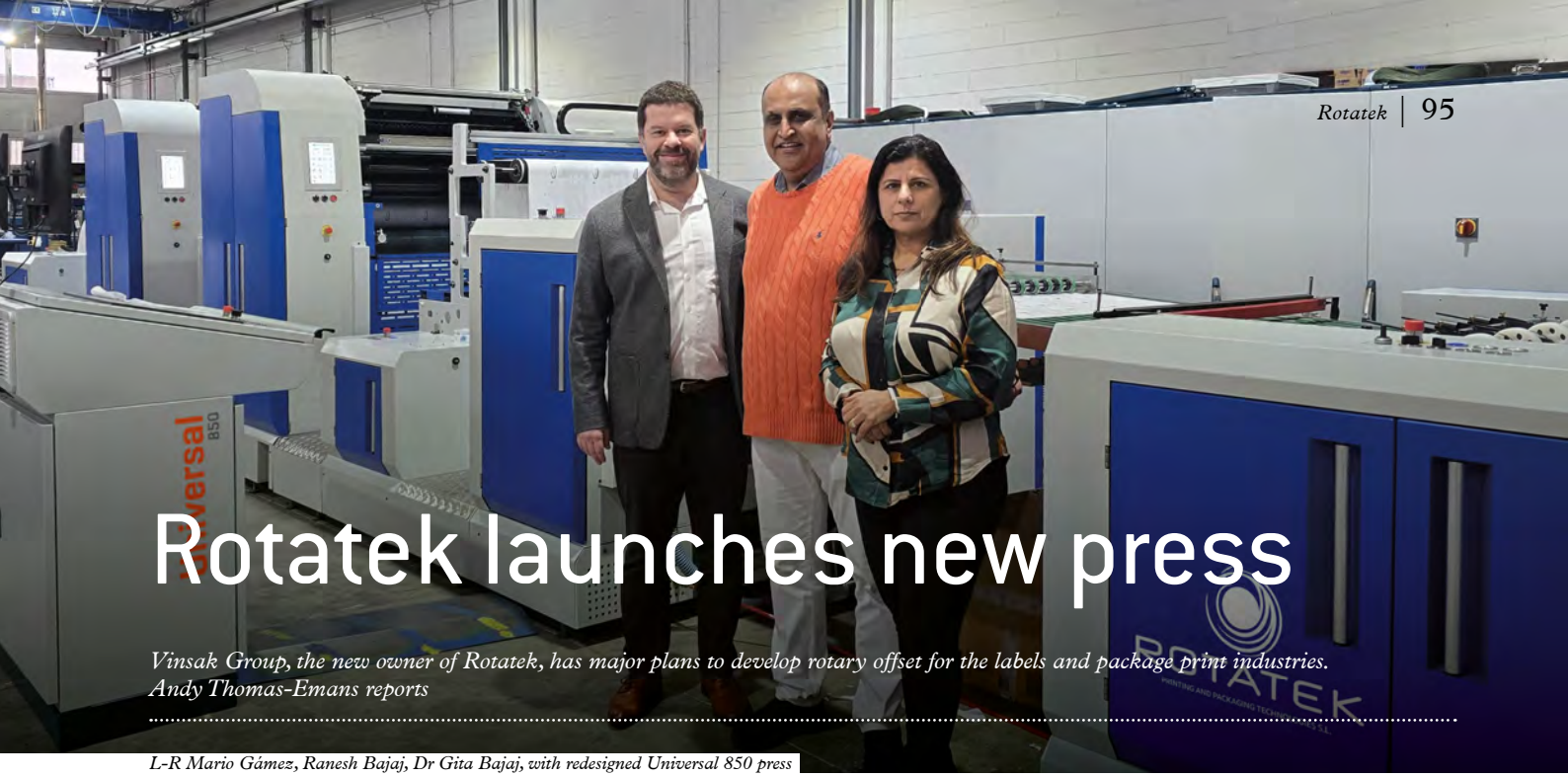
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Rotatek launches new press

Vinsak Group, the new owner of Rotatek, has major plans to develop rotary offset for the labels and package print industries. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

L-R Mario Gámez, Ranesh Bajaj, Dr Gita Bajaj, with redesigned Universal 850 press

Following the acquisition of Rotatek by India-based Vinsak Group two years ago, the rotary offset specialist is back with a fully redesigned Universal 850 and plans for both an offset-based hybrid press and a new version of the intermittent Brava press.

Rotatek Printing and Packaging Technologies will make its first exhibition appearance at Labelexpo Europe 2025 in Barcelona with a print unit from the Universal 850.

The Vinsak Group has a long history of association with Rotatek, having acted as the company's sales and service agency in India, the Middle East and Africa. Vinsak maintains an extensive business servicing Rotatek presses globally, including new software updates. The Vinsak Group also handles sales and support of Lombardi UV flexo presses across India and MENA.

The Vinsak Group was founded by industry veteran Ranesh Bajaj in 1990. He was recently joined by Dr Gita Bajaj, who brings experience as a professor in business transformation and HR.

Rotatek was originally founded in 1970 and today boasts an installed base of 1,700 presses in more than 70 countries, with applications including leaflets and security printing, labels, flexible packaging and folding cartons.

Rotatek CEO Mario Gámez has an engineering background that includes managing dock installations across the UK ports industry.

Under Vinsak's ownership, Rotatek has expanded its workforce, which now stands at 34 full-time and five contractual workers. Gita Bajaj and Mario Gámez have been busy recruiting electronic and software engineers, and are committed to training talented young people from the local area. Plans are underway to acquire a site to build a new production plant.

Rotary offset reboot

Although rotary offset has always been a core technology in high-end label production, it has been somewhat eclipsed by the increasing quality of UV flexography. But Ranesh Bajaj is a firm believer in the future of rotary offset in the package printing market and wants Rotatek to lead that development.

'Rotatek clearly believes that offset is still a relevant technology in the labels and packaging market, and we will be spending considerable efforts and resources in the coming months to offer some game-changing technologies to our customers,' says Bajaj. 'Our focus is on new machines.'

The first machine brought to market by Vinsak-owned Rotatek is the sleeve-based Universal 850. Originally launched in 2008, the press was completely redesigned during the Covid pandemic, and the first units are now being shipped.

"Rotatek clearly believes that offset is still a relevant technology in the labels and packaging market, and we will be spending considerable efforts and resources to offer some game-changing technologies to our customers"

The key development is using lightweight sleeves with integral bearers and a pneumatic locking system that allows rapid change between job formats and ensures maximum stability during the print run.

Repeat size ranges from 20-40in (508-1016mm), allowing the larger formats found in IML, shrink sleeves and folding cartons to be handled.

After a sleeve change, the blanket and impression cylinders and the inking/forme and dampening roller assemblies are moved into position using 21 Individual servo motors per print unit. 'This means make-ready operations are more automatic, accurate, and repeatable,' says Gámez. 'We are able to change between jobs in two minutes.'

Other automation features on the Universal 850 include automatic register control and CIP4 ink key control, using a spectrophotometer for closed loop on-the-fly color adjustment.

The offset roller train has been completely redesigned and now includes a fourth ink forme roller. The oscillating ink roller system allows for adjustment tailored to different ink types, including UV and LED-UV. Technotrans supplies the ink temperature control system to ensure stable ink viscosity.

Rotatek is working on a new system to predict and automate ink-water balance.

'We are doing studies with two of our automation partners to deploy AI-based models for the presses to be able to predict the behavior of ink-water balance on presses when changing press speeds, substrates and pressroom conditions during the day,' says Bajaj. 'We have seen some very encouraging results in being able to reduce the waste drastically and reduce setup times. This could soon be a game changer in the offset industry.'

The Universal 850 prints at up to 400m/min roll-to-roll and



A new version of the Brava Intermittent offset press is under development

"We are doing studies on how to deploy AI-based models to predict the behavior of ink-water balance on presses when changing press speeds, substrates and pressroom conditions"

300m/min roll-to-sheet. Maximum substrate width is 870mm, and maximum print width 850mm. Substrate range is between 12-80 microns for films, 30-400gsm for paper, and 150-400gsm for folding cartons, opening up a wide range of possible applications.

When L&L visited the Barcelona production plant, a two-unit Universal 850 with turnbar and sheeter was about to be shipped to a company in France for printing pharma leaflets. A second press configured for in-mold labels with seven offset and two flexo units is under construction. Rotatek is working with Schober and other IML finishing technologies to accompany the press.

For folding carton applications, Rotatek is currently working on a waste eject system with its rotary die-cutting partners. In this configuration, there are separate die stations for creasing and cutting.

Rotatek also looks at in-line wet glue label production on the Universal 850. A prototype system is currently under development. 'With a format size of 850mm x 1 meter repeat, we are the same size as a sheet-fed machine and we can print at 300m/min, which is equivalent to 18,000 sheets/hour,' says Gámez. 'This matches our philosophy of producing finished products in one process, including in-mold labels, carton boxes and wet glue labels.'

New Brava and hybrid

A strong part of Rotatek's heritage was its ground-breaking Brava intermittent offset press. Launched in 2004, the Brava could be switched between intermittent and full rotary modes. Users in the labels industry include Marzek Etiketten (see Labels & Labeling Issue 1).

Rotatek is now working on a major redesign, with the new press scheduled for launch in early 2026. Gámez says this will be a 'fully revamped Brava press that is more relevant to today's needs of short-run label production.'

The press will be available in 450mm and 520mm versions. 'We are not producing the 350mm press anymore, as we were not competitive at that width,' says Gámez. The new Brava will not have the option to switch to full rotary mode. An update on the new press will be delivered at Labelexpo Europe 2025.

Rotatek is also developing a new hybrid press that combines semi-rotary offset with digital print and embellishment technology developed independently by the Vinsak Group.

Explains Ranesh Bajaj, 'Combined with the technical and financial strength of the Vinsak group, we hope to build a new hybrid model of creating aesthetically appealing packaging economically and making it smart and connected with our VDP solutions. We believe this is the way forward for the industry.'

Another area for synergistic hybrid development between Vinsak and Rotatek is security printing.

Security has historically been a strong market for Rotatek, offering technologies such as intaglio printing.

Rotatek has worked closely with Pantec, Newmec and other vendors to apply holographic tax stamps in-line in up to 12 strips. The same technology is also available for decorative applications.

Vinsak has its own in-house security print design center for applications ranging from brand protection to security documents and builds its own specialist digital print and embellishment hardware.

States Bajaj, 'Together, our security printing solutions now offer combination presses with dry and wet offset, flexo, rotary and flatbed hot foiling, die-cutting, monochrome or full color digital printing, all in-line to make the production of tax stamps, visas and similar products highly secure and counterfeit resistant.'

Ranesh Bajaj is excited by the future potential of the Rotatek-Vinsak collaboration.

He concludes, 'Our wider range of presses from 520mm to 850mm already offers unique flexibility and higher productivity than most similar web presses currently available on the market. We are also employing considerable resources in revamping our product line in the coming 12-24 months to make our products even more efficient in producing labels, flexibles and folding cartons.'

ECG debate

Extended color gamut printing – printing with seven colors permanently in the press – is a hot topic in the flexo industry today. Benefits include not having to wash print units down between jobs and the ability to hit multiple Pantones without requiring special colors.

Ranesh Bajaj is not convinced of the benefits of ECG in the rotary offset world.

'ECG printing requires seven print units, but there is no good reason for a press to have more than five print units. For 20,000 euros, I can receive an automated ink mixing kitchen, which now has no waste as the colors can be reused. With ECG, you are always paying to keep seven colors in the press, even when you are not using them. The additional capital, power and labor needed for doing every single or 2- color job in seven colors is not fully justified.'

A Universal 850 print unit will be displayed on the Rotatek/Vinsak stand at Labelexpo Europe 2025 in Barcelona. Scan the QR code for more information

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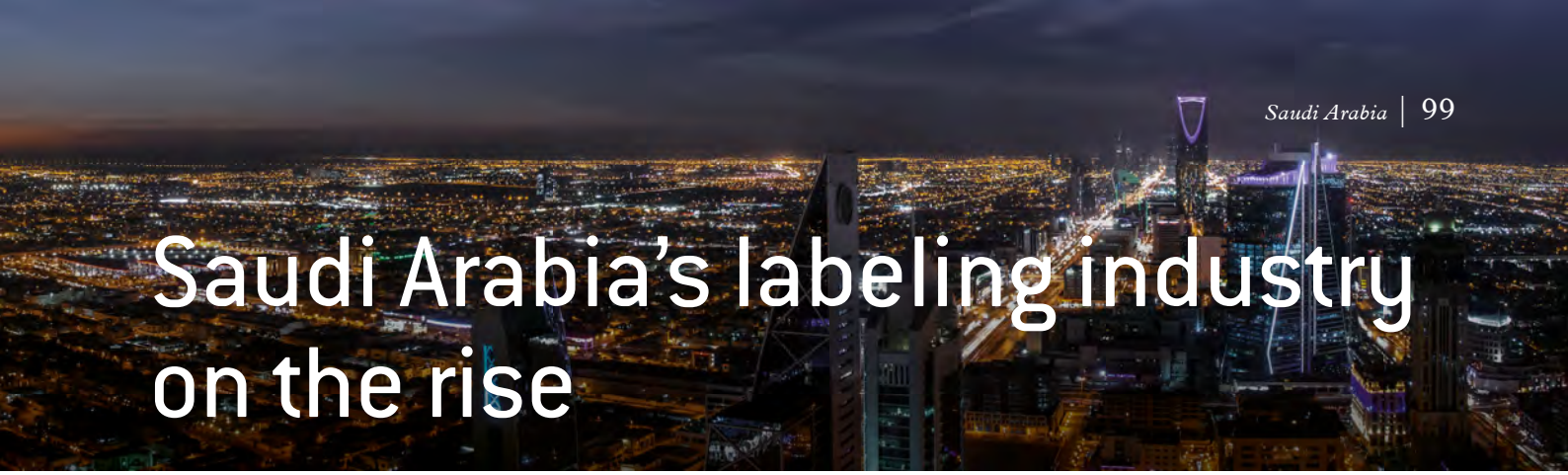
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Saudi Arabia's labeling industry on the rise

Saudi Arabia's labeling and packaging industry is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by technological innovation, evolving consumer expectations and the nation's Vision 2030 roadmap. Akanksha Meena reports

Saudi Arabia's packaging market size reached 11.2 billion USD in 2024, according to a report by IMARC Group. The market is expected to reach 16 billion USD by 2033, with a growth rate (CAGR) of 4.02 percent during the forecast period between 2025 and 2033.

The industry is seeing rising interest in labels and packaging, with an appetite for specialty applications and a growing interest in sustainability.

'Saudi Arabia, being one of the biggest nations in the Gulf, is booming with many labels and packaging requirements,' says Manu Muraleekrishnan, regional business manager for Middle East, West and East Africa at Nilpeter. He notes that the market is now mature enough to embrace technical advancements. 'We're seeing growing demand for specialty shrink sleeves, anti-counterfeiting security labels and lenticular labels,' he adds.

Khalid Aziz Shah, general manager at one of the leading converters in the region, Raqam International, echoes this observation. 'In self-adhesive labels, we're seeing more upgrades in cosmetics and detergents labels with screen and foiling effects,' he says. Additionally, in-mold labeling (IML) and shrink sleeves are gaining traction, while BOPP and wraparound labels remain strong, typically printed in standard three to six-color formats.

Vision 2030

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative and upcoming global events are expected to drive substantial growth. Vision 2030 is a government-led initiative to drive economic, social and cultural diversification in Saudi Arabia. It is focused on transforming the country by diversifying the economy, empowering citizens and attracting global investment.

'The country is preparing for World Expo 2030 and the FIFA World Cup 2034, which will attract millions of travelers,' says Muraleekrishnan. 'This will directly impact industries like automotive, healthcare, hospitality, food and beverage, which rely heavily on labeling and packaging. The 2030 vision looks very promising for the kingdom.'

Shah agrees that government support and large-scale development projects set the stage for growth. However, he adds: 'Since the labels industry is mostly in the private sector, it hasn't yet received as much direct attention or promotion as it should.'

While global markets push toward greener technologies, Saudi Arabia is in the early stages of its sustainability journey. The industry stakeholders, including leading label converters and end users, are discussing sustainability, and there is an interest in reducing waste and carbon footprint. However, Shah notes that it is a new concept in the region, and there are cost concerns.

Label trends

According to Shah, label materials such as semi-gloss, thermal, PP, PE and BOPP dominate the market, making up 80 to 90 percent of print jobs. 'Customers and designers are most familiar with these materials,' he says. 'But if they explore new and unique substrates, it could significantly upgrade branding and create new trends. As a converter, we're always excited about innovation.'

"The World Expo and FIFA World Cup will directly impact industries that rely heavily on labeling and packaging. The 2030 vision looks very promising for the kingdom"

New technologies are entering the market, though customer education remains a hurdle. 'More sophisticated combination printing machines are now available, capable of producing high-end labels. However, due to traditional market habits, it's sometimes hard to explain the long-term value of increased market share versus short-term cost per label,' says Shah.

Digital printing is gradually gaining ground in Saudi Arabia and is growing, especially with combination presses for short-run jobs in both roll and sheet formats. Still, ink costs remain a barrier to faster adoption.

Market challenges

Despite Saudi Arabia's business-friendly policies, challenges persist, particularly pricing. 'Unhealthy pricing is one of the biggest issues. There are only a few ways to solve this issue and one proven solution would be to form a local printers' association, like in Europe, and agree on price brackets for each product category. No printer should sell below or above that range. This is the need of the hour to have sustainable growth for everyone,' Muraleekrishnan explains.

The future

As the Saudi market evolves, there is optimism about new applications and technologies. Shah notes that holographic labels are growing globally and gaining appreciation. 'We've introduced hologram labels to the market, and we're hopeful they'll see stronger adoption among brands,' he says.

As Saudi Arabia advances towards Vision 2030, its labeling industry is exhibiting potential for growth. From embracing specialty applications and new materials to preparing for large-scale events, the region is poised for long-term development. However, tackling challenges such as pricing, sustainability and education will be key in supporting the industry's progress.

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Java Print aligns with Rotocon for future growth

In the fiercely competitive world of label printing, standing still is not an option. Java Print, a powerhouse in South Africa's label sector, has stepped forward with a new Chrome RFP 450 LED press. Anton Pretorius reports

Founded in 2006, Johannesburg-based Java Print has carved out a reputation as a leading supplier of self-adhesive labels, sleeves, lidding, wrap-arounds, tags and sachets in South Africa. With customers spanning the food, pharmaceutical, chemical and FMCG sectors, including retail giants Woolworths Foods in South Africa and Marks & Spencer in the UK, the company found itself nearing full capacity and urgently needing a technological upgrade.

Enter the Chrome RFP 450 LED from Rotocon.

'We were operating at the limits of our capacity, but we also saw a critical need to modernize our machinery,' says Mark Groves, Java Print's managing director. 'The Chrome press was the perfect solution. Its speed, precision and efficiency are unlike anything we've worked with before.'

Java Print aims to maintain its position at the cutting edge of the South African label printing industry, ensuring faster turnaround times, superior quality and an undeniable competitive edge.

Chrome of the crop

Java Print's move to invest in the Chrome RFP 450 LED was more than just a business decision; it was a calculated bet on the future of label production. Trusting his instincts, Groves made the purchase sight unseen.

'The decision took time, but I can say without hesitation that this press has exceeded every expectation,' he says.

The results speak for themselves. A recent project for Oasis Water's sparkling water range tested one of the biggest challenges in flexographic printing: achieving flawless reversed text in CMYK colors.

'The Oasis logo's teardrop was reversed out of multiple colors, and the registration was impeccable. At speeds of up to 150m/min, the Chrome press held perfect stability, with no visible movement,' says Groves.

The Chrome RFP 450 LED is engineered for peak performance. This 8-color press features full LED curing, a short web path for optimal material usage, and an advanced delam/relam unit on a movable rail, enhancing its versatility.



Patrick Aengenvoort, Rotocon director, and Mark Groves, Java Print managing director, with the Chrome RFP 450 LED press

"In a country grappling with energy challenges, the Chrome's efficiency is a game-changer"

A cold foiling station allows for premium embellishments, while a crossover unit enables the production of peel-and-read labels, expanding Java Print's capabilities into multilayer applications.

Dual servo drives on each print station ensure registration stability, while a Bosch Rexroth drive package synchronizes movements to eliminate material stretch or misalignment.

Adding another layer of precision, the Erhardt+Leimer inspection system provides real-time quality control, ensuring only flawless labels leave the production line.

Beyond its speed and precision, the Chrome press is a sustainability powerhouse.

Equipped with LED curing lamps that consume 70 percent less electricity than traditional mercury lamps, it dramatically reduces Java Print's energy footprint.

Unlike mercury-based systems, which require a 30-minute warm-up time, LED technology offers instant readiness, cutting waste, minimizing downtime and ensuring a seamless production flow. 'In a country grappling with energy challenges, Chrome's efficiency is a game-changer,' Groves notes.

Working with Rotocon

While cutting-edge technology is crucial, equally vital is the support behind it. Rotocon's service was a defining factor in its investment decision for Java Print.

'When you're buying a machine of this caliber, you need a supplier that stands behind their product,' says Groves. The team at Rotocon has been phenomenal. No matter the issue, big or small, it provides immediate support. That's what sets Rotocon apart.'

Java Print's collaboration with Rotocon extends beyond press technology. The company also sources its rotary and flexible dies and anilox rollers from Rotocon, ensuring consistency across its production line.

'We needed dies urgently, and Rotocon delivered within 24 hours. That kind of service is invaluable,' Groves adds.

Rotocon director Patrick Aengenvoort echoes the sentiment: 'We don't just install machines, we build long-term partnerships. From operator training to technical support, we ensure our customers maximize their investment. Seeing Java Print thrive with the Chrome RFP 450 LED is a testament to that commitment.'

With the Chrome RFP 450 LED now fully operational, Java Print is poised to set new benchmarks in print quality, efficiency and sustainability.

Anton Pretorius is also editor of Packaging & Print Media (PPM), a publication that covers the commercial print and packaging sectors. Scan the QR code to read more of his work

LABEL ACADEMY



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+ Efficient order processing and job management
+ A detailed appendix of industry suppliers

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Smart labels transform Africa's packaging landscape

Smart label technology is gaining ground in Africa, offering new opportunities for supply chain transparency, product authentication and consumer engagement, Anton Pretorius reports

In Africa's evolving packaging sector, smart labels are at the forefront of innovation, merging technology with logistics, security and consumer engagement.

Warren Pietersen, head of operations at Lebone Paarl Labels, based in Paarl, South Africa, underscores the growing adoption of RFID technology.

'RFID is gaining traction, but in some sectors, the cost and application of ID tags remain challenges,' he admits. While the technology offers immense benefits, the extra cost is usually a deterrent.'

Despite this, smart labels are proving invaluable for supply chain management. By embedding unique data on each label, brands can monitor shipments, minimize losses and ensure compliance. Pietersen notes that 'variable smart labels simplify the tracking process, reducing errors and supporting sustainability goals by cutting unnecessary waste.'

At Rotolabel, a label converter in Cape Town, South Africa, the emphasis is on tailored smart label technology. Managing executive Wicus Maritz highlights the practical benefits: 'Track-and-trace capabilities provide visibility throughout the supply chain, improving route efficiency and reducing wastage.'

He also points to the role of QR codes and NFC technology in enabling instant inventory checks, ensuring optimal stock levels, particularly in cold chain logistics.

He says the local demand for RFID is still emerging, which makes justifying the cost for small quantity orders challenging.

'As the demand grows, we anticipate a steady decrease in RFID unit prices, ultimately making this transformative technology more accessible to businesses across all sectors,' Maritz notes.

Battling counterfeits with intelligence

The rise of counterfeit goods is a persistent threat to Africa's manufacturing and retail industries. Smart labels are stepping up as digital watchdogs, with companies like German-based Vollherbst Labels integrating RFID, NFC and blockchain technologies to safeguard authenticity. Vollherbst, a global supplier of label materials, has made its mark in South Africa's label market by offering innovative technology in the label and packaging sector.

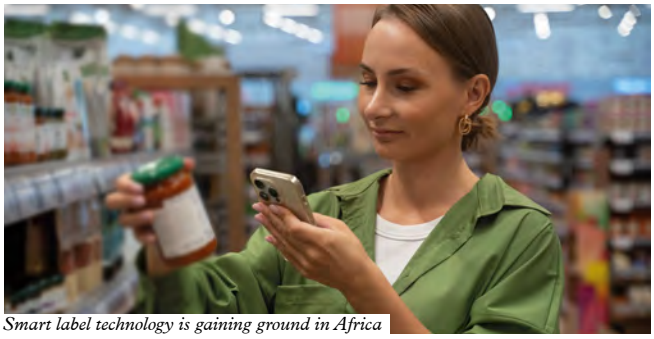
'Invisible codes or embedded chips enable real-time verification, alerting both brands and consumers to potential counterfeits, an essential feature in industries such as wine and spirits,' explains Oliver Jung, head of innovation and business development at Vollherbst. He notes that cryptographically serialized QR codes and RFID inlays allow brands to track products' journey, location and storage conditions, ensuring optimal handling.

One successful implementation has been the AR-enabled labels for South African wine and spirits brand KWV's Cathedral Cellar.

'Consumers gain instant access to product information, promotions and immersive brand stories simply by scanning a label,' Jung adds. Beyond brand engagement, smart labels offer integrated security measures, with blockchain creating immutable product histories that reinforce consumer trust.

Beyond authentication

As e-commerce reshapes Africa's retail landscape, smart labels are bridging the gap between physical products and digital experiences. By embedding QR codes, NFC tags and augmented reality (AR) elements, brands can provide interactive content, product stories and loyalty programs, fostering stronger consumer connections.



Smart label technology is gaining ground in Africa

> **"As the demand grows, we anticipate a steady decrease in RFID unit prices"**

'Smart labels are redefining how consumers interact with products. They're more than just a tag — they provide a personalized experience that makes consumers feel connected to the brand story,' says Derek Dlugosh-Ostap, owner of Pack-Smart Inc, based in the US. His company's Delta-X Global software suite enhances traceability and transparency, enabling brands to monitor products from production to delivery.

Moreover, smart labels ensure that only authentic goods reach consumers. 'Consumers want confidence that what they're buying is legitimate. Smart labels offer this verification, which is especially crucial for high-value items like electronics, pharmaceuticals and luxury goods,' Dlugosh-Ostap explains.

Proactive monitoring

Smart labels aren't just about engagement, they're transforming food and pharmaceutical safety. Embedded sensors now monitor temperature, humidity and expiration dates, ensuring perishable goods remain within safe parameters throughout the supply chain.

'For us, smart labels are about being proactive,' says Dlugosh-Ostap. 'Whether it's monitoring product shelf life or alerting customers about shipping delays, these labels enable us to stay ahead of the game.'

Industries reliant on strict storage conditions, such as healthcare and agriculture, particularly benefit from these innovations. Using time-temperature indicators and GPS-enabled tracking, brands can preemptively address logistical disruptions, preserving product integrity and consumer safety.

Anton Pretorius is also editor of Packaging & Print Media (PPM), a publication that covers the commercial print and packaging sectors. Scan the QR code to read more of his work

Japanese market sees growth despite global headwinds

Each year, The Label Shimbun analyzes a broad range of proprietary data for its annual survey of the Japanese label market. Yukiko Suzuki summarizes the latest findings

In 2024, the Japanese label industry shipped labels to the value of 4.3 billion USD (629.2 billion JPY), up 2.4 percent from the previous year, marking the highest level of growth in the last five years. Food retained the largest share by end-use segment, accounting for 31 percent, or approximately 1.3 billion USD (195.5 billion JPY).

Despite the ongoing stagnation of consumer spending caused by price increases across all sectors including food, the market grew thanks to successful price adjustments implemented by label converters. Shipment volume remained flat year-on-year.

Labels accounted for 12.9 percent of the overall printing market in 2024, a 0.2 percentage point increase from the previous year. Non-adhesive labels, like shrink sleeves and in-mold, saw no significant change in market share, while growth in pressure-sensitive labels helped support the overall growth of the industry sector.

In the wider packaging market, flexible packaging expanded its share significantly, representing 19.4 percent of the printing market, while corrugated board and paperboard accounted for 15.6 percent and 9.9 percent respectively. These gains, however, were primarily driven by price hikes rather than volume growth, as underlying demand showed only a slight improvement.

The label shipment volume for 2024 was flat at 2.49 billion sqm, remaining nearly unchanged from the previous year.

Volume growth slows

While the value of label shipments increased due to price hikes, label volume rose only slightly by 1 million sqm year-over-year. As material costs remain high and consumer spending slows, label converters face ongoing challenges in growing volumes. The market is expected to remain flat in volume terms, requiring a shift from volume-based growth to profit-oriented strategies.

In the food sector, pressure-sensitive labels dominate, while the beverage and alcohol segments rely more on non-adhesive formats. Due to their multi-layer structure and integrated post-press processing, the inherently higher unit cost of pressure-sensitive labels results in higher shipment value.

Future growth for converters will depend on how they add value to pressure-sensitive labels through enhanced functionality and services.

Label types

While price hikes for pressure-sensitive materials had mostly stabilized by 2023, film-based substrates for non-adhesive labels saw multiple rounds of price increases in 2024. As a result, average selling prices for non-adhesive labels rose significantly.

At the same time, the impact of rising raw material costs that began in 2021 continued to affect pressure-sensitive labels, leading converters to persist in price negotiations with customers. These efforts contributed to an overall upward trend in label pricing.

In terms of label type, pressure-sensitive formats accounted for 80 percent of total shipment value in 2024, while non-adhesive labels represented the remaining 20 percent. Shrink labels, the most common non-adhesive format, are predominantly used in the beverage and alcohol segment.



Labels on display at the Japanese Label Forum in 2024

"The market is expected to remain flat in volume terms, requiring a shift from volume-based growth to profit-oriented strategies"

Food labeling

In the food labeling segment, Osaka Sealing Printing holds the dominant position with a 33 percent market share. As a major domestic player, the company not only manufactures pressure-sensitive materials in-house but also provides label printing services. In recent years, it has expanded into film-based applications such as shrink labels and flexible packaging. The company offers a complete one-stop labeling solution, including applicator systems.

In February 2025, Osaka Sealing launched 'Yudemo,' a heat-resistant thermal label designed to improve processing efficiency for brand owners. The label targets applications where durability in high-temperature environments is essential.

Fujiseal supplies its core product, shrink labels, to various food applications, including plastic condiment containers. The company continues to grow its lineup of full-wrap shrink sleeves that extend over the cap, contributing to enhanced food safety.

Nozaki Insatsu Shigyo produces point-of-purchase and product labels and is also engaged in bag-making for food applications using water-based flexographic printing.

Toppan Infomedia launched an eco-friendly linerless labeling system in July 2024. The company targets brand owners in segments like energy drinks and condiments, where glue-applied labels have traditionally been used, offering alternatives that help improve production efficiency.



Durst and Grafotronic at the Japanese Label Forum in 2024

"Future growth for converters will depend on how they add value to pressure-sensitive labels through enhanced functionality and services"

However, adoption is also expanding in food, personal and home care, cosmetics and pharmaceutical and medical sectors, often replacing other label formats.

Trends among converters

Japan is home to approximately 2,800 label printing companies, many of which are small to medium-sized, family-owned businesses. These firms are vital in supplying label products essential for both commercial and consumer applications.

In 2023, Japan's economy showed signs of recovery as society emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic, achieving record GDP growth.

However, the country also experienced its highest inflation in 41 years, leading to significant macroeconomic shifts. Despite the strong GDP numbers, actual economic sentiment remained weak.

For pressure-sensitive labels, material price increases continued into 2023, following earlier hikes in 2022. That year also saw electricity and fuel costs rise, further pushing up variable manufacturing costs. In response, label converters negotiated with customers to adjust label pricing to sustainable levels.

In terms of annual revenue distribution, companies with less than 685,000 USD (100 million JPY) in annual sales saw widespread growth, with many surpassing the threshold and joining the next revenue tier.

As a result, this segment's share fell by 3.5 points to 44.3 percent.

All other revenue categories recorded year-on-year increases, indicating a gradual shift toward higher-revenue structures within the industry.

The Label Shimbum, a specialized industry newspaper focused on the Japanese label sector, recently published the 19th edition of its annual data book, 'Japan's Label Market 2025.' First launched in 2007, this publication has become a widely referenced resource both in Japan and internationally among label and packaging professionals

News in Brief

Mimaki Engineering launches UV printer

Mimaki Engineering has launched its first UV-curable direct-to-film (UV-DTF) printer, the UJV300DTF-75, with a target release date in June.

UV-DTF printing is gaining attention in the global label and sticker market as a new form of digital printing. While its adoption in the Japanese market has been slow, the company anticipates worldwide sales of 400 units within the first three years following the product's release and expects significant future market growth.

The UJV300DTF-75 prints designs onto the adhesive side of transparent film. An application film is applied on top to create a transfer sheet. After attaching the transfer sheet to the object to be decorated, peeling off the application film leaves only the transferred design.

This new technology enables high-quality decoration that looks as if it has been directly printed onto the object. Mimaki says this is suitable for intricate designs.

The printer is compatible with various materials, including glass, plastic, metal and wood. Since it uses adhesive film it adheres well to curved and uneven surfaces. Thanks to the nature of UV printing, the printed layer has tactile thickness, creating a highly appealing three-dimensional finish.

Example applications include custom decoration of tumblers, water bottles, smartphone cases, PCs, helmets, and personalized gift items. By combining hard and soft UV inks, the system achieves both design durability and flexibility, ensuring high resilience.

Among the proprietary new technologies, this printer incorporates a silicone pinch roller and next-generation UV inks. The newly developed roller ensures stable media transport while minimizing adhesive peeling. The new UV inks are free from substances that are expected to be restricted under the EU's SVHC regulations, making them a safer option. The inks are also expected to acquire the Greenguard Gold international safety certification for indoor air quality.

Toppan acquires ISCC Plus certification

Toppan has acquired ISCC Plus certification, an international certification scheme for the sustainability of biomass and recycled raw materials, at its Fukaya, Gunma and Fukusaki plants in Japan as it aims to increase the use of recycled plastic in flexible packaging manufacturing.

Going forward, Toppan plans to provide packaging made from recycled plastic, based on ISCC Plus certification, in markets in Japan and overseas.

International Sustainability & Carbon Certification (ISCC) is an international sustainability certification system. ISCC Plus is an ISCC scheme that certifies the sustainability of products and processes that predominantly use biomass and recycled raw materials outside the EU. It aims to demonstrate that businesses are meeting sustainability standards and ensuring transparency and integrity across supply chains.

Acquiring ISCC Plus certification means Toppan can employ the mass balance approach to provide eco-friendly packaging that utilizes third-party-certified recycled plastic.

Toppan is advancing its strategy of becoming a leading provider of solutions to solve social issues worldwide through Sustainable Transformation (SX) and Digital Transformation (DX), and makes proposals aligned to customers' value chains based on Smart, the Toppan Group's packaging-focused sustainability brand, to drive business that targets a sustainable society.

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Upcycling the future

As industries grapple with the growing challenge of packaging waste, Materials In Works is pioneering an innovative approach by transforming hard-to-recycle label and packaging materials into valuable resources. Piotr Wnuk reports



John Ooi, founder and technical director of Materials In Works

In an industry criticized for contributing to environmental waste, Materials In Works, a Malaysia-based company, is tackling one of the biggest sustainability challenges head-on. John Ooi, founder and technical director, is leading a movement toward a circular economy by upcycling hard-to-recycle label and packaging waste into valuable materials.

John Ooi's passion for sustainability and technical innovation stems from nearly a decade of experience in the industry. Observing the increasing impact of industrial waste, he recognized a critical need for scalable, eco-friendly alternatives to landfill disposal.

'I've always believed that with the right innovations, we can turn waste into a resource,' Ooi explains. 'This belief drives my team's dedication to developing technologies that reduce environmental harm and offer value to businesses.'

From concept to reality

Materials In Works was born out of a pressing issue in the label packaging sector: liner waste. Traditionally sent to landfills due to its specialized coatings, liner waste contributes significantly to carbon emissions and environmental degradation. Ooi saw an opportunity to change this narrative.

'Our main product is upcycled paper liner waste, processed from laminates and matrix waste,' he says. 'Through partnerships, we've developed a specialized process that converts these materials into resources for the cement industry, helping to reduce landfill dependency.'

The company began with small-scale trials in collaboration with universities, leading to a proof of concept that attracted multinational support and government funding.

> "I've always believed that with the right innovations, we can turn waste into a resource"

A key driver of Materials In Works' success has been its collaboration with University Science Malaysia (USM), a leader in paper and pulp research.

'We've worked closely with Dr Leh [Cheu Peng] and her team to conduct extensive material testing and benchmarking studies,' Ooi shares. 'One of our biggest breakthroughs came from comparing our Recovered Cellulose Pulp [RCP] with virgin pulp supplied by a leading tissue manufacturer. This validation helped us ensure our material met industry standards.'

Addressing Malaysia's growing waste problem

With landfill space in Malaysia rapidly diminishing, Ooi warns of the urgent need for sustainable waste management options.

'The scale of the problem is staggering. Just paper liner waste alone could fill Malaysia's iconic Petronas Twin Towers in just 45 days,' he reveals. 'Beyond liner waste, laminate and matrix waste also contribute tons of material to landfills every year. We see these as valuable resources that can be repurposed.'

Materials In Works offers two primary upcycled products that directly address label and packaging waste.

The first is Recovered Cellulose Pulp (RCP): By removing the silicone coating from paper liner waste, the company transforms it into high-quality pulp suitable for the tissue industry. Looking ahead, zit aims to develop molded pulp products as a sustainable alternative to single-use plastics.

The second product is Process Engineered Fuel (PEF): Laminate and matrix waste, often containing adhesives and printed artwork, presents recycling challenges. Through a specialized process, this waste is converted into PEF, an alternative to coal used in cement production.

'This end-to-end upcycling model is the first-of-its-kind in Malaysia,' says Ooi. 'And we're confident it can be scaled globally.'

Building strategic partnerships

Materials In Works has already secured major partnerships with industry leaders. These include Uniqlo Malaysia, which produces significant label waste from RFID tags, price tags and shipping labels. Wipro Unza is another brand owner in Malaysia's personal care and home products sector, generating high volumes of sticker waste. Both work with Materials In Works to lower their carbon emissions and responsibly upcycle labeling waste.

Well-established material suppliers such as Avery Dennison and UPM Raflatac are both engaged in discussions to formalize waste management initiatives in Malaysia in partnership with Materials In Works.

Label converters are also using the company. Mega Labels and Fastroll Labels are local converters that have helped divert at least 18 tons of label waste from landfills in just one year.

Materials In Works has filed patents for its proprietary processes and is eying growth into Vietnam and Indonesia, where landfill waste remains a significant issue.

'Our goal is to work with global brands and governments to create a true circular economy,' Ooi states. 'We have the technology to make a real impact.'

Overcoming industry challenges

Ooi acknowledges that shifting industry norms presents challenges, particularly for label converters used to traditional waste disposal.

'For example, Mega Labels initially had concerns about logistics and waste handling,' he says. 'We proposed an innovative solution utilizing their trucks, which were returning empty after deliveries, to transport waste back for upcycling. It turned out to be a win-win, aligning with ESG goals while remaining cost-efficient.'

Materials In Works proves that packaging waste doesn't have to end up in landfills; it can be transformed into valuable resources. With innovative technology, strong partnerships and a clear vision for the future, Ooi and his team are paving the way for a more sustainable packaging industry, one upcycled product at a time.

Scan the QR code to learn more about Materials In Works

Skyline Printing pushes digital transformation

A hugely ambitious five-month digital transformation program has allowed Skyline Printing to fully automate its labels workflow, from receiving artwork through printing to converting and shipping. Yolanda Wang reports

In 2024, Skyline Printing undertook a hugely ambitious digital transformation project that was completed in just five months. This project established a fully automated process chain for its label production, giving the company a new competitive edge and driving growth in the package printing market.

Skyline Printing was established in Ningbo, Zhejiang Province, in 2006, and has since been focused on producing packaging and decorative printed materials. Its business covers decorated boxes, paper cards, shopping bags, festival cards, self-adhesive labels and various exquisite gift boxes. The company currently has 106 employees and a workshop area of 7,500sqm. In 2024, turnover was close to 100 million RMB (17m USD), with the label business accounting for 25 percent of total output, with a strong development momentum.

History

Ren Weifang, the founder and general manager of Skyline Printing, has a rich and rather extraordinary educational and professional background.

In 1984, he was admitted to Zhejiang University, a famous university in China, to study radio engineering. When talking about his choice of major, Weifang recalls, 'At that time, neither I nor my parents had a clear understanding of different majors. My father was a film projectionist then and knew something about diodes, so he suggested that I choose the radio major.'

After graduating, Weifang was admitted to Fudan University to pursue an MBA. During his studies, he discovered a strong interest in macroeconomics and corporate management, firmly believing that a market-oriented economy was the inevitable path for China's economic development.

Not long after, he switched to working in a private enterprise, overseeing administrative, human resources and information. He quickly progressed to become the general manager of a branch of the company. During this period, he first became aware of opportunities in the printing industry.

Applying his commercial and educational experience to understanding the development trajectory of China's printing industry, Weifang quit his stable job in 2006 and founded Skyline Printing.

In its early days, Skyline mainly focused on producing decorated boxes. To ensure product quality and production efficiency, the company invested in equipment from global brands such as KBA and Roland sheet-fed offset presses, which quickly made the company stand out in the market.

Around 2016, Weifang set his sights on the label business. He explains, 'Through frequent contacts with customers, we quickly realized that although the size of the label printing industry is much smaller than that of all packaging products, it has great development potential and a good profit margin. Moreover, the purchase cost of production equipment for label products is much lower than that for packaging production. More importantly, our existing packaging customers also strongly demanded label products.'

Skyline Printing then invested in two Zonten intermittent offset printing presses, an HP Indigo 6K digital press, and several Reborn digital die-cutting machines and created a separate label division.

Digital empowerment

'During our initial entrepreneur phase, we were fortunate enough to ride the wave of the rapid development and high profit margins in China's printing industry,' Weifang recalls. 'The company experienced explosive growth. However, a few years later, the overall economic growth rate in China slowed down, and the printing industry entered a new stage where sluggish growth was the "new normal".'

Printing is an asset-heavy industry, and market competition has become increasingly fierce with the economic downturn. Coupled with the continuous increase in labor and materials costs, many companies' profit margins have shrunk significantly.

Adds Weifang, 'With the continuous improvement in automation and the intelligence level of equipment, competition among enterprises is becoming more and more severe. The key to breaking through this dilemma lies in strengthening internal production and process management, improving production efficiency, and reducing production costs, to build the company's core competitiveness.'

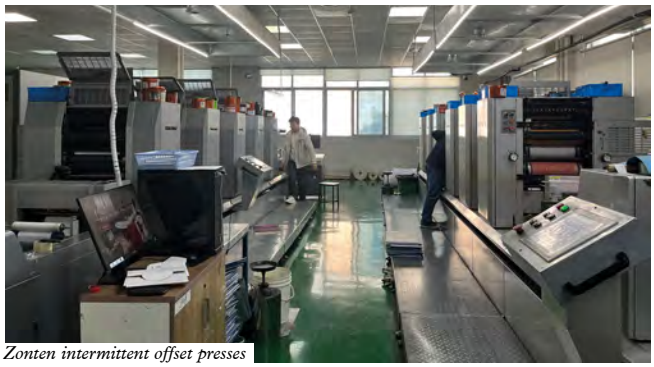
Digitalization is the top choice for achieving this goal. 'During my previous job, I directly experienced the benefits of digitization and information management. That's why I have always spared no effort to invest in the digitalization of Skyline Printing.'

As early as the second year after the company's establishment, Skyline Printing made an investment in an advanced MES

"During printing, the equipment reads the order number, receives production commands, adjusts parameters, and starts printing. The same in the finishing process, where die-cutting machines cut precisely based on online data"



HP Indigo 6K with Reborn in-line digital die-cutter



Zonten intermittent offset presses

(Manufacturing Execution System) and implemented a lean management system, laying a solid foundation for the company in the era of fierce competition.

The pandemic accelerated the digital transformation of the printing industry in China. In 2023, Skyline Printing invested in building a '5G +' digital printing factory, where industrial sensors and 5G data gateways work together to collect real-time energy consumption data during the production process accurately.

Skyline Printing continued to push ahead with its digital transformation through 2024.

Weifang explains, 'Digital printing orders are short-run and need quick turnarounds. Time and efficiency matter a great deal. We've been pondering how to boost production efficiency further. Can we come up with a solution that streamlines the whole process, from ordering, scheduling, printing, to finishing, ensuring seamless digital information flow? This will eliminate the time-consuming and information errors caused by manual transfer between processes.'

But putting ideas into practice is always much harder than coming up with them, as Weifang soon found.

'Take choosing an ERP system provider as an example. It must link up with all our pre-press, printing and post-press processes. But the truth is that each equipment supplier has different interfaces, and data formats are not uniform. This makes integrating processes tough.'

Fortunately, Skyline Printing's digital transformation plan received full-throated support from its suppliers.

'Take Esko and HP, two international leading suppliers in this industry. Their tech engineers and service staff made multiple trips to Skyline Printing's factory for an on-site investigation. These two companies not only shared successful digital transformation case studies, but also actively teamed up with our local suppliers, Tuxian (ERP supplier), and Reborn (digital die-cutting supplier),' shares Weifang.

Starting in June 2024, the technical team at Skyline Printing collaborated closely with their suppliers. They repeatedly tested and optimized technology, solving data-connection issues one by one. Within five months, they had successfully achieved full process automation over the production of label products and significantly contributed to the company's overall digital transformation.

In the new system, as soon as a customer places an order, key details like quantity, materials, colors, processes and delivery details go straight into the ERP system, automatically generating a unique order number. This number is like a 'production ID'. Staff use it to quickly prepare materials and plan production, getting things rolling smoothly.

After layout in the Esko system, design files transfer seamlessly online to the different printing processes without manual operation.

During printing, the equipment 'reads' the order number, receives production commands, adjusts parameters and starts printing. The same is true in the finishing process, where die-cutting machines cut precisely based on online data.

"Within five months, they had successfully achieved full process automation over the production of label products and made a significant contribution to the company's overall digital transformation"

'The first order completed by this system really made us feel the power of digitalization and gave us a great sense of accomplishment,' Weifang says proudly. 'This achievement has not only significantly improved our production efficiency but also enhanced the stability of product quality. Errors and costs caused by manual intervention have been greatly reduced.'

He also reveals that the company's production efficiency has increased by at least 30 percent using the new system, with even greater potential for the future.

Personnel management

Weifang has always regarded talent as the core of any company's success and has established a comprehensive system for talent cultivation and promotion. New employees are provided with a systematic training program covering professional skills and ethics to help them quickly adapt to the working environment. In daily work, they take part in a mentorship system, where experienced seniors provide one-on-one guidance to help new employees steer clear of avoidable mistakes.

Meanwhile, the company has a clear and transparent promotion pathway, depending on job performance and professional abilities. This fully stimulates employees' work enthusiasm and creativity, allowing every employee to find their own path for growth within the company.

In addition to cultivating talent, Skyline Printing also emphasizes retaining talent. The company offers a highly competitive salary system, ensuring that employees are duly rewarded for their efforts.

Skyline Printing has set up multiple WeChat groups where the production progress of each department can be announced in real time. During the production process, responsibility for each link in the chain is clearly assigned to specific individuals, and the completion of job tasks is reported promptly.

All this detailed data serves as an important base for performance evaluation and a bonus at the end of the month. This has created a positive working atmosphere in the whole company.

Moreover, Weifang highly values employees' emotional well-being. He actively encourages a work-life balance, striving to create a harmonious and healthy workplace where employees can fully tap their potential.

Thanks to its comprehensive management and assessment system, Skyline Printing has a 'hands–off' management structure. This approach motivates employees and allows Weifang more time to follow his other passions. He climbs mountains twice a week and regularly takes on challenging journeys, such as to the South Pole, the North Pole, Europe and America. He uses these rich experiences to fuel his management understanding.

The next Labelexpo show in China is Labelexpo Asia 2025 in Shanghai this December. Scan the QR code to learn more

New media and labels drive growth at Kaidun Printing

Kaidun Printing is using short video channels to reach new customers and grow its business as it invests in automated flexo technology. Yolanda Wang reports

During the 28 years he has been in the print and consumables industry, Jiang Herun has shown an unremitting spirit of exploration and adaptation to fast-changing market conditions in China.

His journey has taken the company he founded in 1998, Kaidun Printing, from a consumables printer to printing logistics labels and bills, and finally to a full-scale converter of self-adhesive labels.

Early days

Jiang Herun has had a fascinating career trajectory. In his early years, he worked in a state-owned enterprise in the grain and oil sector. Later, he joined a joint-venture food company in Hong Kong.

During his time with the food processing company, one of Herun's responsibilities was specifying printers, copiers and fax machines. With a keen business acumen, he sensed enormous potential in the printing consumables market.

After leaving the food company, Herun established his own operation to sell consumable products for office printers and fax machines.

Kaidun Printing is headquartered in Shanghai, and its production facility is in Danyang, Jiangsu Province, 250km from Shanghai.

Between 2015 and 2016, Kaidun Printing supplied printer consumables like thermal paper rolls, laser printer toner cartridges and ribbons to the supply chain of well-known supermarkets such as Auchan and Carrefour (China).

In 2017, the company expanded its business, becoming a designated supplier to Sima Form, M&G and Sichuan Haidilao.

Challenges ahead

During these early stages of the company's history, it could not be regarded as a printing company. The printing business developed gradually with changes in the market and customer needs, leading to the printing and converting of logistics labels and paper bills.

To meet these growing business needs, Kaidun Printing invested in a range of equipment, including letterpress, stack flexo presses, intermittent offset presses and die-cutting machines.

By this time, China's e-commerce business was booming, and the express delivery industry rapidly developed a huge demand for logistics labels. Kaidun Printing seized this opportunity, and the company began a period of further rapid growth.

However, as more enterprises entered the market, competition in the logistics label business became increasingly fierce, relentlessly driving down the prices and the associated profit margins.

Faced with such severe market challenges, Kaidun Printing urgently needed to explore new business areas to find more profitable development opportunities. This was especially true after the Covid-19 pandemic, when Herun realized exposure to a single product makes an enterprise extremely vulnerable to risks. Long-term growth required a diversified business.

Kaidun Printing, therefore, expanded the label printing side of its business. It purchased a Zonten intermittent offset press and a Pulisi Aobead digital press to provide a solid hardware base to explore new business opportunities.

Today, prime label printing accounts for 30 percent of the company's total business volume. Together with the cash-register paper and bill businesses, this now constitutes the company's third major business pillar.

Although Kaidun suffered short-term losses during the Covid-19 pandemic, the company achieved slight business growth in 2024 thanks to these new business strategies and the hard work of its employees. By the end of the year, the company's annual output value exceeded 100m RMB (13.7m USD), demonstrating strong resilience and development potential.

Kaidun Printing has always prioritized quality. In 2015, the company obtained ISO:9001-2008 quality management certification and ISO14001 environmental management certification.

In-line flexo

Today, China's label printing industry has

"From 2022 to 2024, the number of new customers through the short video channel has tripled, reaching as many as 1,200"



Jiang Herun, the founder and chairman of Kaidun Printing with Hongsheng SFLEX 450B press



Pulisi Aobead digital press at Kaidun



Zonten offset presses at Kaidun

"Enterprises must always maintain a keen insight into market trends, adapt to changes in market demand, and promptly and flexibly adjust their business strategies"

entered a slower growth stage, reflecting the broader slowdown in China's overall post-pandemic economic recovery. This has led to a new period of ferocious competition. Label converters like Kaidun Printing have survived by improving efficiency and reducing costs. Automation of equipment is a crucial step in this regard.

In January 2025, the company installed its first in-line flexo press, a Hongsheng SFLEX 450B.

Explains Herun: 'Currently, long-run orders don't account for a high proportion of our business, but fulfilling these orders is a big problem for our existing equipment because of the slow speed and low efficiency, which not only delays delivery but also makes it difficult to deliver other small and medium-run orders on time. To solve this dilemma, we decided to introduce new and more automated equipment.'

He reveals that the new press was successfully installed and debugged before the Chinese Lunar New Year, a major national holiday, to help the company handle some urgent orders, effectively alleviating production pressure.

Talking about why he chose the Hongsheng machine, Herun says: 'Hongsheng has been one of our most important suppliers since our establishment. Our first logistics label press was a Hongsheng stack-type flexo press. During that long-term cooperation, we established a solid foundation of trust. The Hongsheng technical support team demonstrated high professionalism, with timely responses and proper handling of any issues. This is an important reason we chose to cooperate with Hongsheng again and introduce the SFLEX 450B press.'

The new press brings many positive benefits to the company, says Herun. 'It significantly shortens the production cycle for larger orders with its high-speed operation, and its advanced color management technology achieves more accurate color matching. This enables our company to meet the strict quality requirements of new high-end label products.

'In addition, the new equipment performs well in energy consumption and emissions reduction,' he continues. 'Its compact design generates less waste during makeready, which meets our sustainability goals.'

New media channel

Herun is confident about the future of China's label printing market. Currently, per capita PS label consumption in China is less than 5 sqm, while in developed countries it reaches 15 to 20sqm per capita. Therefore, I believe that the label printing industry in China has great potential.'

Kaidun Printing's label converting business now covers the entire country, making finding new business in the traditional face-to-face way difficult. Anticipating this, Herun proactively joined well-known domestic e-commerce platforms such as Tmall, Taobao, JD.com and Alibaba, vigorously expanding the company's online business as early as 2015.

This forward-looking move enabled Kaidun Printing to gain the upper hand in the surging wave of e-commerce development.

The expansion of its online business broke through traditional geographical limitations and brought many new orders to the company.

Kaidun Printing has achieved remarkable results in expanding into overseas markets. In 2010, the company established an office in Australia; in 2014, it reached a strategic cooperation with CAS, a South Korean enterprise.

Currently, the company's overseas business accounts for 30 percent of turnover.

After years of development, Kaidun Printing has successfully established a comprehensive sales network in domestic and international markets, covering offline and online channels.

In 2022, traditional e-commerce channels in China began experiencing sluggish growth. Herun came upon a channel showcasing short video promotions and quickly sensed the vast business opportunities they presented.

Continuing to explore new trends, Herun went to Shenzhen to participate in professional new media training and quickly started recording short videos.

Surprisingly, in less than a week, customers began inquiring through this video channel. Herun was convinced that this was a development path worthy of in-depth cultivation.

Kaidun Printing then established a video team, successfully creating a professional media customer acquisition matrix.

Herun shares: 'From 2022 to 2024, the number of new customers through the short video channel has tripled, reaching as many as 1,200. This has generated 21 million RMB (2.88m USD) of business, accounting for 12.5 percent of our total business in 2024.'

Continues Herun: 'Short videos are a highly promising new customer acquisition channel, providing a new path for enterprises to expand their markets and reach customers. As a manufacturing enterprise, there is nothing wrong with actively embracing this new media to enhance brand awareness and attract more potential customers.'

'At the same time, converters need to keep investing in new technology and increasing overall production efficiency, while looking for potential opportunities to diversify into more profitable market sectors,' says Herun.

'Enterprises must always maintain a keen insight into market trends, adapt to changes in market demand, and promptly and flexibly adjust their business strategies, especially in today's rapidly changing business environment.'

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Label trends: PPWR

Key PPWR goals

- Restrict unnecessary packaging
- Promote reusable and refillable packaging
- Make all packaging recyclable
- Increase use of recycled plastics in packaging
- Harmonize labeling of packaging to support recycling

PPWR timeline

2024 • PPWR enters into force

2026 – 2027

- Methodology for the calculation and verification of the percentage of **recycled content** recovered from post-consumer plastic waste will be established
- Food contact packaging with **PFAs** above a certain limit will not be placed on the market
- Harmonized standards for calculation and measurement of compliance to **minimize packaging**
- **EPR** fees may apply
- Minimum number of rotations for **resuable packaging** will be established

2028

- **Harmonized labels** will enter into force
- Implementing acts on **design for recycling** and recycling performance grades
- **Compostable packaging** requirements will enter into force. Labels on fruits and vegetables need to be compostable. **Bio-degradable packaging** needs to be designed for recycling
- May introduce legislation and limits for use of **bio-based feedstock** in plastic packaging

2030

- Packaging will be **designed for recycling** and will be divided into grades based on recyclability:
  Grade A – at least 95 percent recyclable
  Grade B – 80 percent recyclable
  Grade C – less than 70 percent will be considered non-recyclable
- Targets for **minimum recycled content** in packaging will be introduced
- Limit on **minimum necessary packaging** will apply
- Implementing acts to ensure packaging is **recycled at scale**

2035

- Packaging **recyclability limits** might be revised
- **Recycling at scale** criteria applies

2038 • Only recyclable packaging **Grade A and B** to be allowed on the market

2040 • **Minimum recycled** content in packaging limits will increase

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