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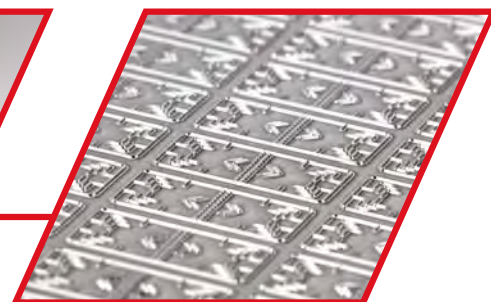
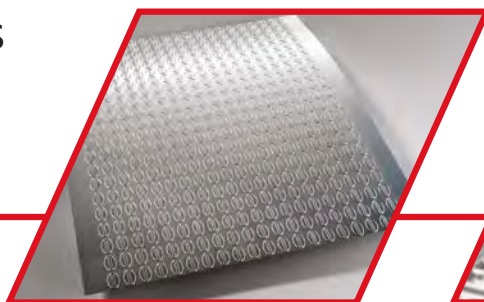


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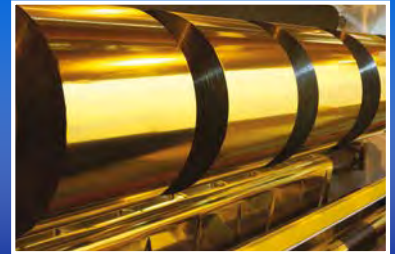
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China: Informa Markets
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E: subs@labelsandlabeling.com
ISSN: 1478-7520

Printed by

CDT Associates Ltd, Sandhurst, United Kingdom



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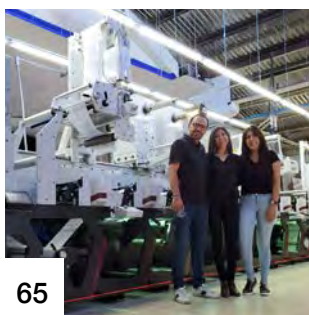
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Mapping the road ahead

Editor's note

One of my favorite traditions at the magazine is our annual predictions piece, in which we ask thought leaders from around the globe what they expect 2026 to bring. It provides a glimpse into the forces shaping our industry and a roadmap for the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Turn to page 88 to see a selection of entries from a wide range of industry thought leaders.

If the past few years have taught us anything, it's that the label and packaging industry doesn't stand still for long. As we look toward 2026, the mood across the label supply chain feels measured, but as always, moving forward. Both converters and suppliers are planning with precision, investing selectively, and this year in particular, navigating uncertainty.

"Converters and suppliers are planning with precision, investing selectively, and this year in particular, navigating uncertainty"

Automation remains at the center of nearly every conversation. Many regions around the world are faced with persistent labor shortages and margin pressures, so converters are stepping up investments in smarter workflows, automation platforms and even robotics. The goal here is not simply to move faster and smarter, but also to be more predictable and data-driven. That's today's competitive edge.

Closely intertwined, and often mentioned in the same sentence, is the expanding role of AI. In 2026, it's my hope that AI moves past just a buzzword or a party trick and into more practical deployment. While we have a long way to go, we're getting there quickly. There are companies at the forefront. Be sure to read Andy Thomas-Emans' column on page 15 for an innovation launched at Labelexpo Asia from Brotech, which developed AI models to control flexo presses. Today's equipment manufacturers are not just looking at 'feeds and speeds' but asking themselves, 'what would this machine look like without a human operator?' That is where the real AI innovation will come.

Sustainability, meanwhile, is no longer optional. It's essential. Brands and consumers are pushing harder on recyclability and environmental transparency, while governments, particularly in Europe, are adding another layer of complexity with shifting regulation requirements. The result is a double-edged sword: on one side, these regulations are driving progress, but it's not without strain.

And we certainly can't forget one of the hottest topics from 2025, which is looking likely to spill into the year ahead: tariffs. Shifting trade policies in the US likely will have a major impact in the year ahead as companies reshape sourcing strategies, diversify their supplier networks and re-evaluate material costs as operational safeguards.

In 2026, success belongs to those who view automation as empowerment, AI as the tool to get there, sustainability as an opportunity, and regulation as a catalyst for change.

Chelsea McDougall

Chelsea McDougall, Managing editor



Installations



Mark Andy Performance Series

Impact Labelling Systems, Ireland

Impact Labelling Systems has added two presses from Mark Andy: a P3 and a P5 Performance Series. The converter has a significant history with Mark Andy, having operated with its 820 and 830 models before moving to twin 2200 units. Now, the P3 provides speed and quality, with intuitive operation. The P5, with its servo-driven platform, delivers quality print with fast changeovers and reduced waste. 'For us, and I know many others, the Performance Series sets the benchmark for narrow-web flexo production,' managing director Evan Fox said. 'They are tough, reliable and deliver premium quality with the minimum of fuss. Mark Andy has been the foundation of our business, and the P3 and P5 are our bread and butter.'

Nilpeter FA-17

Wan Long Printing, Taiwan

Wan Long Printing has become the first company in Taiwan to purchase a 10-color Nilpeter FA-17 press. Founded in October 1991 in Nantou, Central Taiwan, Wan Long Printing is now managed by three members of its second generation. The converter is equipped with digital, flexographic, screen and rotary letterpress technologies, as well as printing and finishing capabilities, including cold and hot-stamping, embossing, die-cutting and a wide array of post-printing processes. Wan Long is also investing heavily in research and development. For Nilpeter, this installation is a strategic step in expanding its presence in the region. Through a new local partnership with Chimeng, Nilpeter is set to strengthen its local support and expand its presence in the Taiwanese market.



Domino N610i

Paez Packaging, US

California company Paez Packaging has installed its first digital press, a Domino N610i digital UV inkjet label press. With this digital press, the converter expects to improve turnaround times, increase capacity, handle shorter runs and variable-data jobs, expand into new markets and respond more quickly to customer needs. 'Domino's strong reputation for reliability, proven technology, excellent print quality and strong support team quickly caught our attention,' said vice president Mario Paez, who runs the company with Luis Paez, his twin brother and CEO. 'The N610i offers the right combination of speed, consistency and color performance, along with the confidence of partnering with a company that truly understands the label market.'

Rotocon Chrome RFP 450S and RDF 540/580

starcodegroup, Germany

German manufacturer starcodegroup purchased a Chrome RFP 450S 8-color sleeve machine with a folding option, as well as three RDF 540/580 nonstop, high-speed, fully automatic blank labeling converting machines. The RFP Chrome 450S flexo press supports a wide range of automation and performance-enhancing options, while the RDF 540/580 machines enable continuous production with minimal downtime. 'The investment in Rotocon's RFP and RDF systems is a decisive step forward for us,' production manager Andrzej Kawiorski said. 'This allows us to meet complex customer requirements with high quality, shorter lead times and maximum process stability – even at growing volumes.'



Installations



Hontec FlexiCon 350

Everfast Labels, Australia

Everfast Labels has installed a Hontec FlexiCon350 8-color flexo press, equipped with two in-line die-cutting stations. Configured to meet the converter's growing demand for high-quality, multi-process label production, the press enables single-pass production, combining printing and converting, while maintaining high registration accuracy and stable output. The Hontec press supports a wide range of label applications, including pressure-sensitive labels for food, beverage, personal care and industrial markets. The dual die-cut configuration allows Everfast Labels to handle more complex jobs with improved efficiency, reduced waste and shorter turnaround times. Everfast Labels selected the press for its ability to customize configurations to production requirements.

Screen Trupress Jet L350UV

Printoly, US

Florida-based Printoly has installed a Screen Truepress Jet L350UV. The press now accounts for 100 percent of the company's label production, which was previously done on wide-format equipment. Since the installation in March 2025, the company's growth has increased from 5 percent to 20 percent month over month. Printoly got its start in 2023 printing signs, decals and labels, and it now generates tens of thousands of labels per day. 'The image quality that the L350UV produces looks stunning with smooth gradients, vivid prints and standout registration when compared to others,' co-president Dr Paul Jackson said. 'The color is vibrant and the contrast is exceptional. We've also been able to capture fine print as little as 1.6 pt.'



Epson SurePress L-6534VW

Sigma Labels, UAE

Sigma Labels has added an Epson SurePress L-6534VW press, supplied and supported by Flex-Europa. This move equips Sigma with a high-speed UV inkjet press capable of delivering sharp, vibrant labels on a wide range of substrates, including clear, metallic and colored materials. The L-6534VW press delivers full-color variable data printing, high-opacity white ink and durable UV-curable inks that meet industry standards for food contact and marine environments. For Sigma, this means faster production, consistent quality and the flexibility to handle both large-volume and specialty label runs. Flex-Europa supports Sigma in enhancing its production capabilities and is advancing digital label production in the region, with other SurePress installations in the UAE and Kuwait.

Durst Tao 340 RSC E

Clever Solutions, Poland

Clever Solutions Group has installed a Durst Tao 340 RSC E digital press as part of a strategic move into digital label production. The company conducted a detailed process to compare digital printing systems before selecting the Tao 340 RSC E based on print quality, substrate versatility and color stability. The company tested the press during the evaluation phase. 'We printed on very demanding materials, and what we saw really surprised us. Perfect quality, zero compromises, no issues with color stability. Simply put: It worked right away,' said Tomasz Grzeszczuk, board member and sales director at Clever Solutions. LFP Industrial Solutions, Durst's partner in Poland, supported the project throughout the process from testing through installation and operator training.



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Appointments

Josh Sigmon

Business development lead, Wink

Sigmon joined Wink's US team to support North and South American market growth. He brings more than 15 years of experience in the flexographic industry to this role. In his new role, Sigmon supports ongoing growth initiatives, works closely with partners and helps ensure Wink continues to provide service, support and tooling to customers across the region.



Rob Brown

Sales and marketing director, Edale

The appointment comes ahead of the launch of Edale's refreshed CartonLine and LabelLine ranges in 2026. With almost three decades of experience, Brown most recently served as sales director for NW Europe and export at OKI Europe. He brings experience from senior roles focused on driving customer, market and application understanding.



Stacey Lucariello

Senior vice president of human resources, Konica Minolta Business Solutions US

Stacey Lucariello joined Konica Minolta in 2019 and most recently served as vice president of talent before being appointed as the senior vice president of HR. She previously held HR leadership roles at ADP and Samsung Electronics America, supporting diverse employee populations globally.



Aditya Pangikal

India business head, Reproflex3

With over 30 years of pre-press and print experience, in his new role, Pangikal leads the expansion of pre-press and flexo platemaking services across labels, flexible packaging and corrugated sectors. He focuses on developing local capabilities and supporting workflow and technology transfer throughout the region.



Pradeep A. Unny

CEO, The Printers House

With over three decades of experience, Unny brings deep operational expertise, strategic vision and a proven track record of driving growth, efficiency and technological transformation. In his role, Unny focuses on strengthening operational excellence, accelerating innovation, expanding global market presence and building scalable systems for The Printers House.



Laura Clark

Chief commercial officer, Flexcon

Clark oversees the company's global commercial and innovation, and technology organizations to strengthen its customer-focused commercial strategy. She brings over 25 years of leadership experience building global teams and driving customer-centered innovation across marketing, R&D, sustainability and product leadership.



Gretchen Kray

Senior key account manager, Wausau Coated Products

Kray leads relationship strategy for a portfolio of customers, focusing on long-term partnership development, opportunity creation and sustained growth. Her leadership has been instrumental in expanding Wausau Coated's distribution segment. She has nearly three decades of product knowledge and experience in the label industry.



Mark Nixon

Global sales account development role, AVT

Based in London, Nixon has a decades-long career in the print industry and a history of working closely with customers across a range of sectors. He joined AVT from Scodix, where he spent more than a decade, most recently serving as executive vice president of sales and marketing.



Matt Sisson

Sales director for the North Central Region, GMG Americas

With more than two decades of experience across territory and national account sales, packaging and manufacturing and inkjet printing technologies, Sisson works under Bill DeWall, who is transitioning into his role as director of sales for the US and Canada. Most recently, Sisson served as territory sales director at Kongsberg Precision Cutting Systems.



Rajagurulingam (Raja) Ramalingam

Service manager APAC, Miraclon

Based in Singapore, Ramalingam joined Miraclon with more than 20 years of leadership experience in printing inks and packaging production, combining technical expertise with strategic commercial insight. In his role, he leads the company's regional service organization, driving excellence in customer service and technical support, field performance and operational execution across the region.



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02 Class 2: Flexo Line & Screen

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03 Class 3: Flexo Color Process

Winner CPF: Company Cymmetrik (Jiangsu) for P&G HR - Hair Recipe (Moonlight Flower) Shampoo

04 Class 4 Flexo Wines and Spirits

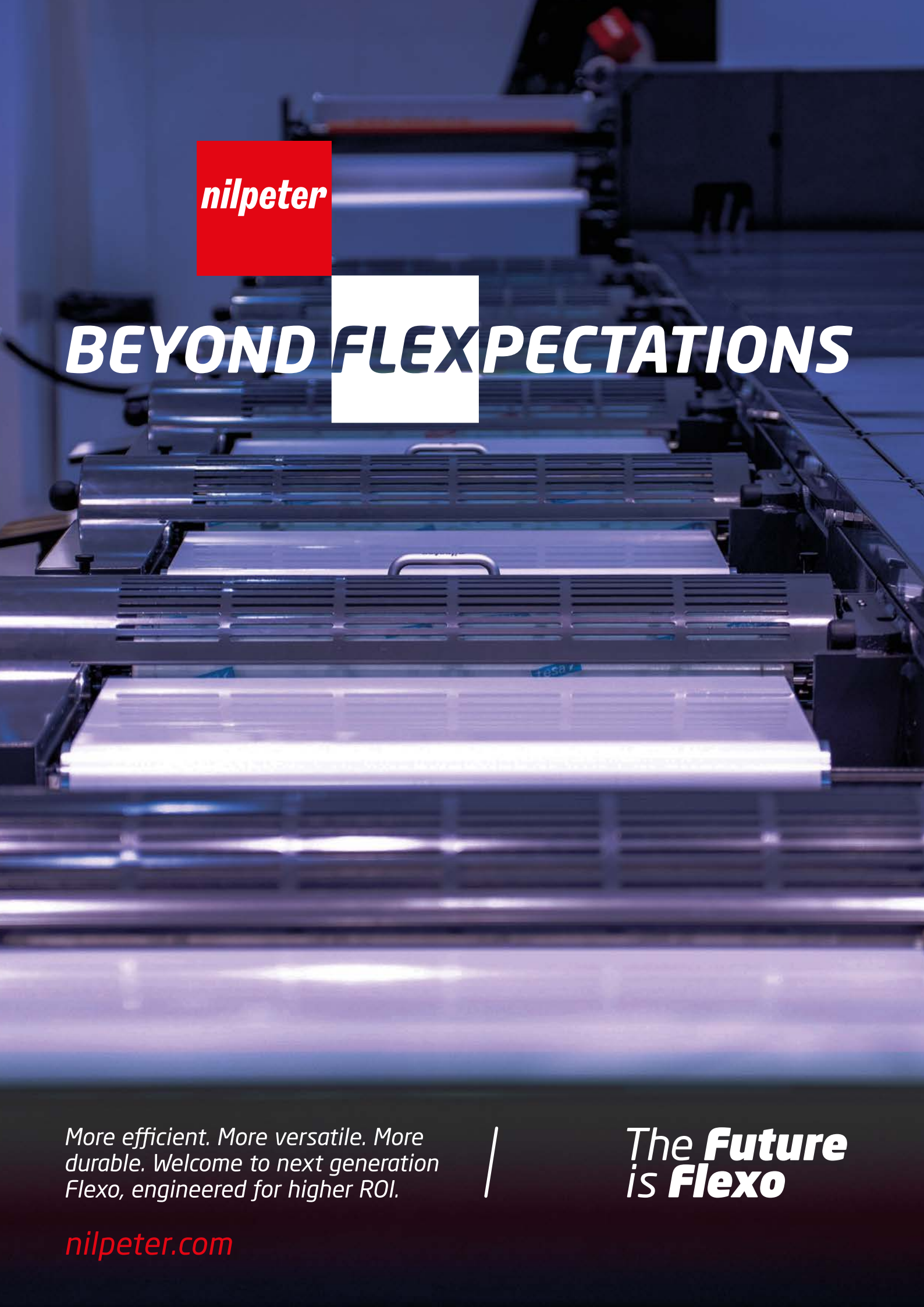
Joint winners CPF: Haoneng Industries for West Lake Green Rain Beer, LMAI: Any Graphics for Grand Whisky

05 Class 5 Letterpress Line

Winner FINAT: Tikedo Srl, Italy for Tenuta Albaricca Olio Extra Vergine



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Andy Thomas-Emans: *China transformed*

Labelexpo Asia 2025 saw innovative technology launches and revealed the opportunities and challenges facing converters and suppliers, writes Andy Thomas-Emans

Labelexpo Asia 2025 in Shanghai demonstrated just how far the Chinese labels industry has come in the 22 years since the show's launch.

The exhibition attracted over 30,000 visitors, not just from across China, but globally from as far afield as the Middle East and Latin America. The show was 14 percent bigger than 2023, and the momentum will carry to 2027, when it becomes Loupe Asia.

Labelexpo Asia 2025 revealed a swathe of innovative technologies, particularly focused on AI-driven automation across print, inspection and workflow. We saw real innovation from companies like Brotech, working with universities at its Shenzhen base to develop AI models to control flexo presses; Spande, with its automated flexo and hybrid presses and pushing toward new models in in-line folding carton production; and Luster, developing AI-driven inspection workflows.

Increasingly, these companies are cooperating not only with the University network across Eastern China but also with Western suppliers.

Most servo-driven presses use German-sourced drives, while Brotech, for example, is working closely with AVT and Spande is working with Pantec to develop new applications like hot stamping on shrink sleeves. Spande's hybrid press partner, General Inkjet Printing, is Agfa's Chinese agency.

High-end equipment

This writer predicted two decades ago that although Chinese label converters might start with cheap local machines like those we saw at the first Labelexpo Asia, they would develop their flexo skill base and graduate to more robust machines backed by high levels of service and technical support. This, in turn, would support innovation and differentiation among Chinese press manufacturers. And so, it has proved. Today, the Chinese flexo press manufacturing industry has displaced Western suppliers from the mid-range market and is now starting to sell these machines globally.

Although we no longer see Western flexo presses at Labelexpo Asia, there is a real and growing demand at the top end of China's label converter market for customized, complex press systems.

The increased confidence and skill level of Chinese converters is already providing a growing market for Western suppliers of high-end digital presses like HP Indigo and Durst, with Xeikon looking to become a bigger player in China with the launch of its lease-model Ecolyne press at the show.

Remarkable change

Summing up the two-decade transformation of China's label industry is the winner of the 2025 China Label Industry Awards, Dagang Li. When this writer first met Li 15 years ago, he was Avery Dennison's first Chinese country manager, having worked first at a state-owned corporation, and then for Boston Consulting in its pioneering study of the potential of China's PS market. Li's mission was to raise the quality of China's PS supply chain so he could source from within the country, which he succeeded in doing in

"The increased confidence and skill level of Chinese converters is already providing a growing market for Western suppliers of high-end digital presses"

a remarkably short space of time. Li went on to run CCL's China operations, in the process building a local management team.

Today, Chinese label converters are at the cutting edge of innovation, as Labels & Labeling readers who follow China editor Yolanda Wang's excellent articles will know.

In particular, there has been an embrace of social media channels and AI-driven marketing tools to reach a new customer base, with a strong focus on automated web-to-print factories.

Challenges ahead

At the same time, the Chinese label industry faces its own significant challenges.

On the converter side, we see fierce price-driven competition that has eroded profit margins. We also see the cost of skilled labor continuing to rise.

China now sits in the middle of the global labor cost scale with a wage rate almost double that of ASEAN countries and five times that of Mexico and India. Shanghai and Shenzhen have become expensive global cities.

Trump tariffs have meanwhile impacted Chinese converters whose business model is based on e-commerce sales to the US.

The urgency of these adverse currents has forced Chinese converters to invest in advanced automation systems and to enter new value-added label and adjacent packaging markets.

Equipment manufacturers have been hit by the same adverse currents. The rising cost of skilled labor has hit manufacturers and is just one element of an overall rise in material and production costs.

The impact of US tariffs is being felt in two ways: by Chinese manufacturers that supply components and subcomponents to US manufacturers, and by the increased cost to end users of exported machinery and materials. In response, Chinese manufacturers have adjusted their strategies to remain competitive, focusing on innovation, cost control and diversification into alternative global markets.

As Labelexpo transitions to Loupe, we await with interest the latest developments in this fascinating and fast-moving market.



Scan the QR code to read a full recap from Labelexpo Asia 2025

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From ghosted to engaged: AI-powered sales follow-up



AI helps sales teams break through buyer noise, reengage lapsed prospects and personalize follow-up at scale, writes Lois Ritarossi

Sales leaders and owners expect their sales teams to achieve big results in 2026. What will sales teams need to do differently to succeed? It's time for new sales approaches to engage prospects and lapsed customers.

Sales teams are facing increased challenges with prospect ghosting and more complex sales cycles. Buyers are overwhelmed with industry trends, new sustainability requirements and generic sales touchpoints. AI is not a threat to sales teams. It is a powerful tool that helps sales and marketing teams determine what is truly relevant to deliver personalized messages that engage prospects and customers.

In my last column, I stated how sales teams in competitive B2B environments must go beyond generic claims of quality and service to focus on creating genuine value that resonates with specific customer needs and priorities.

I suggested five strategic approaches to make your mix of services unique in buyers' minds, enabling your sales messages to stand out in a crowded market.

Buyers of labels and packaging are managing changes on several fronts. They need to address the complexities of sustainability-driven product and packaging decisions that impact messaging and production options. Smart labels and connected packaging are increasingly used by brands to engage consumers. Brand owners are investing more in packaging as a differentiator. They are asking buyers to source distinctive label aesthetics, bold visuals and minimalist designs. Buyers will each have their specific priorities for sustainability goals, tech innovation and bold branding initiatives.

AI approaches to re-engage prospects

AI eliminates starting from a blank page to draft emails or message points for voice mails. Sales and marketing teams can use an approved generative AI large language model (LLM), such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Co-Pilot, etc., to brainstorm likely business issues specific prospects face, informed by industry trends and customer behaviors. For a lapsed customer known for innovation, ask AI to draft variable messages that tie smart label technologies to increased consumer engagement. For sustainability-oriented buyers, generate communications that frame eco-labels aligned with buyers' goals. This approach will provide examples of credible use cases with source information.

Prompt techniques

Prompt AI with specific keywords (such as sustainable label compliance or smart packaging ROI) to generate issue-based content and messaging. Leverage the LLM to iterate and refine messaging. Here's an example prompt. 'I am a B2B sales strategist specializing in labels and packaging, (include your website), a former customer (include their website and their LinkedIn profile) in the (food/beverage/pharma/personal care) sector has not engaged in (X) months. State non-confidential relevant situational details about this customer's need for new product launches, technology initiatives, etc.'

Based on current label and packaging trends, ask the LLM to list the top three to five business pressures this customer is likely facing. For each pressure point, suggest one question a salesperson could ask to reopen a conversation. This approach to prompting will yield ideas and content that are specific and relevant to customers' business needs. Sales and marketing teams can then edit and refine the content to fit specific customer communications.

Content personalization at scale

Sales teams can dynamically tailor messages and subject lines that reflect buyer context.

AI can generate relevant personalized email sequences that reference a recently attended trade show/conference, their past engagement with specific types of jobs, or industry trends detailed above. Personalized content will result in higher open rates, booked meetings and fewer dead ends.

An example prompt: state that the salesperson needs a credible reason to re-engage without asking for a meeting outright. If appropriate, provide specific context from a recent industry event or a relevant news item. Ask the LLM to draft a professional follow-up email to a former customer (add their LinkedIn profile) explaining why reconnecting now may be timely, based on recent changes in the label and packaging market, recent industry events, or news. Specify to the LLM that the tone should be consultative, concise and non-salesy. End with an open-ended question rather than a meeting request. This prompt works because it opens dialogue about relevant topics rather than forcing a call.

Metrics that matter

To measure the success of these AI approaches, leaders will need to identify measurable KPIs that bridge sales performance with AI engagement. Consider current metrics for comparison to track:

- Improvement in response rates (measured by segment and message type).
- Reduction in time to re-engage lapsed accounts.
- Lift in appointment setting with targeted segments.

AI won't replace the trust built by sales relationships. AI helps sales teams think better, not just write faster.

It enables sales teams to speak the buyer's language, anticipate business issues and re-engage prospects with precision. It makes relevance scalable. Sales teams who leverage AI tools are well positioned to reach their sales goals.



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

The power of touch: Why tactile packaging wins

This is the final installment of a two-part series, which presents the hypothesis, research, methodology and results of The Touch Advantage study, a collaboration between Sappi and Clemson University, written by Vicki Strull



In the first part of this series, I laid out the three overarching questions that we sought to answer in The Touch Advantage study, and explained the methodology and results of the first two questions:

1. What is the correlation between touching a package and sales?
2. How does premium packaging affect consumer perceptions of quality?

Here, in part two, we will look at the third question:

3. How does sensory marketing affect post-purchase experiences, customer satisfaction and reviews? This third question explored e-commerce purchasing and gifting behaviors, rather than in-person retail store shopping, which was the focus of my earlier column.

The setup

To remind you of the physical setup and methodology, the study took place in a staged retail space and a staged in-home (e-commerce) environment. We had 60 participants who shopped for various items, and we collected and analyzed data on everything from facial expressions and eye movements to the number of times a shopper touched a product and the duration of each touch. For our study, we printed premium packaging on solid

bleached sulphate (SBS) and added at least one embellishment. We printed the non-premium packaging on coated recycled board (CRB).

When we examined how premium packaging affects perceptions of quality, we wondered whether people would rate a product as higher quality if it were packaged in premium packaging. We also wanted to know how premium packaging affects gift-giving. To understand these two queries, we gave all the participants four chocolate bars. What they didn't know was that each bar was the exact same chocolate. The only difference was the packaging. Two of the bars were in premium packaging, and two of them were in plain packaging. Then we asked everyone to taste the chocolate bars.

The results

Fifty-seven percent of participants said that the chocolate in the premium packaging tasted better than the chocolate in the plain packaging. A majority, but not overwhelming. Still, while 7 percent might not seem like a big deal, it is if you're a high-volume manufacturer. Because if you're a high-volume manufacturer, and I can tell you that putting your product in premium packaging can give you a 7 percent sales lift, that is big.

After the participants tasted and rated the chocolate bars, we asked them to consider a scenario: pretend you are going to dinner tonight with a good friend. It's your good friend's birthday, and your friend loves chocolate. You're going to take them a bar of chocolate as a gift. Which one do you choose?

A whopping 70 percent of the participants chose a chocolate bar in the premium packaging. And what's so interesting about that is that 13 percent of the people didn't even think that it tasted as good as the plain-packaged bars. Yet they still gifted it, which proves that consumers consider packaging when gifting, and they associate premium packaging with higher quality. When we give a gift, we want to make people feel valued. We purchase things that look and feel valuable.

The reviews

The impact of premium packaging also influenced customer reviews. The people who chose the premium packaging to gift to their friend wrote longer, more descriptive reviews and talked more about the packaging. They wrote things like:

'This chocolate tasted very high quality compared to the other selections.'

'It felt luxury.'

'The chocolate bar has a great look and feel to it.'

That last one makes me smile. 'The chocolate bar has a great look and feel.' Really? Is that about the chocolate, or is that the packaging?

Expressions and emotions

During another part of the study, we asked people to purchase a luxury pair of earbuds using their phone. The earbuds cost 100 USD. We simulated a home/online ordering environment and delivery.

Half of the participants received their earbuds in premium packaging, and the other half received them in non-premium or 'plain' packaging. We wanted to see how they felt about their package, so we examined and analyzed their facial expressions.

Now, there are 40 muscles in the face, and one of my co-authors, Dr Andrew Hurley, a packaging science professor at Clemson, is an expert in facial expression and eye movement analytics. So, unbeknownst to our participants, we were watching, monitoring and collecting their facial expressions as they received their earbuds.

Next, we took that information and entered it into a software program that coded it as either positive or negative emotions. (Note: when you analyze people's emotional response to something, it can be either neutral, which is 0, or you can have negative or positive emotions.)

The results? The participants who received their earbuds in premium packaging had 95 percent more positive emotions. The people who received their earbuds in plain packaging had 35 percent more negative emotions.

Why is this important to us, as

**"We purchase
things that look and
feel valuable"**





“The research reveals a key takeaway: packaging is the true influencer”

converters, marketers, designers, paperboard and label manufacturers and so on? Because a lot of brands don't put their product in premium packaging, particularly if it is purchased online-only, they may feel that it's not worth the cost, and that not doing it can't hurt them. Well, guess what? The Touch Advantage study proves that it does hurt them, because people have 35 percent more negative emotions when they receive their luxury product in plain packaging. Their emotions don't just remain neutral; they go to negative, which can actually hurt the brand's image and perception.

This data also showed up in reviews. The people who received their earbuds, their luxury product, in plain packaging wrote negative reviews. They wrote things like:

'I think the packaging is okay. But I don't get a sense of high quality. It's kind of bland for a 100 USD product.'

'I would expect it to look and feel nicer as well as sturdier.'

'The materials look and feel a little cheap and flimsy.'

And there's this one: 'It definitely lowers the quality of the headphones.'

Now, in that last testimonial, there is a direct connection between how the consumer feels about the packaging and how they feel about the product inside.

Have you ever returned an item because of a negative unboxing experience? Because it made you feel not-so-great about the product that you purchased? I have.

We asked our participants the same question: *Would you consider returning a product because of a negative unboxing experience?* Eighteen percent of them said yes. Again, another piece of data for you to use when you're talking about the impact on customer satisfaction and perception of various embellishments, finishes and high-quality materials.

And speaking of unboxing experiences, have you seen the videos on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram? It's not just about mindless scrolling. Sixty percent of people watching unboxing videos are prospective

customers; they have an intent to purchase. Watching is part of their research for the product or the category.

What does that 60 percent actually mean? Well, YouTube videos featuring the word 'unboxing' were viewed 25 billion times in 2023. When we do a little math, that's 15 billion views of people watching an unboxing video. And the person doing the unboxing is typically either excited about the package and telling people all about how great it is, or they're annoyed or disappointed with the packaging and telling people all about that.

When we look at the study's third overarching question, how does sensory marketing affect post-purchase experiences, customer satisfaction and reviews, the research reveals a key takeaway: packaging is the true influencer.

Quick recap

Study question 1: *What is the correlation between touching a package and sales?*

Key takeaway: **Untouched is unsold**

The data covered in part one of this article revealed that when someone touches a premium package just twice, they're 50 percent more likely to purchase it.

Study question 2: *How does premium packaging affect consumer perceptions of product quality?*

Key takeaway: **Premium outperforms plain**

The data covered in part one of this article showed that an item sold 13 times more frequently when it was premium packaged. Also, when given the choice, 60 percent of our participants purchased a package with a foil embellishment.

Study question 3: *How does sensory marketing affect the post-purchase experience, customer satisfaction and reviews?*

Key takeaway: **packaging is the true influencer**

Remember the data: Participants who received their earbuds in premium packaging had 95 percent more positive

emotions than those who received them in plain packaging.

Influence at your fingertips

Quality packaging can help convey a brand's personality, reputation, purpose, functionality and even its commitment to sustainability. As shoppers and consumers, we pick up on all those traits through emotions triggered and perspectives influenced by the packaging and the product itself. That kind of brand connection can lead to long-lasting customer engagement, loyalty, satisfaction and word-of-mouth marketing.

With the Touch Advantage Study and the neuroscience of touch literally at our fingertips, only one question remains: why wouldn't a brand consider premium packaging for its product?



Vicki Strull has over 25 years of experience in the marketing and design industry as a brand strategist, creative director, and packaging designer. 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

DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORT BECOMES A BUSINESS ADVANTAGE

By 2030, every product sold in the EU will carry a digital passport. For label converters, this isn't just compliance; it's a 1.7 billion USD market opportunity. Piotr Wnuk reports



The Digital Product Passport (DPP) represents a fundamental shift in supply chain tracking, moving from a linear economy to a circular model in which every product carries a unique digital identity throughout its lifecycle. For label converters, this presents a significant opportunity to evolve from suppliers to strategic service partners.

According to the latest report by Markets and Markets, the Digital Product Passport market is experiencing significant growth, driven by regulatory requirements, consumer demand for transparency, and technological advancements. It was estimated to account for 185.9 million USD in 2024 and to reach 1.7 billion USD by 2030, with a CAGR of 45.7 percent.

The Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (EU ESPR), issued by the European Commission, requires a standardized digital identity for each product by 2030, covering materials, origin, reparability and sustainability information across multiple regulated sectors, including electronics, batteries, textiles, construction and packaging.

However, the EU is not alone in driving this change, according to Dr Vlad Sljapic, strategic partnerships director at Watermill Press, one of the suppliers of industrial and traceability labels for brands and label converters in UK FMCG, retail and logistics sectors. Sljapic, together with Sophia Savvides, director of sustainability, strategy and market intelligence at Avery Dennison, offered insight on DPP at a session at Labelexpo Europe 2025. 'Different countries around the world, in

different areas of operation, are continually implementing rules to regulate how we use our natural resources and the impact it creates on our environment,' notes Sljapic.

Governments in the US, Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan and South Korea are implementing policies supporting DPP initiatives. This global regulatory momentum creates a compelling case for brands: 'The message is clear: if you don't comply, you will not be able to sell,' Sljapic explains. 'The brands are increasingly looking for trusted ways to operationalize traceability at the label and packaging level. This is at the core of what we do at Watermill: ensuring those identities are created and verified correctly from day one. But compliance is just the starting point for value creation.'

BEYOND COMPLIANCE

Savvides positions DPP as fundamentally changing how businesses operate. 'We are in a transformative environment, moving from a linear economy to a circular economy,' she explains. 'In the linear economy, we extract natural resources, they become products, those products get consumed, and then those products experience an end of life.'

The current system generates 3.5 billion tons of waste globally each year. DPP enables a shift where every physical item will have 'a unique digital identity and digital life'.

Lee Metters, group business development director at Domino Printing Sciences, frames this transformation in practical terms: 'Driven by Digital Product Passport

requirements, labels and packaging are becoming active data carriers of material and lifecycle data, rather than merely regulatory or decorative components. For label and packaging converters, this creates an opportunity to play a much larger role in their customers' supply chains.'

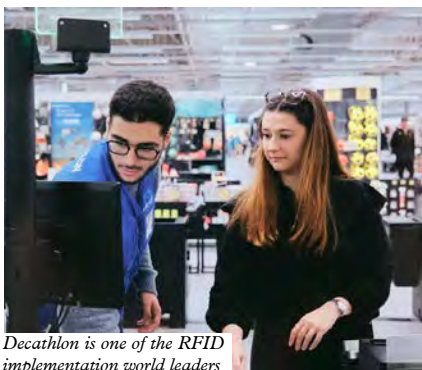
Metters emphasizes the importance of standards. 'Being familiar with and able to advise on standards such as the GS1 Digital Link, which will form the basis of some of the DPP standards currently in development, could become a key differentiator,' Metters notes. 'Converters that support variable data workflows and link printed codes to resolvers (a service connecting a physical product with its digital information using unique identifiers) or data platforms can deliver significant added value to their customers.'

For brands, benefits extend beyond compliance: transparency builds consumer confidence, operational efficiency streamlines supply chains, brand differentiation demonstrates sustainability leadership, and circular models open new business opportunities.

REAL-WORLD IMPLEMENTATIONS

The fashion industry provides compelling examples of DPP's commercial potential. 'One of the earliest examples that exists in the world is Decathlon,' explains Sljapic. 'Decathlon implemented item-level RFID identification through its labels across the supply chain probably four or five years ago. As a result, its revenues jumped 11 percent in the following year, attributed directly to the implementation.'

Nanna Ingemann Dalsgaard, vice president of sustainability, digital ID and marketing at SML, identifies three key advantages for organizations with established RFID infrastructure. 'Brands and retailers already operate serialized, item-level data systems that can align with DPP data models and support consistent product identification. Years of using RFID have built habits around system integration and data governance, essential foundations for high-quality DPP data management,' Ingemann Dalsgaard notes. 'They can verify the physical authenticity and movement,



Decathlon is one of the RFID implementation world leaders

“RFID AND DPPS ARE PART OF THE SAME SHIFT: FROM PRODUCTS AS STATIC GOODS TO PRODUCTS AS SOURCES OF DATA. RFID BRINGS PRECISION; DPPS BRING PURPOSE”

providing trustworthy input for future regulatory and sustainability reporting.'

Ingemann Dalsgaard highlights the scalability advantage RFID provides for DPP implementation. 'As DPP regulations evolve, one of the biggest challenges will be managing data for billions of products. RFID is already proven at that scale. With tens of billions of items tagged globally each year, the apparel sector has a head start in serialization, event capture and data governance,' she explains. 'These are all critical elements for DPP success.'

The retail sector's unique challenge of the loss of inventory due to theft, admin errors, damage/spoilage, or process losses, makes RFID particularly valuable. 'This is a serious problem in retail. Retailers monitor and even report it in their formal business accounts,' Sljapic notes.

Walmart's implementation represents the largest RFID deployment globally, with shrinkage losses reaching 3 billion USD annually. When Walmart mandated that specific retail categories adopt RFID, major logistics companies UPS, FedEx and DHL announced infrastructure investments, underlining how item-level data reshapes entire ecosystems.

Benoit Charnallet, product manager for TSC Auto ID EMEA, provides another compelling example. 'GS1 talked about a customized t-shirt supplier who saw its order accuracy top 99.54 percent after EPC/RFID deployment,' he notes. 'When things had been done manually, the company was levied thousands of dollars in chargebacks from inaccurate shipments. The deployment reduced chargeback claims by 98.8 percent, delivering a solid ROI and payback in less than eight months.'

Avery Dennison's textile circular loop demonstrates the practical implementation of DPP. Working with partners such as Adidas, Intersport and various recycling companies, the system utilizes both RFID and QR codes to facilitate data sharing throughout the garment lifecycle. 'We put digital IDs on those Intersport t-shirts that allows them to comply with the regulations, and we were able to then communicate with the sorting partners who could recycle and share information about the product, how to manage it at end of life, and if it's broken, we've been able to keep these garments in the loop to avoid waste,' Savvides explains.

These examples only work because every item can be uniquely identified and tracked, which raises the question of how to serialize products at greater scales.

Ingemann Dalsgaard emphasizes the critical importance of source-level encoding. 'Every trustworthy digital record begins at the same place: the factory floor. When products are tagged



Serialization using barcodes or QR codes offers very low-cost production but requires visual contact for reading

“NOW IS THE TIME TO MOVE FROM SUPPLIER TO PARTNER, OFFERING DPP AS A SERVICE”

and encoded at the source, each item receives a unique digital identity from day one, creating the first verifiable link between its physical and digital lives,' she explains. 'Source-level encoding eliminates duplication, mislabeling and manual entry errors, ensuring that the data captured upstream truly reflects what was produced.'

She describes how these systems work in concert. 'While QR and NFC tags empower consumers to explore product details, care instructions and circularity options, RFID ensures item-level data integrity across complex global supply chains. Together, they form the foundation of an effective and scalable DPP strategy,' she notes. 'In that sense, RFID and DPPs are connected not by default, but by trust: one providing item-level precision, the other ensuring that precision translates into transparent, verifiable product stories.'

She emphasizes the complementary nature of these technologies. 'RFID and DPPs are part of the same shift: from products as static goods to products as sources of data. RFID brings precision; DPPs bring purpose,' she explains. 'While RFID optimizes what happens inside the supply chain, DPPs aim to create visibility beyond it. As an end-to-end provider, SML delivers both DPP-ready physical products and a robust digital platform for managing, sharing and integrating product data, ensuring brands and retailers stay compliant, connected and competitive.'

RFID AND SERIALIZATION

Two technologies dominate industrial-scale product identification: serialized barcodes and RFID. Each offers distinct advantages and limitations that converters must understand when advising clients.

Domino's Metters notes that converters are well positioned for this transition.

'The good news for label and packaging printers is that the DPP does not require a completely new technology stack. In most cases, it builds on the same capabilities already being adopted for 2D codes and variable data,' he explains.

Serialization using barcodes or QR codes offers the benefit of low-cost production but requires visual contact, while RFID eliminates line-of-sight scanning but involves a higher cost; the technologies are complementary and will coexist. Once every product carries its own identity, the tolerance for mistakes in printing, encoding or data handling collapses to near zero, elevating data and process control from 'nice to have' to an essential.

The technology choice impacts data management requirements. 'When you start identifying every product, you have to have technology to support managing vast amounts of data, and that's where traceability labels become the control point,' explains Sljapic. 'The core is that the labels are produced with a verified digital identity that can be relied on across systems and partners.' This creates both challenges and opportunities for converters willing to develop data management capabilities.

TSC Auto ID's Charnallet emphasizes the ecosystem complexity. 'When it comes to RFID, it doesn't matter if you're a retailer, supplier or intermediary such as a logistics operator, the importance of doing your homework and selecting the right RFID partners, printers and equipment cannot be overstated,' he explains. 'The average number of different providers involved in delivering a successful RFID solution ecosystem is between five and seven.'

Ingemann Dalsgaard stresses that the reliability of any DPP will only be as strong as the data it carries. If that first connection between the physical and digital is inconsistent, every process that follows, from compliance reporting to circularity, is affected, making it critical to get tags and data right from the start. Charnallet adds that the biggest challenge retailers faced was getting the right data encoded into an RFID tag and formatting it correctly, underlining the importance of working with competent partners.

ZERO-ERROR TOLERANCE

Successful DPP implementation requires fundamental changes to production approaches. Sljapic emphasizes two critical requirements: full automation and a zero-error guarantee.

'Full automation means you cannot operate where operators manually upload CSV files,' explains Sljapic. 'At item-level traceability, the label is the point where physical product and digital

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RFID technology eliminates the need for line-of-sight scanning but operates at a higher cost

“THE RELIABILITY OF ANY DPP WILL ONLY BE AS STRONG AS THE DATA IT CARRIES”

DPP READINESS CHECKLIST

1. Have we identified which customers and SKUs will be hit first by DPP and EU ESPR rules before 2030?
2. Are we up to date on DPP pilots and standards such as GS1 Digital Link and item-level serialization?
3. Can our presses print high-quality variable 2D codes at speed with zero-error tolerance, and/or support RFID where needed?
4. Do we have software or partners to generate, manage and link serialized codes or RFID tags to trusted product data platforms?
5. Is our workflow automated enough that we are not relying on manual CSV uploads for item-level data?
6. Have we chosen technology partners on capability and ecosystem strength, not just lowest cost?
7. Do we have a clear commercial model for DPP (subscriptions, usage-based fees, or bundled print + platform + services)?
8. Are we planning pilots with key customers to prove ROI in areas such as shrink reduction, labor savings or chargeback reduction before scaling up?
9. Do we have an internal champion or team building expertise so we can move from supplier to strategic service partner?

identity must be guaranteed without error. Every single product is different; therefore, every delivery becomes exponentially more complex.'

The zero-error requirement stems from the unique nature of serialized products. 'If you lose a product, you lose the value of the product, not just the label package,' Sljapic warns. 'That's why traceability labels need to be treated as part of the product itself, not just packaging. Errors in product traceability are like going to someone and saying, "Here's my ruler, it measures rooms, but the measurement has a two-meter error". Conceptually, this is going to become less and less acceptable.'

Charnallet frames DPP implementation as requiring three essential components: 'Think of DPP as a three-legged stool where you need the right three components in place: hardware, software and services,' he advises. 'Printers are well advised to look at a number of potential partners with advanced technical knowledge to fully understand their competency before investing in anything.'

Machine manufacturers are responding with automated systems guaranteeing error-free output, with equipment ranging from low-cost desktop to fully custom-made production systems.

'Available systems are the same; they all connect to your customer's database, and they're all delivering zero-error output regardless of how complex your requirements are. The only difference is that one is cheaper and less productive than the other,' Sljapic notes.

These operational shifts are not limited to narrow web labels, they extend across wider packaging formats as well. 'Modern technology is not limited to web-fed labels. Sheet-fed production up to B2+ format and single-piece production can be processed equally efficiently,' says Sljapic.

POSITIONING CONVERTERS FOR GROWTH

The DPP transition offers converters an opportunity to evolve their business model from commodity suppliers to strategic service partners. Savvides frames this transformation clearly: 'Now is the time to move from supplier to partner, offering DPP as a Service (DPaaS) to strengthen client relationships, secure relevance in the value chain and unlock profitable new revenue streams.'

As converters develop DPP capabilities, pricing and service models become critical considerations. Charnallet identifies several possible approaches. 'Tiered subscriptions work well, with monthly or annual plans based on features, SKUs or volumes,' he explains. 'This provides predictable recurring revenue and scales with brand growth.' Usage-based pricing

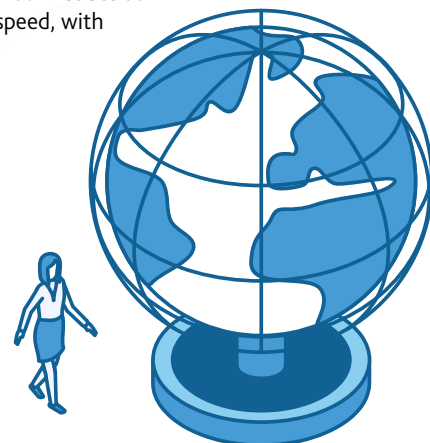
per DPP, per label or per scan offers an attractive option for smaller brands and aligns cost with value.

Bundled approaches combine printed labels with DPP hosting, analytics and support. 'This positions printers as end-to-end compliance partners and increases deal value,' Charnallet notes. Value-added services like analytics, consumer engagement, anti-counterfeiting and managed compliance help drive long-term retention.

Jan de Roeck, Esko marketing director, suggests converters consider expanding into content services. 'Develop digital print expertise at every level of the business. The flexibility and data-handling capabilities of digital printing align naturally with DPP requirements,' he advises. 'Consider bringing additional services in-house related to the content accessible via 2D codes on packaging. A major strength of packaging and label converters is that they already own and manage data that could be highly relevant for feeding into backend platforms that drive consumer experiences.' He recommends a hybrid model combining base subscription, usage fees and optional add-ons to offer flexibility, lower entry barriers and maximize lifetime value.

Metters emphasizes the importance of supporting data strategy alongside print execution. 'By supporting data strategy, print execution and ongoing compliance, not just artwork reproduction, label and packaging converters can become trusted, long-term partners, helping brands navigate regulation, traceability and consumer engagement with DPP data over time,' he explains. This positioning requires converters to develop new capabilities around data management, platform integration and compliance consulting.

Metters recommends converters start with practical investments. 'The first practical investment should be in equipment for high-quality variable data and 2D code printing. This could be a digital color press or monochrome printer capable of reliably printing variable QR or Data Matrix codes at speed, with



consistent quality and readability,' he advises. 'Secondly, converters need software, either in-house or via partners, that can generate, manage and add variable 2D codes to label and packaging designs. This could include handling serial numbers, batch identifiers and links to external data platforms or resolvers,' he continues. 'Together, these investments enable converters and print service providers to treat 2D codes as dynamic data, not static artwork, a crucial shift for DPP readiness.'

Avery Dennison's atma.io platform demonstrates how material suppliers are building comprehensive data management ecosystems to support converters in this transition, managing over 30 billion items and integrating with existing databases to reduce the burden on companies.

De Roeck identifies Esko's WebCenter as essential infrastructure for DPP readiness: 'Our packaging management platform enables converters to orchestrate custom workflows, manage assets securely and ensure all stakeholders have access to current, accurate information throughout the production process,' he explains. 'WebCenter provides the foundation for managing the complex data requirements that DPP demands, from artwork and specifications to variable data handling and approval workflows.'

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CONVERTERS

The three experts provide complementary roadmaps for converter preparation.

Metters emphasizes staying current with evolving standards. 'Converters should stay up to date with DPP legislation and standards. Requirements are still developing, with technical standards continuing to evolve through 2026,' he explains. 'By monitoring legislation, pilot programs such as current trials for batteries and textiles, and standardization activity, converters will be able to identify potential gaps in their technology stack and avoid heavy investment in a single approach before requirements are fully finalized.'

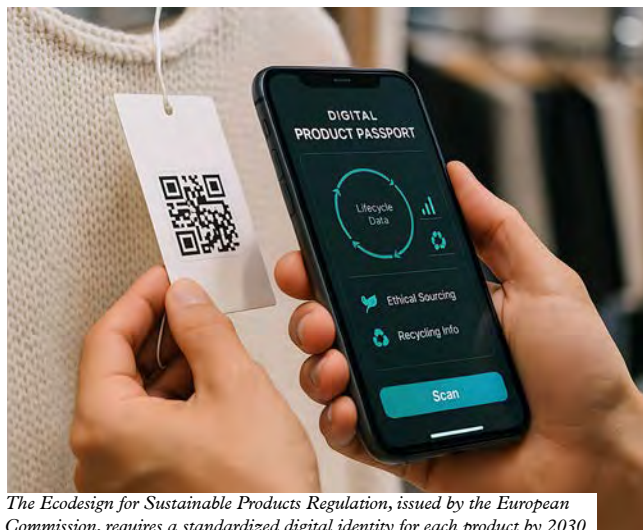
Building on this, converters can make informed decisions about which added-value services to support their customers with, from management of variable data and serialization to consultancy on code placement and durability or support integrating resolvers and third-party platforms.

Charnallet focuses on client business problems. 'Think about what business problem your clients are trying to solve, like labor or stock optimization. Once you have item-level data, it changes everything,' he explains. 'It enables them to uplift sales by 5 to 15 percent, reduce costs and manual errors, help with shrink reduction, warranty and returns tracking.'

He stresses the importance of pilot programs. 'Always ensure a pilot implementation is completed to ensure it meets DPP requirements. Doing this enables you to learn lessons along the way, identify necessary refinements, ensure the hardware and software work, and minimize any risks when you come to scale up,' Charnallet advises. He warns against prioritizing cost over capability: 'Don't always go for cheap in vendor selection, as it could cost you long term. Interview a number of potential partners, dig deep into their ecosystems, and ask them how RFID or 2D barcodes could solve your clients' business problems. And always ensure they have a clear roadmap for implementing the work, including that all-important pilot,' he cautions.

'Start with building in-house expertise on this topic to better advise customers and inform technology investments,' de Roeck emphasizes. 'Knowledge is king, so partner with established providers who can help navigate this evolving landscape with confidence,' he recommends.

Metters advocates for proactive customer engagement. 'Many brands are aware of the DPP but are unsure how it will affect their products or packaging. Converters that



The Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation, issued by the European Commission, requires a standardized digital identity for each product by 2030.

"THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: IF YOU DON'T COMPLY, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO SELL"

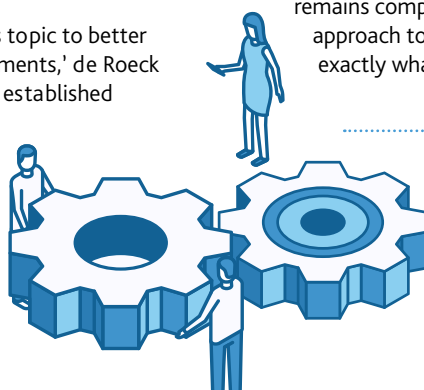
proactively engage customers, asking how they plan to comply and where support is needed, can deepen their customer relationships and position themselves as knowledgeable advisers rather than reactive suppliers,' he adds.

Savvides concludes, 'This is a huge opportunity for us as an industry, and we really want to be partners in helping converters unpack this opportunity and go to market with it. We know that first movers will be the ones to really benefit from this opportunity. So now is the time for converters to step up from being a supplier to being a service provider or service partner.'

The regulatory timeline provides a clear window for preparation, with compliance required by 2030 for most sectors and early adoption already underway in fashion and retail, allowing converters who act now to establish market leadership positions before DPP becomes a universal requirement. De Roeck offers a critical reminder about maintaining standards: 'Never lose sight of quality. It remains the primary way to differentiate from competitors and maintain healthy profit margins,' he emphasizes. 'The arrival of the Digital Product Passport, providing traceability coupled with consumer engagement opportunities, presents tremendous business potential. But ultimately, the key enabler is accessible and secure data about both product and package.'

Digital Product Passports represent more than regulatory compliance; they offer a pathway for label converters to transform their businesses and capture new value in an increasingly data-driven supply chain ecosystem. The question is not whether DPP will become standard, but which converters will be ready to lead the transformation.

'With integrated AI capabilities, we can now connect people, processes and technologies on a single cloud platform, simplifying data exchange between all players in the value chain,' De Roeck concludes. 'This provides a solid, rich data architecture that remains completely secure, while enabling a right-first-time approach to artwork preparation and flexo platemaking, exactly what DPP implementation demands.'



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Emotional power of labels

A tequila packaging neuromarketing study by UPM, Kurz and Eurostampa examines how labels emotionally influence consumers and shape perceptions of product value, Akanksha Meena reports

UPM Adhesive Materials, Kurz and global label manufacturer Eurostampa together conducted a neuromarketing study exploring how tequila label design influences consumer perception and purchase behavior. The study reframes the label as a strategic brand asset, moving beyond its technical role to become a key driver of consumer engagement and brand value.

Conducted by SenseCatch in collaboration with UPM, Kurz and Eurostampa, the study examines how label materials, finishes and embellishments shape consumer behavior from shelf impact to perceived product quality.

'Labels are an essential part of our packaging. They are the silent sellers of our products,' says Florencia Daroni, packaging solutions manager for wines and spirits Latin America at UPM Adhesive Materials. 'Design is an art form, a way for designers to express ideas and concepts through creativity. At first glance, we can subjectively decide whether a label's design appeals to us or reflects the product's concept.'

'But the real question is: Is the label truly effective in capturing the consumer's attention and convincing them to buy? This study aims to answer that question and identify which elements can make a label more persuasive.'

In the past, UPM has conducted neuromarketing studies on labels and packaging for white wine, red wine and gin. This time, the focus was on one of the spirits with the strongest character and identity, tequila. Despite its tradition, tequila stands out for its innovative designs, offering a wide range of creative possibilities to experiment with design resources. To achieve this, UPM partnered with leading companies to combine expertise and resources to evaluate every aspect of label design. Kurz contributed its range of finishes and decoration embellishments. Eurostampa used its label printing and converting technology to create stunning labels. UPM provided a wide variety of label materials. Saverglass provided bottles, and closures were from Amorim Top Series.

This study delivers actionable insights for producers, designers and stakeholders across the value chain.

The study

The study was conducted in Texas, one of the largest regions for tequila consumption globally, to ensure authentic consumer reactions and behavioral data. Using a fictional tequila brand and 27 unique packaging designs, the research simulates real-world buying conditions and tracks visual attention, emotional engagement and implicit perceptions.

Neuromarketing specialists SenseCatch conducted the research. The team used advanced tools, including the eye tracker, brain tracker and bio tracker, to gain deeper insights into consumer decision-making. Through these methods, they were able to objectively identify which different aspects of the label lead consumers to choose one product over another.

Three design studios, Hi! Studio and Estudio Albino from Mexico, and Denomination from Australia, developed a label with creative freedom, based on a brief UPM created for a fictional brand Cielo Roto.

'We asked each studio to design three different styles: one highly detailed, one moderately detailed and one minimalist. Then, with guidance from experts at Kurz, Eurostampa and UPM, we combined embellishments, printing techniques and label materials to produce nine finished labels for each design. And when I say different, we truly witnessed how the same design could come to



Three design studios developed a label with creative freedom, based on a brief UPM created for a fictional brand, Cielo Roto

“Is the label truly effective in capturing the consumer’s attention and convincing them to buy? This study aims to answer that question and identify which elements can make a label more persuasive”

life in completely unique ways with each combination,' Daroni says.

Based on a tequila market study, the team selected the location and the type of consumers to participate. The study was conducted in Dallas with a representative sample of 30 non-expert tequila consumers, balanced 50 percent between men and women, and 50 percent Hispanic. To conduct the evaluation, the team recreated a store shelf with these samples in a controlled environment to minimize the influence of other variables on the measurements.

Moment of truth

This study marks a significant step forward in understanding the emotional and sensory power of packaging and how the label, once a technical detail, is now a central driver of consumer connection and brand success.

'At the first moment of truth, when the consumer chooses the product from the shelf, the most eye-catching labels share three key characteristics. Metallic paperless materials with spot gloss or foils. Layered richness and overlapping embellishments. Tactile appeal such as embossing, engraving and textured varnish,' Daroni explains.

This study confirms that the material on which a label is printed is much more than a technical choice; it is a sensory and strategic decision.

The study also uncovered a surprising result: premium papers and finishes performed exceptionally well, even when bottles were placed away from the central shelf position. Shiny and tactile enhancements quickly drew the consumers' attention, proving that design quality can outweigh where the product is placed on the shelf. This means that investing in high-impact materials allows brands, especially challengers, to stand out without relying on prime shelf space. Haptic finishes play a significant role in shaping consumer perception and behavior. Touch adds emotional impact to the experience.

'At the second moment of truth, when the consumer physically

interacts with the bottle, there is a natural gesture of touching the label,' Daroni explains. 'This tactile interaction creates sensory reinforcement, which strengthens emotional engagement and builds a sense of quality and authenticity. As a result, consumers are more likely to develop a positive impression of the product, increasing purchase intent and brand loyalty.'

Consumers were influenced primarily at a subconscious level. Neuromarketing tools allowed UPM to identify which label elements attract subconscious attention. Interestingly, the impact extended to the tasting experience as well. Consumers tasted the same tequila packaged with different labels, yet the tequila associated with the most preferred labels was perceived as smoother, more balanced and with a better aroma.

From texture to finish, the label's appearance plays a vital role in how consumers perceive tequila and assign value to the brand.

'This study offers spirits producers and packaging professionals valuable insights to guide label material selection, helping them create stronger shelf presence, emotional resonance and lasting brand loyalty,' says Daroni.

'Material, texture and embellishment aren't merely design choices; they're powerful triggers of perception, emotion and value that directly influence the consumer's final purchase decision. In the world of spirits, like tequila, the label can turn a product into a story and a shelf into a stage. Packaging becomes storytelling. Backed by neuromarketing data, this research confirms what we stand for: labels become emotions,' says Priscilla Montilla, marketing manager at Eurostampa.

Allan Quimby, head of marketing at Kurz, adds that the weight and texture of the substrate, the shimmer of metallics, the depth of print effects, and the tactile pull of haptic finishes together shape how consumers perceive quality and authenticity. These elements engage sight and touch to make a brand feel more premium, memorable and desirable, transforming packaging into a powerful sensory brand experience.

Takeaway for brands and designers

The study focused on a premium tequila, Tequila Reposado, and revealed that consumers directly associate investment in label materials and embellishments with the perception of 'premiumness'.

High-quality paper label materials, textures, foils and print effects signal value and authenticity, which strongly influence purchase decisions in the premium segment.

'However, it is important to note that for spirits in other segments, brands do not necessarily need to replicate the same level of investment,' Daroni notes.

'When designing the perfect tequila label, start by creating a strong shelf impact with label materials that deliver brilliance, like metallic or natural papers with iridescent finishes. Combine visual shine with tactile elements, embossing, debossing, textured varnishes and textured papers, to engage multiple senses and reinforce authenticity.'

She adds that every choice should reflect the brand story. Metallics evoke luxury and celebration, while natural textures convey authenticity and sustainability. Layering techniques such as foil and varnish add depth and craftsmanship, and placing tactile details where consumers naturally touch enhances interaction. Finally, consistency across materials and finishes is essential, turning the label into a sensory identity that ensures a coherent narrative aligned with the product.

Experts at Kurz, Eurostampa and UPM can provide guidance for creative combinations of materials and effects that can capture attention and drive engagement without exceeding budget constraints. The study emphasizes that the priority should be to balance visual impact and tactile appeal with the brand's positioning and target consumers' expectations.

“Consumers tasted the same tequila packaged with different labels, yet the tequila associated with the most preferred labels was perceived as smoother, more balanced and with a better aroma”



Kurz partners with Jägermeister

Leonhard Kurz and Mast-Jägermeister SE, together with label manufacturer Götz + Müller from Berlin, Germany, have developed a recyclable embellishment project for a limited-edition Jägermeister label that combines iconic design with sustainability.

For the limited-edition label, Kurz supplied its recyclable embellishment technology, which meets modern sustainability standards while maintaining brand impact. The project used Kurz's shiny gold KPS slim 2.0, which reduces the transfer-carrier thickness from 12 to 6 microns, conserving resources at the material input stage.

The application was carried out using a resource-saving cold transfer process. The PET carrier residues collected and removed after the finishing process are sustainably recycled using the Recosys recycling system. The resulting Recosys rPET material can then be used in various applications, including textile yarns.

Kurz and Jägermeister developed the project around the principle of 'design for recycling', ensuring no compromise in shine, feel, appearance, iconic design, quality, or brand impact, while maintaining a focus on sustainability. The high-quality finish not only features an ultra-thin transfer carrier but can also be fully integrated into the recycling process.

The collaboration between Kurz, Mast-Jägermeister and Götz + Müller demonstrates what sustainable embellishment can achieve in combining creative design with full recyclability. The project shows that responsibility and premium quality can coexist in modern packaging design.



Scan the QR code to explore UPM's neuromarketing studies on red and white wine labels

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'Regaining trust' biggest challenge for MPS Printing

L&L spoke with MPS CEO Michiel Borst as the company strives to recover following financial woes and filing for bankruptcy late last year. Will Drysdale reports

After rumors had been circulating for some time about financial hardship within MPS, the company announced that four of its Dutch entities would file for bankruptcy in 2025. A myriad of issues contributed to its financial difficulties, but Michiel Borst, CEO of MPS, says a prospective buyer pulled out of a deal late into the process, leaving the company no choice but to declare bankruptcy on 28 October 2025.

MPS Holding, MPS Systems, MPS Service & Commissioning and MPS Supply Chain will continue moving through the bankruptcy process. The business will now continue as MPS Printing after the group announced a management buyout on November 21, 2025.

The MBO team is formed by Borst along with Richard Miedema, Bert van den Brink and Nick Tyrer. Miedema takes on the role of commercial director, and Tyrer is managing director of MPS UK, the same positions both held in MPS. Additionally, Tyrer will work as area sales director at MPS in the Netherlands. Bert van den Brink is one of the original founders of the company.

Despite the financial challenges it faced, Borst believes MPS Printing still has the potential to thrive, as its long-standing reputation and strong relationships will assist the team as it begins to rebuild.

Borst says: 'A leaner organization has been formed that is fully capable of all of the activities the "old" MPS was capable of, at a reduced capacity, but with the know-how on board to scale up as the business grows. The business model is not aimed to grow at all costs, but to grow sustainably.'

'MPS Printing's short-term focus will be on becoming a stable, healthy and reliable partner to the industry that can be trusted,' he continues. 'A large portion of this, will be to provide best-in-class service to the large customer and installed base.'

'This does not mean that we will continue to deliver new equipment to the market at any price.'

Those converters who purchased machines before the bankruptcy have been contacted and 'solutions have been worked out,' says Borst.

Borst shared that one of the key metrics for the first year after the buyout will be 'customer satisfaction'.

The CEO says that the primary focus of the business 'will be on machines that require the best technology' adding that, 'the new business model allows for sustainable growth in machine sales.'

MPS Printing's future

Before the buyout, there were four Dutch entities within the Netherlands-based business and from now on, all activities will take place under MPS Printing. The three remaining entities remain in the insolvency process.

Borst says: 'MPS Systems has operated globally through three subsidiaries. These subsidiaries do not form part of the new structure that remain in the insolvency process of MPS Systems. However, MPS Systems' main distribution network consisted of independent and very loyal agents.'

Borst is realistic about the challenges that lie ahead.

'Restarting after an insolvency is not easy. Even though we have a loyal customer [base] and very loyal supplier base, some parties in the supply chain have unfortunately faced some financial or



MPS Printing in Arnhem, Netherlands

"Regaining trust from both sides will be our main challenge"

operational disturbance,' he says. 'Regaining trust from both sides will be our main challenge.'

The company has not been able to retain every employee position, with Borst sharing that the company is being restarted with half the previous number of staff. However, Borst says: 'We have been able to retain a significant number of employees, keeping key know-how on board, securing the continuity of the business, and with an eye on scaling up the business as we face sustainable growth.'

Borst says that many existing MPS customers have shared 'overwhelmingly supportive' feedback regarding the restructuring after the bankruptcy order. 'We appreciate all of the support we have received from our customers and partners throughout this process.'

MPS Printing will continue to focus on its EF Packaging mid web line of flexo presses officially launched at Labelexpo Europe 2025, along with a 'renewed focus' on its hybrid label press offerings and further investment in automation and connectivity.

Borst says MPS continues to sell new machines and remains eager to close deals with customers.

'However, we will not sell those at any price and are willing to step away from deals that we maybe would have closed prior to bankruptcy.'

Borst did not disclose the financial details of the buyout but did share that there are no plans to change the location of any of its sites going forward.



Scan the QR code to read more about the restart at MPS Printing

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Concordia Group shows power of cooperation

As the labels industry consolidates, Concordia demonstrates a powerful model based on voluntary cooperation rather than on mergers or acquisitions. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

Consolidation among label converters is an accelerating trend on both sides of the Atlantic. This M&A activity has been driven mainly by private equity looking to capitalize on the strong growth of package printing as other graphic arts sectors continue to decline.

But mergers and acquisitions are not the only model for industry consolidation. Over the last 30 years, the Concordia Group has demonstrated that converters can also come together in less formal, voluntary confederations that still confer the benefits of being part of a larger group.

Concordia Labels was established in 1994 by four family-owned businesses: Iwaco (Denmark), Arca Etichette (Italy), Caposa Sinel (Spain) and Labelpak (Belgium). The key objectives were to act as a buying group and to share best practices.

Today, just one of those original founding members remains, Arca Etichette, now joined by Auraprint (Finland), Carini (Austria), Digi-Paq (Belgium), Eshuis (Netherlands), IPE (Spain) and Mercian Labels (UK).

Francesc Egea, director general of IPE, explains the group's core philosophy: 'The first thing to understand is that Concordia itself is not selling anything and there is no legal entity behind it. Concordia is a strategic alliance of independent companies. We collaborate closely, share insights on market trends, new technologies and best practices, and challenge each other's thinking. It is a powerful sounding board for leaders and their teams, and that collective strength naturally creates strategic commercial advantages, including raw material sourcing.'

There is no membership fee, but there is a membership agreement that includes undertakings to deliver on certain responsibilities. 'But how each business is run rests entirely with each of the individual members themselves.'

Committee structure

Each member company nominates one person to the Concordia board, which meets twice a year at one of the group's factories. The meeting L&L attended in November was held at IPE Etiquetas & Sleeves in Barcelona.

Beneath the main board are various



L-R: Jussi Oksanen, managing director Auraprint; Simon Sohm, COO Carini; Peter Overbeek, CEO Eshuis; Adrian Steele, director Mercian Labels; Roberto Sala, COO Arca; Frederik Parrein, Co-CEO Digi-Paq; Francesc Egea, director general of IPE, Spain

"We would like to get to 10 members, as long as their geography and approach fits with the rest of us. Size-wise, I think the ideal profile is an owner-managed business with between 10-50 million EUR turnover"

subcommittees. Perhaps the most important is the purchasing committee, which handles joint sourcing of materials and dies.

'The subcommittee for volume raw material purchasing is where our collaboration is the deepest,' says Jussi Oksanen, managing director of Auraprint. 'We are grouping our volumes with a total spend of 150 million EUR [174 million USD]. As part of this process, we share the experiences we have with different suppliers in terms of product quality and service.'

Every second month, a team call provides updates on the status of purchases and allows the group to predict volume requirements going forward.

'The final purchasing decision is down to each individual company,' says Oksanen. 'They can pretty much do what they like, but the benefit of pooling a lot of the bulk use materials is that, obviously, you are able to be more competitive against the larger consolidated groups. But it doesn't stop anybody from having their own independent supply chain as well. So there's a sort of a balance here.'

Another important subcommittee is technical and production, which provides for regular technical workshops, plant visits, and sharing of best practices across printing, finishing and quality control.

Peter Overbeek, managing director of Eshuis, explains: 'We meet twice a year for a deep dive at one of our companies, and we share in the latest technologies, developments, learnings, new products, new technologies, or where somebody is investing in something completely new. You can go there and collect all the information that you want instead of reinventing it for yourself. This is very, very powerful.'

'To give you one example, as we are recording this interview today, obviously, the breaking news is the MPS (bankruptcy) story. We have a number of different exposures to that situation around Concordia, so we'll be talking about that and what the collective approach may be, how we can source servicing or parts or whatever.'

Other committees include IT and cybersecurity, which cover collaboration on

ERP and MIS systems, data protection and common standards for cyber resilience.

The sales and marketing committee covers exchange of market intelligence, joint benchmarking and exploration of opportunities with multinational customers, and sustainability covers joint initiatives around legislation, certifications like FSC, ISO and EcoVadis and sustainable materials.

Overbeek stresses that these are not just 'top-down' initiatives. 'We shouldn't forget the importance of the teams that operate as interfaces for the technical committees. They are talking directly to their peers. So it's not purely channelled from the top table here. It's actually part of developing your own team, to be able to check your own performance and to learn how other organizations with similar challenges do things.'

Range of capabilities

While all Concordia Group members convert pressure-sensitive labels, they also produce a wide range of other products that bring added benefits to the group.

Between them, Concordia Group members produce PS labels for a wide range of applications, including FMCG, industrial, security and specialist medical applications, alongside booklets, shrink sleeves, sachets and flexible packaging. In addition, both Arca Etichette and Auraprint are agents for Ravenwood linerless label/sleeve systems, and Arca Sistemi is a division dedicated to manufacturing labeling machinery.

Concordia members can offer any product produced by another group company.

'You can front the sale and manage the customer relationship while actually it's being printed in another plant,' explains Adrian Steele, managing director of Mercian Labels. 'I think this is very important, because outsourcing to a third party where there is not an established relationship is always a problem.'

Steele says this spread of capabilities also makes it easier to diversify.

'Mercian Labels is today 100 percent pressure-sensitive labeling. I don't do anything else. But if we had a change of strategy and we wanted to produce Ravenwood linerless sleeves or sachets, the chance of making that a strategic success in my own market is very significantly higher. You cut down the time and cost of that journey, whilst not compromising any markets for members of the group. You can only do that if you're not a direct competitor and you share a lot of trust.'

Resilience

One of the key advantages of being part of a bigger group is increased business resilience. This was clearly demonstrated during the Covid pandemic.

'We met regularly, especially when a new communication came from the suppliers,' recalls Roberto Sala, CEO and sustainability manager at Arca Etichette. 'One thing that I particularly took out of the difficult events of 2022 was how important it was to have availability of a wide range of materials. I'm more comfortable now. If we have a repeat of that situation, we can work together to source materials. After Covid and the 2022 UPM supply crisis, people are much more alert to having single supply chain exposure, so that's a good piece of resilience.'

One of the requirements of Concordia membership is to offer disaster recovery facilities to other group members, taking account of different areas of expertise and operational capability.

'It's certainly been very useful for us when you can say to a blue-chip customer, I'm a member of Concordia, I've got seven trusted partners who can provide disaster recovery from data that we will securely share with them,' says Overbeek. 'This is a huge box ticked for a lot of people.'

Adds Overbeek, 'The Concordia network enhances each



"The subcommittee for volume raw material purchasing is where our collaboration is the deepest. We are grouping our volumes and buying with a value of 150 million EUR"

member's credibility, scale and resilience. Together, we can present ourselves as a globally connected group with shared values and capabilities, something that major brand owners increasingly demand. Eshuis, for example, manages international Coca-Cola self-adhesive and wraparound labels projects and benefits from shared know-how and backup capacity within the group.'

The future

Going forward, the Concordia Group is looking to expand its geographical reach.

Simon Sohm, managing director of Carini, says: 'Between us, we already cover a lot of territory. For example, Carini operates in other markets outside of Austria. But there are markets where we have very little or no coverage. Ireland, France, Poland, quite a lot of eastern and southeastern Europe, we don't have anything at all.'

'We would like to get to 10 members, as long as their geography and approach fit with the rest of us. Size-wise, I think the ideal profile is an owner-managed business with between 10-50 million EUR [12-59 million USD] turnover. If you start going too small, you may not have the resources to contribute to the committees and enjoy the benefits. And if you go too big, then you are not really engaging with the same level of mid-sized customers as we are and facing the same challenges. It has to be independent, able to take their own decisions, and must have a good use of English at all levels of the management team.'

While PS label production is core, 'we also actively encourage a wider range of products because it adds technical skills to the group.'

The size of the company also relates to its degree of innovation and ability to take advantage of new opportunities, says Sohm. 'We all make our own decisions pretty fast. If you are part of a big group, then you know what needs to be done, but before it can be done, it has to go up and down through management layers. We can be much more agile. And when you talk to people who have a very similar approach to businesses in a different marketplace, with whom you're non-competitive, then actually you can be much freer about exchanging information.'

As the pressure grows on independent label companies in a consolidating market, it will be very interesting to see how Concordia's co-operative model develops and how it impacts the future development of our industry.



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Nordvalls grows with digital

Swedish label converter installs two V12 presses in under two years. Piotr Wnuk reports

Nordvalls Etikett has deepened its commitment to digital transformation by installing a second HP Indigo V12 press in Sweden, deployed less than two years after the first. This follow-up investment reflects the company's strong confidence in the HP Indigo V12 as a catalyst for profitable growth and its central role in the 'Nordvalls 2.0' strategy, a bold program focused on modernizing production and establishing the company as a leader in digital label manufacturing across the Nordic region.

Founded in 1907 when Victor Hugo Olsson started the company in Sjöbo in southern Sweden, Nordvalls has evolved from a traditional label printing house into one of Scandinavia's most respected label converters, serving key sectors including food and beverage, pharmaceuticals and logistics. In its 118 years in business, the company has learned that customers appreciate a supplier that values long-term relationships and collaboration.

Nordvalls has three production facilities strategically located across Sweden: a headquarters in Sjöbo, about 40 kilometers from Malmö; one in Bjuv just east of Helsingborg and one in Mölnlycke. The company also operates in Norway, with an office near Oslo and a production facility in Trondheim. Today, the company prints on 30 presses, six of which are new Gallus Labelmasters with a 12-color configuration and screen printing.

Leading Scandinavia's digital adoption

Nordvalls became the first label printer in Scandinavia to install the HP Indigo V12 press in late 2023, underscoring the company's commitment to staying at the forefront of technological innovation. The installation marked a pivotal moment not just for Nordvalls but for the entire Nordic label printing industry.

'The first HP Indigo V12 printing press we installed was revolutionary and a bit of a game changer,' says Patrik Jenemark, CEO of Nordvalls Etikett. 'It offered high speed, high precision, and we could sustainably print labels. The decision to be first in our region was strategic. We wanted to establish ourselves as the go-to partner for brands looking for the most advanced digital label production capabilities in Scandinavia.'

The HP Indigo V12 is an end-to-end technology that helps Nordvalls build a digitally enabled supply chain, allowing brand customers to deliver faster, more personalized campaigns that boost relevance in competitive markets.

For Nordvalls, the HP Indigo V12 fills a vital production gap between short-run digital print jobs handled by the HP Indigo 6K digital press and high-volume analog work. With Indigo's LEPx technology, which enables on-demand, nonstop performance and speeds of up to 120 m/min, the HP Indigo V12 allows Nordvalls to consolidate production from several legacy presses while increasing throughput and delivering gold-standard digital print quality.

'Our offer becomes even more beneficial with 12 colors that allow our customers even more complex designs,' adds Liselot Widerström, senior key account manager at Nordvalls. 'You can truly see the speed and see the precision in results. It is absolutely phenomenal. We're now able to produce labels that were previously only possible through conventional printing methods, but with all the flexibility and efficiency advantages of digital.'

Doubling down on digital

The decision to invest in a second HP Indigo V12 came quickly. During drupa in Düsseldorf, just months after installing the first press, Nordvalls revealed it had committed to a second V12. The speed of this decision was remarkable in an industry where capital



Nordvalls' investment in a second HP Indigo V12 led to the purchase of another non-stop unwinder and rewinder from ABG

"The first HP Indigo V12 printing press we installed was revolutionary and a bit of a game changer"

equipment investments are typically planned years in advance.

'After the installation of our first HP Indigo V12, I said that growth is part of Nordvalls' DNA,' says Jenemark. 'Investing in the second HP Indigo V12 in less than six months represents our commitment to investing for the future and serving our customers with the latest technology. When we saw the impact the first press was having on our production efficiency and our ability to win new business, we knew we needed to act quickly.'

The second HP Indigo V12 is a cornerstone of Nordvalls' newly expanded production facility, purpose-built to house the two digital presses. Designed to maximize operational workflow and digital output, the site reflects Nordvalls' intent to make high-volume digital printing the foundation of its next growth phase.

'Nordvalls is a powerful example of what non-stop digital printing looks like in action,' says Noam Zilbershtain, vice president and general manager of HP Indigo. 'With the installation of a second HP Indigo V12, the company is not just adding capacity; it is unlocking a new level of production agility and responsiveness. This is digital transformation at its core: rethinking the entire production model to grow the business, serve customers faster and stay ahead in a competitive market.'

Transforming operations

'The HP Indigo V12 has fundamentally changed how we operate,' explains Jenemark. 'It's a great complement to traditional flexo. It has improved our operational efficiency. We've reduced setup times, minimized waste and improved responsiveness across our production floor. The press has given us the flexibility to scale smarter, with fewer machines and greater output.'

The operational improvements have been both immediate and far-reaching. Setup times that previously took hours on conventional presses now take minutes on the V12. This dramatic reduction in makeready time has allowed Nordvalls to take on smaller run lengths economically while also improving efficiency on longer runs.

This move is shaping a modern production environment built around automation, end-to-end workflows and operational simplicity. By removing the complexity of analog processes, Nordvalls has created a workspace that is both efficient and

“Growth is part of Nordvalls’ DNA. Investing in the second HP Indigo V12 in less than six months represents our commitment to investing for the future and serving our customers with the latest technology”

appealing, especially for a new generation of operators who value digital agility. This has made recruitment and training faster and more effective.

A recent migration of a popular Swedish food brand’s labels from flexo to the HP Indigo V12 has illustrated the press’s ability to deliver color consistency across SKUs and meet complex run requirements with precision. Brands that produce multiple product variants requiring frequent design changes had previously struggled with the long lead times associated with flexographic printing.

By moving production to the V12, Nordvalls enabled the brands to reduce inventory carrying costs, respond more quickly to market feedback and introduce limited-edition variants that would have been economically unfeasible under the previous production model.

Sustainability benefits

The sustainability benefits have been equally compelling and align with growing pressure from both regulatory bodies and brand owners to reduce the environmental impact of packaging production. The HP Indigo V12’s fast changeovers and streamlined setup processes translate directly into reduced substrate waste and efficient inventory management across print runs.

Traditional flexographic printing typically requires substantial setup waste as operators dial in color and registration. With the V12, this waste is virtually eliminated, with labels coming off the press within the first few meters.

Consolidating production on fewer presses has enabled a leaner, more agile model that increases output while lowering environmental impact.

“The digital workflow also eliminates the need for printing plates, reducing material



After seeing production efficiency on the first HP Indigo V12 press, the company acted quickly to further improve its productivity

waste and chemical use associated with plate production.

“We always strive to invest in the environment and future to give our customers the latest technology combined with our solid knowledge and expertise,” notes Jenemark. “Sustainability is not just about meeting regulations. It’s about taking responsibility for our impact and finding ways to deliver better results with fewer resources.”

Finishing equipment investment

In response to the installation of the first HP Indigo V12 digital press in late 2023, Nordvalls sought to enhance its production line to keep pace with the press’s output. The company recognized early that maximizing the return on investment from high-speed digital printing required equally capable finishing equipment.

This enhancement involved the purchase of ABG’s non-stop unwinder and rewinder systems. Designed in partnership with HP, the systems integrate seamlessly with the HP Indigo V12 digital press. The non-stop capability is particularly crucial for maximizing the V12’s non-stop printing technology, allowing roll changes without stopping the press.

Building on this success, Nordvalls also invested in ABG’s flagship Digicon Series 3 with turret rewinder. The inclusion of ABG’s patented fast-track die, which now reaches speeds of up to 180 m/min in semi-rotary mode, represents a significant advancement in label production efficiency.

After drupa, Nordvalls’ investment in a second HP Indigo V12 led to the purchase of another non-stop unwinder and rewinder from ABG, as well as another Digicon Series 3, allowing Nordvalls to take production capacity to the next level.

“We have had a strong working relationship with ABG both in England

and Sweden for many years,” adds Jenemark. “This company understands our needs, and we strongly believe its product offering is not just innovative but also suits our production requirements now and for the future.”

“We are dedicated to developing cutting-edge technologies that address the evolving needs of digital printing,” comments Matt Burton, global sales director at ABG. “Our collaboration with Nordvalls exemplifies this commitment.”

Looking ahead

“Growth is part of our DNA,” reaffirms Jenemark. “With our investment in the HP Indigo V12 press, we now have Scandinavia’s most modern digital label production. But we’re not stopping here. The label industry is evolving rapidly, and our customers’ needs are becoming more sophisticated.”

The company is already exploring additional applications, including pharmaceutical labels with variable data for serialization, promotional labels with personalized messaging and limited-edition packaging for craft beverages and premium food products.

With the infrastructure now in place to support high-volume digital production, Nordvalls is well positioned to capture emerging opportunities and maintain its leadership in the Nordic label market. The Nordvalls 2.0 strategy has transformed the company from a traditional converter into a digitally enabled packaging partner capable of meeting the most demanding brand requirements.



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Sacchital rewrites flexible packaging rules

Italian converter installs world's first Screen Truepress PAC 520P. Piotr Wnuk reports

Sacchital Group is using a single, compact digital press machine to rewrite the rules of paper-based flexible packaging, blending 80 years of converting know-how with a bold bet on inkjet as the next strategic platform for brands under pressure to decarbonize and differentiate.

With the world's first Screen Truepress PAC 520P, Sacchital positions itself not only as an early adopter but as a co-architect where paper, print and regulation intersect in the next decade.

From Milan printer to paper pioneer

Founded in 1945 near Milan, Sacchital grew alongside Italy's post-war food and consumer-goods boom. It evolved from a traditional flexible packaging converter into the hub of a diversified industrial group. Over the decades, the company layered printing, laminating and paper-processing expertise on top of its roots, building a reputation for tailor-made, high-barrier structures serving food, cosmetics and pharmaceutical customers.

Today, Sacchital Group operates five production plants across Northern Italy, with Dupol Next in Bergamo focused on semi-finished extrusion and other sites in the Milan and Turin areas dedicated to flexible packaging converting and printing. Across a roughly 350,000sqm industrial footprint, the group supplies both European and global markets, combining industrial scale with the flexibility to engineer niche structures for demanding brands.

Built around bespoke packaging

Sacchital talks about 'bespoke' packaging: structures engineered not only to protect a product, but to fit a specific brand story, machine park and distribution reality. Within the group, this philosophy translates into the ability to combine paper, aluminum and polymers into mono- and multi-layer laminates, integrating options such as windows, specialty coatings and premium finishing effects to deliver precise shelf impact and performance.

The multi-plant model underpins this bespoke approach. Dupol Next provides core extrusion capabilities, while other plants specialize in rotogravure, flexographic printing and now digital printing on paper, allowing Sacchital



The partnership between Sacchital Group and Screen is set up as a collaborative platform rather than a one-off machine sale

"Competitive sustainability and performance must go hand in hand"

to cover the entire workflow from semi-finished materials to fully printed, finished reels. That spread of technologies gives the group latitude to allocate work by run length, complexity and lead time, rather than forcing every job through the same production channel.

Sustainability pressures

If the group's history is rooted in print and converting craft, the future is being dictated by regulation, innovation and consumer requests. Rising demand for recyclable, low-impact packaging is intersecting with the European Union's upcoming Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR), which will mandate higher levels of circularity and recyclability across the sector. Sacchital reads that combination as both an obligation and an opportunity: a chance to elevate paper from 'green option' to a mainstream alternative to plastic in flexible formats.

'Competitive sustainability and performance must go hand in hand,' says Alberto Palaveri, executive board member of the board at Sacchital Group and CEO of Åkerlund & Rausing. That ethos has already driven investments in paper-based structures, barrier development and process optimization, and now extends into digital printing as a tool to support circularity initiatives and reduce waste at the level of SKUs and campaigns.

Why digital, why now?

As brands rationalize plastic usage and experiment with recyclable paper-based formats, they are simultaneously grappling with exploding SKU counts, shorter product lifecycles and a constant churn of promotions and market tests. Traditional gravure and flexo remain indispensable for long runs and highly standardized ranges, but they struggle to reconcile economic efficiency with the high variability and fast response times that marketing teams now expect.

Sacchital saw a gap: an agile, low-impact printing technology dedicated to paper-based flexible packaging that could complement, not replace, its analog platforms. By becoming the first company worldwide to install Screen's Truepress PAC 520P, the converter aimed to secure that missing link by adding digital inkjet as a strategic 'third pillar' in its print architecture.

Inside the Truepress PAC 520P

Screen's Truepress PAC 520P is a water-based inkjet press designed specifically for the new generation of heat-sealable, recyclable paper packaging. Its inks comply with strict European safety standards, targeting food and sensitive applications, and align with brands and regulatory requirements for migration and environmental impact.

Physically compact and engineered for

simple integration into existing converting lines, the press is designed to slot into a plant without requiring major infrastructure overhauls. For converters like Sacchital, that means the ability to introduce digital paper printing into established workflows, from pre-press through finishing, while relying on proven Screen inkjet technology already deployed in commercial and label markets.

New economics for paper-based SKUs

For Sacchital, the most profound impact of the PAC 520P is economic rather than purely technical. Digital printing makes it possible to produce short-run, fully finished reels of paper-based packaging with high design variability, ideal for market testing, seasonal campaigns and the proliferation of niche SKUs. By printing 'what's needed, when it's needed,' the company can reduce overproduction, slash inventory risk and limit obsolescence when regulatory symbols or nutritional information change.

The platform also promises a step-change in responsiveness. Sacchital reports that the new technology enables final orders to be ready for shipment within 48 hours, dramatically compressing time-to-market compared with conventional processes that depend on cylinder engraving, plate production and longer makereadies. That speed is particularly attractive to brands using localized designs, personalized messaging or test-and-learn campaigns, where the cost of delay can outweigh the cost of print.

Balancing digital with gravure and flexo

Crucially, Sacchital's move is framed as additive rather than disruptive to analog operations. Flexo and gravure remain the backbone of long-run production, delivering cost-effective manufacturing and ultra-stable color for core SKUs. The PAC 520P is deployed as a complementary asset, absorbing work where run lengths, versioning or lead times would make plates or cylinders a barrier.

This hybrid mindset allows Sacchital to make pragmatic technology choices on a job-by-job basis. Long, stable runs stay on gravure or flexo; mid and short runs with frequent artwork changes, localized content or regulatory complexity migrate to digital, all while sharing substrates, finishing and quality standards across the group. The result is an integrated print ecosystem rather than parallel silos competing for volume.

Circularity, PPWR and digital's role

The timing of the investment is tightly bound to PPWR and similar regulatory frameworks that are reshaping packaging design criteria in Europe. As recyclability thresholds rise and EPR schemes intensify



Screen's Truepress PAC 520P is designed specifically for the new generation of heat-sealable, recyclable paper packaging

“This project represents a pivotal entry into a new segment, and we believe digital inkjet can lower entry barriers for converters exploring paper packaging”

scrutiny on material choices, brands will need to iterate more quickly on both structures and artwork to stay compliant and communicate clearly with consumers. Digital paper printing can help them do that without locking capital into large stocks of pre-printed material that risk becoming obsolete with each legislative tweak.

By focusing the PAC 520P on heat-sealable, recyclable paper substrates, Sacchital is also aligning its printing platform with its broader sustainability narrative: enabling the pack itself to join established paper recycling streams. At the same time, the print process uses water-based inks and avoids plate or cylinder waste.

According to Palaveri, the objective is not to react to market shifts but to 'actively shape the transition' toward packaging portfolios that are both competitive and genuinely eco-conscious.

A partnership to de-risk digital paper

For Screen, Sacchital's installation is a showcase of inkjet's expansion into flexible paper packaging, building on long experience in commercial and label printing. 'This project represents a pivotal entry into a new segment, and we believe digital inkjet can lower entry barriers for converters exploring paper packaging by simplifying production and reducing waste,' notes Yuki Yoshi Tanaka, president of Screen.

The partnership is set up as a collaborative platform rather than a one-off machine sale. Sacchital and Screen plan to work together on new applications, supporting customers in shifting from plastic to paper and demonstrating how digital can future-proof their packaging

portfolios in the face of regulatory and market change. For brand owners, that collaboration offers a pathway to experiment with new structures and designs without assuming all the technical risk themselves.

Redefining role in the value chain

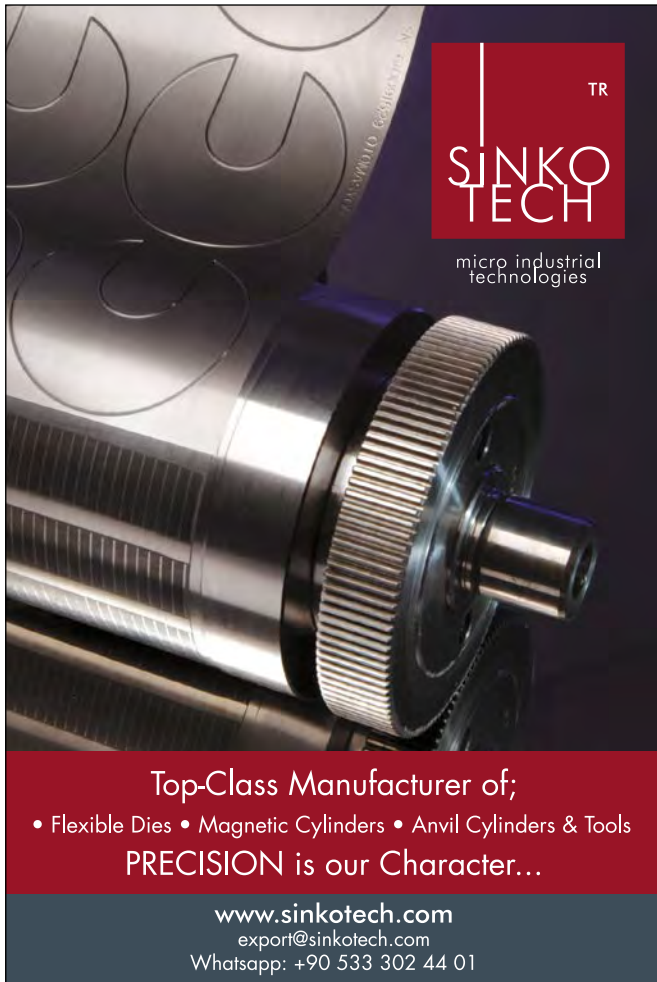
Sacchital's adoption of the PAC 520P crystallizes a broader repositioning of the group from converter to co-designer of packaging ecosystems. With five plants spanning extrusion, converting, gravure, flexo and now digital inkjet on paper, the company can engage earlier in customers' development cycles, advising on material choices, print strategies and regulatory trajectories. Its capacity to deliver short-run, high-variability paper packaging within 48 hours is likely to pull it even closer to marketing and innovation teams, not just procurement departments.

'Innovation is in our DNA,' notes Palaveri, 'but the PAC 520P installation shows that this is no mere slogan: it is a strategic bet that the intersection of paper, digital print and regulation will define the next phase of flexible packaging.'

For the labels and packaging community, Sacchital's move offers an early glimpse of how converters may re-tool their plants, and their business models, to ensure that sustainability, performance and speed to market are no longer competing demands, but mutually reinforcing elements of the same value proposition.



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A-Z Color achieves zero-defect pharma label production

A-Z Color transforms quality control with automated inspection technology. Piotr Wnuk reports

Polish printer, A-Z Color, began operations in Ostrołęka, Poland, in 1992, from an area measuring 20sqm. Over its 30-year history, it has evolved from a small plant producing mainly simple, single-color labels into a modern flexographic printing house, well-equipped and continually expanding its offerings.

A period of rapid development for A-Z Color began in the late 1990s. The world-class machinery that was purchased then transformed it into a company with a diversified production profile. The following years of dynamic development led to the construction in 2006 of a 3,850sqm, modern production plant and further expansion of the machinery park.

Today, with over 90 employees, the family-owned company manufactures high-quality self-adhesive labels, shrink sleeves and flexible packaging for customers in the cosmetics, food and pharmaceutical industries throughout Europe. Its mission: uncompromising precision in every print, especially in regulated markets. The label manufacturer confirms this promise of quality with ISO 9001:2015, BRCGS Packaging Materials and FSC certifications, as well as DPG qualification for the German market.

A-Z Color provides comprehensive printing services from design to delivery of ready-made labels. To meet the ordering parties' expectations to the best of its ability, the printing house operates under an integrated management system that enables complete control of all production processes. A customer service department was established within the printing house to provide advice and professional assistance throughout production preparation.

Pharmaceutical quality

In the pharmaceutical industry, precision is paramount. An incorrectly placed decimal point in dosage instructions, a slight change in batch number or a subtle color change on a warning label can have serious consequences.

'Our priority has always been to deliver products that meet our customers' high expectations,' explains Katarzyna Zecer-Gólaszewska, partner at A-Z Color. 'However, in a dynamic market that does not forgive mistakes, ensuring absolute reliability at every stage of production was a real challenge.'

For a company serving customers across Europe in highly regulated industries, maintaining strict quality standards while meeting production deadlines and efficiency targets has been an ongoing operational challenge.

A-Z Color faced the challenge of finding a future-proof, automated technology that would combine 100 percent reliability with maximum production speed. The company needed a system that could meet the exacting standards of pharmaceutical manufacturing while integrating seamlessly into existing production workflows without compromising efficiency.

Evaluation process

A few years ago, A-Z Color implemented its first automated print inspection systems and evaluated their performance over the long term. The selection criteria were simple and included ultra-precise detection, stable 24/7 performance, easy integration, user-friendly design and reliable operation.

'When selecting the right product, it is not only the technology



By combining off-line and in-line systems, A-Z Color fully digitized its quality control process

"In an industry where a single missing point can mean the difference between success and failure, EyeC is our life insurance"

and price that matter to us, but also the quality of cooperation,' emphasizes Zecer-Gólaszewska. 'We need partners who understand our requirements, share our quality standards and provide us with reliable support in our daily production.'

The evaluation process accounted for the specific demands of pharmaceutical manufacturing, where GMP guidelines set rigorous standards for quality control and documentation. An evaluation of various quality control systems, taking into account pharmaceutical requirements and GMP guidelines, enabled the company to make a clear decision. While competing systems failed in areas critical to the pharmaceutical industry, EyeC systems reliably and consistently detected even the smallest deviations.

This thorough evaluation process demonstrated A-Z Color's commitment to making strategic technology investments based on real-world performance rather than specifications alone. The company's approach of testing systems in actual production conditions over an extended period provided invaluable insight into how different technologies would perform.

Dual-system approach

The EyeC Proofiler 600 DT off-line scanner system was used to check the print pattern, while EyeC ProofRunner Web in-line systems were used for 100 percent inspection on the label printing line. This combination of off-line verification and in-line inspection created a comprehensive quality control framework.

The EyeC Proofiler combines intelligent software with a high-resolution flatbed scanner and enables objective, repeatable quality control of text, colors, graphics, 1D and 2D codes and Braille. It compares printed products against approved PDF templates to verify print quality and content accuracy. This off-line verification step ensures that approved templates meet all specifications before production begins, establishing a verified

reference point for in-line inspection.

Using this approach, EyeC ProofRunner Web cameras capture every label during printing. Each item is thoroughly checked for accuracy in color, registration and positioning, and then automatically verified. The system detects and flags errors in real time, so that only error-free products are processed further.

All EyeC systems are equipped with pixel-accurate comparison algorithms that detect deviations of 0.1 millimeters, enable real-time analysis at full production speed and automatically compensate for differences in materials and prints. This level of precision is essential for pharmaceutical applications.

Intelligent contrast analysis also prevents false alarms, a critical feature that helps maintain production efficiency by ensuring operators are alerted only to genuine quality deviations, not to acceptable material variations. If deviations are detected, the system immediately notifies production, precisely locates the deviation and allows operators to make targeted corrections.

By combining off-line and in-line systems, A-Z Color fully digitized its quality control process.

Rapid implementation

After two weeks of technical preparation, including analysis of production lines, infrastructure upgrades and definition of real-world test cases, three ProofRunner Web systems were installed, qualified and tested in a single day.

This efficient installation process reflected both the preparatory work undertaken by A-Z Color and the support provided by EyeC. After operator training, the systems were immediately put into production mode. The installation complied with pharmaceutical standards and included approved documentation (IQ/OQ) and training certificates for all operators.

The installation qualification and operational qualification documentation are essential for pharmaceutical manufacturing, providing the audit trail required by regulatory authorities. Training certificates for all operators ensure that quality control is maintained across all shifts and that systems are operated consistently in accordance with established protocols.

Proven partnership

The collaboration with EyeC was a decisive breakthrough for A-Z Color in label production. In several years and thousands of production orders, only one defective printing template was produced. Following a joint analysis with the manufacturer, insufficient color contrast was identified



Katarzyna Zecer-Gólaszewska, partner at A-Z Color

“When selecting the right product, it is not only the technology and price that matter to us, but also the quality of cooperation”

as the cause. The system parameters were adjusted, and a preventive action protocol was implemented. Since then, the error rate has been zero.

This single incident, rather than representing a system failure, demonstrated the value of the partnership approach. The collaborative problem-solving process identified the root cause, implemented corrective measures and established preventive protocols to ensure the issue would not recur.

This has fundamentally changed quality assurance from random sampling to 100 percent automated inspection on the production line. The most significant advantage: deviations immediately lead to production stoppages, are documented and enable targeted corrections – fully GMP-compliant and audit-proof.

For customers, especially in the pharmaceutical industry, this means no product recalls, complete documentation, audit security and predictable delivery dates. The elimination of product recalls alone represents significant value, avoiding not only the direct costs of recalls but also the reputational damage and regulatory scrutiny that accompany quality failures in pharmaceutical supply chains.

At the same time, waste and reprints have been significantly reduced, resulting in real resource savings and higher production efficiency. This dual benefit of improved quality and reduced waste demonstrates how advanced quality control technology can deliver both compliance and operational advantages.

The investment has also paid off

in business terms: A-Z Color has transformed itself from a standard supplier to a preferred supplier for leading pharmaceutical companies. Top audit ratings, extended framework agreements, a growing number of orders, active recommendations and a reduced number of incoming inspections are proof of this increased trust.

‘In an industry where a single missing point can mean the difference between success and failure, EyeC is our life insurance,’ emphasizes Zecer-Gólaszewska.

Company-wide adoption

What began in 2019 as a targeted application in pharmaceutical labels has become a company-wide standard. ‘Over time, we realized that EyeC technology also offers us enormous benefits in other areas,’ adds Zecer-Gólaszewska.

Today, in addition to the EyeC ProofRunner, five EyeC ProofRunner systems are integral to production, operating virtually around the clock. The most recent installation took place in 2025. In accordance with internal standards, the systems must always be running when the printing machines are in operation.

This expansion from pharmaceutical applications to company-wide adoption reflects the recognition that quality control benefits extend across all market segments. Monitored and controlled by printing house employees, shift managers and technologists, the systems check the entire printing process during all production shifts, ensuring consistent quality regardless of when production occurs or which crew is operating the equipment.

Strategic quality vision

With the implementation of EyeC systems, A-Z Color has set a new quality standard in label printing that guarantees error-free results. Building on its successes to date, the company is now working to further develop predictive quality control through data-driven analysis and continuous process improvement. The partnership with EyeC is an indispensable foundation for these activities, providing both the technology platform and the collaborative relationship necessary to advance quality control capabilities.

‘Based on our consistently positive experience, we have no hesitation in recommending EyeC as a proven and reliable partner,’ concludes Katarzyna Zecer-Gólaszewska.



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McDowell Label's differentiation factor

The Texas converter's proprietary technology enables its customers to stand out on the shelves. Selah Zighelboim reports

Awards line the walls at the McDowell Label facility in Plano, Texas

This article and interview with John McDowell were completed prior to McDowell's last day at Resource Label Group on February 9. McDowell says: 'I am exploring many new opportunities that have been presented since the separation. For now, I am excited to serve my board of director duties with the FTA and remain engaged with the Regulatory Affairs Committee at TLMI.'

The walls at McDowell Label's facility in Plano, Texas, serve as a testament to the company's achievements. From floor to ceiling across multiple hallways, these walls showcase the 1,347 print awards that the converter has won, starting with its first TLMI recognition in 1997.

'There's really nothing more gratifying than when you have third-party industry peers recognize the quality of work that you manufacture and execute, day in and day out, as among the world's best,' says John McDowell, president of McDowell Label, a Resource Label Group (RLG) company. 'The brand owners that we serve, they value that. They want to be part of that.'

"RLG recognized our market differentiation, the unique brand identity that we have, the culture of quality that we employ"

McDowell attributes this success to the company's blend of proprietary technology and its strong sense of identity, centered on partnering with brands that seek differentiation. The converter focuses on creating labels with crisp image quality and unique embellishments, helping clients stand out in competitive marketplaces.

'We don't try to be all things to all people,' McDowell says about McDowell Label's brand identity. 'We're hyper-focused on identifying verticals or market segments, and brands within those verticals and market segments. At the end of the day, these brands, whether they're traditional retail brick and mortar or even direct to consumer, it's a very competitive landscape. We allow our brands to out-graphic their competition because the reality is, as a consumer, whenever you shop – whether it's online or traditional brick-and-mortar retail – a brand has only one-sixth of a second to capture your attention.'

'We afford that brand the ability, through our technologies, our printing excellence, to provide brand cohesion, to attract that customer, the consumer, and invoke them to engage with the brand.'

McDowell Label produces pressure-sensitive labels, shrink sleeves and flexible packaging – all with solely flexographic technology. While the business breakdown does change from year to year, John McDowell said that currently about 70 percent of the company's revenue comes from shrink sleeves, while about 28

percent is labels and the last 2 percent from flex pack. Its primary end-use markets are functional beverages, wine and spirits, health, beauty and cosmetics, dietary supplements and sports nutrition. A fast-growing segment for McDowell Label is pet care products.

As a Resource Label Group company, McDowell Label is part of a network of more than 30 facilities across North America. In Plano, McDowell Label has about 100 employees. It operates 10 flexo presses, but as part of RLG, it can tap into a broader system of locations and technologies to meet customer needs.

From father to son

Dave McDowell founded McDowell Label in 1981, after a decade of working for Stan Avery at Avery Label. He started the business in a room in John McDowell's childhood home and built it from the ground up.

'I'm the youngest of three boys, raised largely by a single father,' says John McDowell. 'Growing up, it was a very competitive, machismo household. The two older boys and I used to always grapple and verbally position the moxie of who's the best. We never considered that the best was dad, but a time eventually came when we ultimately realized it was him all along.'

John McDowell and his brothers initially worked in different industries, with John McDowell owning Gold's Gym health clubs in Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston. He sold the health clubs in 1996 and joined his father's business. He thought he would move on to a new business venture after a few months.

The experience proved pivotal to McDowell Label's future.

Dave McDowell had been thinking of selling the business. John McDowell convinced him to teach him how to run it instead.

Over the next few years, John McDowell brought his two brothers into the company. David Wayne, the eldest brother, serves as plant manager, while Jeff, the middle brother, is the production manager.

Their father officially retired when Resource Label Group acquired McDowell Label in October 2020.

RLG acquisition

John McDowell had not initially intended to sell the company. But McDowell Label eventually grew to the point where it became a challenge to self-fund its accelerated growth, and John McDowell began looking for a partner.

He wanted to make sure he selected a partner that would benefit the company. He spent about two years considering six potential companies before deciding to move forward with Resource Label Group.

RLG stood out as a partner because it recognized McDowell Label's identity as one focused on high excellence and skilled craftsmanship.

'RLG recognized our market differentiation, the unique brand identity that we have, the culture of quality that we employ,' John McDowell says. 'We've been able to proliferate that throughout the entire enterprise. They didn't want to come in and change what we did. They wanted to optimize who we are.'

Additionally, John McDowell believed that RLG, with its dozens of facilities and diverse capabilities, was well-suited to navigate market challenges. This felt especially pertinent at the time, as the pandemic disrupted workplaces, supply chains and global markets.

With access to RLG's capital, McDowell Label has grown its workforce and upgraded its technology.

'We're able to respond more swiftly, more intentionally, to market segment growth, specific brand growth or specific technology growth,' John McDowell says. 'We've recapitalized the company. We've reinvested in the company. Like any relationship or partnership, both parties have to uphold their end of the bargain. We grew the sales revenue of the business, and they capitalized the infusion for us to reinvest in order to add capacity, optimize our technologies, and continue to grow. We've enjoyed the dynamics of the enterprise network. We move business to other facilities, and in time, they move business to us.'

John McDowell's role also included responsibilities at the greater RLG network, where he purveyed and parlayed subject matter expertise, cultivated talent, developed key strategic accounts and identified cohesive technology for and throughout the entire network of facilities.

Printing capabilities

McDowell Label utilizes eight Omet and two Gallus presses.

'We have a fantastic partnership with Omet,' John McDowell says. 'I'm a big fan of its press technology. It is an Italian, multi-generation, family-owned company. Omet is about as nerdy about manufacturing presses as we are about manufacturing labels and packaging.'

McDowell Label's machines are combination and multi-process printing presses, capable of printing multiple substrates, high-definition UV flexo, rotary screen printing and micro-embossing stereograms. Each press has multiple foil, die-cutting and emboss/deboss stations.

McDowell Label only has flexo presses. The converter was an early adopter of digital technology in the packaging space in



L-R: Jeff McDowell, John McDowell and David Wayne McDowell

“There were times people accused us of printing offset and digital when 100 percent of our operations is flexo because we can print a very fine dot”

2005. However, the technology was still in its early days and not quite yet ready to meet the company's production demands. The current technology makeup works well for the company, and it can tap into RLG's network to meet customers' digital needs.

'I've always believed that the digital print engine and digital technology are the way of the future, and in my lifetime will be the primary print engine in our industry,' John McDowell says. 'It's made some quantum leaps and great advancements, but it still hasn't arrived to serve our niche of business.'

McDowell Label's finishing technology is from BW Converting/Accraply and Rotoflex.

The converter is renovating its pre-press department by adding capacity to address a recent bottleneck issue. The company recently upgraded with a new, wider Esko CDI Crystal unit for platemaking.

Proprietary technology

John McDowell attributes much of McDowell Label's success to its proprietary technology, which he calls the company's 'secret sauce'.

'We've always been on the leading edge of innovation, innovative technologies,' he says. 'We've coveted technology, a lot of which has been, over the years, proprietary, which we've developed here. We've certainly invested in it, too.'

At the heart of this is the company's Crisp-Dot-Technology, or CDT, its proprietary pre-press and art production

technology developed many years ago. CDT came out of a long-time goal of the converter's, a priority since Dave McDowell's days, to create the perfect dot.

CDT enabled the company to print very fine dots, long before the rest of the industry's pre-press technology caught up. It allows the converter to print screen tones and vignettes with no discernible dot gain.

'There were times people accused us of printing offset and digital when 100 percent of our operations are flexo because we can print a very crisp dot,' McDowell says.

McDowell Label operates on two principles to achieve this perfect dot.

The first is the importance of the original artwork quality. McDowell Label often rebuilds art files received from customers. Sometimes a received artwork file looks nice on the screen, but when the file is preflighted and distilled into vector layers, it becomes clear that it is not high-quality enough to manufacture an excellent product, necessitating the rebuilding.

The other principle is that environmental quality can also not be compromised, so McDowell Label aims to operate a clean, quality-controlled facility.

John McDowell notes the importance of skilled operators in printing fine dots. 'One thing that often gets lost in our industry, even with the advent of innovative technologies, is that our industry is still very much a craft,' he says. 'It's very artisanal, and our press operators are, in kind, very much like craftsmen, because it's a skilled trait. In our industry, you can take two identical presses that employ the same prepress, same plate technology, same material, same substrates, and you may or may not get the same results. Hence, the training curated for our team of operators, specific to our standard, is also what sets us apart.'

McDowell Label has worked with its suppliers to create other proprietary technologies as well, such as embellishments, inks and coatings. One example is the company's micro-shimmer technology, developed with one of its ink suppliers, Cyngient. These proprietary technologies, which McDowell Label does not sell, provide customers with a tool to distinguish themselves from their competition.

'We've been able to bake into our DNA and culture an award-winning mindset,' McDowell says. 'We treat every job, every order and every portfolio that we serve as an award winner.'



Scan the QR code to learn more about McDowell Label

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Western States grows beyond envelope market

The 118-year-old envelope manufacturer is expanding the label side of its business with a Mark Andy Digital HD hybrid press. Selah Zighelboim reports

Labels aren't new at Western States. The company, one of the largest envelope manufacturers in the US, based in Butler, Wisconsin, has been producing pressure-sensitive labels for 30 years. But for the 118-year-old family-owned business, labels had remained a small part of its portfolio, accounting for 11-12 million USD, about 11 percent of its revenue.

The company is hoping to grow that side of the business with the installation of a Mark Andy Digital HD hybrid press. The press is enabling Western States to expand its label business, and the company wants to grow its label segment to about 50 percent of its revenue over the next five to 10 years.

Currently, about 60 of the company's 600 employees are focused on manufacturing labels, with an additional 30 salespeople who sell both labels and envelopes. Its primary end-use markets for labels are beer and wine, food and candles.

'I'm very thankful that 30 years ago we decided to diversify into labels,' says Kevin Bayerlein, director of national sales at Western States, and the sixth generation of his family involved in the company. 'At the time, we wanted to be an envelope company that also sold labels. What I'd like to see is us eventually becoming a label company that still sells envelopes.'

For its entire history, Western States has been family-owned. Currently, Bayerlein and his father, CEO Steve Bayerlein, are the only two family members involved in the company.

'Envelopes have become a very commoditized market, and labels are very much a solutions-based market,' Kevin Bayerlein says.

'You find a solution for a customer; you find an application that's working for them. You can help them with their brand, and they stay loyal, and they want to stay with you. That's where we want to go with our business. We want customers to start to look at us as a partner rather than a vendor.'

Label growth

Western States was founded in 1908 by George French Moss, a paper salesman, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Throughout

the 20th century, the company grew, investing in and patenting new technology, increasing its square footage and acquiring other businesses.

In 1999, Western States entered the labels business by acquiring Four Lakes Label in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

Entering the label business was not easy. Western States found the market competitive, and the company needed to learn a great deal about the industry, including its technical aspects, such as materials and adhesives.

Western States also needed to train the Four Lakes Label staff to work with the reseller market, which has historically accounted for the bulk of Western States' customers.

'We've had a lot of training to get our people on the same board, and we're there now,' Kevin Bayerlein says. 'We have a very knowledgeable sales force, and we have very knowledgeable customer service and manufacturing people. Now our biggest strategy is, how do we grow and how do we keep up with the demand?'

Mark Andy Digital HD

Western States decided to invest in a 13in Mark Andy Digital HD press about a year ago to better serve industries like pharmaceuticals, cannabis, wine and beer that require high-quality small type print.

'We have a lot of different customers now that are printing multiple SKUs, and so using the digital press, and not having all the different plate costs, makes us much more efficient and competitive,' Kevin Bayerlein says.

Another draw to the press was its speed. The Mark Andy Digital HD press can run at 400 ft/min.

Western States had a positive history with Mark Andy already. It has several other Mark Andy label presses: two 8in digital presses and a 13in and a 17in flexo press.

Western States also recently switched to Label Traxx's Sitaline program for its online storefront in Q4 of 2025.

Future goals

To continue growing its label business, Western States plans to eventually acquire another label converter. The company currently has six locations in Wisconsin,



Western States facility

"Envelopes have become a very commoditized market, and labels are very much a solutions-based market"

Ohio, Kentucky, North Carolina and Minnesota and produces labels only at its Sun Prairie facility.

'We'll need to add capacity,' Kevin Bayerlein says. 'We don't have enough capacity right now to do 50 million dollars in labels, but that's obviously what we would like to achieve someday. We're going to have to make an investment at some point where we buy another label company in another location, and we're certainly going to have to look at expanding our own plant.'

Bayerlein says that to become known as a label company, Western States must also prove itself more in the market.

'We need to get to the point where people think of us for labels first, instead of thinking of us as an afterthought,' he says. 'The sales force has to continue to drive that into our customers' heads, and we have to continue to diversify our customer base in order to make that happen.'



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The rise of Lone Star Labels

For the last several years, the family-owned converter has experienced explosive growth, increasing its workforce, square footage and revenue. Selah Zighelboim reports

Lone Star Labels & Packaging's physical presence has more than quadrupled in the last five years, from about 6,000sqft of facility space and a handful of employees, to 25,000sqft and 27 staff members.

With a recent building acquisition behind the company, and a potential significant workforce expansion ahead, Lone Star Labels sees itself at a moment of explosive growth.

Based in Lewisville, Texas, in the Dallas area, the converter is truly a family-run business. It is helmed by president Perry Wray and his two children, vice president of operations Brandon Wray and vice president of sales Katie Wray.

"It's a big deal that we're family-owned, and that it's run like a family-owned business, not a big corporation"

Katie's husband, Blake Lewis, serves as director of marketing, while Perry's wife, Carolyn Wray, manages finance for the company, and Brandon's wife, Tatiana Wray, takes care of customer service and payroll.

For Lone Star Labels, the last five years have seen year-over-year revenue growth, significant investment in technology and a growing workforce. At the same time, the company has re-done its website and made Katie Wray's LinkedIn profile a focal point for visibility.

The company, which currently runs just one shift, must now decide whether to add a second shift to maintain its growth momentum.

'I always said we were little Lone Star Labels,' Katie Wray says. 'People were like, "Oh, I've never heard of you". Then, all of a sudden, bam, we're here. But that wasn't by chance. The past five years have been trying to build that, what it is now, but I hear that all the time. People often say, "Oh, I've seen your LinkedIn" or "I've heard of you, but I didn't really know about your company". That was intentional in a way, and now it's time to rattle the industry a little bit.'

History

Perry Wray has worked in the labeling industry for decades. He spent eight years at Avery Dennison before deciding to work for himself, brokering for various label converters. During that time, he served for a year as president of Lone Star Labels, then a reseller. About 25 years ago, Perry bought the Lone Star Labels name and started his own business. Having started as a reseller, the company eventually began producing its own labels, which it sold to resellers.

Perry Wray and Brandon Wray have worked together since 2003. To ensure that Lone Star Labels would last for his children, Perry Wray decided about 15 years ago to make a switch from selling to resellers to selling directly to end users, brand owners and co-packers.

That led the company to make another shift: from producing simple industrial labels to more complex decorative prime labels and shrink sleeves.

The company is certified by Graphic Measures International,



From left: Perry, Katie and Brandon Wray in front of a Nilpeter press

a quality certification required by some major retailers such as Lowe's, CVS and Target.

Today, about 15 percent of the company's revenue still comes from industrial labels, while about 20 percent comes from flexible packaging.

The last 65 percent is split fairly evenly between prime labels and shrink sleeves. Its biggest end-use markets are health and beauty, and food and beverage.

Technology

Lone Star Labels produces its industrial labels on a Mark Andy 2200 press, which has run smoothly since Lone Star acquired it nearly 20 years ago.

To produce its prime labels and shrink sleeves, the company uses three presses, all of which it purchased in the last five years: an 11-color Nilpeter FA-17 press, a 10-color Nilpeter FA-17 press and a 13in HP Indigo 6K. The Nilpeter presses have adjustable anvil die stations and quick-change die stations and are set up for printing thin film. The HP, Lone Star Label's newest press, which it purchased about two years ago, can print multiple SKUs.

'The HP got us a lot more versatility,' Brandon Wray says. 'We could do stick pack or sachets, we could do shrink sleeves, we could do labels, all of that. Ultimately, the biggest thing was that it was what's proven to work for digital shrink.'

The converter also has a Grafisk Maskinfabrik GM 350 finishing unit and three CEI 17in slitter rewinders. The company's most recent investment is a second 100 percent inspection CEI unit.

'We needed more throughput in our finishing department,' Brandon Wray says of the new CEI unit. 'We were starting to get bogged down in there. We also got it geared more toward thin films and flexible packaging.'

Other impactful technology for the company includes its Label Traxx software, which helps automate job scheduling, and its BST inspection system, which is on the presses and finishing equipment.

Building acquisition

Lone Star Labels has been located in the same building since 2000. Over the years, the company gradually increased the amount of space it rented in the building until it eventually made financial

sense for Lone Star to buy the entire building, which it did in July 2025.

'We've looked at buying buildings at other locations, but this location is just perfect,' Katie Wray says. 'We're close to the highway; trying to get in and out of here is easy. Centrally located; we have employees coming from all over the metroplex.'

Lone Star Labels does not currently occupy the whole space and still has one renter.

According to Perry Wray, the building acquisition sent a reassuring message to employees that the family was heavily invested in the company's future and wouldn't be selling the business anytime soon.

'It sent a huge message to the people that worked here that we're here for the long haul,' Perry Wray says. 'We're not going to sell, and we're not going to move somewhere that doesn't make sense for them logistically to come into work.'

Sustainability

Lone Star Labels prides itself on being an early adopter of sustainable technologies, such as LED curing systems and CPET shrink film. The company says it was among the first in the US to invest in a Flexo Wash water-recirculation machine and has worked with its ink supplier to test deinking primers.

'We're always trying to stay ahead of what we can do, like on the flex pack side, with mono-material, laminations that are more recycling-friendly, stuff like that,' Brandon Wray says. 'Just trying to help our customers know what their options are as far as what can we make them that's recyclable, or switching from some container that they're using to a flexible package.'

The team stays educated on sustainability through conversations with their suppliers and by attending industry events.

Lewis adds: 'We have to be ready to go when that client says this is going to be a requirement for them. We are going to be ahead of the curve and not be shocked by anything. Brandon is doing a great job with the R&D, so there won't be any type of delay in either production or quality control, because we've already tested it. It already passes our QC.'

Company culture

Maintaining its family-run business culture is also important to Lone Star Labels. For instance, the company holds cookouts and Christmas parties for its employees. 'We've established an incredible culture inside the four walls, that we're all on the same page, and we're all teammates, and we all want the same things, just to take care of people and have organic growth,' Lewis says.

Lone Star's culture is something the company is known for, and it helps with its workforce. The company has a low turnover rate and regularly receives employee referrals and frequent inquiries about available employment opportunities.

'Those people are drawn in by the fact that Lone Star Labels is family-owned,' Perry Wray says. 'It's a big deal that we're family-owned, and that it's run like a family-owned business, not a big corporation.'

Its location in the Dallas, Texas, metropolitan area, where there are many print shops, also provides them with a strong base from which to draw talent.

'Everybody running all of our stuff is seasoned in the industry,' Katie Wray says. 'For none of our press operators is it their first time being a press operator. Everybody's been in the industry for quite a bit of time.'

Looking ahead

The next step for Lone Star Labels is likely adding a second shift.

'If you look at most big shops, they all run three shifts, so we're only a third at capacity,' Perry Wray says. 'But we're stubborn. We're causing ourselves all kinds of aggravation in



Lone Star Labels' HP Indigo 6K

“Our biggest challenge is, how do we continue servicing the customer at the level that they're used to, and take on new business without interrupting them?”

terms of production that we can solve just by doing a second shift. Everybody here has heard the horror stories about a second or third shift; it's harder to manage.'

The immediate goal of adding a second shift would be to alleviate the pressure on the first shift workers. Adding that second shift would also enable Lone Star Labels to take on more business.

As a family-owned company, Lone Star Labels wouldn't even necessarily feel enormous pressure to make sure the second shift pays for itself right away.

'Our biggest challenge is, how do we continue servicing the customer at the level that they're used to, and take on new business without interrupting them?' Perry Wray asks. 'The simple answer is to start a second shift.'

Additionally, Lone Star Labels expects flexible packaging, including wider-web flexible packaging, to be a larger part of its business going forward. The company anticipates eventually investing in wider-web machinery.

'That's an emerging market for us,' Perry Wray says. 'We haven't really dived into that big time on that side, but it is going to be a big part of where we go going forward.'

Perry Wray is now 71 years old, and he does plan to eventually retire, at least part-time. With Brandon and Katie Wray (40 and 34, respectively) at the company, the future leadership of Lone Star Labels is secure.

'We're not trying to be as big as we can be. That's not the point. The point is to be big enough to be relevant and still cover service to customers,' Perry Wray concludes.



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Q&A

After working for TLMI for five years, Dale Coates stepped into a new role as president and CEO of the association late last year. Selah Zighelboim reports

Dale Coates is TLMI's new president and CEO, having taken over from Linnea Keen, who announced her resignation at the TLMI 2025 Annual Meeting.

Coates first joined TLMI in November 2020 as the association's engagement director. She has since held roles as vice president of member operations and engagement and as COO at TLMI.

She has a PhD in polymer science from the University of Connecticut and a Bachelor of Science in physics/engineering from Washington and Lee University. Prior to her time as a TLMI professional, she worked at Unison Tube and Franklin International and had been involved with TLMI as a supplier member.

L&L: What do you see as the primary purpose of TLMI?

Dale Coates: Our purpose is really to provide connection. We do that through how we bring people together, the knowledge that we share, solutions that we're sharing at our meetings.

The TLMI values are community, insight and advocacy, and we try to use those values to drive any of our programming, any of our studies, any of our in-person events or virtual events.

We host several in-person networking events each year. In the spring, we typically do a printer member leadership-style meeting. In the summer, we have Label Leaders of Tomorrow. In the fall is our big Annual Meeting, where everyone comes together to network and share. Our Committee Summit is the last event of the year, and that one is where our tried-and-true volunteers come together and work all day. We spend the entire day in meetings, planning and anticipating what the membership might need in the coming year.

We are very much participating in other events, and Loupe Americas is one of them. We'll be so excited to be part of Loupe Americas in the fall, and we enjoy bringing our membership together for that.

We've really tried to amp up our webinars over the last couple of years. So again, the idea is that we're trying to connect people through knowledge and solution-sharing.

With the connection piece, it's important for us to have our members helping each other, since we have so much industry expertise. We started a program called the TLMI Gurus. That's another way we're trying to connect our individuals with people who have a question and someone who's an expert already in the industry who can provide an answer.

It's connection, but through a lot of different mechanisms.

L&L: What is your vision for TLMI?

DC: I recently had a really fun thing happen. We received some history from the son of a former TLMI chair. His father had described TLMI to him as the perfect balance of competition and collaboration.

That's so true. And my vision for TLMI is that we continue to be the space where people can come together. They not only find support and solutions, but sometimes they find their lifelong friends, and it's all under this umbrella of advancing the industry.

I hope I can help position TLMI to continue leading in this space, supporting our members and the industry overall.

L&L: What are the most significant initiatives that TLMI is currently undertaking, and what are the next steps for those initiatives?

DC: I've already mentioned some of the things we're doing with webinars. We have quarterly ones for regulatory affairs issues, and we work with a partner, Pace LLP, to keep our members informed about anything that falls under that regulatory umbrella. We have quarterly workforce updates monthly. We're having technical special topics, and multiple times a year, we bring in some special sustainability speaker as well.

We're launching some partnerships to bring other association

education resources to our members at a discount. We don't want to reinvent the wheel if there's great content that already exists out there. We're starting to find some partners so that we can share some resources from other groups to our members as well.

Members helping members is one of our big initiatives through the Guru program.

The Converter Exchange is a new webinar series we've started, and in each session, a supplier member shares information about a product their company produces or a service they provide. It gives them a little bit of a different style of networking when we aren't in person.

We're trying to have some more focused networking opportunities at our meetings. Those might be peer-to-peer or seller-to-buyer. We've introduced speed networking at both the spring meeting and the fall meeting, and it's been a lot of fun. We used AI to do the matching [at the latest Annual Meeting].

We always value and have an initiative to meet our members where they are, so Labelexpo/Loupe Americas will be that opportunity this year, as well as some other events we participate in.

We have started, in the last couple of years, some exclusive member benefits, and these are partnerships that we've developed with companies that can offer some kind of savings to our membership if they choose to work with them. That can be anything from credit card processing and purchasing to shipping and supplies for their facilities, or human resources assistance or planning needs. We want to promote those and make sure that our members are aware of those resources and are taking advantage of them.

L&L: What do you see as some of the biggest challenges facing TLMI?

DC: I think all association people would say this, that it's getting our share of someone's time. We are all busier than ever before, and our members and prospective members have so many options for connection and for education.

"My vision for TLMI is that we continue to be the space where people can come together"



Dale Coates with Mike Potter and Bob Anderson at the TLMI 2023 Annual Meeting

TLMI strives to provide events and information for our members that's beneficial. We want it to be easy to find. We want to make sure we're doing things that add value to them, both personally and professionally.

Our members share with us that, if they allow themselves to take that break and connect with their peers, to learn and have a little fun at some of our events, they always feel like it's worth the time to take that time away from the regular day-to-day. But we know it is time away from the regular day-to-day.

We have some members who join just to do our annual management ratio study. They don't want to step away and be part of a meeting, and we want to make sure that continues to be valuable for them. We're always adapting those reports and looking again at how to make it easy so we're not wasting anyone's time.

We're going to continue to offer benefits that meet each member exactly where they are, whether that's in person or with just a study or anything in between.

L&L: What are you most excited about in the label industry right now?

DC: AI and automation are the most exciting things. We talk about the workforce being such a problem, and we know the population is declining; we're not backfilling as we used to. The pool of people that we can attract to the industry, even if we are hugely successful in our efforts, will not alleviate the workforce issue that we see today. It's still going to be a problem, so the companies that are in a position to be more efficient and embrace new technologies where possible will find solutions and succeed. The AI and automation piece are huge for that.

I'm also excited about our young leaders. I was at a meeting and interacting with some of our TLMI members who are considerably younger than I am, and they're fantastic people, and already in companies where they're being leaned on heavily, using their strengths to lead their companies for growth. I'm just really excited about the future of the industry in the hands of those individuals.

L&L: What do you think are the biggest issues facing the labeling industry?

DC: Everybody talks about the workforce. It's going to continue to be a challenge. Regulatory compliance is challenging now. There are a lot of things coming at companies, restrictions, different state regulations, and federal regulations. Sustainability is a tricky one. A lot of brands are driving initiatives that are quite positive, but in a lot of places we don't have the infrastructure in the country yet to support actually seeing those things through.

Global supply chain volatility is still an issue, and some of that might be due to product availability, but certainly, there's been a lot this past year just in uncertainty around things like tariffs and how that's going to impact our industry.

I sometimes think the biggest issue is a general lack of awareness of the label and packaging industry's importance to everything else. It touches everything else. You can't order things into your house without a label. You can't have medication without a label. You're in the grocery store with labels. You're getting your favorite wine with labels and your car engine, anything that has to have a safety label. They're just everywhere around us. I'm really excited to see that there's a greater effort for TLMI going to [Washington], DC, and trying to make people more aware of the importance of the industry.

The board meeting that we annually have for TLMI, was [in Washington, DC] in May. And part of that meeting, our board members reached out to their legislative representatives to invite some of them to come join us for a cocktail party, just to have a chat.

Mark Glendenning and Linnea [Keen] and Patrick Potter, representing TLMI, were able to go in and have some conversations



From left: TLMI senior marketing coordinator Jessica Avery, Winpak senior marketing manager Katie Harrington, Dale Coates and TLMI senior community programs coordinator Makayle Botts at the TLMI 2025 Committee Summit

“The pool of people that we can attract to the industry, even if we are hugely successful in our efforts, will not alleviate the workforce issue that we see today”

with some of those folks that couldn't make that evening event, but were willing to sit down and hear a little bit more about our industry and how significant it is. We put together a one-pager that they were able to take that just talked about the breadth of the industry and showed some of the locations of our biggest members, both converter and suppliers across the country.

I think you'll see more of that where we're trying to just get the word out. A lot of our members are doing it locally with their legislators when they're back in their home states as well.

L&L: How does your background shape your perspective of TLMI?

DC: I like details. I was trained as an engineer and a polymer scientist. I love data. I love problem-solving. I really like a good experiment, whether it's on myself personally or something that we're doing at TLMI. I like to try new things, evaluate them, adjust to create something better than what we originally hoped for, and then try it all again.

I'd say look for that. Look for us to test some new things. TLMI has been a member-driven association forever, and I'm going to continue to look to our fantastic membership for direction and ideas as we experiment with anything new that we do.

We have a wonderful team right now and energetic, driven colleagues that work with me that bring their best with them every day to help TLMI and to help continue to drive value and help our membership see that value, so I'm excited.



TLMI will host its Converter Leadership Meeting in Clearwater, Florida, from April 12-14. Scan the QR code to learn more



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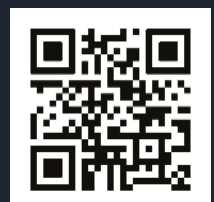
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Canadian label industry looks inward

Strained trade relations with the US over the past year have inspired the Canadian market to embrace domestic growth. Selah Zighelboim reports

In the spring of 2025, as the Canadian government considered implementing a 25 percent reciprocal tariff on imports from the US, Canadian converter Northern Label Group considered pivoting away from the US market to focus on Europe.

'In April, our government was going to implement 25 percent reciprocal tariffs, and they backed down on that at the 11th hour, thankfully,' says Sean Murray, president of Northern Label Group, based in Ontario. 'That would have had a massive impact on us. In fact, we were ready to pivot to Finland and Europe for almost everything, if we had to.'

'There are a lot of people in other industries, and a lot in manufacturing, friends I have, that have already pivoted away from the US, putting their arms up. There's quite an "elbows up" sort of Canadian mentality going on right now.'

Amid concerns over tariffs and a more complicated relationship with the US, Canada is now focusing on its own development.

Southern Ontario hub

Southern Ontario has long been a hub for label manufacturing in Canada.

CCL, one of the largest label converters in the world, was founded in Toronto, Ontario's capital city, in 1951. As the company grew from a local converter to a global entity, it shaped Canadian label manufacturing alongside it.

'From a technology standpoint, CCL's growth into the world's largest label converter has helped set higher standards for innovation and automation in the industry,' says Marika Knorr, head of sustainability and communication at CCL.

According to Knorr, CCL's investments in innovative technologies, such as RFID and digital technology, have motivated smaller Canadian converters to invest in order to remain competitive.

'Regarding talent, CCL's prominence globally and its continued Canadian headquarters in Toronto have made it a significant employer and talent magnet in the Canadian label and packaging sector,' Knorr adds.

Regulatory landscape

Overall, the same issues that impact

"There's quite an 'elbows up' sort of Canadian mentality going on right now"

The Toronto area is a label manufacturing hub

the American label market also impact converters in Canada. One of the biggest differences in the industry between the two countries is the regulatory framework.

For example, in Canada, all labels must be bilingual, with both English and French text. Canadian labels, therefore, require twice as much text. This often necessitates smaller text on Canadian labels and makes extended content labels much more common in Canada.

Canada generally has more stringent environmental and food-safety regulations than the US.

'We're also more influenced and maybe even a little bit more ahead of the curve versus our US counterparts around low-migration inks, food contact safety, even going to sustainability,' says Charlie MacLean, president of ASL Print FX, which operates out of the Toronto area. 'We're at different stages of our evolution with those types of things. We're maybe a step behind the Europeans, but maybe a little bit further ahead than the Americans are.'

US relationship

The tension in Canada over its relationship with the US has eased since early 2025, when there was greater uncertainty about US tariff policies.

'Especially in the beginning of [2025], Q1, Q2, there was so much difficult rhetoric coming from the leadership in the US that I think we got pretty insular as Canadians,' MacLean says.

'I think our strength is that we're actually so diverse and we're so empathetic to

so many different people and countries. Canadians love to travel, love to get out there and experience different cultures. We really got pretty insular for a number of months there. The emotions were high when it came to the US.'

In March, MacLean's own perspective shifted when he attended the TLMI Converter Meeting in San Antonio, Texas.

'What we needed was to just be around Americans and go, "OK, this is not the big evil". These are our friends,' he says.

The events of this past year have inspired a renewed interest in the domestic market in Canada. A 'Buy Canada' movement has inspired Canadian consumers to buy local products and travel more domestically.

'As a sales organization, we're still looking for opportunities in the US,' MacLean says. 'With that market being so large, you can't ignore it, but I'd say we've had a little bit of a reset where we said, "OK, let's try and focus our commercial activity on acquiring as much Canadian business as possible". There's such allure over the years to getting down to the US. If you can connect with a couple of big customers down there, it can really make an impact on your top line, but I think we've seen people try to partner up with folks that are on this side of the border even more recently.'



Scan the QR code to read news about the North American label market



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Jaime Mir Pastor, CEO - Mirmar

Rapid growth in Mexico for Sama Etiquetas

Mexican converter Sama Etiquetas has experienced extraordinary growth since its foundation in 2018, and plans are in place for it to continue. James Quirk reports

Few label converters have grown as rapidly in recent years as Mexico-based Sama Etiquetas.

Since its foundation just eight years ago, the company has expanded from a fledgling operation with three staff and a single flexo press into an 88-person business running state-of-the-art flexo and digital technology and specializing in the stringent demands of the pharmaceutical label market. Annual growth regularly exceeds 30 percent, and Sama even managed a dizzying 1,000 percent growth in its third year.

Now its youthful founders – still in their 30s – are preparing for further expansion by adding more printing capacity, recruiting new production and sales directors, and opening a sales office across the border in the US.

'Not even in our wildest dreams in 2018 did we imagine that we would have grown as much as we have,' says co-founder and general director Armando Madrid. 'At first, the growth was not necessarily planned. We were surprised by it. But now we are prepared for it, and expect it.'

Undeterred

Sama Etiquetas was founded in Tepetlaoxtoc de Hidalgo, just outside Mexico City, by Armando Madrid and Rocío Sánchez, with additional investment coming from Rocío's sister Jessica. Madrid and Sánchez met in their 20s while working for a Mexican label converter: Madrid in production and Sánchez in sales. Madrid left to work at another label business, before the pair teamed up a year later to found another label printing company. The business was not a success, he admits. The pair sold it to another buyer, and it remains in operation today.

Undeterred, they swiftly started again, setting up Sama Etiquetas in July 2018 and printing simple labels on a 5-color Webtron flexo press. A key early client was growing fast by buying excess stock from US manufacturers and selling it in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Sama grew alongside it and quickly added an 8-color Mark Andy 2200 flexo press to increase capacity.

In 2020, Sama hired two sales staff with experience in the

"Not even in our wildest dreams in 2018 did we imagine that we would have grown as much as we have"

pharmaceutical industry. It proved to be a turning point. A pivot to this new market supercharged the company's growth, which hit an astonishing 1,000 percent that year, thanks to surging demand during the Covid pandemic. Today, pharma labels represent 75 percent of the business.

'We hadn't planned to serve the pharmaceutical market,' says Madrid. 'But we saw the opportunity. There was a huge boom in booklet labels for the pharma industry, and we could print them on our Mark Andy 2200. Entry into this market helped us continue to operate during the pandemic.'

That same year, Sama achieved ISO 9001:2015 certification and added digital printing capabilities with the installation of an HP Indigo 6600.

'The move from flexo to digital required a big learning curve,' says Madrid. 'It took a little while to adjust to it, but now we are very efficient with the technology.'

In 2022, the company installed an 8-color Mark Andy Evolution Series flexo press with a 13in (330mm) web width. Two years later, it added another and sold the Webtron and Mark Andy 2200 presses.

'With the two Mark Andy Evolution Series presses, we have grown so much,' says Madrid. Sama equipped both machines with EyeC inspection systems and has installed finishing equipment from Rotoflex and Rhyguan. The latter machine, a modular system, is soon to be upgraded with semi-rotary flexo and laser die-cutting units, which Madrid says is aimed at reducing delivery times.

Finishing of labels printed on the HP Indigo press takes place on an A B Graphic Digicon Series 3 converting line, while Sama also runs shrink sleeve equipment from the UK manufacturer. A second HP Indigo press, this time a 6K+, is due to be installed



Sama Etiquetas' founders with one of the Mark Andy Evolution Series presses



Sama Etiquetas' plant in Tepetlaoxtoc de Hidalgo, just outside Mexico City



Sama Etiquetas runs digital printing technology from HP Indigo



The converter runs shrink sleeve finishing equipment from A B Graphic

“We decided at the very beginning that reinvesting our profits into new technology would be a key strategy to maintain strong growth”

imminently. ‘We attended Labelexpo Europe 2025 in Barcelona to look at digital machine options, and we decided to choose an HP Indigo machine again. We are very happy with the quality and efficiency of their technology.’

This regular investment in new technology is one of the two key reasons behind Sama Etiquetas’ extraordinary growth, according to Madrid. ‘We are always keen to invest and upgrade our technology,’ he explains. ‘Mexican converters are often reluctant to invest. They don’t want to take money out of the company. We decided at the very beginning that reinvesting our profits into new technology would be a key strategy to maintain a strong growth trajectory.’

‘The second reason,’ he continues, ‘is the responsibility with which we deal with our clients, partners and employees. It is very rare that we lose a customer, and we consistently attract new ones. We work hard to ensure that our operations are very professional. And we have a talented sales team, led by Rocio.’

Next phase of growth

Alongside investment in the new HP Indigo digital press and the upgrading of the Rhyguan converting line, this year Sama Etiquetas is preparing for its next phase of growth with two further strategies. The first is to further strengthen its team by hiring new operations and sales directors, both with extensive label-industry experience, so that Madrid and Sánchez can focus on overall business management. ‘They will help us to grow our sales even further and also to improve the efficiency and capacity of the plant,’ says Madrid.

The second is to open a sales office in the US. Currently, Sama Etiquetas’ production

is sold entirely within Mexico, even if around 50 percent of its labels end up on products sold into the US by the company’s Mexican clients. ‘Having a sales office in the US, most likely located in Texas or Arizona, will allow us to target that market directly and compete with US converters to label US-manufactured products,’ says Madrid.

The motivation behind the move is growth, but also future-proofing. ‘In recent years, Mexico has been the factory of America,’ he explains, citing the example of the automotive sector. ‘Nearshoring has helped the Mexican economy to grow, which in turn has boosted label consumption. But this growth has slowed, and there is uncertainty surrounding Trump’s tariffs. We can take advantage of our much lower labor costs here in Mexico to serve the US market.’

‘Investment in new technology will also continue,’ says Madrid. ‘We have new deals with pharmaceutical companies, and so we will also need to increase our flexo printing capacity with a new press. It is likely that this will be another Mark Andy machine, because we have had a great experience with the Evolution Series presses. They produce high-quality output with easy changeovers and fantastic registration. We’ve not had any problems with them.’

Pharma makes up 75 percent of Sama Etiquetas’ business. ‘Pharma is a complex market with specific needs,’ says Madrid. ‘Delivery times are short and quality demands are high. Quality control processes are stringent. We have four or five audits from our customers every month. Our competitors are very experienced. But not many converters have the ability and capacity, or the interest to serve this market. It was complicated for us to gain the experience and abilities needed.

But we feel that if we can successfully serve the pharmaceutical market, then we can serve any sector.’

The remaining 25 percent is highly diversified and includes food and alcoholic beverages such as tequila. The focus is always on high-quality applications. ‘Our client base is very diversified,’ says Madrid. ‘Our most important client is just 6 percent of our billing.’

Speaking about Mexican market trends, Madrid notes that variable data is increasingly required on labels. ‘We have noticed this as a new trend in the last year or so.’ Shrink sleeves are also growing strongly.

Booklet labels make up 30 percent of production, with 20 percent shrink sleeves and 50 percent self-adhesive. Booklet label printing takes place exclusively on the Mark Andy presses, while shrink sleeve and self-adhesive production is shared by both the flexo and digital machines.

Digital represents 25 percent of the company’s production, though Madrid believes this will rise to 45 percent this year. ‘Not because flexo is slowing; on the contrary,’ he says, ‘but because of digital growth and the extra capacity which will be brought by the second HP Indigo press.’

Order numbers in 2025 grew 92 percent from the previous year, while the company’s overall growth was 26 percent. With 35 percent growth forecast over the next 12 months, Sama Etiquetas’ trajectory continues. ‘2026 will be an exciting year,’ says Madrid.



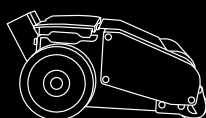
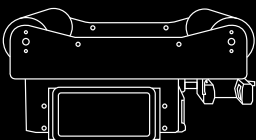
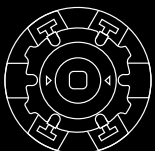
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Open Pack accelerates export expansion

Open Pack prepared for the reopening of Argentina's economy by installing hybrid technology and is now ready to re-establish itself as a regional player. James Quirk reports

Four years ago, Argentine label converter Open Pack was faced with a stark choice, according to managing partner Alejandro Szpektor: 'We knew we had to change, or we would die.'

It's a surprising sentiment, given that Open Pack was, at the time, running a successful business. Its expertise in security labeling was well-known. It was providing innovative, specialist self-adhesive labels for premium technology products, among other sectors.

But Open Pack and its fellow label converters in Argentina were operating under extremely challenging conditions. Government-imposed currency controls and import restrictions were suffocating the local industry. Credit was hard to come by. Materials were hard to source. It was, in effect, a closed market.

'We knew that sometime soon, the political situation would change and the market would open up,' says Szpektor. 'We would be competing not just with local companies, but with the world. If we did nothing, in a few years we could have big problems. And we knew that we would want to go out and sell our labels into the wider region. We needed to be prepared.'

So Alejandro Szpektor and his brother, fellow managing partner Gabriel Szpektor, began to hatch a plan.

Hybrid printing investment

During multiple visits to Labelexpo trade shows around the world, the Szpektor brothers had become convinced that hybrid flexo/digital printing represented the future of label production. 'We didn't want just any machine. If you're going to compete in the top league, you have to buy the best. We wanted Messi, not any old player,' says Alejandro Szpektor, referencing the legendary Argentine soccer star.

After researching the market and watching multiple press demonstrations, the brothers decided to install a Mark Andy Performance Series P7 hybrid. It would be the first in Latin America, after a demo machine installation in Mexico.

'Even Mark Andy themselves were surprised that a company in Argentina – with the closed economy we had at the time – would be ordering this machine,' recalls Alejandro Szpektor. 'Tom Cavalco



L-R: Alejandro Szpektor and Gabriel Szpektor are managing partners of Argentine converter Open Pack

"We didn't want just any machine. If you're going to compete in the top league, you have to buy the best. We wanted Messi, not any old player"

[Mark Andy's vice president of international sales] came to visit us. I think he wanted to find out who these crazy guys were. The machine wouldn't even fit into the small factory we had at the time. Over a coffee, I told him not to worry, we would move to a bigger space to fit the machine. And I said that we would also end up buying a second press, too. I don't think he believed us. He laughed, we hugged and we ended up with a great relationship.'

This was in May 2022. The Performance Series P7 hybrid arrived in October of that year. 'We were very proud because it was very hard to get credit in Argentina, and very hard to try to do something different from everyone else,' says Alejandro Szpektor.

'We see the move to hybrid printing as a path of no return,' says Gabriel Szpektor, who oversees new product development at Open Pack. 'Hybrid technology has broken the paradigm of choosing between flexo and digital. When we installed the first Mark Andy P7 hybrid, it was the only machine of its kind in Argentina. Our clients didn't realize what could be achieved. The bigger companies said, "Okay, can we try this, can we try that", until suddenly we started to have a volume that got out of hand. We hadn't appreciated the level of demand, the response speed, the

satisfaction we would get from clients.

'We are natural developers; we enjoy developing products. We enjoy it like a magician who performs a magic trick and surprises the client with different solutions. In Argentina, which previously didn't have this hybrid combination, it's very easy to surprise people. The press changed the standard of what can be achieved in one pass.'

Word spread. Gabriel Szpektor cites the example of the agricultural products division of Argentina's largest energy company, YPF, approaching Open Pack unsolicited to supply multi-layer labels with embedded security features. This combination of advanced printing capabilities, married to Open Pack's expertise in security labeling, has led it to become a supplier to the country's national airline and numerous government ministries.

Two years after installing the first Mark Andy P7 hybrid, Alejandro Szpektor's words to Mark Andy's Cavalco proved prophetic. After a visit to the press manufacturer's European headquarters in Poland to see the new machine, Open Pack installed a second P7 hybrid late last year, making it the only converter in Latin America to run two of the presses.

'Single-pass hybrid flexo/inkjet is

the future,' says Alejandro Szpektor. 'Some of our competitors have digital toner or inkjet presses, but these machines are not efficient for the high-volume work that our clients need, so hybrid technology is a huge strategic advantage for us.'

Export

Just 14 months after the installation of Open Pack's first Mark Andy P7 hybrid, libertarian politician Javier Milei was elected as Argentina's new president. He swiftly set about dismantling the import/export and currency exchange restrictions that were so hampering local businesses. Open Pack's bet – to prepare in advance for potential political change – had paid off.

Prior to Milei's victory, Open Pack could already count on export experience. Food products, particularly meat, are a key market for the company. 'Argentina is a huge producer of beef, but many of the most important cuts are not consumed here; they go directly abroad,' says Gabriel Szpektor. 'We produce security labels which identify where the beef is from and that it complies with certain certifications, such as being kosher, for example.'

Open Pack sells its meat-certification labels to various clients abroad, and in the past was also a major supplier of prepaid telephone cards to Cuba. But the reopening of the Argentine economy allows Open Pack to reassert itself as a regional player rather than just a national one, says Alejandro Szpektor. 'Before Milei, we could export, but because we couldn't bring consumables into the country, it was very hard to serve markets abroad.'

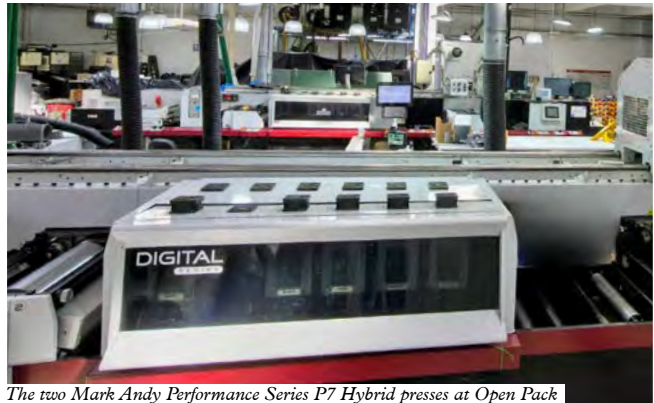
Exports of security labels for meat products have already ramped up, with millions now sold into Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, the US and Uruguay. Now, the company's principal focus for developing its export business is the technology sector, to which it has long been a leading supplier, even prior to adding hybrid printing capabilities. The converter provides specialist, high value-added labels, with features such as tamper-evidence, holograms and unique tracking identifications, to technology companies such as LG, Nokia, Microsoft, Motorola and Samsung. 'Non-conventional labels for high-level companies with complex needs,' as Alejandro Szpektor puts it.

The next step is to serve those needs regionally, rather than just nationally. 'The companies we serve have a regional presence,' says general manager Pablo Rumelfanger. 'So we don't want to supply them only in Argentina, but throughout the region. Argentina is well-located to serve neighboring markets in Chile, Brazil and Uruguay, for example. We have a modern plant with high-level technology and an experienced team. We have been preparing ourselves to compete internationally and are now well-positioned to do so.'

Rumelfanger joined Open Pack 18 months ago. His background in technology innovation and international business development in various Latin American countries, rather than specifically in graphic arts, chimed with the Szpektor brothers' vision. 'They explained the project to me: the border will open; we want to ramp up our exports and create a factory based on technology and software,' he says. 'The graphic arts industry is changing. Increasingly, it is about gathering and managing data and creating a digital identity for each individual label. It's the natural next step for the industry, and similarly, the project at Open Pack was the natural next step for me, too. We already had the background and expertise in security labeling, we just needed to add the digital identity and workflow.'

With this goal in mind, Open Pack began to reconfigure itself. It brought in new people to run the plant. It started using artificial intelligence to program its machines. It automated processes. 'We want to transform graphic arts into an automated, efficient, high-quality, sustainable process, without losing our passion for the constant development of solutions for our customers,' says Alejandro Szpektor.

'The key elements are security, technology and packaging,' he



The two Mark Andy Performance Series P7 Hybrid presses at Open Pack

“The graphic arts industry is changing. Increasingly, it is about gathering and managing data, and creating a digital identity for each individual label”

continues. 'We are part of the solution and want to be involved in all three areas.' He describes the different security options offered by Open Pack as being like a fruit salad. 'You can add however many ingredients you want, depending on the budget or complexity of the project.'

One new development aimed at food and pharmaceutical applications is smart labels, which can monitor if a product goes above or below a specified temperature as it moves through the supply chain. 'Although it is still in the experimental stage, laboratory tests show that we will soon have a product that has been industrially tested in renowned pharmaceutical laboratories, which, in their enthusiasm to have it as soon as possible, offered to conduct field tests for the final adjustments,' says Alejandro Szpektor.

Serving these blue-chip clients across the region, rather than just in Argentina, puts Open Pack – currently an independent company with only one production facility – into competition with multi-national converting groups with facilities in multiple countries across Latin America. It's a big challenge, but one which enthuses the Open Pack team. 'Service is the key,' emphasizes Alejandro Szpektor. 'Service, and also passion. When a multi-national converting group has been created through acquisitions, they might not have been developing alongside their clients in each of these locations. We have very close relationships with our customers. We have put together a very strong service team, we have brought in experienced people who know what they are doing, and we have set up our plant with the latest technology.'

Open Pack's 2,200 sqm facility in the Buenos Aires suburb of Vicente López houses close to 50 employees and is recertified to ISO:9001 each year. Its Mark Andy P7 hybrid presses are two of six flexo lines, with the others a mixture of machines from Mark Andy and Nilpeter.

'It's not just about doing things well, but about doing them better than yesterday,' says Gabriel Szpektor. 'This is our philosophy of work.'



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Sicon Packs scales new heights with Orthotec

Navi Mumbai-based converter solidifies its premium label positioning with a strategic 8-color intermittent flexo investment at Labelexpo Europe 2025. Adyasha Sinha reports.

Sicon Packs, one of the leading names in the self-adhesive label sector in India, purchased an Orthotec FLX3028 8-color intermittent flexo press during Labelexpo Europe 2025. The deal, inked during the show, marks a major technological leap for the company as it seeks to bridge the gap between high-volume production and the increasingly complex demands of short- to medium-run premium labels.

The strategic choice

For Sicon Packs, the decision to invest in the Orthotec FLX3028 was not merely about adding capacity; it was about precision and versatility. The FLX3028 is a semi-rotary flexo press designed to handle the 'sweet spot' of the modern market: jobs that are too long for digital but too complex and short for traditional full-rotary flexo.

The 8-color configuration provides Sicon with the expanded color gamut necessary for the high-end cosmetic and wine label segments, areas where consistency is non-negotiable. The press features a 330mm web width and is engineered for rapid job changeovers, significantly reducing substrate waste and setup time.

'In an era where brand owners are demanding shorter lead times and more SKUs, the FLX3028 gives us digital-like adaptability with the economics of flexo,' says Devendra Solanki, director of Sicon Packs. 'We have a long-standing relationship with Orthotec, and its reputation for reliability and the machine's ability to deliver consistent high-speed performance on varied substrates made it the clear choice for our next phase of growth.'

From Lagos to Navi Mumbai

The story of Sicon Packs is one of entrepreneurial grit and global vision. The company's roots trace back to the early 2000s when founder Yudhviram Solanki ventured to Nigeria.

What began as a trading operation in carbon paper evolved into a manufacturing powerhouse with the establishment of Perfect Packaging in Lagos, one of the first roll-form label manufacturing companies in the region.

After successfully scaling the Nigerian operations, Solanki returned to India to



L-R: Amit Sheth, managing director of Label Planet, with Yudhviram and Devendra Solanki of Sicon Packs

"In an era where brand owners are demanding shorter lead times and more SKUs, the FLX3028 gives us digital-like adaptability with the economics of flexo"

replicate that success in his home market. In 2007, Sicon Packs was born in Navi Mumbai. Today, the company operates out of a 30,000sqft facility in the MIDC Kopar Khairne area, complemented by its continued 40,000sqft presence in Nigeria.

The transition of leadership to Devendra Solanki, a computer engineer by training, has brought a data-driven and process-oriented approach to the business. Under his guidance, Sicon has achieved Graphic Measures International certification, aligning its operations with the stringent color-compliance standards required by global FMCG and pharmaceutical giants.

Precision engineering

The Orthotec FLX3028 is expected to be a game-changer for Sicon's premium portfolio. The intermittent drive system allows for any repeat length without changing cylinders, a feature that drastically lowers costs for the diverse label sizes common in the personal care and pharmaceutical sectors.

'Sicon Packs is a company that understands the value of process control,' notes Amit Sheth, managing director of Label Planet, the exclusive partner

of Orthotec in India for over 30 years. 'The FLX3028 is designed for converters who refuse to compromise on quality. With its high-precision registration and the ability to add value-added finishes in-line, it is the perfect tool for Sicon to serve the top tier of the Indian and international label markets.'

Solanki highlights the press's tension control and LED-UV curing capabilities (an optional but favored upgrade for sustainability) as key factors in choosing the machines. These features ensure that even thin, heat-sensitive films can be processed at high speeds without distortion, catering to the growing demand for sustainable, lower-micron labelstocks.

Sustainable labels

The installation of the FLX3028 also aligns with Sicon's commitment to environmental stewardship. The company has set an ambitious target to ensure that at least 20 percent of its total production utilizes eco-friendly and sustainable labelstocks by the end of the decade. By reducing setup waste, a hallmark of the Orthotec intermittent system, Sicon is taking a tangible step toward minimizing its environmental footprint.

The Navi Mumbai plant, already ISO 9001 and 14001 certified, is preparing for a site expansion to accommodate the new machinery. This investment follows a period of robust growth; Sicon Packs generated a revenue of approximately 3.6 million USD in the 2023-24 financial year, maintaining a steady upward trajectory despite global supply chain pressures.

The addition of the 8-color Orthotec FLX3028 reinforces the company's position as a preferred partner for brands looking for more than just a printer. 'We aren't just selling labels; we are providing shelf appeal and security,' Solanki concluded. 'This new press is a testament to our belief in the future of the Indian label industry. We are ready to take on the most challenging jobs the market can throw at us.'



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Dulari Printpack's strategic leap into labeling

Ludhiana, India-based Dulari Printpack bolsters its digital production capabilities and targets the region's nutraceutical and direct-to-consumer sectors. Adyasha Sinha reports.

The industrial pulse of Ludhiana, often referred to as the 'Manchester of India', is beating at a new, digitized rhythm. In the center of this transition stands Dulari Printpack. Long recognized as a leader in North Indian photo albums and commercial digital printing, the company has recently made a high-stakes entry into the label segment by installing the Epson SurePress L-6534VW UV digital label press alongside a Vorey VD330 digital die-cutter integrated with a Luxarjet UV inkjet varnish and foil system, purchased via Kridwinn Innovations. With these installations, Dulari is not just adding capacity; it is signaling a new era for the Ludhiana label landscape.

From Miller Ganj to digital dominance

The story of Dulari Printpack is one of consistent, calculated evolution. Founded in 1998 by brothers Aman and Rahul Goyal as Dulari Digital Photo Service, the company began its journey in the analog era, operating Japanese chemical-process photo machines. In the late 90s, the wedding photography market in Punjab was commoditized, yet the Goyals identified a niche for premium quality that others overlooked.

By 2010, the company pivoted toward the digital revolution. It was an early adopter of high-end digital presses, including the Konica Minolta bizhub 70hc and later the HP Indigo 5600. Its investment in the MGI JetVarnish 3D with iFoil further cemented its reputation as 'embellishment experts' capable of turning standard prints into tactile, luxury experiences.

Today, the group is transitioning into its second generation of leadership. Harshit Goyal, son of Rahul Goyal, has taken the helm of the label division, bringing a fresh, data-driven perspective to the family business.

'We realized that the traditional photo market was reaching a plateau,' says Harshit Goyal. 'Our analysis showed a massive surge in the startup ecosystem in Punjab and nearby Haryana. These brands, ranging from organic honey producers to high-end nutraceutical manufacturers, needed premium labels, but in quantities that traditional flexo printers couldn't economically handle. We saw an opportunity to become their technology partner, not just their printer.'

The technology choice

For a company rooted in high-fidelity color and luxury finishing, choosing a label press was critical. After evaluating various digital technologies, Dulari opted for the Epson SurePress L-6534VW.

The press is a workhorse designed for high-productivity environments, featuring Epson's proprietary PrecisionCore technology. Unlike many entry-level digital systems, the L-6534VW is built for industrial-scale reliability and offers a productivity mode that reaches speeds of up to 50 m/min. It has a resolution of 600 x 1200 DPI. The machine supports standard self-adhesive label substrates, BOPP, PET and metallic foils (80 to 320 microns thickness). The drum platen system securely holds the substrate to the drum during printing, ensuring precise color-to-color registration.

'The primary reason for selecting the Epson L-6534VW was its versatility and ink performance,' explains Harshit Goyal. 'We deal



L-R: Harshit and Rahul Goyal with Epson SurePress L-6534VW UV digital label press

"In today's competitive environment, printing alone is no longer sufficient. Post-print enhancements play a decisive role in creating differentiation"

with a lot of transparent and metallic substrates. The high-opacity white ink of the Epson allows us to print vibrant colors on clear films in a single pass, which is a game-changer for cosmetic and beverage brands.'

Talking about the strategic importance of this installation, Prabakaran S, senior general manager, Epson India, shares: 'The Indian label market is at an inflection point. Converters are moving away from the "quantity over quality" mindset. The L-6534VW is specifically engineered to bridge the gap between short-run digital flexibility and long-run industrial stability. By integrating our PrecisionCore technology, Dulari can offer their clients consistent color across different batches, a critical requirement for pharmaceutical and nutraceutical brands.'

The finishing touch

In the label industry, a beautiful print is only half the battle. Precision finishing and value-added embellishments are where the margins lie. Dulari's installation includes a comprehensive finishing suite provided by Kridwinn Innovations.

The Vorey VD330 digital die-cutter offers a knife-cutting system that eliminates the need for expensive physical dies, making it suitable for the high-SKU, low-volume orders that define the D2C market. When coupled with the Luxarjet 330mm UV inkjet varnish and foil system, Dulari can add 3D effects, spot UV and digital foiling.

The combined workflow allows Dulari to handle complex embellishment jobs with consistent quality, improved efficiency and faster turnaround times.

The investment supports Dulari's strategic expansion into the rapidly growing digital label segment, complementing its established expertise in photo albums and commercial digital printing.

“The Indian label market is at an inflection point. Converters are moving away from the ‘quantity over quality’ mindset”

With brand owners increasingly seeking differentiation through superior shelf appeal, finishing and embellishment have emerged as key value drivers in label production. In response to this market shift, Dulari Printpack has installed these machines to move beyond conventional label printing and cater to premium and value-added label requirements across diverse industry segments.

‘In today’s competitive environment, printing alone is no longer sufficient,’ says Rahul Goyal, director of Dulari Printpack. ‘Post-print enhancements play a decisive role in creating differentiation. The Kridwinn systems enable us to produce labels that invite consumers to touch and feel the product. It’s about creating an emotional connection on the shelf.’

He further comments: ‘The newly installed systems are helping elevate both the visual appeal and perceived value of Dulari’s label offerings.’

The post-press machines from Kridwinn have enabled Dulari to produce high-impact, value-added labels in roll form. These capabilities are particularly relevant for the sectors where short runs, multiple SKUs and premium presentation are critical.

Dinesh Thakur, director of sales and marketing at Kridwinn Innovations, adds: ‘Our association with Dulari Printpack is built on a shared vision of innovation. Their focus on the startup ecosystem in Punjab matches the design intent of our Luxarjet systems, providing premium, high-impact finishing for brands that are scaling fast.’

Scaling the vision

Since the installation approximately three months ago, Dulari’s label division has been operating at high capacity. The Epson SurePress runs between 10 to 12 hours a day, producing roughly 2,000 running meters of labels daily.

But the Goyals are not stopping there. With plans to introduce a second shift, they aim to scale production to 5,000 meters per day shortly. Their team of nearly 70 staff members is now being cross-trained to handle the intricacies of digital label workflow, from AI-driven pre-press design to high-precision finishing.

‘We don’t just see ourselves as a printing press,’ Harshit Goyal concludes. ‘We are a solution provider for the entrepreneurs of Punjab and beyond. Whether it’s a metallic honey label or a textured pharmaceutical sticker, we want to be the reason a brand stands out. The Epson and Vorey installation is the foundation of that promise.’

The company’s footprint is also extending across Maharashtra and North India, supported by a robust infrastructure and a philosophy of ‘meticulous preparation.’ With plans to integrate more automation and explore sustainable substrates, the Goyals are already looking at the next phase of expansion.

‘In today’s competitive environment, you cannot compete on price alone,’ concludes Rahul Goyal. ‘By integrating digital printing with advanced finishing, we are equipped to deliver labels that enhance brand identity. We are moving from being a service provider to being a technology partner for our clients.’

As the Epson press hums in the background, churning out high-impact labels for the next generation of Indian brands, it is clear that Dulari Printpack has successfully navigated its most important transition yet. In the heart of Ludhiana, the future of label printing is no longer a prospect; it is a digital reality.



Dulari Printpack owners with the Vorey finishing machine

Ludhiana’s label evolution

Ludhiana is witnessing a tectonic shift in its industrial identity. While the city remains a global hub for hosiery and bicycle parts, it has recently emerged as a primary destination for the nutraceutical, agrochemical and food processing industries. This diversification is the engine driving the local labeling boom. The rise of the ‘Start-up Punjab’ initiative and the growth of e-commerce have decentralized brand ownership and birthed a new class of entrepreneurs who require agility.

‘The “new Ludhiana” is different. The city is currently experiencing a boom in the nutraceuticals, wellness and agrochemical sectors. These industries require labels that are not only durable – resistant to chemicals and oils – but also highly informative to comply with stringent government regulations,’ shares Harshit Goyal.

India’s nutrition industry is projected to double from 30.37 billion USD in 2024 to 60 billion USD by 2030. Ludhiana is becoming a hub for these ‘clean label’ brands.

A wellness startup in Ludhiana can now sell to a customer in Mumbai or New York. This global reach demands a global standard of packaging. Digital label printing is the only technology that can provide this level of sophistication for a brand launching its first 500 units.

Kamal Mohan Chopra, former chairman of the World Print and Communication Forum, aptly notes: ‘The printing industry would have been dead without the packaging boom. In India, there has been a year-on-year growth of about 15 percent in packaging.’ Diving deeper, he talks about the dual engines of growth: digital disruption and eco-innovation, bolstered by e-commerce’s insatiable appetite for custom labels and brochures.

Geography is another advantage that makes Ludhiana a preferred hub for label printing. The city serves as a primary logistics gateway for North India, with many manufacturers from neighboring states flocking to Ludhiana for its advanced conversion capabilities.

While Dulari is the ‘new guard’ of digital labels, the market is built on the shoulders of legacy regional players like Krishna Halftone, Nayyar Labels, Sangam Labels, Pacific Labels, Lord Weavers and Om Packaging.

By focusing on roll-to-roll digital labels with high-end embellishments, Dulari is positioning itself to serve the ‘premium Ludhiana’ of 2026.



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Platinum Packaging turns crisis into opportunity

Kenya-based converter Platinum Packaging re-enters the market with a growth-focused strategy following a fire, Akanksha Meena reports

Platinum Packaging, a Kenyan flexible packaging converter, planned growth in the narrow-web adhesive market, but those plans are on hold after a devastating fire caused significant losses and marked a critical turning point for the company.

By mid-2022, the company was on a strong growth trajectory, with revenues up around 26 percent, when disaster struck. An electrical spark caused a fire that ignited one of the machines, and the flames quickly spread to the ceiling. Once the roof insulation caught fire, the blaze swept through the rest of the factory, damaging most of the company's machinery beyond repair. This loss was compounded by the fact that the company had recently diversified its technical capabilities. Platinum Packaging was a gravure and digital company, and the team had invested in a used Nilpeter narrow web flexo press to enter the self-adhesive market only months prior. The flexo press was also lost in the fire.

The company attempted to partner with other manufacturers to continue servicing its customers with flexible packaging. But the team was unable to find one that could take on additional tonnage and ensure quality. Platinum Packaging also considered securing supply chains from Egypt and India, but also found it unviable.

The only answer was total reconstruction from the ground up.

Reconstruction

Platinum Packaging benefited from the fact that its facility had been built only six years prior, meaning the architectural plans were already in place. The company was able to rebuild quickly.

To maintain continuity for its flexible packaging customers, the company purchased a second-hand Miraflex machine from Windmüller & Hölscher, along with a laminator and a slitting machine, from a local factory that was no longer profitable. Platinum Packaging began operating from its premises almost immediately. However, it required a significant technical transition, as the company had to move from gravure to CI flexo.

While the team couldn't move all of its jobs to its newly acquired secondhand flexo equipment, it was successfully able to



Hasit Patel, CEO of Platinum Packaging

“We believe that we can differentiate in self-adhesive labels by applying the same oneECG workflow used elsewhere in the business”

service its top clients.

While sourcing new machinery from Italy to replace the lost equipment, the leadership began to rethink its entire business model.

‘We questioned whether to return as the previous plant or as a versatile plant with a completely different value proposition,’ says Hasit Patel, CEO of Platinum Packaging. ‘Even as the market leader, the company struggled with inefficient job cycles. In more mature markets, a gravure line might change jobs two or three times a day; however, Platinum was changing jobs maybe six or seven times a day to accommodate customers who would twist our arm to go below minimum order quantities.’

The team decided to build a more versatile operation better suited to the demands of the Kenyan market. When developing the new production line, the team opted for a fresh approach.

‘Why don't we go narrow web flexo, wide web flexo, and then one gravure line,’ Patel explains of his thinking at the time. ‘Standardizing on a oneECG format would allow the business to change on the fly

while strengthening competitive position.’

‘This setup enables MOQs [minimum order quantities] as low as 100kg. Around 30 percent of capacity is dedicated to short runs, while approximately 35 percent is focused on longer runs produced on wide web flexo,’ he adds. The short runs are produced on the narrow web flexo, mid runs on the wide web flexo and the long runs on the gravure machine.

Introducing ECG to a market unfamiliar with the technology proved challenging.

‘There was only one label company that attempted this and not successfully,’ Patel says. To overcome this, the company built an in-house pre-press department. ‘That’s something we never saw outsourced, and it helped protect the workflow and make it a barrier to entry.’

The plant is now equipped with two Bobst M6 flexo presses, a Windmüller & Hölscher wide web flexo press, a Bobst gravure line, and Nordmeccanica lamination systems, including combi and simplex configurations.

The site also operates Comexi equipment and pouching lines sourced from India, largely replicating the setup before the fire. The plant is now equipped to produce a full range of flexible packaging and pouch formats.

Patel adds that the fire revealed who the company's true partners were. ‘While some suppliers attempted to exploit the situation with inflated pricing, others stepped forward to help. We had competitors who opened their plants to us and offered to take on outsourced work,’ he says.

The company accepted support from at least two competitors and continues to value those relationships today. Despite being out of the flexible packaging market for around 18 months, recovery was swift.

Short runs and lower MOQs

The plant reopened in April 2024 and is currently operating at about 50 percent of its pre-fire capacity. With competitors increasing capacity during this time, re-entering the market has been challenging, Patel admits.

However, the company continues to win new business through its broader value proposition. The company introduced low MOQs and short-run printing.

The company is encouraging customers to shift their ordering behavior as well.

'We're trying to get the market aligned to ordering based on consumption rather than MOQs because we can provide all sizes of MOQs,' Patel notes. 'Around 80 percent of SKUs are slow-moving, while 20 percent are fast-moving. By helping customers reduce inventory and overproduction, we don't have to stock as much, they don't have to stock as much, and it becomes a win-win.'

He says the turning point came during discussions with Bobst, when Platinum Packaging adopted a strategy of creating lower MOQs for flexible packaging from narrow-web machines, with pricing and margins adapted to support orders as low as 100kg. The analysis showed that short runs offered a faster route back to volume and stronger margins. 'If we had come back exactly as we were before the fire, we would have been forced into aggressive pricing just to re-enter the market,' he explains.

While longer runs remain price-competitive, Platinum's advantage lies in short-run flexible packaging, where competitors struggle to match the company's capabilities. Although some have reduced MOQs, Patel notes that it is tough for them to stay lucrative given higher setup waste and ink changes on gravure machines. With a single ECG workflow, the company avoids ink changes and enables rapid job changeovers.

The new factory has been developed to serve new entrepreneurs operating from their homes, whom Patel refers to as 'homepreneurs'.

'They would never be able to afford MOQs of even 250kg, making runs of 50–100kg a more viable option. These businesses typically operate with just one or two SKUs and were largely underserved by the packaging industry in the past, relying instead on standardized polythene bags. As a result, many were unable to access supermarket listings,' he says.

'By offering high-quality, low-MOQ packaging, we are enabling these homepreneurs to improve product preservation, compete on shelf, and scale their businesses more quickly.'

The 'Sprint Pamoja' initiative was designed to simplify the offering for 'homepreneurs', minimizing the need for hands-on involvement from business owners.

'They're busy running their businesses, which is why the process has been structured to be as frictionless as possible. Customers can place orders via a messaging platform, pay digitally and benefit from very short turnaround times, enabled by in-house production,' he adds.

The company also uses AI-assisted tools



Platinum Packaging's new plant began operations in April 2024 and is currently operating at about 50 percent of its pre-fire capacity

“We are now working to shift this mindset by encouraging customers to order based on actual consumption rather than stockpiling”

to kick-start design, allowing it to deliver end-to-end service, from artwork and payment to final delivery by rider.

Patel adds that the long-term goal is to act as a packaging advisor and a one-stop shop for 'homepreneurs' and enable them to get their products onto shelves and scale more quickly.

Coming back stronger

The new machines were installed, and production began in April 2024 with output initially at around 100 tons and gradually increasing to approximately 250 tons. Looking ahead, the company is targeting 300–400 tons by the second quarter of 2026. About 25 percent of volumes are expected to come from B2C customers, with the remainder from B2B customers.

Platinum Packaging currently produces shrink sleeves and flexible packaging on narrow web but plans to expand into self-adhesive labels and in-mold labeling (IML) with further investment in slitting and die-cutting equipment. While the self-adhesive market is relatively mature, Patel notes that IML is experiencing strong growth. The company is actively seeking strategic partners as it expands beyond flexible packaging into self-adhesive labels, IML and beer labels.

These expansions would allow the plant to serve multiple industries, unlike most competitors that operate in only one or two segments. He notes that, despite local IML capability, significant volumes are still imported from Turkey and the Far East into the region. 'We believe that we can differentiate in self-adhesive labels by applying the same oneECG workflow used elsewhere in the business. This would allow shorter runs than competitors who are still using spot colors,' he says.

Smaller runs also allow the company to tailor packaging for different consumer

demographics, such as using wrappers for the same product to target children, adults or the elderly.

Patel adds that this approach is helping the market rethink packaging as a marketing tool. 'Short-run printing is increasingly being used for seasonal, promotional, or one-off campaigns such as Easter or Christmas packaging, encouraging even B2B customers to engage consumers in more targeted and flexible ways.'

The company has earlier focused on exports across Africa. Kenya is a more mature market, where smaller runs are better understood, unlike many African markets, where large order volumes are still prominent due to weak logistics and supply chains, with customers often holding 160 to 180 days of inventory.

'We are now working to shift this mindset by encouraging customers to order based on actual consumption rather than stockpiling. Changing ordering behavior across Africa will take longer than it has in Kenya and require greater education,' he says.

Customer visits to the plant play a significant role in building this confidence. To support markets where in-person visits are less feasible, the company is exploring a virtual shop-floor experience to demonstrate its capabilities and to understand oneECG and how it could reduce MOQ. The company is also investing in customer and technical training to support this shift. In Kenya, this is relatively easier, as customers can visit the factory to see the differences firsthand, helping both customers and technical teams better understand the new operating model.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Platinum Packaging

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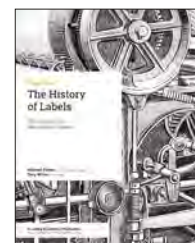
Despite the recent advances in digital printing, the great bulk of self-adhesive labels are still printed by conventional printing processes, namely flexography, letterpress and offset.

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Li honored with Chinese achievement award

Dagang Li was named the 2025 Achievement Award winner at the Chinese label awards at Labelexpo Asisa 2025. Yolanda Wang reports

Dagang Li has been awarded the Chinese label industry's highest accolade, the Achievement Award, at Labelexpo Asia 2025.

This award was established to celebrate individuals who have made a lasting impact on the industry, serving as benchmarks for innovation and catalysts for broader industry growth. The judging panel recognized Li's contributions to the development of China's self-adhesive label industry. His 32-year career has established him as a role model admired by his peers.

The awards ceremony, held on the second day of the exhibition and attended by over 300 professionals from the label and package printing sector, was a key highlight of Labelexpo Asia 2025.

Pioneering China's label industry

Li's career is deeply intertwined with the evolution of China's self-adhesive label industry. He entered the field in the early 1990s and played a pivotal role in the Boston Consulting Group's 1993-94 research project on China's self-adhesive label industry. This project laid the groundwork for the official recognition of the label industry in the country.

From 1994 to 2014, Li held key leadership roles at Avery Dennison, including vice president and general manager of Greater China and vice president of strategy for Asia Pacific. His 20-year tenure set a benchmark for professional management in China's foreign-invested enterprises. Since 2014, he has served as group vice president at CCL Industry China, driving company growth and technical development.

Contributions to development

Dagang Li's career reflects the gradual opening and rapid technical development of China's label industry. Over three decades, he has made extraordinary contributions through his leadership, innovation and commitment to talent development. At Avery Dennison, he integrated world-class technologies with local market needs, leading to significant business growth in China. He also spearheaded the localization of management teams and raw materials, such as glassine liners and adhesives, while advancing film and paper



Dagang Li was named the 2025 Achievement Award winner

"Dagang Li perfectly defines the concept of industry influencer"

face-stock technologies to build a robust local supply chain.

Under his leadership, the Avery Dennison Label Innovation & Application Academy (LIAA) was established in 2000, serving as a vital bridge between the Chinese label industry and cutting-edge global technologies. After joining CCL Label China, Li continued to introduce advanced international technologies and innovative products in self-adhesive labels, RFID and other areas, elevating CCL Label China to a top-tier industry supplier and advancing technological standards across the sector.

Talent development

Li has been instrumental in cultivating local talent, a cornerstone of sustainable industry growth. At both Avery Dennison and CCL Label China, he trained and nurtured management and technical professionals in areas such as lean production and business marketing. Many of these individuals now hold key positions across China's label industry, contributing to its vitality and growth. Li's mentorship has earned him widespread respect as an industry leader.

Recognition of excellence

The jury commended Li's contributions, stating: 'With the courage of a pioneer, the foresight of a strategist, and the generosity of a mentor, Dagang Li perfectly defines the concept of industry influencer. His 32

years of unremitting dedication have not only established benchmark enterprises but also promoted industrial development and talent cultivation, laying a solid foundation for the prosperity and development of China's label industry. He is truly worthy of this honor.'

Li's achievements exemplify the pioneering spirit and strategic vision that have driven the growth and success of China's label industry. His legacy continues to inspire innovation, collaboration and excellence across the sector.

China Label Awards

Alongside Li's recognition, winners of the Label Industry China Awards 2025 were unveiled at the event. The awards celebrate exceptional achievements in innovation, sustainability, media impact and industry leadership.

Organized by Labels & Labeling, the awards recognized excellence across five categories: achievement, innovation, sustainability, media impact and Converter of the Year.

Innovation award

The Innovation award, sponsored by Hanlabel, honors companies that have achieved groundbreaking advancements in product development or production processes. This year's winners are:

- Cymmetrik Group for its EcoStrip water-activated peelable coating
- Avery Dennison for rCrush Barley FSC labelstock
- Hybrid Software Helix for SmartDFE software components

Converter of the Year

This award, sponsored by Caisheng and Hongsheng, acknowledges leading enterprises in the printing industry that excel in innovation-driven growth, sustainable practices and employee development. The winners are:

- Jiangtian
- BSN Group
- Sunway
- Wellking
- AP Label
- Maxim Group

Media impact

Recognizing individuals or organizations

with significant influence on new media platforms such as WeChat VChannel, TikTok and Kuaishou, the winners are:

- CPP114 Printing & Packaging Network
- Guan Guoping of Packaging Zone
- Xiaohumei
- Yumaxian
- Jiangsu Kaitun

Sustainability

The sustainability award, sponsored by Avery Dennison (China), highlights innovative initiatives that reduce environmental impact and enhance resource efficiency. This year's winners are:

- Cymmetrik Jiangsu
- Weigang

HP China and Reborn sponsored the gifts distributed during the ceremony.

Judges' comments

The awards were judged by a panel of industry experts, chaired by Andy Thomas-Emans, strategic director of the labels and packaging group at Loupe Global. Other jury members included Xu Wencai, Yin Jinhua, Wang Yang, Emily Xiao, Rocky Sun, Jacky Yang, Wang Benhong and Yolanda Wang. Special jury members for the Converter of the Year award were Apple Su and Tu Shengwen.

Commenting on the awards, Andy Thomas-Emans stated: 'The overall standard of this year's Label Industry China Awards was impressive. We have witnessed industry-leading innovation, a strong commitment to sustainable technology and world-class label converting companies. The judging process was highly competitive, reflecting the professional expertise of our jury members.'

Jade Grace, managing director of Loupe Global, congratulated the winners and thanked the sponsors for their support in driving innovation.

Kevin Liu, group director for China, emphasized the industry's rapid pace of innovation and transformation, stating: 'The winning enterprises represent the best of this dynamic industry. Their achievements set benchmarks that will inspire others to deepen innovation and collaborate to advance the modernization of China's label industry.'

The Label Industry China Awards 2025 serve as a testament to the remarkable progress and innovation within the sector, showcasing the dedication of enterprises and individuals to excellence and sustainable development.



The Label Industry China Awards were held during Labelexpo Asia 2025

"The winning enterprises represent the best of this dynamic industry"

Labelexpo Asia 2025 reports visitor growth

Labelexpo Asia 2025 closed its latest edition, reporting 14 percent visitor growth, with over 30,560 visitors from 114 countries. The show occupied 40,000 sqm at the Shanghai New International Expo Centre in December 2025.

Labelexpo Asia 2025 was elevated by a series of new initiatives designed to connect and promote business growth, innovation and sustainability. Attendees experienced cutting-edge technology through the Smart Label Trail and Digital Pouch Factory, engaged with a comprehensive educational program featuring expert seminars and masterclasses, celebrated excellence at the Label Industry China Awards, and maximized business connections in the new Global Connect Hub, a dedicated VIP zone designed for international buyers.

With over 450 exhibitors on the show floor, Labelexpo Asia 2025 delivered on innovation and business opportunities.

Kevin Liu, group director, China, explained: 'The Asia-Pacific labels and package printing market continues to demonstrate remarkable growth and relevance, driven by the region's dynamic economic expansion and increasing demand for innovative and sustainable solutions. Labelexpo Asia 2025 has once again proven to be a vital platform for showcasing cutting-edge technologies and fostering meaningful connections across the industry. The event not only highlights the strength of the Chinese market but also underscores its critical role in shaping the future of global label and package printing.'

In addition to demonstrating

sustainable label technology on the show floor, Labelexpo Asia 2025 launched its own sustainability initiatives, such as dedicated recycling bins for a range of materials and substances, including exhibitors' ink waste.

Another important initiative is ensuring the recycling of all show floor carpets, with a total of 19,558 sqm saved from landfill.

The increased use of LED screens for signage across the show further enhanced sustainability credentials, combined with the recycling of all physical show signage.

Jade Grace, managing director of Loupe Global, commented on the success of the event and its future: 'Labelexpo Asia 2025 has been an extraordinary success, reaffirming its position as the largest and most influential event for the labels and package printing industry in the Asia-Pacific region. Our objective continues to be to evolve and ensure our platforms foster meaningful connections to promote business growth, innovation and sustainability. The overwhelming response from exhibitors and visitors, coupled with the innovative features introduced this year, such as the Global Connect Hub, has set a new benchmark for the event. As we look to the future, we are excited to continue evolving and expanding the show under the LOUPE Asia brand in 2027, ensuring it remains the premier destination for innovation, collaboration, and business growth in this thriving market.'



Scan the QR code to read more about the label industry in China, including a full recap of Labelexpo Asia 2025



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Cwl drives digital transformation in flex pack

Chinese flexible packaging manufacturer installs second HP Indigo, driving growth in the region. Yolanda Wang reports

Cwl Group has taken a significant step towards advancing its digital transformation by commissioning a second HP Indigo 200K Digital Press, following the successful installation of the HP Indigo 25K in 2022. This move underscores the company's commitment to strengthening its position in the digital flexible packaging sector.

Headquartered in Foshan, Guangdong Province, Cwl Group operates in a highly competitive market. The region is home to numerous flexible packaging companies, making industrial competitiveness a core focus for the company.

Focus on digital

Digital flexible packaging is a central pillar of Cwl Group's business strategy. According to Frank Jia, deputy general manager of Cwl Group and general manager of its digital business division, the company has seen a growing proportion of short-run orders. Traditional production methods are costly and inefficient for handling short runs, creating a bottleneck that limits growth, leading Cwl Group to choose digital technology to address these challenges.

Cwl Group's core product is coffee bags, which are exported to over 70 countries. These products demand high color precision and consistent quality, alongside increasing market demand for multi-version customized packaging. Recognizing these dual requirements, the company began exploring digital technology eight years ago, including visits to HP's demonstration center in Guangzhou and testing equipment at other facilities equipped with HP Indigo presses. This groundwork paved the way for its first HP Indigo 25K in April 2022, which enabled the company to meet key needs such as small-order production, short delivery cycles and customization.

Technology and talent investment

To complement its hardware upgrades, Cwl Group has invested in building a professional digital printing technical team. The company offers customized flexible

“The region is home to numerous flexible packaging companies, making industrial competitiveness a core focus for the company”

packaging to meet diverse customer needs, ensuring that each product accurately reflects the brand's values and philosophy.

With the first HP Indigo device operating at full capacity, the new equipment is expected to drive three major upgrades: improved efficiency, cost optimization and service expansion.

The HP Indigo 200K offers a 45 percent improvement in efficiency, enabling shorter delivery cycles and faster responses. Its on-demand production model reduces inventory waste, supporting 'zero-inventory' services. Enhanced automation and speed allow for targeted reductions in labor, energy consumption, and consumables, lowering overall production costs. The advanced variable-printing capabilities of the new equipment enable the company to better meet customer demand for multiple SKUs. This positions Cwl Group to transition from a flexible packaging manufacturer to what the company calls a 'full-process digital experience service provider,' enhancing its competitiveness in the high-value-added flexible packaging market.

Following its installation in January, the HP Indigo 200K is expected to double the company's production capacity, handling both large-batch standard orders and small-batch custom orders. It also reduces delivery cycles by 40 percent through cloud connectivity and intelligent quality assurance, enabling 'same-day confirmation and next-day production'.

Future market trends

Jia highlights key structural transformations shaping the digital flexible packaging market, beginning with personalization, which is driving demand.

'The market is shifting from scale-oriented production to

personalization-driven solutions. The rise of small and medium-sized brands, coupled with diverse consumer demands, has led to increased demand for small-batch, multi-category, and multi-iterative packaging. Traditional gravure printing methods are unable to meet these requirements, whereas digital printing aligns perfectly with this trend.'

He continues: 'Innovations in digital technology, such as HP Indigo, are driving a shift from the traditional inventory-based model of "produce first, sell later" to an on-demand production model. This reduces operational risks like inventory backlogs and capital constraints while enabling brands to respond quickly to market changes, enhancing their competitiveness.'

Environmental policies are also driving this demand. 'With stricter environmental policies and growing consumer awareness, eco-friendly packaging materials are becoming more prevalent. Digital printing is highly compatible with these materials, making it a key growth area in the flexible packaging industry.'

Cwl Group was recognized as a 'Green Factory' in Guangdong Province in 2025, with digital printing technology 'playing a pivotal role in achieving this milestone'.

HP says that Chinese flexible packaging companies are leading the sector's digital transformation. Cwl Group's strategic initiatives align with industry trends and are expected to serve as a valuable reference for other companies embarking on their own transformation journeys.



Scan the QR code to read more news on the Chinese label market

2026 GLOBAL PREDICTIONS

20

26



*As 2026 is well underway, some of the biggest names in the industry have the same thing on their minds as regulations begin to roll out, forcing many to adapt to sustainability. Additionally, artificial intelligence and automation are constant talking points.
Compiled by Will Drysdale*

THORSTEN KRÖLLER, PRESIDENT, ACTEGA

The print and packaging industry continues to evolve, with sustainability firmly at the forefront of this transformation. In 2025, the sector made notable progress, moving beyond simply acknowledging sustainability to embedding it as a core business strategy. Companies across the value chain have taken significant steps to meet regulatory demands and rising consumer expectations, focusing on reducing waste, supporting a circular economy and prioritizing environmental responsibility.

Digitalization also gained momentum in 2025, enabling more innovative production, greater personalization and reduced waste. However, this transformation demands collaboration across the value chain. By partnering with technology leaders, material suppliers and brand owners, we co-create tailored solutions that drive innovation and accelerate the transition to a sustainable future.

TINA HART, VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER, AVERY DENNISON

As we enter 2026, the label and packaging industry is at a truly exciting turning point. We're seeing incredible technological advancements, but more importantly, an essential shift toward putting people first. Building on everything we learned in 2025, there's a fresh sense of energy as we work together to solve the real-world challenges facing converters, supply chains and everyday consumers.

This year, the industry is focusing on the growth of RFID technology, driven by emerging mandates. With Walmart expanding its requirements to nearly all general merchandise categories, businesses are rising to the challenge and meeting the growing demand for compliant products. At the same time, breakthrough innovations in fresh food tracking are emerging, demonstrating that intelligent labeling can transform operational efficiency and significantly reduce food waste throughout the retail supply chain. This evolution enables new levels of item-level transparency and deeper engagement across the value chain, further creating the connection between the physical and digital.

Looking ahead to Loupe 2026, there is excitement to connect, collaborate and showcase what's possible when the industry comes together with a vision for a more sustainable, efficient and connected future. By fostering innovation and keeping customers' needs central, the stage is set for another year of meaningful progress and leadership.

As we embrace new technologies, we remain committed to sustainable innovation, ensuring that our collective progress benefits both our businesses and our customers.

MAHER MAKRAM, GLOBAL HEAD OF R&D, ARCHROMA PACKAGING TECHNOLOGIES

We expect 2026 to be a year of continued progress in sustainability for labels, delivering solutions that improve circularity without sacrificing performance. Momentum is building behind bio-based pressure-sensitive adhesive systems as brands and converters replace fossil-derived monomers with renewable alternatives. Recyclability requirements will continue to drive adoption of wash-off label systems that enable recycling streams for glass and PET, supported by established test methods such as Finat FTM 26.

Occupational health regulations, particularly in Europe, are accelerating demand for low- and no-noise packaging tapes that reduce decibel levels during converting. Water-based PSA technology, which accounts for around half of global volumes, will continue to expand thanks to its low odor and reduced

environmental impact compared with solvent-based options. Material efficiency will remain central: linerless labels are gaining ground, cutting liner waste and reducing paper use by up to around 50 percent while maintaining runnability.

Finally, supply-chain resilience remains a priority: we're seeing more customers ask for regionally dependable supply and local technical support to reduce risk as geopolitical volatility continues.

PATRICK GRABER, MARKETING DIRECTOR, PL LABELS, BOBST

During the first half of 2026, we expect challenges caused by the current geopolitical tensions, with relief anticipated during the second half. Converters must seek out innovations and support that enable them to be hyper-agile, able to meet demands for faster speed-to-market, rapid design cycles and multiple SKUs. They also have to navigate rising cost-efficiency demands, volatile materials supply, staff shortages, and above all, sustainability requirements.

The single most transformative trend we expect to see, however, is AI. Deploying artificial intelligence will become the new standard, enabling a move towards autonomous machine operation with AI-driven quality control for compliance, within an automated workflow.

EDO COTICHINI, SENIOR MANAGER OF MARKETING AND INNOVATION, CANON EMEA

The convergence of technological advancement, tightening regulations and changing consumer behavior is driving a period of transformation in the label industry, creating both pressure and opportunity for label converters. Based on this, in my opinion, the industry will be driven by three key trends in 2026:

Sustainability, particularly with the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) coming into effect. This, coupled with consumer demand for recyclable materials, allows converters not only to comply but also to add value by advising customers on sustainable alternatives.

Secondly, automation is becoming an essential tool for overcoming workforce constraints and rising costs. Rather than replacing personnel, automation enables converters to better utilize the expertise and skills of experienced staff, creating higher value and more future-proof operations.

Lastly, smart labels represent an expanding growth area. Technologies such as RFID, NFC and connected QR codes are becoming more popular for traceability, anti-counterfeiting and enhanced consumer engagement. While smart labels introduce complexities across production, data handling and in retail environments, they also enable converters to differentiate their offering and access new revenue streams.

Of course, all of these trends are also affected by the uncertain backdrop that label converters and society as a whole face. But I believe that, in 2026, label converters who are adaptable to market shifts and who can educate their customers on opportunities beyond standard labels will see great success.

VIRGILIO MICALE, GLOBAL SALES DIRECTOR, CARTES

In 2026, the labels and packaging machinery market is expected to continue its gradual modernization to adapt to new business challenges.

Demand is likely to be driven mainly by targeted investments that use automation to address workforce shortages and reduce waste, enabling greater flexibility to



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manage rising SKU counts and smaller batch sizes. In this context, digital technologies should keep gaining share, also through hybrid approaches.

Sustainability will remain a cross-cutting theme support for more challenging facestocks, alternative adhesives, liners and set-ups designed to minimize energy use and unplanned downtime.

End users will look for solutions that improve OEE and enable more maintenance, supported by remote diagnostics and simplified spare-parts management.

Overall, 2026 will favor suppliers who can offer modularity, responsive service and measurable ROI, as well as improving embellishment and converging technologies while keeping regulatory compliance and label aesthetic quality at the center.

RUSSELL WELLER, HEAD OF DIGITAL PRODUCTS, DOMINO PRINTING SCIENCES

Automation, sustainability and connectivity have been the driving forces in the label and packaging industry in 2025. We expect these trends to accelerate in 2026, with a focus on advanced digital technologies that help converters further optimize the performance of their printing operations.

Developments in AI and vision technology will play a pivotal role for converters looking to establish efficient quality control. Vision systems and intelligent workflows will improve press efficiency and reduce the risk of errors, providing the reassurance that every label produced meets the highest quality standards.

Sustainability will remain a core focus, with converters adopting energy-efficient LED printing, fast-drying inks and more efficient workflows to reduce energy use and waste. Workflows powered by AI will enable smarter operations, from real-time data insights to predictive maintenance, helping manufacturers achieve higher productivity and consistent quality.

STEVE LYNN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DURST

As we move into 2026, the label industry is expected to continue its steady shift toward digital production, driven by brand demands for greater flexibility, shorter runs, faster time-to-market and increased SKU proliferation. While flexographic printing will remain a core production technology, legacy flexo lines and earlier-generation digital platforms are increasingly being evaluated against modern, high-productivity, true-native 1,200 DPI inkjet alternatives.

Durst anticipates continued growth and investment in 1,200 DPI UV inkjet systems, both in standalone digital presses and hybrid configurations integrated with flexo finishing and converting equipment. Converters are looking beyond entry-level digital equipment and toner-based platforms, instead prioritizing 1,200 DPI inkjet technologies that deliver consistent print quality, scalable productivity and lower total cost of ownership for short-, medium- and long-run applications.

Hybrid inkjet technology is expected to gain further momentum in 2026 as converters seek to maximize asset utilization, blending the strengths of digital print with in-line

finishing, embellishment and conventional processes.

At the same time, standalone digital presses will continue to replace aging flexo and toner equipment in applications where flexibility, repeatability and reduced waste are critical.

JAN DE ROECK, MARKETING DIRECTOR, ESKO

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence, alongside increased and evolving sustainability requirements and emerging models of digital packaging intelligence, are driving deep and lasting change across our industry.

The future of labels and packaging will be reliant on technological innovations that address key concerns of both brands and converters, namely speed to market, quality and sustainability. In fact, our recent industry research found that sustainability will remain the strongest driver of change in 2026, while the role of smart packaging now and into the future cannot be underestimated.

The arrival of the DPP, which provides traceability and consumer engagement opportunities, presents a tremendous opportunity with significant business potential. Ultimately, the key enabler is accessible and secure data about both product and package.

The burgeoning use of AI is expected to continue apace as companies experiment further and seek to identify where and how it delivers most value. Its potential to achieve new levels of go-to-market speed, efficiency and quality is undeniable, and the technology is clearly here to stay.

JULES LEJUNE, MANAGING DIRECTOR, FINAT

Entering 2026, the European label sector is cautiously optimistic, but clear-eyed. Demand is stabilizing after a volatile period, yet growth will be incremental and uneven across end-use markets. The winners will be those that combine operational discipline with the ability to adapt quickly to shifting customer requirements and macro uncertainty.

Sustainability will move further from ambition to execution. PPWR, evolving EPR frameworks and supply-chain due diligence expectations are pushing brands to ask for proof: design-for-recycling compatibility, credible data and scalable end-of-life solutions. This is accelerating practical innovation in label materials, adhesives and constructions, and it reinforces the need for cross-value-chain collaboration, especially to build viable collection and recycling routes for release liners and matrix waste.

We also expect momentum in traceability solutions, such as QR, serialization and RFID, supporting circularity and supply-chain efficiency overall.

At the same time, digitalization continues to reshape competitiveness. Workflow automation, smarter data use and AI-enabled process control will help converters reduce waste, improve uptime and manage shorter runs, faster changeovers and increasing SKU complexity. Finally, people remain central: attracting skills and upskilling teams will be as important as investing in equipment.

2026 will reward resilience, collaboration and evidence-based sustainability, turning compliance pressure into a platform for innovation and long-term competitiveness.

**ALESSANDRO AGNOLETTI,
CEO AND FOUNDER,
THE FLEXO COMPANY**

In the flexo pre-press field, we expect 2026 to accelerate further a transition that has already been very strong over the past couple of years. As machine manufacturers, we are seeing a clear and continuous shift toward LED exposure. Fluorescent lamps are slowly exiting the market, and even the late adopters are now aligning with this change. For many, LED is no longer seen as a futuristic option but simply as the natural next step for stable, predictable and energy-efficient plate production.

We also anticipate significant growth in water-washable systems. Beyond the operational advantages, environmental considerations are becoming increasingly important, and interest in moving from solvent to water continues to rise. Many companies, including those that were initially hesitant, are now actively exploring water solutions to reduce their ecological footprint and simplify handling.

Another trend we observe is the growing number of printers who traditionally outsourced their flexo plates and are now considering bringing plate production in-house. It is not always clear whether this is driven mainly by cost, by a desire for greater process control, or by both.

However, the trend is real, and we believe it will strengthen in 2026, especially as printers and converters look for sustainable, self-contained solutions based on LED exposure and water technology.

**WALTER BENZ, PRESIDENT,
FLINT GROUP, INCLUDING XEIKON**

The label industry enters 2026 with momentum from all sides. We see growth at both ends of the spectrum: accelerated entry-level digital adoption

by smaller printers, while mature converters push high-end automation and customization. That dual movement shows one thing: labels remain a crucial bridge between brand and consumer.

Sustainability will define the next wave of innovation. Brand owners push for packaging to support circularity. In that context, the label proves remarkably resilient. It adapts to any packaging material, preserves design freedom and enables compliant communication without locking brands into a single substrate path. As regulations tighten, that flexibility becomes a strategic advantage.

We also expect a sharp rise in demand for variable embellishment. Brands look for standout shelf presence, but they also want personalization, versioning, protection and storytelling embedded in the decoration itself. Digital embellishment, especially when fully integrated into the workflow, will unlock new value for converters who embrace it early.

**MARK STEPHENSON,
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER, FUJIFILM EUROPE**

More and more, I hear how businesses are becoming increasingly risk-averse as they gather and are possibly distracted by mountains of data and analysis. Decisions are delayed, and whole projects are abandoned for lack of clarity as we all drown in a sea of unreliable forecasts and projections.

My goal for 2026 is to present ever more compelling arguments that remove any doubt, and to tell relatable customer stories that say far more than data tables or industry forecasts.

This is the year of print and packaging in the real world.

Are we talking directly to our customers or have we settled for relationships by proxy of emailed documents, shared links and executive summaries? This is the time for us to lift our eyes from Excel, Tableau and the weekly dashboard and do business face to face, eye to eye, B2B.

DARIO URBINATI, CEO, GALLUS

As we look to 2026, we are seeing a clear step-change as hybrid flexo-digital solutions move decisively into the mainstream, evolving from an emerging option into an established and trusted central technology for the modern printshop. As the industry navigates continued change and uncertainty, hybrid technologies are proving their value in unlocking digital capabilities

while delivering clear operational benefits on the shop floor.

From faster changeovers and greater flexibility to lower waste and improved efficiency across varying run lengths, hybrid is increasingly empowering converters to operate with greater agility and confidence. This momentum also reflects a shift towards a hybrid mindset, with a growing emphasis on combining the strengths of different processes to best suit each application, whether within a single piece of equipment or across the production environment.

At the same time, the industry is entering a new and exciting phase of digital transformation. While we're continuing to see promising signs of purposeful innovation, from advances in automation that address skilled labor challenges, to data- and AI-enabled tools that drive workflow efficiency, waste reduction and better decision-making, the focus is now extending beyond the press itself.

Increasingly, converters recognize that real performance gains depend not only on the capabilities of individual technologies, but on how effectively data, software and processes are connected across the entire print landscape. This is what will define the year ahead: not the emergence of new technologies alone, but the industry's ability to apply them in a connected, purposeful way.

**NOAM ZILBERSHTAIN, VP AND
GENERAL MANAGER, HP INDIGO**

The past year marked a pivotal shift: automation and data-driven workflows have become industry standards, enabling converters to scale capacity while reducing friction and waste.

Non-stop digital printing empowers customers to maximize uptime and profitability through 24/7 operations. This approach addresses labor shortages, rising costs and sustainability mandates, while reinforcing integrated ecosystems that connect brands, converters and supply chains.

Looking ahead, three pillars define HP's roadmap: more jobs with less friction, deeper brand engagement and intelligence at the core. Versatility and scalability will be critical differentiators, allowing converters to pivot across formats and meet surging demand.

Interactive packaging and personalized campaigns will gain traction as brands seek stronger consumer connections. Service-based models and advanced software platforms will further elevate



efficiency and strategic value.

Innovation is not just about technology – it's about creating value for customers and building resilient, connected ecosystems.

NICOLA LOMBARDI, MARKETING MANAGER, LOMBARDI

As we move toward 2026, the converting industry will continue to navigate a world shaped by geopolitical instability, economic uncertainty and increasingly fragile global supply chains. In this scenario, converters are being pushed to rethink not only how they print, but what they print and for which markets.

Mid web and flexible packaging are set to become key pillars of this transformation. The ability to serve multiple applications, from labels to flexible packaging, on a single platform is no longer a competitive advantage, but a strategic necessity. Flexible packaging, in particular, offers converters greater resilience thanks to its broad market reach, faster product cycles and growing demand across food, beverage, home care and personal care sectors.

At Lombardi, we see a clear shift toward mid web technology that combine productivity, material efficiency and adaptability. Converters are looking for robust platforms capable of handling a wide range of substrates, supporting sustainable materials and scaling with evolving market needs. Hybrid architectures and modular machine concepts will be essential in enabling this transition while protecting long-term investments.

In an unpredictable global landscape, technology must empower converters with flexibility, reliability and confidence. Those who invest in versatile mid web and flexible packaging technology will be better positioned to absorb market shocks, diversify revenue streams and build sustainable growth for the future.

JENNIFER DOCHSTADER, FOUNDER, LPC

For label converters, I think 2026 will be a year defined less by big swings and more by day-to-day decision-making under pressure. Labor remains tight. Converter margins are under continuous strain. Lead times, pricing volatility and broader economic uncertainty continue to complicate planning. And yet, most converters aren't in retreat mode.

Over the past two months, LPC has conducted an extensive survey

of more than 70 North American label converters to better understand how companies are entering 2026. We asked questions like: What are converters' capex strategies this year? How exactly are they upskilling their production floor personnel? What are they expecting more from suppliers to help them operate more efficiently in a constrained environment?

Their feedback was clear: converters are still investing, but with far more scrutiny than in years past. Capital decisions are increasingly tied to productivity, automation and the ability to keep presses running efficiently with fewer people.

For all converters, regardless of size, the focus has shifted more than ever toward operational fundamentals. Improving backroom efficiencies, reducing downtime and bringing more predictability to operations are taking priority over aggressive expansion. We're seeing press technology choices become more application-driven, with flexo, digital and hybrid presses evaluated based on how they support specific job profiles, automation goals, and, in some cases, entry into new markets.

For suppliers, I think 2026 will be all about follow-through and support. Converters are looking for partners who deeply understand their operational pressures and consistently help make the production floor easier to manage. In a market environment like this one, continuing credibility won't be based on what suppliers are saying it will be about how reliably they deliver.

DUANE PEKAR, PRESIDENT AND CEO, MARK ANDY

As the industry moves into 2026, productivity has become the defining metric for success in the label and package printing market.

Hybrid production will continue to play a critical role in achieving step-function productivity gains for converters. Simply put, hybrid presses combine the benefits of in-line converting with the benefits of digital printing.

High-speed hybrid platforms take this one step further by increasing the volume crossover point at which digital printing is more cost-effective than flexo.

At the same time, many converters are focused on maximizing output from existing equipment by achieving and sustaining higher run rates. We often see machines running at a fraction of their speed and hear customers'

frustration with their inability to maintain rates across production runs.

Productivity in 2026 is not confined to the press alone; supply chain responsiveness and service support will remain key differentiators. Converters need fast, reliable access to dies, plates, parts and consumables, along with steady technical support, to keep presses running and avoid unplanned downtime. Many converters don't know how much they spend on consumables and they're leaving money on the table by ignoring this portion of their spend.

As we look ahead to 2026, Mark Andy has aligned its business around these realities, supporting productivity gains both through new technologies and by helping customers get more from the equipment they already own.

By prioritizing productivity-driven solutions across equipment, service, and consumables, we are positioned to partner closely with our customers as they work to do more with less and operate more profitably in an increasingly demanding market.

MARTIN TAILBERG, MARKETING MANAGER, NILPETER

In 2026 we see continued momentum in multi-layer and extended content formats. Even though specific chemical labeling requirements have been pushed to 2027, brand owners still need more space for information, multiple languages and compliance-related messaging.

At the same time, flexible packaging remains the fastest-growing segment, with a clear shift towards pouches and sachets. For converters, that development is creating growth opportunities, but also higher expectations for flexibility and consistent performance.

We also expect stronger competition in segments like shrink sleeves and wraparounds. As more converters enter or expand, the winners will be those who can increase efficiency and productivity while maintaining stable quality.

That links directly to another major shift we see: the market is moving beyond mechanical press performance alone. Customers are dealing with more SKUs, shorter runs, faster changeovers and increasing pressure on lead times.

AI will naturally play a growing role in that development, supporting better decisions, more stable production and higher overall equipment effectiveness.

Overall, the global market for labels and flexible packaging continues to grow steadily through 2026.

**MARCO CALCAGNI,
SALES DIRECTOR, OMET**

Looking ahead to 2026, the label market will continue to face strong competitive pressure, prompting many converters to broaden their scope toward short-to medium-run flexible packaging and increasingly toward folding carton, where sustainability-driven demand is accelerating.

In this environment, technology choices will hinge on production versatility: printers need platforms capable of shifting quickly between applications, ensuring faster changeovers, lower waste and consistent quality across a wider range of materials.

I expect growing interest in advanced configurations that combine high-efficiency flexo with targeted technologies such as digital, offset, gravure or specialty processes, as converters search for reliable ways to differentiate their offering while keeping turnaround times tight.

Automation, modularity and intelligent workflow management will be decisive factors enabling this transition.

Service will also become an even more strategic asset. Remote diagnostics, AI-supported assistance and comprehensive operator training will directly influence productivity and return on investment, strengthening long-term customer relationships.

Partnerships across the supply chain will remain essential, fostering innovation in areas such as sustainable substrates, energy-efficient processes, and hybrid production ecosystems.

Entering 2026, Omet will continue to focus on customer-driven innovation, delivering flexible, high-performance solutions that support converters as they adapt to new market dynamics and prepare for the next wave of opportunities.

RENÉ ABÄCHERLI, CEO, PANTEC

As we look toward 2026, the label industry faces a polarized challenge: brands demand increasingly sophisticated, high-end embellishments to stand out on the shelf, yet the pressure for sustainability and cost-efficiency has never been higher.

At Pantec, we predict 2026 will be the year when sustainable premiumization moves from a concept to a production

standard. The days of sacrificing efficiency for high-quality finishing are over. Converters will increasingly rely on advanced in-line systems that allow for multi-stroke embossing and foil stamping at high speeds, eliminating offline bottlenecks.

Furthermore, foil saving will dominate the conversation. Technology that allows for significant foil reduction, without compromising the visual impact of the design, will be crucial.

Converters utilizing smart foil-saving software and modules will gain a competitive edge by lowering consumable costs and reducing their carbon footprint.

In short, 2026 will not just be about how good a label looks, but how intelligently and efficiently that look was achieved.

High-performance embellishment will become the key differentiator for printers navigating the balance between luxury and logic.

**GABRIELA FITZGERALD,
MARKETING MANAGER,
ROTOMETAL**

As we approach 2026, the label industry is entering a period of profound transformation. The market's growth comes with a hard stop of regulatory deadlines and intensifying economic pressures. For the modern printer, survival is no longer just about output. It is about precision, material innovation and the agility to absorb margin compression.

Economic consolidation is accelerating. With raw materials accounting for up to 75 percent of costs, SMEs are facing severe margin pressure. In this environment, operational waste is the enemy.

This is where the technical advantage of high-quality tooling becomes a financial lever.

By August 2026, compliance with the EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) will become mandatory. The transition to mono-material polymers, compostable films and wash-off materials requires capable tooling partners.

The industry is also moving toward flexo-digital integration to manage the workforce challenge and handle complex, medium-length runs. Automation is no longer an option; it is a necessity.

In a market defined by consolidation and rapid regulatory shifts, the winners will be those who choose partners committed to long-term innovation.

**DALE COATES, CEO
AND PRESIDENT, TLMI**

As TLMI looks toward 2026, the label and packaging industry faces a dynamic environment shaped by economic resilience and strategic complexity. Economist Alex Chausovsky highlighted at TLMI's Annual Meeting that US GDP remains strong, with no recession indicators, though tariffs may influence costs later in the year and into 2026. He advised converters to protect margins, strengthen supply-chain communication and invest in workforce retention while pursuing smart growth opportunities.

Beyond economics, two transformative forces define 2026: regulation and innovation. Brands and converters continue to prioritize recyclable substrates, mono-material designs and reduced waste through improved printing efficiencies. Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) regulations and consumer expectations are accelerating the development of circular packaging solutions and traceability systems.

Simultaneously, new technology continues to reshape operations. Converters are leveraging automation, data-driven workflows, AI and other manufacturing efficiencies to meet demand for shorter runs, faster turnaround and SKU proliferation, all with a reduced workforce. Smart labeling and connected packaging are emerging as tools for compliance and consumer engagement.

TLMI remains committed to equipping members with benchmarking, regulatory and sustainability resources while providing opportunities to network with peers and suppliers for informed decision making. By aligning economic strategies with regulation and innovation, converters can thrive in 2026's complex yet opportunity-rich landscape.

All entries are edited for space and clarity and ordered alphabetically by company or association.



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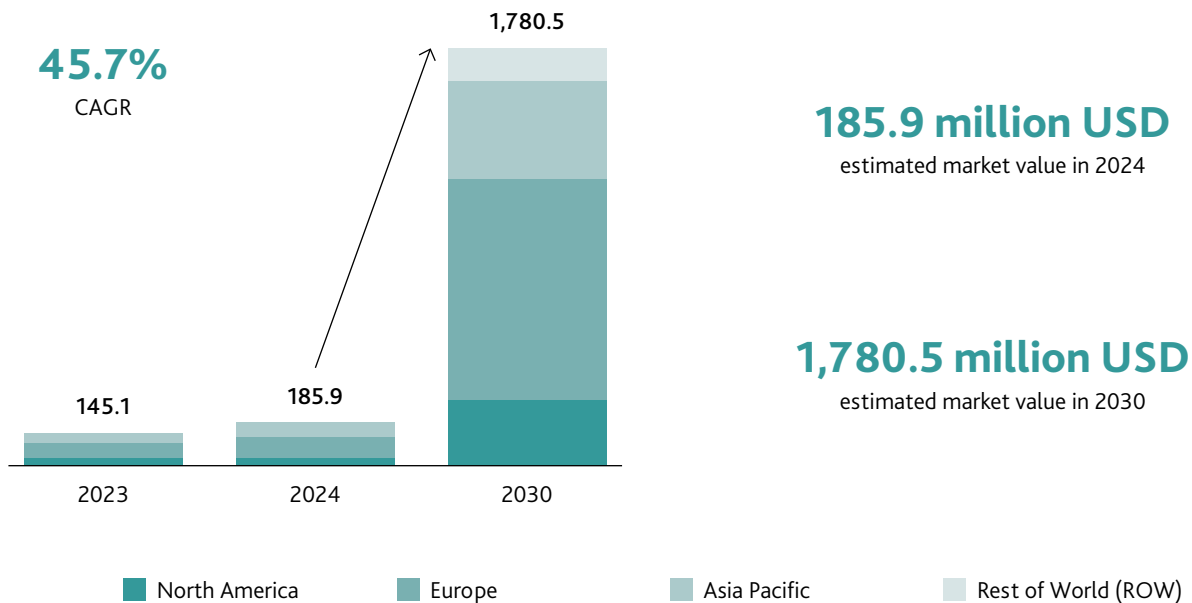
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Label trends

The Digital Product Passport market is witnessing considerable expansion, propelled by regulatory requirements, consumer desire for transparency and technological progress.

Market evaluation



Global DPP market dynamics



Drivers: Sustainability and regulations

Increasing implementation of strict regulatory frameworks. These policies aim to enhance sustainability, reduce waste and encourage circular economy initiatives



Restraint: Costs

High setup cost, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, and recurring costs for data management, software updates and system maintenance



Opportunity: Battery passports

These DPPs can deliver a digital record of the entire battery lifecycle and its recyclability. This will be particularly valuable in the global shift toward electronic vehicles



Challenge: Data integration

Many businesses operate on siloed systems, causing stakeholders to use several standards, media and technology

Source: Digital Product Passport (DPP) Market report published by Markets and Markets in January 2025.

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