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Labels & Labeling

The wider world of narrow web

Oct/Nov 2006

Volume 28 Issue 5

Labelexpo

Part one of our extensive Labelexpo Americas 2006 technology review

Analysis

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Analysis

PS laminate specialist invests in new European capacity

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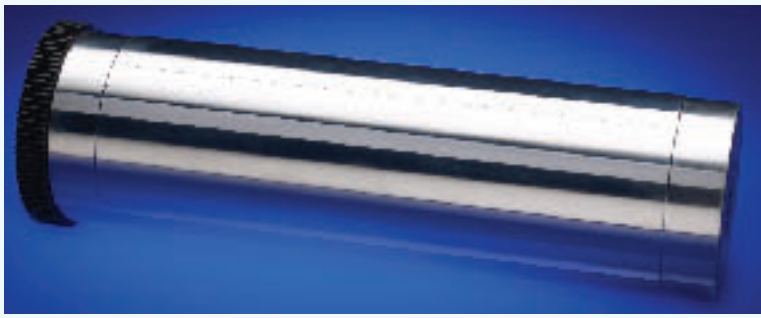

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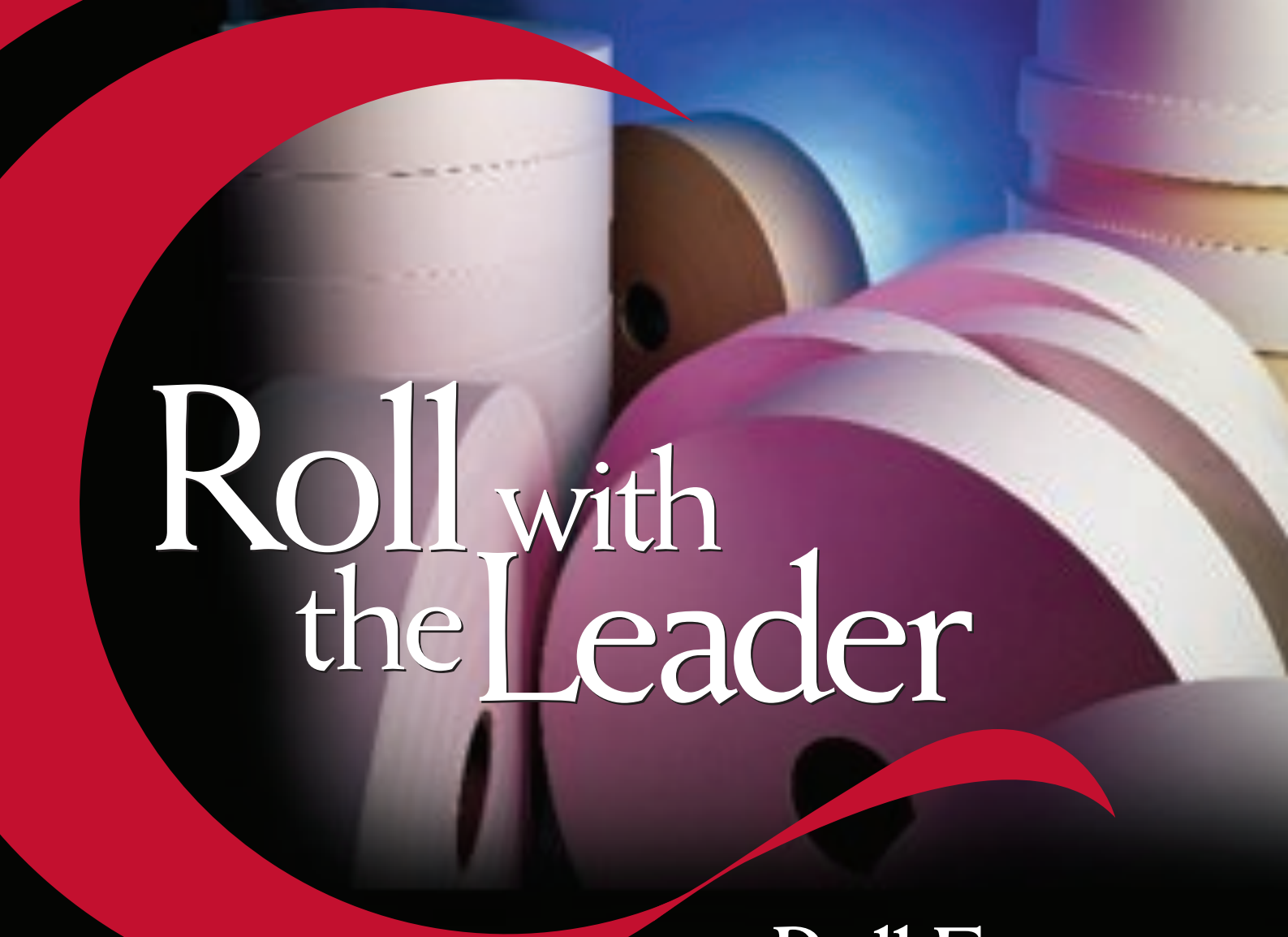

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Leader

The tenth anniversary of Labelexpo Americas was a great success from many points of view. Firstly, the show has never before attracted so many international visitors – which largely accounted for the 6 per cent increase in attendance. The 13,256 visitors came from 88 countries, and over 20 per cent of visitors traveled from outside the US, including large delegations from Mexico, Brazil, China, Japan, Germany, Denmark, Italy and the UK. Delegations from Latin America increased by 23 per cent, mirroring the accelerating growth of the label industry in this region.

> "The 13,256 visitors came from 88 countries, and over 20 per cent of visitors traveled from outside the UK"

Secondly, in terms of new technology, the importance of the Americas show was demonstrated by the world launch of new presses – always a measure of how key industry suppliers view the importance of an exhibition.

We saw for the first time at an international show presses from Comco, Aquaflex, Nilpeter and Edale, while several European manufacturers launched machines into the Americas market including Codimag and Omet. Edale used the show to launch a new US operation, and MPS announced consolidation of key personnel and technical support operations in the US.

In terms of digital equipment we saw a new HP Indigo digital press for the first time, and – surely a major signpost for the digital future – a raft of companies showing in-line 4-color UV inkjet modules or stand-alone units. Indeed, an interesting trend is for suppliers previously selling into the commercial digital print market to move into our sector to take advantage of consistently high global growth rates. Thus Konica Minolta showed an in-line inkjet module, and EFI announced the acquisition of Flint Group's Jetrion inkjet operation.

There were other interesting product introductions across the full range of materials, ancillaries and technologies. Avery Dennison launched a high shrink polyolefin wrap-around film, Raflatac announced a big increase in its US manufacturing capability, and there were other major product announcements across inspection, plates, rewinding, and RFID sectors, all of which will be covered in this and the next edition of Labels & Labeling.

Last but not least, we should mention the excellent conference sessions, which were well targeted at some of the key concerns and development opportunities in our industry.

Andy Thomas
Group Managing Editor

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Labeling news

Mark Andy sold by Dover

Mark Andy has been acquired by Morgenthaler Partners, a strong financial business holding company based in Cleveland, Ohio and Boston, Massachusetts. Mark Andy, Inc. had been owned by Dover Corporation since 1995. The transaction was completed on September 15, 2006.

'Mark Andy is excited about our new ownership, Morgenthaler Partners,' stated Paul Brauss, CEO of Mark Andy, Inc. 'We've worked very hard in the areas of product development and customer support which has dramatically improved our sales and market position. Our strong position has attracted a solid financial supporter and partner. We look forward to continued growth supported by our new ownership.'

As part of the acquisition, Mark Andy's long-standing management team structure will continue: Paul Brauss, CEO; Mike Howard, VP finance & CFO; John Howard, VP engineering; Bill Thompson, VP manufacturing; Greg Palm, VP sales & marketing and Adam Baer, VP customer support.

UPM Raflatac builds Midwest business

UPM Raflatac is to build a new pressure sensitive labelstock factory in Dixon, Illinois, 105 miles west of Chicago. Representing a $109 million investment, the new factory will focus on serving label converters in the US Midwest marketplace and feature UPM Raflatac's latest coating and finishing solutions. Construction is scheduled to start immediately, with completion due in the first quarter of 2008.

In the third quarter of 2006, UPM Raflatac is also opening a new terminal to provide slitting and distribution services from Rochelle, Illinois. The company's other US terminals are located in Ontario, California and Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Major accomplishments last year included the start-up of an additional coating machine at UPM Raflatac's labelstock facility in Fletcher, North Carolina, and, also in Fletcher, the construction of a new state-of-the-art RFID facility for the production of HF and UHF inlays.

UPM Raflatac also announced a doubling of its European production capacity for film labelstock, while in China a greenfield factory is being built in Changshu, 100 km west of Shanghai.

UPM Raflatac's Fletcher operation has already expanded the company's range of locally made film products including polypropylenes and polyethylenes for rigid and semi- and fully squeezable containers. UPM Raflatac is also offering new hot melt and rubber resin dispersion adhesives and a number of additional liner options to boost processing speeds. Special programs include splice-free, trimless and longer rolls, available from several stock locations.

UPM Raflatac is also devoting significant resources to continue the development of RFID tags and inlays for applications in the supply chain and the retail, pharmaceutical, library/media management, transportation and security markets, among others.

Labels & Labeling bookshop launched

Labels & Labeling has introduced an online bookshop, bringing together some of the best publications in the industry. Titles include The Encyclopedia of Labels and Label Technology; RFID Smart Labels – a 'How to' guide for the label converter; and market surveys & analysis of label converting in North America, South America, and Japan.

The Encyclopedia of Labels and Label Technology, written by label expert Michael Fairley, is the first and only book of its kind for the label, product decoration, web printing and converting industry. It is an easy-to-use global reference guide, which, according to Laura Moutin, global buyer for Unilever, is 'a comprehensive resource to de-mystify the jargon.'

The Encyclopedia is published in English, Chinese and Turkish, with a Spanish translation on the way.

Other publications include 'RFID Smart Labels – a 'How to' guide', also written by Michael Fairley, and bringing together the combined knowledge of some of the world's leading RFID smart label experts.

Also on sale are the Labelexpo series of regional label converting surveys. Chapters in each survey include: market and economic trends, types of products manufactured, technologies and materials used, product and customer base, future growth, and industry requirements to stimulate growth.

More publications will be available soon. Visit the bookshop now at http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/shop

Avery licenses RFID technology

Avery Dennison Corporation has launched an RFID technology transfer program that will give converters access to a broad range of its products and know-how, beginning with licenses for high-speed strap attach technology.

Avery has also announced the acquisition of RF IDentics, a Grand Rapids, Michigan start-up that has developed innovative processes for producing high quality products and quickly moving them from design into production.

Avery Dennison's RFID division began production with the industry's first high-speed inlay production process that uses small subassemblies called straps to create labels or inlays. It is this high-speed strap attach process that Avery will license to its converting and equipment partners. In addition to patent licenses, converters will also be able to acquire a variety of materials, components and supporting technology from Avery Dennison.

The scope of the program will expand over time, with new technologies and support capabilities made available to converters as they become proven.

'These two announcements reflect Avery Dennison's commitment to being the right partner and providing the right tools for the converting industry,' said Dean Scarborough, president and chief executive officer of Avery Dennison. 'The technology transfer program will enable converters to broaden and differentiate their product offerings, considerably enhancing their value to their customers.'

'RF IDentics brings another valuable set of technologies, manufacturing assets and talent to the Avery Dennison team,' added Scarborough. 'It is a great complement to the technology transfer program for our converter partners and is consistent with our goal of empowering converters to add more value with greater flexibility and responsiveness for their customers. RF IDentics has developed significant technology that will be included in the package of tools that we offer converters.'

RF IDentics was formed in 2004 and will continue to operate out of Grand Rapids, Michigan. 'It is great to partner with a company that shares the same vision and commitment that we have for the RFID business,' said Gary Burns, president and one of the founders of RF IDentics. 'Avery Dennison will bring many resources that are not currently available to us like global reach and support, as well as economies of scale, strong relationships with converters and other RFID stakeholders and additional marketing skills.'

UPM increases label paper capacity

UPM's paper machine 4 at the Jämsänkoski mill will shift from producing magazine paper to manufacturing label papers, in an investment totaling €45M. 'For the customer, this will entail more volume, better quality and opportunities for new products,' said the company. The announcement follows the completion of the upgrade to UPM's glassine-producing PM8 line.

'PM3, the machine producing face papers at Jämsänkoski, has been running at the very limits of its capacity, and for a good year already, the capacity has been sold one hundred percent,' said Heikki Hyvärinen, vice president of UPM Label Papers. 'The investment is completely market-driven. It will enable specialization in label papers on two machines.'

PM4 will be upgraded as a partner for PM3, producing one-side coated face papers, coated release liners and flex papers. The annual production capacity of the new PM 4 will be 120,000 tonnes, and the combined annual capacity of the two lines over 260,000 tonnes. 'Combined with PM8 and PM5 at Tervasaari, the two Jämsänkoski machines will enable us to balance the production volumes of face and base papers,' said Hyvärinen. The conversion will be completed in the second quarter of 2007.

Gallus joins Brand team

Gallus Inc has joined the Brand Protection Alliance, citing its ability to integrate multiple printing and converting processes in-line. Ken Goetze, vice president of the BPA said, 'In addition to building application-specific printing presses – for example for brand protection, authentication or security - we see Gallus Inc. as an integrator of the many technologies currently provided by the supply based membership.'

Jon Guy, president of Gallus Inc., stated, 'I see the BPA as a force for equipping the brand owners with tools to combat counterfeiting and protecting their brands as well as giving our customers another way to add value to their product.'

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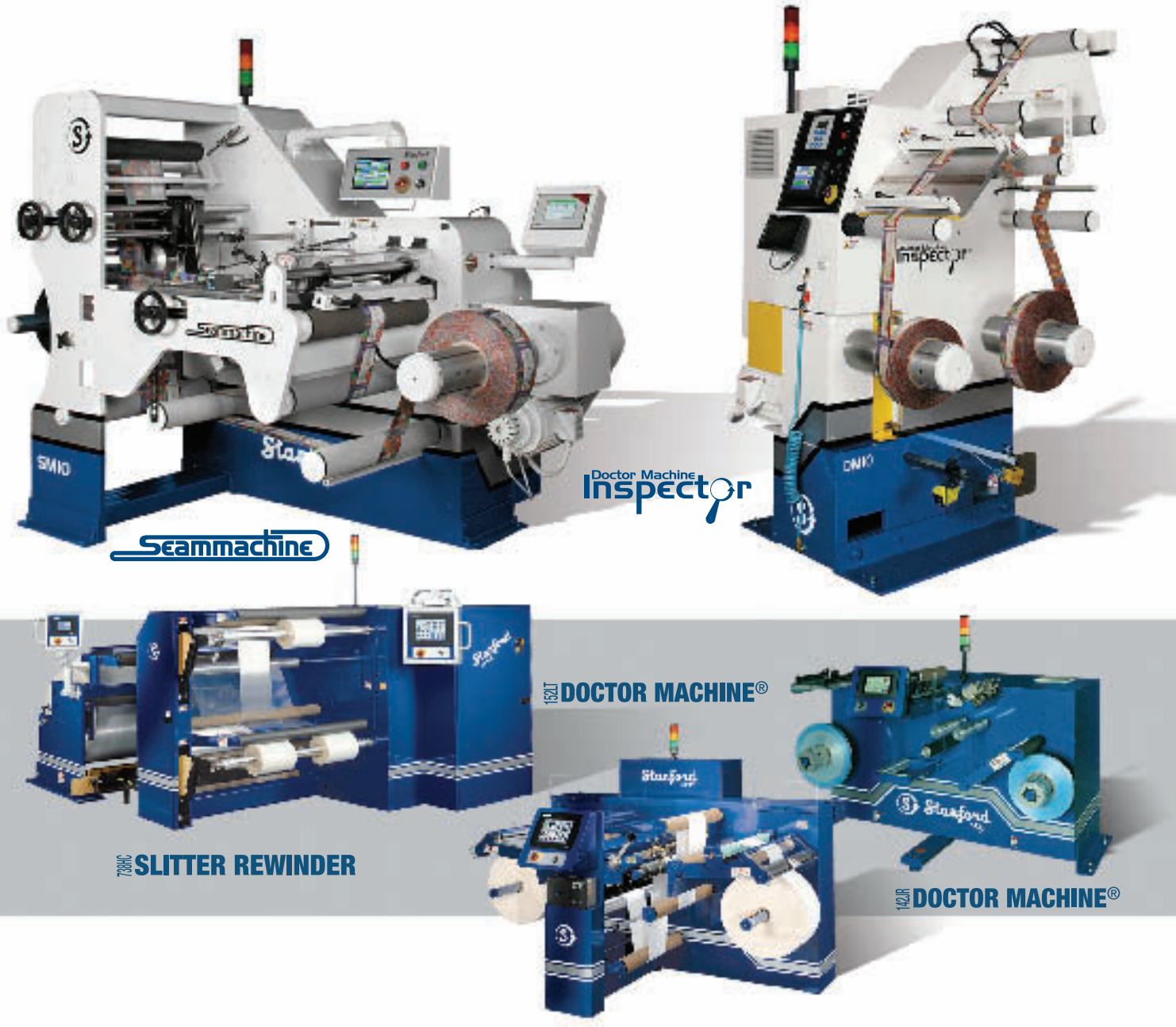

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Labeling news

Karville expands into Europe

Karville Development LLC, a manufacturer of shrink sleeve converting and application machinery based in Miami, Florida, has acquired the complementary business of French manufacturer Scheidegger Inc. This acquisition will expand Karville's global product line, as well as bolster service and support for Karville's growing converter base in Europe.

A 60 year old family-owned business, Scheidegger began manufacturing shrink sleeve application machinery in Lyon, France, 20 years ago and has developed a number of unique solutions. This acquisition will enable Karville to offer a complete range of full body application machinery including high speed tamper-evident solutions.

Scheidegger was an attractive proposition for Karville. With a reputation for innovation and quality, Scheidegger has installed over 700 pieces of machinery worldwide with many major end users such as Quaker, PepsiCo, Shell, McCormick, Snapple and Unilever. Karville has successfully focused on the converting market within the shrink sleeve industry in the past and aims to leverage the experience of both companies to increase its visibility and sales to major brand owners.

'Moving forward our vision is three-fold,' said Karvill vice president Raul Matos. 'First, our European business has been growing significantly on the converting side and we are planning to open a technical center, like the operation we have in Miami, to support our customer's business. The center will offer end-to-end testing and demonstration equipment that converters will be able to use with their customers to find the right solution for difficult applications.

'Second, this acquisition will enable us to offer a complete production line. The Karville portfolio currently covers about 60-70 per cent of applications, but the merger with Scheidegger will enable us to service 90 per cent of the worldwide market.

'Third, we will be able to offer a new level of design and development for specialty high-volume applications.'

Karville will continue to manufacture machinery in Scheidegger's existing operation in Lyon, France, and the European service technicians will be cross-trained on both brands of machinery. 'This will ensure even faster service for Karville customers in Europe, the Middle East, Russia and Africa,' says Matos.

Karville president John Price concluded: 'This acquisition shows our customers that we are committed to taking a global leadership role in developing the shrink sleeve market and have high expectations for market growth.'

Acquisition moves Sun into brand management

The Sun Chemical Group has made two acquisitions in the UK: leading repro house Watt Gilchrist and design agency Parker Williams Design, both UK subsidiaries of the Envoy Communications Group.

Watt Gilchrist, headquartered in Leeds, is one of the leading graphic arts companies in the UK, while London-based Parker Williams is one the country's leading packaging design and brand development firms. The acquisition will enable Sun Chemical to better serve its customers in the areas of packaging development and color management and will also create new opportunities for Watt Gilchrist and Parker Williams. The acquisition includes the ODIN packaging and digital asset management system.

'This addition will greatly enhance Sun Chemical's understanding of packaging market trends and customer needs,' said Dr David Hill, president and CEO of Sun Chemical. 'The acquisition of Watt Gilchrist and Parker Williams will allow Sun Chemical to provide superior service to customers in the packaging segment and other markets requiring sophisticated color management.'

Paul Bean, managing director of Watt Gilchrist, added: 'Our combined portfolio of products, and services, and color management technologies will provide faster design and launch of new package concepts to package goods companies and retailers.'

Kate Bradford, managing director of Parker Williams Design, said: 'We are all excited about the opportunity to tap into global trends and new innovative packaging technology which this deal creates.'

BASF grows in US

BASF is to invest $4.9 million in its acrylic emulsion manufacturing facility in Monaca, Pennsylvania, to increase its capability to produce coater-ready adhesives. The company also launched, at Labelexpo 2006, three new pressure sensitive adhesive (PSA) polymers.

'This capital project planned for completion in second quarter 2007, enables us to provide more products to the pressure sensitive adhesives industry,' said Jim Tanger, business manager, adhesives and fiber bonding for BASF in North America. 'It allows us to offer more base products for adhesives and demonstrates in a tangible way our strong commitment to this market.'

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Labeling news

GiDue announces aggressive global expansion program

Italian press manufacturer GiDue has announced a series of agency agreements and appointments aimed at strengthening its presence and support capabilities across the world.

KPG Europe and KPG Corporation – formerly the Ko-Pack sales and support operations – are the company's new agents for the UK and USA respectively.

Based in the UK at Peterborough and Lincolnshire and in the USA at Vermont, the management team at KPG has many years experience of developing and marketing presses for the labeling and packaging industries. Glenn Miller, managing director of KPG Europe, commented: 'Our partnership with GiDue represents an exciting opportunity for our two organizations to offer customers the very latest printing and converting technologies, combined with vast experience of specialist applications.'

GiDue has also expanded its marketing and sales activities in Latin America with the appointment of Hector Aguilar to the position of area manager. The Spanish, English and French speaking mechanical engineer brings with him experience as sales manager for the converting division of Erhardt & Leimer and extensive experience of equipment sales in the printing industry including offset, rotogravure and flexography.

In India, GiDue has formed GiDue India with Reifenhauser India Marketing Ltd., a subsidiary of M/s. Reifenhäuser GmbH & Co, Germany. Reifenhäuser India Marketing Ltd. has a strong presence in India's plastics, packaging and converting sectors, with a team of more than 20 sales and service engineers.

The cooperation between the two companies will cover a broad range of technologies including UV flexo combination (offset plus flexo) printing technologies, wider presses for carton, tags, wrap around labels and shrink sleeves, short run digital printing, security applications against counterfeiting/duplication, and converting of pharmaceutical and liquor labels on the roll.

Finally, GiDue has appointed Simark d.o.o. as its agent in Eastern Europe. The company will be responsible for GiDue sales in the region including Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Simark is currently involved in the field of flexible packaging and narrow web printing and represents consumables and equipment suppliers for flexo and gravure printing.

'Digital coating' launch

PAT Technology Systems has teamed up with inkjet technology company Xaar to bring 'true digital UV-coating systems' to market. Both new machines, the web-fed, semi-rotary converter/digital coater, branded Rotoworx, and the sheet-fed digital coater, named Varstar, are the result of a two-year development project and are the first commercial implementations of Xaar's hybrid side-shooter (HSS) technology.

The digital coaters perform flood, spot coating, textures, variable gloss levels with a single fluid, and special effects without the need for plates.

Until now digital varnishing has not been feasible – existing technology did not offer the required print quality and reliability. However, having assessed the potential of Xaar's HSS platform, PAT recognized that it was now possible to turn this demanding application into a reality.

The HSS platform combines advanced piezoelectric, drop-on-demand (DOD) inkjet technology with Xaar's patented 'through-flow' (TF) technology, to provide jetting reliability and to enable self-recovery – essential features for the industrial print environment. In addition, the new platform features Xaar's patented multi-pulse grayscale technology. This combination of high productivity in a single-pass and high print quality is crucial to both Rotoworx's and Varstar's ability to deliver images, textures and special effects that were either impossible to produce or not cost-effective with traditional technologies, says the manufacturer.

Closed loop UV Heidelberg

Scottish label printer Gilmour & Dean Ltd is to take delivery of a UV dedicated Heidelberg Speedmaster CD 74-6+LYLX-F fitted with full closed loop color control. The six color press with double coaters, towers and interdeck UV drying plus double extended delivery replaces two older SM74s.

With two Prinect workflow modules in place – Prepress Interface and ImageControl on-press spectrophotometry – the company will not only be able to measure and keep accurate control of color within a set job but also from job to job, a feature which is especially important where there is a requirement for repeat continuity. (See page 98)

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Labeling news

Pharma converters adopt certified PDF

Copapharm, a European alliance of converters servicing the pharmaceutical and healthcare industries, has adopted Artwork Systems' PA:CT (Packaging:Certified Technology), bringing secure, trackable PDF processing to Copapharm Europe's printed packaging operations.

Copapharm Europe, formed in 1997, is an alliance comprising 18 plants in nine countries, with a total capacity of 6.5 billion units. Members include August Faller KG in Germany; Icesa, Pans and Cartonplex in Spain; Packart and Rotanotice in France; Palladio/Zannini in Italy; Storey Evans in the UK, and Goldprint in Belgium.

Copapharm Europe companies have been installing PA:CT for validation periods during the last 18 months. Across the group, most member companies have implemented or are implementing the system to ensure a more optimized and secure workflow.

Copapharm's Thomas Wahl, system administrator and pre-press specialist at August Faller KG in Germany, comments: 'With Artwork Systems' sophisticated technology, the suppliers and brand owners can now optimize and secure the whole pre-press process. PA:CT has broken down the boundaries between design and production, and the workflow can be controlled and is consistent. PA:CT provides complete traceability through the whole process from design to print including prepress. It is a key point in a complex pharmaceutical workflow.'

Artwork Systems introduced PA:CT (Packaging:Certified Technology) during 2005. This technology, based on the Certified PDF technology of Enfocus, encapsulates PDF in a secure data layer that provides packaging professionals with instant access to clear, straightforward information about the file and its history.

Dynamic Dies cuts back

Dynamic Dies Inc., a manufacturer of cutting dies, printing plates and pre-press services servicing North American package converters, has dissolved its partnership with City Stamp Works and closed its Rochester, New York, plant.

The business partnership of Dynamic Dies, Inc. and City Stamp Works, Inc. also known as the DieGraphics Group has been dissolved effective August 31, 2006. The partnership lasted nearly 30 years. Dynamic Dies plans to continue to provide sales and technical service to its customers in the New York region.

The company will transfer the Rochester cutting die production to its Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, facility. Printing plates will be produced at its Holland, Ohio, facility.

Loads more news to be read at www.labelsandlabeling.com

Smith & McLaurin enters 'new era'

Four years after it was rescued from administration, Scottish substrate manufacturer Smith & McLaurin company is 'entering a new era' with a share restructuring deal that spreads ownership more widely across its management team.

Smith & McLaurin manufactures more than 2,000 different paper products to self-adhesive label, ticket and tag manufacturers across four continents. The restructuring of the firm will pave the way for the implementation of a new five-year business plan.

The deal, worth a seven-figure sum, has been made possible by funding from the Clydesdale Bank's acquisition finance team in Glasgow, which has provided facilities totaling £6m to the company, including the re-banking of existing debt from Royal Bank of Scotland.

Colin Gault, managing director, is supported by operations director Colin Loudon, sales director Craig Monks, chairman Ian Mackay, and non-executive director Allan McLaughlin. Mackay, hitherto the majority shareholder, has released shares to allow management to increase their stake in the company.

Mackay has played a major role in turning round the fortunes of the company, taking it out of administration in July 2002 and drafting in Gault to help him transform the ailing business.

Mackay and McLaughlin own Corporate Solutions Scotland, a turnaround/ investment corporate finance firm which actively invests in the recovery of distressed and growth businesses. Smith & McLaurin is one of eight companies in the Corporate Solutions portfolio.

In the four years since Mackay's arrival – with the firm overhauled under a 'back to basics' campaign implemented by Gault – the company has increased turnover by 46 per cent from £12m to £17.6m, raising export sales from 30 per cent to 40 per cent in the same period. This has all been achieved with a very modest rise in employee numbers from 73 to 79.

Labeling news

AVT enters the sheet-fed market

Advanced Vision Technology (AVT), a leader in web-fed presses print inspection, has announced its strategic entrance into the sheet-fed printing market.

'The demand for high-end quality and 100% fault free products in industries such as pharmaceuticals, cigarettes, wine, cosmetics and security printing, makes this regulated sheet fed market a perfect match for our advanced machine vision technology,' said Shlomo Amir, AVT President & CEO. 'We have adapted our market leading web-fed print inspection technology to meet the requirements of the sheet-fed market. We intend to continue introducing a variety of solutions for the sheet-fed print market in the next 12 months.'

DataLase and XSYS enter global licensing agreement

DataLase (formerly Sherwood Technology) has announced a collaboration with XSYS, whereby XSYS will market a complete range of inks produced using DataLase's patented DataLase process, via a non-exclusive license agreement. The agreement will enable XSYS to develop the DataLase Packmark solution and distribute it to their global network of subsidiaries and distributors.

This agreement combines DataLase's expertise in laser responsive color change chemistry and XSYS' established experience as a global manufacturer in the printing systems and inks markets. The DataLase process is based around an additive or coating that changes color when exposed to a low-power CO2 laser.

BCF warns of raw materials shortages

The British Coatings Federation has warned of the likelihood of price rises as a result of ongoing shortages in a range of key raw materials.

The federation believes that although manufacturers will be able to hold prices while current stocks last, future price increases appear inevitable.

Artwork Systems opens new offices

Artwork Systems Group N.V., a provider of professional pre-press software, has announced that its new offices in Gent, Belgium, have been declared officially open by Mr Yves Leterme, minister-president for the Flemish Government.

Tailored Solutions opens European office

Tailored Solutions, the producer of Label Traxx print business management software for flexographic narrow web label printers and converters, has opened a sales and support office to service users in Europe. The operation will be headed up by Katy Wight, previously deputy editor of L&L.

Tailored Solutions president Ken Meinhardt commented: 'We first showed Label Traxx to the European market at Labelexpo Brussels in 2005, and the response we received demonstrated the depth of interest in this area. The office is now being staffed with personnel experienced in the label market and software support.'

Tailored Solutions offers two versions of its job tracking software – Label Traxx for flexographic narrow web converters and printers, and Litho Traxx for sheetfed lithographic printers and prepress trade shops.

Converter unveils new name

UK-based packaging and labeling company Tach-It (UK) will now be known as Teneo (UK), a Latin word that means to know, to understand and to maintain.

Tach-It (UK) was established in 1986 by Jim McAndrew and was run by him until his retirement in 2001. It is now owned and managed by his son Derek, who has worked with the company for over 17 years. Having now severed its alliance with its American partners Derek McAndrew took the opportunity to develop and rebrand the company. Headquartered in Grimsby, Tach-it (UK) has three divisions in tag attaching systems, packaging equipment and label printing solutions.

ETI announces more partnerships

Following on from the announcement of a strategic partnership with silicone specialist Degussa Goldschmidt Chemical (L&L3 2006, p.7), ETI has added two more strategic partners to its program to bring in-line laminate manufacturing to label converters.

Nordson is ETI's chosen strategic partner for hot melt adhesive coating systems, while UV Ray, Milan, Italy, is partnering in the development of UV curing systems. The curing system combines ETI/Degussa's free radical technology with UV Ray UV technology. ETI has used UV Ray curing systems for several years on its flexo press Metronome flexo press and Labeline in-line printing and coating equipment.

Appointments


Margaret Harper Kluttz


Kimberly Hawkins


Yashpaul Dogra


Robert Sayer


Justin Green (r)

Pamarco Global Graphics has appointed **Dave McBeth** as VP sales for Europe and OEM markets. With over 24 years in the printing and graphic arts industry McBeth joins after a role as packaging sales and marketing director at Creo/Kodak in Europe, Middle East and Africa.

Pamarco also announced that **Dudley Underwood** was appointed technical director. Underwood, who has worked in print for more than 40 years, understands the 'dramatic need for technical support and training within the industry'.

Harper Corporation of America has appointed **Margaret Harper Kluttz** as its new president. As daughter of company founders Ron and Katherine Harper, Kluttz has been with the company for the last 34 years.

MDC-USA welcomes new apprentices. **Travis Anderson,** from North Iredell High School, Shawn Tikkala, from South Iredell High School, and Karl Golinski, from Independence High School, are the newest members of the Apprenticeship 2000 program.

Keith Hevenor has been chosen as editorial and conference director for CMM International, Penwell, maintaining his existing role as editor of Electronic Publishing.

Assisting Hevenor in his new duties are long-time industry advisors Roger Halligan and Fred Shapiro. Halligan has been with CMM International for longer than a decade whereas Shapiro has been conference chairman and technical advisor for countless CMM Events.

Maxcess International have announced the appointment of **Lee Nanney** as local sales and support for Fife, MAGPOWR and Tidland customers in Illinois.

Kimberly Hawkins has been chosen by Precision AirConvey Corp. (PAC), Newark, Delaware, to be sales engineer. Ms Hawkins has previously won awards for her sales ability when working at Smurfit-Stone Container.

InSync Software has named **Yashpaul Dogra** VP of product marketing and strategy. InSync's CEO Ashish Chona announced that Dogra's recruitment 'is an important step for InSync'.

Datalase FOODMARK selected **Robert Sayer** as the company's new project leader. The Datalase FOODMARK product is due to launch in 2007.

Shigeru Takano has been appointed President of Yupo Corporation, Japan. Departing president, Osamu Sasaki, will continue his involvement with Yupo as an advisor along with Chairman of Board Norimoto Takahashi. Previous managing director Sumio Nomura will take on the challenge of executive vice president. Within Yupo Corporation America, Marty Fiorillo has been made vice president of distribution, sales and marketing, a step up from his role as commercial paper sales manager, North East, Mid-West region. Ex-director of sales Andrew Madden has been appointed the position of vice president of sales, thermal, pressure sensitive labels, and general label applications. Ed Burtner has been promoted from director to vice president of manufacturing. Mike Licata, who worked as manager of technical services has now been named director of technical services.

Justin Green has been chosen by Anderson & Vreeland to fulfill the role of technologies specialist. Green will be responsible for quality control with support with professional development programs for A&V employees and customers.

Oscar Planas has been appointed by the Eastman Kodak Company as managing director in the Latin America region. He has also been appointed vice president in Kodak's Graphic Communications Group (GCG). Planas brings nearly 25 years experience to the company.

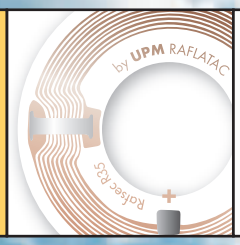
Nim-Cor has selected Kevin Hellrigel as its new general manager. Hellrigel brings 15 years of executive and managerial leadership experience, a B.S. degree in industrial engineering and an MBA in operations management. Senior engineer John Ritchie has also been promoted to engineering manager.

Rayven Inc. has added **Gary Evenson** to its sales team. Gary Evenson worked for 11 years previously at Douglas Hanson. At Rayven he will serve as national sales manager for release liners.

Harper Graphics has announced the additions of **Martin Heidemann** and **Daniel Yjord** to its team to take on the roles of customer service specialist and technical solutions specialist respectively.

Esko has named **Arjen Maarleveld** new senior vice-president packaging solutions. Arjen, who has more than 20 years experience, and worked with companies including Apple Computer, will take care of managing and further growing Esko's packaging business, leading all product management, R&D and global support activities for pre-production software and flexo platemaking.

Unilux has chosen **Volker Schlevoigt** as its new marketing director for Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Shlevoigt will be based in Düsseldorf, Germany, and will



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Heikki Pikkarainen
President
UPM Raflatac

UPM RAFLATAC

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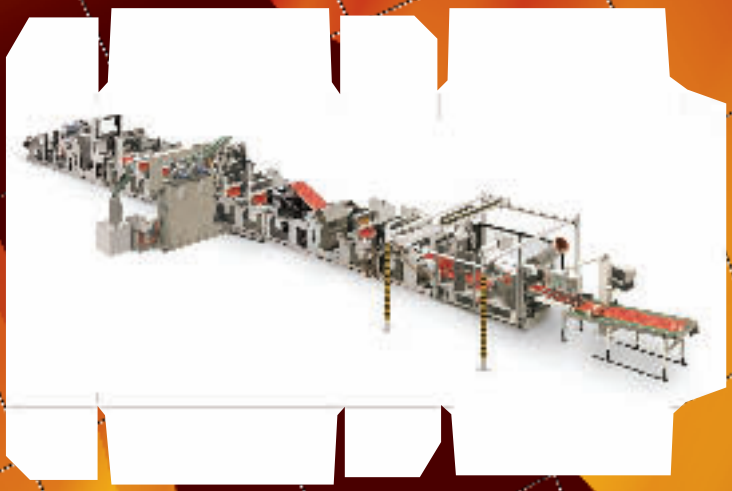

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Appointments


Oscar Planas


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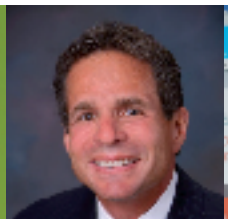
Eric London


Dr Long Lin


Katy Wight

deal with all the company sales, service, customer queries in the steel, printing/converting and papermaking industries.

Dr Long Lin has been appointed Professor of Reprographic Science and Technology at the University of Leeds. Commercial manager at Digital Print CIC, David Williams, said: 'Dr Lin's professorship signifies that the print industry is beginning to take its rightful place as a key science. It is not only a great boost for the University but will also help attract more talent to this sector.'

Avery Dennison has named **Philip Calderbank** as director of marketing – RFID & security. In his new role, Calderbank will be responsible for Avery Dennison RIS' worldwide strategy for RFID and security products. Calderbank replaces Mischa Reis, who has been promoted to lead Avery Dennison's strategy team in Pasadena, California, as director, corporate strategy and business development.

ODIN has appointed **Ted Milone** as federal practice director. In his new role, Milone will be responsible for leading government, aerospace and defense client activities, establishing industry specific RFID solutions, and positioning ODIN as the Federal Government's most trusted RFID expert.
In response to continued growth in the Printing, Coating & Laminating (PCL) division at Paper Converting Machine Company (PCMC), global sales director Mark Gillis has announced the promotions of **Andy Gillis** and **Mike Reedy** to product development managers. In their new roles, Gillis will be responsible for PCMC's Mid & Narrow Web PCL product lines, while Reedy will focus on Wide Web PCL machinery for applications 40 inches and wider.

Allied Pressroom Chemistry, an international manufacturer and supplier of pressroom products, has appointed **Eric London** as VP sales and marketing. London brings 20 years of graphic arts experience to his new position

Brewin Dolphin Securities has announced the appointment of **Philip Browne** as director of marketing. This appointment follows the promotion of **Charlotte Black,** who has been marketing director since 1992, to become director of corporate affairs, where she will be concentrating on Brewin's PR and public affairs. Charlotte is also a non-executive director of Euroclear PLC. Browne has 18 years marketing experience having worked for Storehouse, Mothercare UK, Sainsbury's Bank, British Airways Holidays and for the last five years he has been director of marketing for the stockbroker Killik & Co.

Dynamic Dies has appointed **Kevin Burke** as sales representative for New York region. Burke went to Rochester Institute of Technology and has over 25 years experience in cutting dies and printing plates. He was an employee of the former DieGraphics Group at its Rochester facility for nearly 20 years.

X-Rite has announced the implementation of the planned CEO succession which was outlined at the time of the January announcement of the Amazys acquisition. Effective October 1, 2006 Michael C. Ferrara will retire from his positions of CEO and member of the board and **Thomas J. Vacchiano Jr**. will become president and CEO as well as a member of the board of directors. Tom Vacchiano was the president and CEO of Amazys Holding AG from January 2001 until the acquisition by X-Rite in July of this year. Mr Ferrara will remain available to consult on the transition through the end of this year.

Ryan Stroupe, label technician specialist at WorkflowOne, an Ohio, USA-based label converter, has joined the Phoenix Challenge board of directors. 'I'm really excited to take on a larger role in the Phoenix Challenge Foundation,' said Stroupe. 'It's an amazing organization that is shaping the future of our industry's workforce.'

Spartanics has appointed **Karl-Heinz Jordan** as director of European sales. Jordan brings nearly a quarter of a century of sales experience in graphic arts related fields, as well as noteworthy achievements in coordinating sales and service organizations throughout Europe to the Spartanics organization.

Alien Technology has announced that **Dr Stav Prodromou** is stepping down as the company's CEO to assume a new position in the company as executive advisor, business development and government affairs. The Alien board of directors has appointed Robert Eulau, executive VP, CFO, to the role of acting CEO, and will be conducting a search for the Alien CEO position. The board of directors has also elected Duane Zitzner to the position of interim chairman of the board.

Artwork Systems has appointed **Stan Lemmens** to head up the marketing team at the Gent-based software company, with immediate effect.

Tailored Solutions – the producer of Label Traxx print business management software for flexographic narrow web label printers and converters – has named **Katy Wight** to the position of European business development manager, based in the United Kingdom. Prior to joining Tailored Solutions, Wight was deputy editor of Labels & Labeling magazine.

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FINAT launches Euro-Indian exchange

In December, FINAT and the LMAI will bring together small and medium-sized European and Indian label converters to explore opportunities for mutally beneficial partnerships

When Columbus set sail for India in a westward direction in 1492, he rightfully assumed the world was round. According to bestselling author Thomas Friedman, however, the world has become flat. The latest stage of globalization, empowered by new (ICT) technology, 'is shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny.' Unlike before, globalization is no longer the exclusive domain of countries or multinational corporations, it is now also allowing small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as individuals to compete and collaborate globally.

Inspired by this potential, and as part of its core function to offer an international networking platform for the labeling community, FINAT, along with the national associations of Germany and India, VskE and LMAI, is organizing the Euro–India Labeling Exchange, a unique B2B 'matchmaking' event in New Delhi, India, from 5 –7 December. The program, sponsored by the European Union (EU), aims to bring together delegations from Europe and India to explore the potential for bilateral business-to-business co-operation between Indian and European SMEs in the label industry. It will include 15 rounds of 40-minute parallel sessions allowing European label printers and their Indian counterparts to meet face to face and discuss common opportunities.

On 25 August FINAT and LMAI organized an information workshop in Mumbai to warm up the members of LMAI for this event. In his opening address, LMAI general secretary Prof. P.V. Narayanan welcomed the FINAT initiative and stressed its impact on technology and commercial development. 'Both supplement each other. Technology strengthens with finance and financial stability grows with technological capabilities. Technological development is about synchronisation of functions, processes and materials and in this respect the Euro-Indian Labeling Exchange assumes greater significance.'

FINAT managing director Jules Lejeune highlighted the mutual benefits of the program, pointing out that the EU is India's largest trading partner with nearly one quarter of Indian trade flows in 2004. The EU is also India's largest source of foreign direct investment.

'India is currently one of the fastest growing self-adhesive label markets in the world at over 20 per cent per annum,' said Lejeune. 'With the progressive establishment of global brand owners and retail groups, the standard and quality requirement of labels are being upgraded accordingly. European label converters can provide key skills to meet these standards – for example combination printing on modern film substrates – as part of an alliance. This will help Indian printers to become more competitive in their own, domestic market.'

From a European perspective, Lejeune continued, growth through an overseas alliance or partnership can be an attractive alternative to autonomous growth at home in Europe:

'The European labels market is characterized by, on the one hand, commoditization, and on the other specialization/value add. European converters working with Indian converters may also be able to have labels produced in India that would be uneconomic to manufacture in Europe, but they could become competitive with an Indian manufacturing cost structure. The Indian converter thus makes immediate moves into the European market with products which perfectly suit his current technology level.'

LMAI managing committee secretary Bavin Kothari of Interlabels encouraged his fellow label printers to seriously consider the opportunities offered by the matchmaking event. 'The label is more than just product decoration. It is an essential tool in the logistic process, in retail in RFID, and Indian label printers have only just started to specialize. We can certainly benefit from the European experience, their technological capabilities as well as workmanship. But in order to achieve an optimum "fit", it is important to consider one's own value add. Know what kind of match you would like to have, but also what "fit" you have to offer. I am convinced that with the information provided, you are well positioned to make that fit,' he concluded.

For more information about the Euro-Indian Labeling Exchange visit www.euro-indialabel.com. ■

Labelexpo Americas 2006

Chicago was the venue for the latest Labelexpo Americas show. Not only did the exhibition attract more international visitors than ever before – particularly from Latin America – a great deal of new and innovative machinery, tools and materials were introduced. Report by **Barry Hunt, Andy Thomas** and **James Quirk**

Labelexpo Americas 2006, which took place in Chicago in September, welcomed a 13,256 visitors from an astonishing 88 countries, representing a six per cent increase on the previous 2004 show. Over 450 leading label industry suppliers unveiled and sold new machinery, launched innovative materials and showcased the latest technologies available to this fast-changing global industry. This year marks the tenth show in Chicago and the expansion of the event reflects the continued growth of the label industry.

Over 20 per cent of visitors traveled from outside the US, including large delegations from Mexico, Brazil, China, Japan, Germany, Denmark, Italy and the UK. Delegations from Latin America increased by 23 per cent, mirroring the accelerating growth of the label industry in this region. The show provided suppliers with the platform to launch new presses on a global stage, and there were significant developments across a wide range of solutions including digital printing, RFID/smart labels, materials and productivity-enhancing ancillary products.

Scott Pillsbury, chairman, TLMI Board of Directors, commented: 'The Labelexpo Americas team should be congratulated for once again putting on an excellent show. All of our members – converters and suppliers alike – were very pleased with the results of the show. Converters had the opportunity to see the latest innovations available to the industry, while suppliers reached thousands of motivated decision makers. Overall, another job well done!'

John Hickey, chairman-elect, TLMI, added: 'Labelexpo Americas has served as a showcase for the latest equipment, materials, supplies and technologies available today since it was established more than two decades ago. And, as a converter, I can conveniently see it all in one place, at one time. Anybody interested in improving their business can't afford to miss it. I know I never do!'

Labelexpo Americas also saw the major launch of a new report analyzing the North American label market. Mike Fairley, director of strategic development, Labelexpo Global Series, unveiled the key findings of the survey at a press conference and highlighted the big increase in flexo, UV flexo and digital printing in North America. The survey also focused on the effects of globalization, mainly analyzing the opportunities available to label converters in North America by selling to the emerging markets. Further surveys and market reports will be published later this year and in 2007.

Roger Pellow, Labelexpo managing director, said: 'I am extremely happy with the visitor quality at this year's show. The improved investment climate in the Americas has helped with equipment sales. This year marks the tenth Labelexpo Americas event and we're delighted to see the show becoming increasingly international with many visitors coming from across the world, tapping into the latest products and learning about new trends. Many new visitors came from Latin America and Asia. I thought the awards night was a tremendous evening and a great gathering of the industry. We look forward to seeing friends and colleagues again in Chicago in 2008.'

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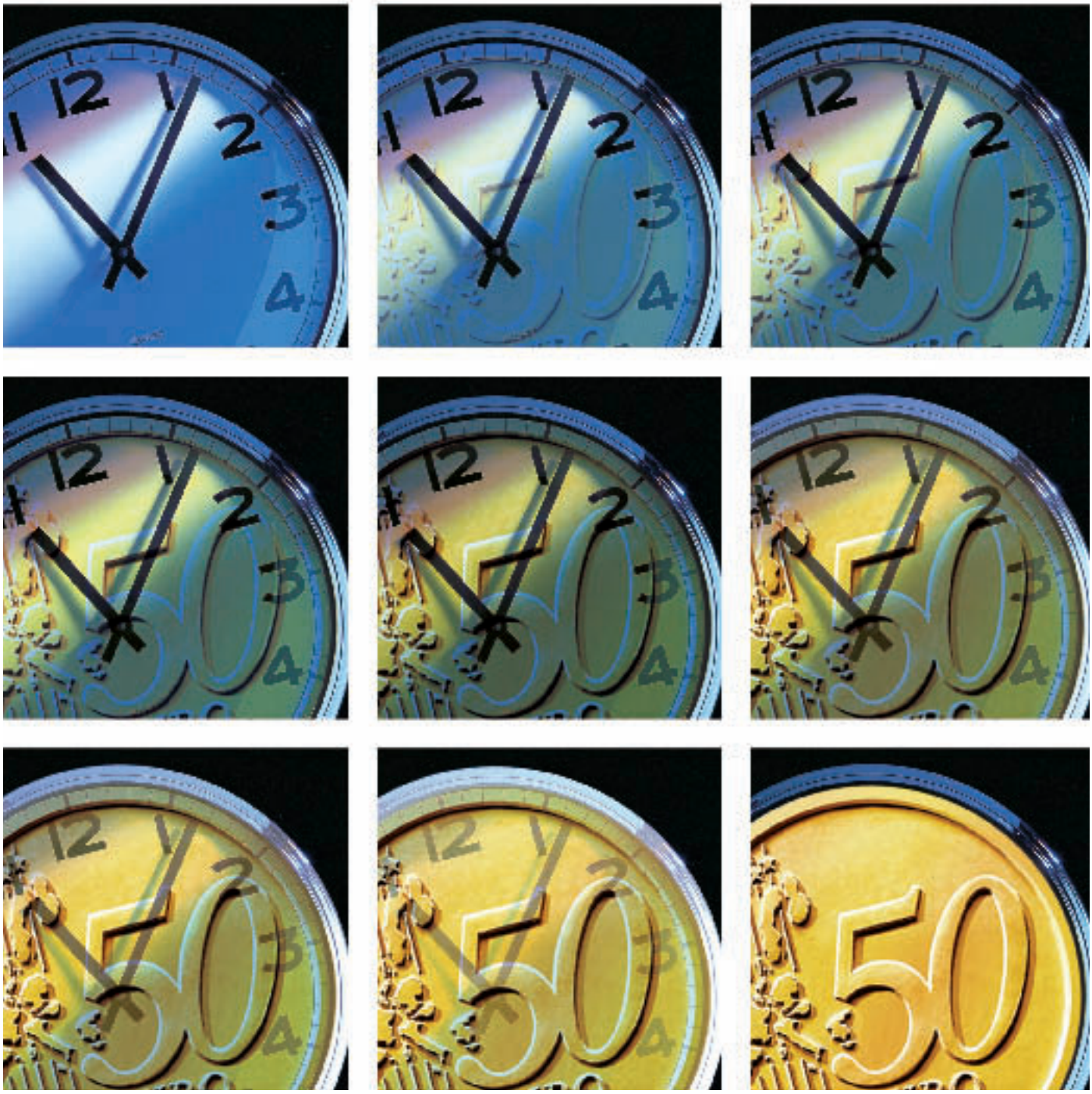

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The Conference

Labelexpo Americas featured a high-level conference organized in association with TLMI. **Andy Thomas** reports

Labelexpo Americas provided visitors with the chance to hear the latest developments in the global label industry through an in-depth conference program delivered in association with show partners TLMI. The success of the program was illustrated by the 63 per cent increase in delegates attending the conference compared to the show two years ago.

Entitled 'Managing risk in the 21st century', industry experts offered advice on streamlining processes, increasing productivity, and boosting that bottom line. The program had a number of major label converters contributing, along with key figures from major industry vendors, to discuss issues highlighted by printers themselves. Highlights of the conference program included international panel sessions on the global label industry, digital printing, servo technology, and success with prepress.

Frank Sablone, president of TLMI, said: 'The technical level of the conference program offered converters tangible information and strategies they can take back to their own businesses.'

Three sessions were chaired by this writer. The first, 'Success with Pre-press', looked at completing the digital workflow, and featured as panelists representatives from three heavy hitters in the digital workflow arena: Esko, Agfa and Artwork Systems.

The panelists concentrated heavily on the current status of job definition format, which has the potential to tie together graphic management and management information systems, as well as to control finishing and converting equipment – and all from information contained in a 'digital job bag'.

The panelists stressed that JDF is under constant development, and just because two applications are 'JDF compliant' is no guarantee they will work together out the box. The concept of JMF – job messaging format – was also introduced, which will allow feedback from processes within a JDF workflow. For example, it will inform multiple actors that a certain process is finished, for example that proofs are ready to be remotely viewed. MIS systems are being re-written for JDF.

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The first JDF standards for packaging equipment have been released, with a heavy focus on pre-press and upstream automation, where concepts like trap automation, automated color retouching are now well accepted, allowing pre-press to concentrate on more critical issues.

Artwork Systems' Dan Lacey explained that legacy equipment will hold back the implementation of JDF on downsteam converting and finishing hardware.

The panel also explained how converters can now handle both conventional and digital output devices with a single, seamless workflow, and how the technology allows a further digital link with end users, including content approval driven from that same workflow.

Agfa's Deborah Hutchinson talked about the company's experience with both 'soft' remote proofing using calibrated monitors, and hardware remote proofing, whereby Sherpa digital proofers are located at remote sites and are centrally calibrated using locked color profiles. 'This means duplicate proofs are not required for each stage in the design to print chain,' she said.

Hutchinson says the global CPCs are driving these developments, which are already common practice in the commercial print field.

The panel described how a digital asset management system can manage and integrate a huge range of data including CAD, PDF and ink coverage files, and how real-time web-based collaboration software enables detailed viewing of the print ready file down to the screen angles and dot shape. It also enables facilities management inside customers.

This new integrated workflow puts the customer service rep (CSR) right at the heart of the converter's operations, with the task of managing the workflow with the client and interacting with JDF-enabled MIS and graphic arts management systems to monitor jobs from estimating to completion.

The panel did point out, however, that there is a big difference between holding customers' digital files and a true asset management system, which among other things is searchable, annotated by thumbnails.

Global partnerships

Given the astonishingly high percentage of converters from outside North America visiting Labelexpo this year, the session on establishing global partnerships was always going to be an interesting one.

On the panel were Jeffrey Arippol, president of Novelprint, Brazil; Luis Maria Garcia, president of Multilabel in Argentina; Sandeep Lal, president of Metro Label, Canada and Gary Fitch, business manager Amberley Labels in the UK.

All these companies apart from Amberley already have operations outside their own countries, and shared their experiences on how they have become important regional players. Sandeep Lal was recently in India exploring the possibilities of establishing alliances and partnerships there.

The session was well attended by label converters interested in the idea of becoming regional or even global players by leveraging alliances and unofficial partnerships with similar companies in other countries or continents. A question which arose from the audience was how to go about identifying partners in different regions of the world. The answer given by all the panelists was to attend networking events such as TLMI and FINAT meetings, attending global Labelexpos and Label Summits, and use networking opportunities such as FINAT's Indian-European label converter exchange program.

'Distance and cultural differences can be a problem,' said Jeffrey Arippol, 'so I wouldn't think of opening a plant in China, for example. However, I would welcome an alliance for an exchange of information.'

Gary Fitch agreed: 'Cultural differences must be broken down otherwise success is not going to be possible.'

Sandeep Lal emphasized the importance of trust in building alliances: 'In our personal lives,' he said, 'we know that to establish trust in a relationship we must open ourselves up and be vulnerable, yet in business people don't seem prepared to do this. Without trust, alliances aren't possible.'

One very interesting contribution came from Brazilian converter delegate Debby Forman, who reminded converters

Global partnerships (L-R): On the panel were Gary Fitch, business manager Amberley Labels in the UK; Jeffrey Arippol, president of Novelprint, Brazil; Luis Maria Garcia, president of Multilabel in Argentina and Sandeep Lal, president of Metro Label, Canada

from developed economies that they should not belittle the capabilities of converters in developing nations, who may well be using the same equipment, working for the same global end users and producing labels which regularly score in global labels competitions. 'Partnerships can only start from a position of equality and mutual respect.'

RFID

One whole morning was devoted to the topical subject of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), and contained some realistic insights from those at the front end of real world application of the technology.

The keynote was delivered by Michael Meranda, president of EPC Global, which fosters the adoption of the Electronic Product Code in the US. Meranda said the adoption of royalty free Gen-2 standards and sub-10 cent tags is driving the technology forward, with 100 companies adopting RFID by the end of this year, with 1,000 on the step behind. Security is a major focus of standards development.

Dr Dave Edwards, chief technology officer at session sponsor Avery Dennison, pointed out the issues in future proofing RFID technology, pointing out that five years ago 13.56 Mhz was seen as the dominant technology of the future – but has now been consigned to niche applications as the torch was passed to UHF. The airlines have not yet moved beyond pilot programs.

Strap technology is practical for converters because although the chip is small, the chip/antenna strap assembly makes it feasible for converters to handle RFID label production in-line. Avery now has a program to license this technology to converters. Printing the electronics in-line will be a big challenge, not least because of the greater electrical resistance of inks – currently some 4x order of magnitude slower than silicone.

Edwards sees the future development of RFID linked to smart sensors – for example pressure transducers measuring tire pressure and linked to an RFID circuit, or sensors measuring pathogens, blood or food temperature sensors, possibly enabled by printed electronics.

Mark Andy has been at the forefront of practical implementation of RFID at the converter level, demonstrating the manufacture of RFID labels with straps and printed antennae at Labelexpo in Europe last year, and as R&D manager, Kevin Manes, was intimately involved.

Manes pointed out that the famed Wal-Mart mandate only affects high volume commodity level supply chain labels, with no added value possibilities for the label converter. Manes said Mark Andy is pitching its solutions at niche high margin RFID applications. 'The opportunities for converters are increased by the "price wars" among inlay suppliers. RFID converters need to position themselves to be part of product design and management, to make the design of the antenna integral to the pack. With their expertise in printing antennae they will form the critical link in the overall chain.'

Manes questioned whether, just because of the Wal-Mart mandate, UHF would be the future system standard, or whether HF would take over – questions which complicate converters' decisions to enter the market. 'There is more history of using HF than UHF.' Manes pointed out that lower frequencies are less

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sensitive to environmental influences caused by the package or its contents, while UHF shows better range and read rates.

'The key advantage for the label converter with UHF is that we can print the antenna in-line on a flexo press using a 3-5 micron ink film. This cannot currently be done with HF, although it's being worked on, and within a year HF antennae should be printable.'

Tom Hartmann, RFID manager, Topflight Labels, talked from a practical point of view about the critical importance of testing. This is an area where there are no standard procedures, and there are a wide range of tests possible – from simply 'waking' the chip, or 'pinging' a GEN2 chip. Even if chips test positive, however, they can get knocked out every time they are handled, or some chips may not be operating at full range.

Topflight handles HF pharma labels, where off-line testing is therefore a necessity. It is possible to test the chips in an RFID-enabled thermal transfer printer, but this is not effective or fast. Hartmann pointed out that a machine had been launched at this Labelexpo capable of automatically finding defective chips, removing and replacing them (see Smart Zone review). 'Do remember though, that testing in-line are one inch range is not the same as testing at 10 feet away at the end user.'

Hartmann said that despite the existence of standards, it is still very important to know the target thermal transfer printer 'inside out', to ensure chips will work. Is there a tester on the TT printer/applicator? What speed will it be running at? What will shut it down? 'Specifications on thermal transfer printers are all over the place, for example in their cross-web tolerance.'

Andrew Grace, director of the RFID business unit at George Schmitt looked further into the question 'what is a good tag?', drawing on his past experience working for companies which designed and manufactured RFID chips. 'This will haunt you,' warned Grace. Just some of the issues raised by Grace:

- Some chips are 'detuned' to compensate for certain end use conditions, 'and you must make the proper adjustments when testing'.
- If there are multiple antennae, do you have to test each one?
- Unlike Gen 1, the new Gen 2 chips have common protocols, but you still need to know the right mode to test.

The result can be inconsistent test results, says Grace. 'Take a 4 x 6in label with an Alien inlay. If two different converters build it, there will be two entirely different test results! Every version of an inlay design needs to be certified by the supplier, and this puts limits on how fast you can test. Then you need to know the sensitivity of the target reader, which differs from unit to unit. We had to do a lot of software work here.'

Jan Svoboda, business development director at UPM Raflatac RFID business, looked at the end user areas with the biggest potential for growth.

He began by pointing out that RFID is no substitute for a properly organized data management system: it is not a magic bullet for a badly organized supply chain: 'if something is not working on barcodes, it will not work with RFID.' Pharma companies, for example, have adopted HF RFID, 'but we still need to know the data structure which will be used to make the pharma systems visible on a national scale.'

Svoboda pointed out the huge opportunities for RFID implementation where it was already proven, however – for example in libraries. 'In the US alone we have 110,000 libraries in schools, universities etc and less than 30 which have, or are looking to implement RFID, so there are millions of books waiting to be tagged.'

Svoboda gave Singapore as an example of a fully automated, RFID enabled library system, with automated 24-hour book return kiosks.

The apparel industry already uses both HF and UHF item-level RFID for tackling 'grey' goods which are diverted into different global markets and sold illegally at a mark-up.

In the lively Q+A, the panel tackled a number of questions from converters in the audience. Here are some highlights:

- Making RFID labels in-line on a press – the faster the press runs, the more potential there is for electo-static damage.
- Copper still remains the antenna material of choice. Silver in conductive inks is after all a precious metal which will be used over billions of tags – how will it be recovered and redeemed? In performance terms it does not have the conductive performance of copper.
- On the Wal-Mart mandated RFID labels, up to 80 per cent of the cost is represented by the material – so how can a converter make money?
- Public unease about privacy issues should not be ignored by RFID industry stakeholders, particularly as the next generations of chips and readers are developed with more powerful data capture and read/write ranges. Chris Pederson of Global Tag & Label made a particularly strong intervention here, detecting a worrying complacency in the industry's response. 'The first step is to acknowledge that there is a problem and stop assuming that the public will stop worrying when they understand the technology better.'

Other interesting sessions...

Keynote speech

Karim Rashid's keynote presentation was also interesting in its main thrust: why do products to follow commonly accepted design guidelines? His answer: because the limitations of earlier manufacturing technologies have solidified into archetypal pack and label shapes. Rashid's solution – the 'death of formalism' – is to push the boundaries of the manufacturing process in order to realize new design and decoration possibilities.

A concrete example is his design for a range of kitchen products which used new possibilities of innovative container design and removed almost all the branding and text from the label. 'I used a very high quality label, but treated the brand and text at a minimal subsidiary level – hiding and not emphasizing the brand.' The concept was developed in support of a start-up company in San Francisco which wanted to take on the dominant global brands.

RFID panel (L-R): Kevin Manes, R&D manager, Mark Andy; Andrew Grace, director of the RFID business unit at George Schmitt; Jan Svoboda, business development director at UPM Raflatac RFID business; Tom Hartmann, RFID manager, Topflight Labels; Dr Dave Edwards, chief technology officer at session sponsor Avery Dennison

'Today peoples' kitchens are about stainless steel refrigerators, while packaging and container design reflects kitchen décor of half a century ago.' Today the hand soap product outsells its nearest global brand competitor by two to one.

The clear-on-clear branding label on the bottle is vanishingly small. So what had Rashid done with the legal information which kitchen products are required to display? 'I make it vanish, for example using a removable label. The other alternative is to play all the legal information UP – print it over a big label like a mechanical blueprint. Then you have to work out how to market it.'

Lean manufacturing

This session looked at the myths and the real opportunities surrounding 'lean manufacturing'. The chief myth dispelled by all three panelists – Malcolm Keif, who lectures on the subject at Cal Poly; Dwane L Wall, president of Creative Labels of Vermont; and Thomas Dahbura, vice president Hub Labels – is that 'lean' is a set of academic principles which can be implemented from a text book.

'The tools only function in the context of a team,' explained Malcolm Keif, who examined two successful 'lean' models: at Toyota – which changed the entire corporate culture – and supermarkets implementing consumer-driven replenishment.

'Inventory is just a safety net. Having no inventory creates a sense of urgency throughout the organization.'

Some of Keif's conclusions:

■ Do not fire employees displaced as a result of 'lean' reviews. This creates distrust about the process.

■ Be prepared to reward employees who 'stop the line' to bring quality control problems to light.

Dwane L Wall, president of Creative Labels of Vermont, brought 'lean' down to earth, asking delegates, 'do you see the awesome potential, the gifts in each and every one of your people? Your task is to find out what they possess and bring it out of them.'

In practical terms the company identified that what it needed was not faster presses, but a more efficient front end. 'We cut four days off jobs by not batching processes. You don't have In and Out boxes any more. Just In and About to Go Out boxes.'

Thomas Dahbura, vice president Hub Labels, explained how management needs to set the culture which genuinely empowers employees. Particularly powerful are teams which bring in employees from different – and apparently unrelated – departments, like bringing accounts into a finishing team meeting, or CSR staff into production meetings.

Among practical changes was the pre-press department taking information on colors and size from the quote file. A meeting between the ink room and maintenance departments came up with the idea of an ink draining jig, while suppliers were brought in to look at ink and anilox color matching to make sure of correct color when the job was put on the press. The UV team's job was to ensure the press could run consistently at 400fpm.

The company actually added employees, developing a cart assembly line, while the press operators came up with their own makeready strategies.

'You will develop leadership skills, and find that it is not always the most experienced employees who come up with the best suggestions.'

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(Above l-r) Dean Scarborough, president and CEO of award sponsor Avery Dennison; Calvin Frost, CEO Channeled Resources Group; and last year's winner Lars Eriksen, CEO of Nilpeter

And the big winner is...

At a gala dinner for the Label Industry Global Awards, The R. Stanton Avery Lifetime Achievement Award was awarded to Calvin Frost, CEO of the Channeled Resources Group. **James Quirk** reports

The R. Stanton Avery Lifetime Achievement Award is the most prestigious in the label industry. It is presented to a key label industry individual who, in the opinion of the judging panel, best recognizes the ongoing values and vision of Stan Avery, a label industry pioneer and the founding father of the global pressure-sensitive label sector.

It is particularly fitting in today's world that such high recognition should be awarded to a man who has dedicated his career to championing recycling and environmental awareness. These issues are more prevalent than ever before, and not just in the label industry.

Calvin Frost has devoted most of his working life to salvaging PSA waste and turning it into useful materials. He began his working career in marketing before establishing the Channeled Resources Group in Chicago in the mid-1970s. Under his leadership, the Group has become a pioneer in the field of re-processed paper, film labelstocks and liners, as well as in the re-use and recycling of pressure-sensitive waste. Throughout his long association with the label industry, Mr Frost has played an active role in the sector and in recycling organizations all over the world.

Mr Frost received his award from Dean Scarborough, president and CEO of Avery Dennison, who sponsored the award. Last year's winner Lars Eriksen, CEO of Nilpeter, also gave a speech.

Mr Frost was delighted to win the award: 'I can't think of a greater honor in our industry,' he said. 'When I received notice from Mike Fairley I was shocked – my selection is very humbling. To be recognized Mike and his peers is, without a doubt, the most gratifying and rewarding part.'

'It says to me that the industry is recognizing a problem,' he continued. 'Historically, all of us in the industry, myself included as I started our business in the mid-70s, looked at self-adhesive labels as a panacea to make money. It was early days, and growth rates were huge. There was little, if any, concern for what affect

The Label Industry Global Awards Gala Dinner

we were having on disposal, by-product and efficiency. The award symbolizes that all of us, not just me, must make a conscious effort to improve. We must look at ways to reduce, redesign, and re-use.'

Given the high profile of the award and the gala evening, which was attended by so many of the industry's key figures, does Mr Frost hope that his success will inspire companies to act more responsibly with regard to the environment? 'Yes, yes, yes, and one more yes!' he exclaims.

'I think we are at the beginning of change,' he elaborates. 'The award is a symbol of this. During my acceptance comments I dedicated the award to the small but growing group who has already climbed onto the train of change. Trust me, change is difficult: using PLA, the new film made from a renewable resource, isn't easy. There are problems with stiffness, die-cutting, ink compatibility, and so on. But I am convinced that change will occur. The problems that we see today will be sorted out in the next 12-18 months. Then we'll have the next PLA formulation, and this one will work better. The same goes for EBAs.'

'The incongruity that I see is the acceptance by large corporations for environmental stewardship, but a lack of in-house mandates,' he continues. 'If a corporation joins an environmental sustainability coalition why aren't they behaving that way in practice? There is still a big disconnect, and I intend to attack it. Get on the train!

'The biggest volume of waste is generated by the OEM, the laminator. The next villain in the chain is "matrix" generated by every single converter. There is only one environmentally solution for this problem today – thermal recycling. And that costs money – it's the same old problem.'

Channeled Resources reuses materials and guarantees their quality. 'The reprocessed products that leave our plant have gone through the same QC process that occurs in all major OEM facilities,' says Frost. 'We are extremely proud of all MaraTech facilities – we sell a reprocesses "B" grade, non-warranted product and have less that one and a half per cent annual returns. Our facility in Wisconsin is the largest, most sophisticated B-grade processing plant in the world.'

In the UK, recent legislation has now categorized release liner as packaging waste, as opposed to industrial waste, meaning it can no longer be dumped in landfill sites. However, Frost explains that the country is still not facing up to its responsibilities in this area.

'I'm very familiar with the liner situation in the UK,' he says. 'We made a proposal to lead the industry out of its abyss and it fell on deaf ears – because of money. We have the answers and solutions to liner recycling, but no one in the UK, and I literally mean no one, will listen.

'Silicone liners, for the most part, are recyclable – both paper and film. However, the Europeans fight it. I know of a paper mill in the UK, which has identical pulping equipment to its sister plant in the US, who says it's impossible. But my message is that spent liners are recyclable.'

There can be no doubt that Calvin Frost is a more-than worthy winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award, and he follows in the footsteps of many great figures of the industry. 'The gala dinner was a great success,' he concludes. 'Our team attended in full force and we were all excited to be a part of such a huge industry event. It was a celebration for all of us that will be remembered

The R Stanton Avery Lifetime Acheivement Award

Nomination criteria for this award are for an individual who:

- Has served a minimum of 25 years in the label industry
- Has made a significant contribution to the promotion and growth of the label industry
- Has participated in industry associations, conferences, and activities
- s a high profile industry influencer and motivator
- s a person of high integrity, honesty and respect
- Operates on both a national and international scale

Past winners

An international 'Label Industry Man of Achievement Award' was first launched in 1992 by the Labelexpo/Cowise Group (now Tarsus Group plc) to recognize the achievements of the early pioneers and creators of the pressure-sensitive label industry. Previous winners of this award were:

Label Industry Man of Achievement Award

- 1992: R Stanton Avery, Avery Dennison
- 1993: Ferd Ruesch senior, Gallus Group
- 1994: Werner Jackstädt, Jackstädt
- 1996: Richard Rosemann, Rotometrics Group
- 1997: Mark Andrews senior, Mark Andy
- 1998: Nozomu Shiwaku, Lintec Corporation

R. Stanton Avery lifetime Achievement Award

- 2004: Dale Bunnell, Mark Andy
- 2005: Lars Eriksen, Nilpeter A/S

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Industry celebrates excellence

At Labelexpo Americas, hundreds of global suppliers, converters, trade associations and media gathered to celebrate and reward excellence in the label industry at The Label Industry Global Awards Gala Dinner. Votes from across the world were collated earlier in the year and a Judging Panel met this summer to review the nominations for each award.

Calvin Frost, CEO of the Channeled Resources Group based in Chicago, collected the prestigious R. Stanton Lifetime Achievement Award, sponsored by Avery Dennison and presented by last year's winner, Nilpeter CEO Lars Eriksen. Also announced at the ceremony were the global label awards for Continuous Innovation, New Innovation and – a new category – an award recognizing achievement in RFID/Smart Label development.

(Bottom) (L-R) Roger Pellow, managing director Tarsus Labels Group and Mike Fairley, director of strategic development Tarsus Labels Group

The Label Industry Global Awards Gala Dinner

(Above l-r) Jan Frederik Vink, president elect of FINAT; Eric Hoendervangers, managing director MPS; Ian Hole, director for market development, Esko; Scott Pilsbury, president TLMI

Award for Continuous Innovation

(Sponsored by: Labels & Labeling, Label & Narrow Web, and NarroWebTech magazines)

Winner: DuPont

This award recognizes innovation and rewards a company that is instrumental in continuously developing new technologies and systems that are benefiting the label industry.

Awards chairman Mike Fairley said: 'DuPont has served as one of the prime movers of the label industry away from a craft-based industry to a science-based industry over many years. The quality and reproducibility of the flexographic label process today owes much to their creativity and innovation.'

Dupont, founded in 1802, has continuously developed a wide range of innovative and sustainable product and service solutions for markets as diverse as agriculture, nutrition, electronics, communications, safety and protection, home and construction, transportation and apparel.

In the printing and graphics field, innovation has been continuous and on many fronts, whether design, pre-press, or the pressroom, using film or digital. Examples of products which have been of major benefit to the label industry include, the ongoing evolution of Cyrel photopolymer plates, the Cyrel Digital Imager technology, color management solutions, digital proofing and workflow all of which enable flexographic printers to compete head to head with the offset and gravure processes. Most recently, DuPont has introduced the environmentally friendly FAST thermal dry flexographic plate, which has a complete absence of solvents or drying requirements.

(Top l-r) Jack Kenney, editor Label & Narrow Web; Tony White, NarroWebTech; Jerry Palmer, channel manager North America at DuPont; Andy Thomas, editor Labels & Labeling

(Bottom l-r) Ewald Draaijer, managing director of XSYS Print Solutions; Suzanne Zaccone, president Graphic Solutions International, Bob Zaccone; Andy Thomas, editor Labels & Labeling; Roger Pellow, managing director Tarsus Labels Group

(Left) Magician Bob Higa entertains the crowd; (right) Clockwise from left: Mike Fairley, Labels Group; Jeffrey Arripol, Novelprint, Brazil; Debby Forman, Novelprint, Brazil; Jan Frederick Vink, Kolibri, The Netherlands; Bill Bamford, Impressions International, New Zealand; Roger Pellow, Labels Group; Amar Chhajed, Webtech Industries, India; Andy Thomas, Labels & Labeling; Fernando Araguren Alvarez, Flexoprint, Mexico; Lisa Milburn, Labels Group; Michael Aisenberg, Austab Labels, Australia

Award for New Innovation

(Sponsored by MPS)

Winner: Esko

Esko is a relatively new name in the label industry although its roots go back to Barco and Purup-Eskofot in the early 1980s. However, the Judging Panel awarded the New Innovation Award to the company for its work as a key industry pioneer over the past five to ten years.

The company's products in the label and tag field today cover a broad range of applications, with desktop tools that enhance popular design applications, automate workflows and optimize output quality for various print processes. Specific innovative products introduced in recent years include Scope workflow, Graphic editors, BackStage workflow management software, FlexRip and FlexProof.

The Judging Panel was particularly impressed with Esko's innovative solutions that addressed JDF, remote proofing, 3D virtual imaging, plus exceptional quality dots on the plate, fast make-ready and a key commitment to a digital future for labels.

RFID Smart Label Manufacturer Award

(Sponsored by XSYS Print Solutions, A Flint Group Company)

Winner: Graphic Solutions International LLC

Graphic Solutions was one of the pioneers of printed circuit and RFID smart label solutions. The company specializes in pressure-sensitive labels, RFID antennas, printed circuitry and thin flexible batteries for microelectronics, as well as turn key RFID systems, and has been manufacturing printed circuitry solutions for more than ten years.

The Judging Panel said: 'Graphic Solutions International was developing RFID and smart solutions long before it became a high profile growth sector. They have been key pioneers and innovators over many years and have created markets and applications far beyond the more popular logistics and retails sectors of today. The label industry needs such pioneering converters to develop a route to the future.'

Graphic Solutions have the capability of printing any frequency, including 13.56 MHz, 900 MHz and 2.4 GHz RFID labels. In addition to conductive ink printing, the company has a continuous web assembly system that produces RFID inlays that offer numerous improvements over conventional printed circuit technology.

The Label Industry Global Awards take place at Labelexpo Americas and Labelexpo Europe. The next Awards will take place in Brussels in September 2005. ■

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Labelexpo Americas 2006

What's new in narrow-web technology?

The heavy metal is always a major draw at the Labelexpo series. This A-Z review of the latest developments by **Barry Hunt** attempts to give an up-to-date guide to what the major manufacturers are offering.

Labeling has become a fragmented and globalized industry where the narrow and mid-web technology has largely reached a plateau. Manufacturers talk of their second or even third generation models, but commercial considerations ensure they are upgraded with impressive levels of automation over web tension, register control and inking systems. Being in the USA, waterbased and UV flexo naturally dominated, nevertheless conventional and waterless offset presses have become more numerous. Across all press types, servo-drives with centralized controls are almost de rigeur, which is fine as long as mainstream converters ensure this exacting technology suits their individual production needs. One thing is certain, they will continue to seek features that allow fast changeovers between jobs, reduce materials wastage and maintain high quality standards using a wide range of materials.

Aquaflex restated its credentials in the market under the F L Smithe banner. It promoted the new 10 and 13-inch wide ELS Servo UV flexo line, which replaces the DBX and offers converters an entry-level move into multi-substrate production. It includes big-press features from the FPC, a servo-driven packaging press available in widths from 17 to 32 inches and first flagged up two years ago. The high-speed FPC features inline print units incorporating sleeve technology on both plate and anilox cylinders to increase changeover speeds and increase efficiencies. An arrangement between Aquaflex and Jetrion means press buyers can integrate the latter's 3025 UV ink jet printing system on both the FPC and ELS Servo presses.

Codimag displayed a Viva 340 combination presses equipped with waterless offset, hot foil, screen, UV flexo varnishing and embossing units. It has sold over 230 versions of this variable-size semi-rotary press around the world. It also promoted the latest Viva 420, another servo-driven intermittent feed model, but with larger repeat lengths of 8-16 inches from a wider web up to 420mm for longer runs. It uses letterpress print cylinders, hot-foil stamping and UV flexo varnishing.

Drent Goebel featured the offset-based and servo-driven VSOP multi-product press with sleeve plate technology. It is now available in several widths and option packages, including a patented 'staggered' plate mounting system to achieve near seamless printing using either UV curing or EB curing. Emphasizing the 'one-stop' and short-run flexibility of the the VSOP, DG pointed out that a single machine can handle a brand owners' demands for paper or

Omet introduced its servo-driven Flexy-S to North America

filmic labels, flexible packaging and carton printing, while maintaining the same standards of print quality and consistent color matches.

Newly-formed Edale America hosted the launch of its UK parent's Lambda, a servo-driven production line with several upgrade and web path options for converting, printing or laminating countless products. Products include multilayer labels, booklet-labels, security and scratch-off gaming labels. The reel-to-reel version at Labelexpo was topically configured for off-line insertion of RFID inlays to delaminated and relaminated label webs using a Tamarack inserter module. Edale presses were represented an entry-level and compact Alpha, configured as a 10-inch, five-color flexo press with four IR dryers and one UV curing unit producing food packaging labels.

Another UK manufacturer, Focus Label Machinery, showed its latest six-color CI compact Centraflex press, running unsupported film with a cold-foil unit. It comes in 10 and 13-inch web widths and includes a quick-change cartridge system. It also displayed the new LX6 Letterflex press for printing fabric labels.

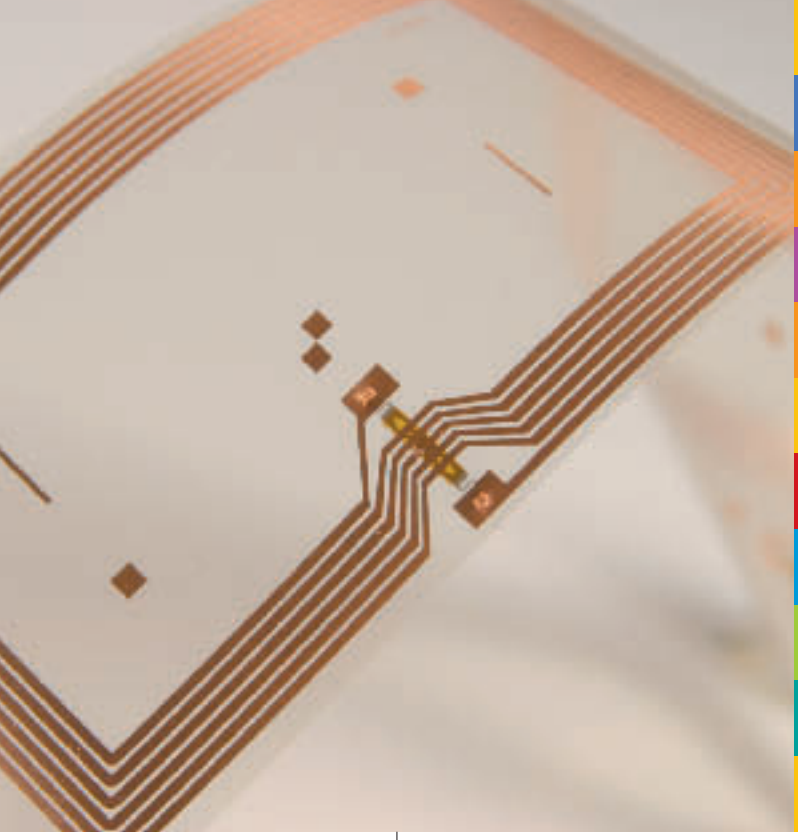
Gallus Inc – now 25 years old – displayed the latest version of the long-running EM 280 range. Options now include servo-drive technology for high substrate flexibility, a chambered doctor blade system, plus a hot-foil saving and hologram insetting device. The three-year-old EM 510 S is now a fully servo-driven platform press incorporating new sleeve technology. Backwards compatibility allows buyers to use existing Gallus EM standard modules, including rotary embossing and hot-foil stamping available at any print unit using 'Plug & Print' technology. A nine-unit UV-flexo based EM 510 S with an AGE inline sheeter/stacker was shown producing glue-applied film and paper beer labels.

Also promoted, but not shown, was the offset-based and all

"The reel-to-reel version at Labelexpo was topically configured for off-line insertion of RFID inlays to delaminated and relaminated label webs"

servo RCS 330 platform press. Gallus now has 50 international installations, including five in North America. An upgraded Screeny rotary screen printing system now offers faster turnarounds. Under development is Screeny S, a digital version with laser ablation imaging and processing on any existing CTP systems.

Gallus EM510-S with in-line sheeter-stacker



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Mark Andy Comco introduced its multi-substrate Comco C2 gearless press

GiDue showed a 14.5 inch wide print unit from the new Xpannd combination packaging press for UV offset, UV flexo and rotary screen. Joining the existing Combat series and mid-web Athena lines, it is available in widths up to 21 inches. The Xpannd is designed for frequent job changes and short runs, with wine labels cited as a targeted market. Lower plate origination costs for offset, ease of operation and low idling speeds to reduce waste producing high-quality products were given as major selling points. Interestingly, GiDue also announced it has incorporated Ko-Pack International's US sales and service operation into its network, following KPI's demise as a press manufacturer.

Another big business development, announced after the show closed, was the sale by the Dover Corporation of the 60-year-old Mark Andy group to Morgenthaler Partners, a US venture capital company. The deal, which includes Comco and UV Technologies, leaves Mark Andy's management intact. Before then visitors saw demonstrations of the latest version of the servo-driven XP5000 UV flexo line. This includes fully automatic registration, precision preregistration and re-registration, and finite control of every piece of tooling including die cutting. The venerable 2200 series has been revamped with a greater range of options and three models: entry-level L class, improved XL class and the upgraded XLS class. Also shown was the company's VSR inspection rewinder, with 100 per cent inspection and several finishing options.

"Another big business development, announced after the show closed, was the sale by the Dover Corporation of the 60-year-old Mark Andy group to Morgenthaler Partners"

Comco introduced the second-generation and multi-substrate C2 series. The new I-Drive (Intelligent Drive System) combines several gearless technologies and is said to present a fully integrated approach to measurable performance improvements, including continuous tension management and customized setups for individual substrates. Fully automated pre- and re-registration is achieved at speeds up to 1,000 feet/minute (305 m/min). Comco also offers a new flexo sleeve system.

Iwasaki showed a five-unit TR2 offset press with a 16-inch web, magnetic die cutter unit and UV flexo coater. The servo-driven intermittent feed gives variable repeats of from 2 to 10.5 inches at up to 164 feet/minute. The press is available with

Impossible is an excuse.

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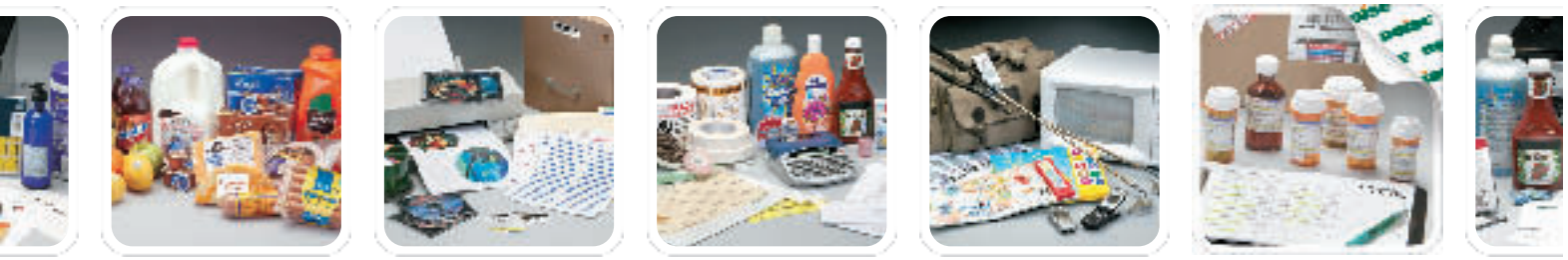

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Nilpeter introduces the shaftless FB3300-S press

"On show was a nine-color, 16-inch EF (Effective Flexo) press and the sixth print unit was the 1,000th made by MPS"

conventional or waterless offset units. A spokesperson said Iwasaki was seeking to attract converters of small quantities of premium-quality wine or cosmetic/toiletry labels, with the TR2 augmenting existing label press installations.

MPS made much of its progress in introducing four series of servo-driven UV flexo presses since 1996. On show was a nine-color, 16-inch EF (Effective Flexo) press and the sixth print unit was the 1,000th made by MPS. Also displayed was a two-color, 10-inch wide EC (Effective Converting) module, a 16-inch EF module to show the flexible positioning of rotary screen and hot foiling units on each print station, and a similar module to show a new sleeve plate system. Finally, a 22-inch EP (Effective Printer) flexo and rotary screen model featured 'walk-in platform' technology available on all MPS presses of 20 inches and wider.

New features included Non-stop Print Change (NPC), which

through the servo-driven idler units allows converters to switch designs without stopping the press and achieve zero waste.

Applications include split-run labels and packaging orders involving changes in text, bar coding or batch numbering. MPS also introduced Auto Teach Technology, a self-learning technology that can set register for all print units automatically after a job change. Benefits include improved set-up times and

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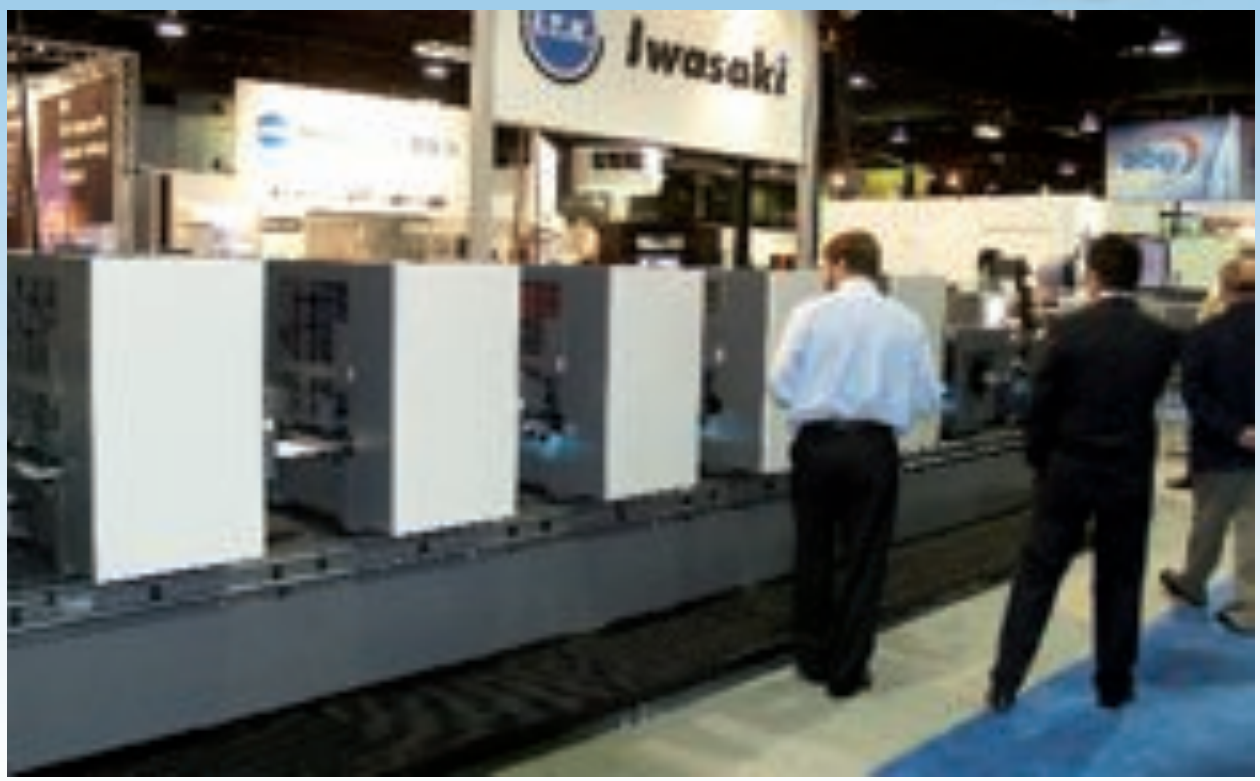

Iwasaki targets short runs with the TR2 intermittent offset press with UV flexo coater

reduced waste.

Nilpeter's eight-unit FB-3300S represented the first servo-driven and completely shaftless press built by its Cincinnati plant as part of the redesigned FB-Line. (A non-servo FB-3300A version to show cold-foil applications was shown separately by Kurtz.) Half of the total of 20 presses ordered at the show were FB flexo press, destined mostly for US label converters. Apparently they are back on the investment trail following past years when Latin American buyers made most of the running.

The third-generation FA-Line received its US debut. Servo drives permit the production of labels and film-based packaging. The FA-4 model displayed had ten-flexo units, a 16-inch web width and an AVT 100 per cent web inspection system. It was shipped to Syracuse Labels in New York State, while Group Lelys in Montreal ordered a ten-unit FA-4. Also shown was a servo-driven MO-3300 S platform press with five offset units, a flexo unit and a rotary screen module. The show press was later shipped to W S Packaging in Wisconsin.

Omet focused on updates to its Flexy S combination press, of which 40 have been installed worldwide. It features dual, brushless servo motors on each print station: one for the plate-holding axis and one for the printing unit. It eliminates torsional stiffness and gear backlash while offering infinite print repeats and tighter control of print register. The company's Twin Cut die cutting unit provides automatic register between die cut and print and is suitable for short-run label jobs. Changes of variable repeats between 12 and 24 inches are tool-less using magnetic plates mounted on magnetic cylinders. Omet also introduced the off-line Holo Foil King holographic unit for brand protection and promotion. A foil saving feature allows the application of up to six independent hologram streams.

> "Rotatek gave details of the Universal, a new shaftless servo-driven press for labels and packaging equipped with automatic register and color density control. The first, with a 20.5-inch web width, was sold to an unnamed German label printer"

Rotatek gave details of the Universal, a new shaftless servo-driven press for labels and packaging equipped with automatic register and color density control. The first, with a 20.5-inch web width, was sold to an unnamed German label printer. A wider 34.5-inch version with sleeve plates on the stocks. Interestingly, the concept was promoted with EB ink or coating curing from Wilmington-based Advanced Electron Beams. Its AEB Webline unit is said to be optimized for narrow-web offset or flexo presses. Claimed benefits include lower energy costs compared with UV curing and suitability for food packaging.

Labelexpo Americas 2006

Digital and variable data technologies

The extent of existing and pending developments in the various digital printing technologies, especially with UV-cured ink jet, was a noticeable feature of Labelexpo Americas, reports **Barry Hunt** in this A-Z guide

Intended for short-run color labels with a variable data content, Degrava Systems' desktop DP 8500 takes a different approach to other established and emerging technologies. It uses an OKI LED (Light Emitting Diode) dry toner print engine, powered by Degrava's DCP color management system. It offers a 600 x 600 dpi resolution in print widths from 3 to 8.25 inches. At around $50,000, the DP 8500 is said to offer an affordable option for converters, or even brand owners, for producing high quality labels and tags.

Digital Print Inc featured the latest additions to its ink jet products for inline variable data printing of presses and finishing units. The entry-level TIJ 150 offers a 1.5-inch print area with a 2-inch option, while the TIJ 425 and TIJ 850 offer a 4.25-inch print area (or twice that as an option). All use HP's high-speed thermal print heads and print a variety of images at up to 600 x 600 dpi with a speed up to 300 feet/minute. The 600 x 300 dpi resolution option doubles this speed. Water-based, solvent and UV curable inks can be used with the TIJ 150 with colors available, while the TIJ 425 and 850 use water-based black inks. DPI also offers two d-o-d and two continuous flow ink jet systems.

Prototype Domino

Domino Printing Sciences showed a prototype K-Series Color ink jet module, with up to 200 x 600 dpi, ahead of its launch in early 2007. Derived from the K-Series of d-o-d heads, it offers CMYK variable data personalization and can be integrated with most narrow-web presses or finishing platforms. Also new was the DSL1 and inline laser scribing head for permanent marking of bar codes, numbering and text for numerous applications.

> "A new ink replacement feature allows the fast replacement of Pantone-licensed spot colors without stopping the press"

HP Indigo's new ws4500 digital color press for labels and packaging was shown running with a Rotaflex Vericut 2 digital web finishing line. Based on existing ws4050 seven-color technology, it offers an improved automated workflow and enhanced color capabilities. A new ink replacement feature allows the fast replacement of Pantone-licensed spot colors without stopping the press. Converters can therefore switch between jobs with near-zero downtime. HP says the ws4500 is a robust and reliable production device designed for 24/7 operation for both small and medium-order work. Optional third-party Esko software can reduce color matching time by as much as 50 per cent. It helps make the press a cost-effective producer of label and packaging jobs up to around 6,500 linear feet (2,000 m).

New Opportunities Begin Here

Today's label finishing demands are increasingly complex. Labels need to reflect image and brand quality while maintaining the highest accuracy and security. More than ever, label producers need a finishing partner to remain competitive and profitable.

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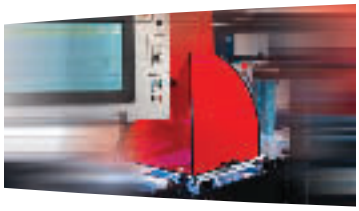

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Digital Print Inc featured the latest additions to its ink jet products for inline variable data printing of presses and finishing units

HP is now a reseller for Esko's pair of digital front-end workflows: Optimize Pack and Scope Pack for HP Indigo. It also introduced the Label Job Estimator software, allowing users to determine whether digital or conventional printing is more profitable for a given job. It's free for existing HP customers as part of a business support scheme.

Stand-alone inkjet

Jetrion launched the 4000 series, a stand-alone CMYK UV ink jet printer with a speed of 65 feet/minute. Web widths start at 6 inches up to custom widths. It complements the existing 3025A, but the Xaar d-o-d print heads give a higher 900 dpi resolution with grayscale print quality (variable sized dots). The press is therefore ideal for producing secondary and industrial labels and some primary labels. According to Jetrion's figures the 4000 is the first affordable full color digital press which, on a cost per label basis, is competitive with UV flexo for runs lengths up to 50,000 labels. Its RIP takes pre-press image files from standard design packages and can pre-RIP queued files.

Production models are available from Q1 2007, soon afterwards Jetrion plans to introduce a white ink and extended gamut inks for Pantone color matches. Spot colors and gold, silver and colored metallic inks are also planned.

Konica Minolta is among some key electronic players investing in specialized applications of UV ink jet technology. As an OEM supplier to buyers of print engines and print heads, the IJ Technologies division showed the prototype Inkjet Label Printer, fitted with four KM 512LH print heads, each with a print width of 5.5 inches (144mm) and giving a resolution of 360 x 360 dpi in standard mode. The top print speed is 98 feet/minute (30 m/min) using paper, synthetic paper or film substrates. KM offers its own radical or low odor cationic UV curable ink.

Matan Digital Printers' US distributor, Graphic Marking Systems, featured the new Spring 3 thermal transfer printer. This third generation six-color digital press handles a broader range of substrates, including many types of paper, coarse-surfaced media and reflective sheeting. Matan has also released the SpotBoard electronic card, a standard component to control the energy level of each print station, as well as offer USB connectivity to desk and laptop computers.

Newfoil Machines showed a hybrid approach aimed a smaller

3D embossing dies

Carey Web, a trade platemaking house in Ohio, gave an example of how even the smallest exhibitors often have the brightest ideas. It showed how direct digital laser engraving of elastomer materials can be applied to making relatively inexpensive male/female dies for 2D and 3D embossing. Based on Luscher's Flexpose dual-laser ablation system, the dies and other applications created much interest at the show.

Jetrion's 4-color UV inkjet rig

converters that combines full color digital printing with the Model 3500/5500 hot foil and die cutting equipment. The demonstration line comprised a Newfoil SP500 unwinder, taking pin-fed webs into a VIP Color VP8020 and a Model 3500 with a 10-inch web width. The VP8020 uses a 'cool fusion' LED print engine, giving a resolution of 600 dpi at 3.5 inches/second.

PAT Technology Systems from Quebec introduced Rotoworx 330, described as the world's first combination digital UV coater and semi-rotary magnetic die cutter and converting system. It uses specially-developed d-o-d ink jet heads based on Xaar's new 'through-flow' (TF) technology. They apply PAT's own Nuvo UV-curable coating fluid in a single pass under touch-screen control and precision web guiding to achieve flood, spot coatings and textured effects in the smallest of detail to pre-printed labels and cartons. The plateless and non-contact system followed two years of development and includes a sheet-fed digital coater for commercial applications. Web widths of 13 and 20 inches (Rotoworx 508) are offered. The former uses a 30-inch diameter unwinder with web guide and splice table.

Primera Technology showed the LX810, a desktop ink jet printer for printing short-run, full-color labels on demand. Label sizes range from 0.75 inch square to 8 inches wide x 24 inches long. Drop-on-demand print heads with a 4,800 dpi resolution print high quality labels for various consumer, industrial and office applications using semi-gloss and high-gloss materials. Printed results are said to resist scratching and smudging and

PAT introduces the first inkjet-based 'digital coater'

are virtually waterproof. There are printer drivers for MS Windows 2000/XP and Macintosh OS X version 10.2 or higher, with USB 2.0 connection. It is globally available through resellers. A prototype LX820 version, differentiated with a bulk ink system, rather than individual cartridges, was also displayed.

Printing Technology Services featured the inline JetFlex variable data printer, including bar codes, with the integrated VeriFlex data verifier. The system uses standard UV modules and curable inks that adhere on all substrates. The software includes optional RIPFlex4 for incorporating rasterized PDF and PCL open format files in the workflow for output on a JetFlex module.

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Alberto Ghiotto, Managing Director – Sutermeister

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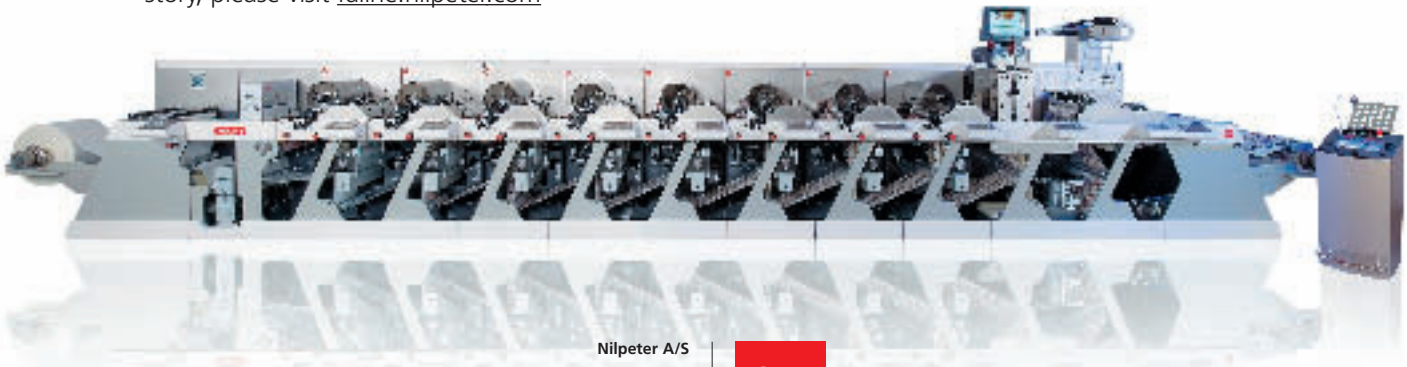

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AM Engineering's R2R laser cutter

Xeikon America's main display centred on the established model 330 digital label printer, offering CMYK and white for paper and filmic labels. It also featured LabelSprint, which can run inline with the 330 or as an off-line converting and finishing unit. Among the various finishing options, the show model included a new sheeter from Grafisk Machinery.

Ancillary equipment

AM Engineering from Italy introduced two applications of laser cutting and marking. The roll-fed R2R kiss-cuts paper and film on the fly at up to 196 feet/minute. It has a sealed CO2 laser source that eliminates external gas tanks to give an average working life of 16,000 hours. It comes in four Wattage ranges. AME ran a demonstration job with two-across labels, each with a different cutting profile. The Windows-based Amdrive software offers 64 different ways to set-up the cutting steps for individual label jobs. AM also offers the sheet-fed Nexus version with a maximum sheet size of 19 x 15.5 inches and an automatic feeder.

Fuji Hunt introduced CodeStream, a new type of laser marking technology from FujiFilm. As an alternative to thermal transfer, ink jet or laser ablation, it applies permanent and tamper resistant marks on all types of substrates. It works by applying the CodeStream invisible coating by existing processes

Newfoil model 3500/5500 hot foil and die cutting 'cool fusion' system

to anywhere on the packaging or labeling to receive an ultra high density laser mark, Whether flood or spot coated, CodeStream shows any attempts to alter the data. The process is described as being fast and clean without producing airborne particulates or solvent release. ■

Newly-formed Edale America launched the Lambda press which can be configured for off-line insertion of RFID inlays

The smart place to be

This year's Labelexpo Americas featured the event's first ever Smart Label Zone. **James Quirk** reports on the event's smart news

The growing industry trend towards smarter label solutions was reflected at this year's Labelexpo Americas by the first ever Smart Label Zone at the show.

The biggest announcement regarding smart technology came from Avery Dennison RFID – who announced the launch of a new technology transfer program that will give converters access to a broad range of Avery Dennison products and know-how, beginning with licenses for high-speed strap attach technology.

Avery also announced the acquisition of RF IDentics, a Grand Rapids, Michigan start-up that has developed innovative processes for producing high quality products and quickly moving them from design into production.

'These two announcements reflect Avery Dennison's commitment to being the right partner and providing the right tools for the converting industry,' said Dean Scarborough, president and chief executive officer of Avery Dennison. 'The technology transfer program will enable converters to broaden and differentiate their product offerings, considerably enhancing their value to their customers.'

Acheson showed its water-based conductive ink technology for RFID antenna and other printed electronic applications. The technology boasts among its advantages long application life that minimizes product waste; improved operator safety through the elimination of hazardous organic air pollutants; and fast ambient curing and drying that enables low-cost, high-speed assembly.

'Lablexpo Americas is a very international show,' said sales manager David Stoddard. 'It has been great for creating new leads and reestablishing contacts.'

Israel-based ATB-Group-TSYN, which manufactures an anti-counterfeit solution, was delighted at being in the Smart Label Zone. 'We have made tons of contacts,' said Vadim Yesepkin, ATB's executive VP. 'We are very pleased with the show and think it is superbly organized.'

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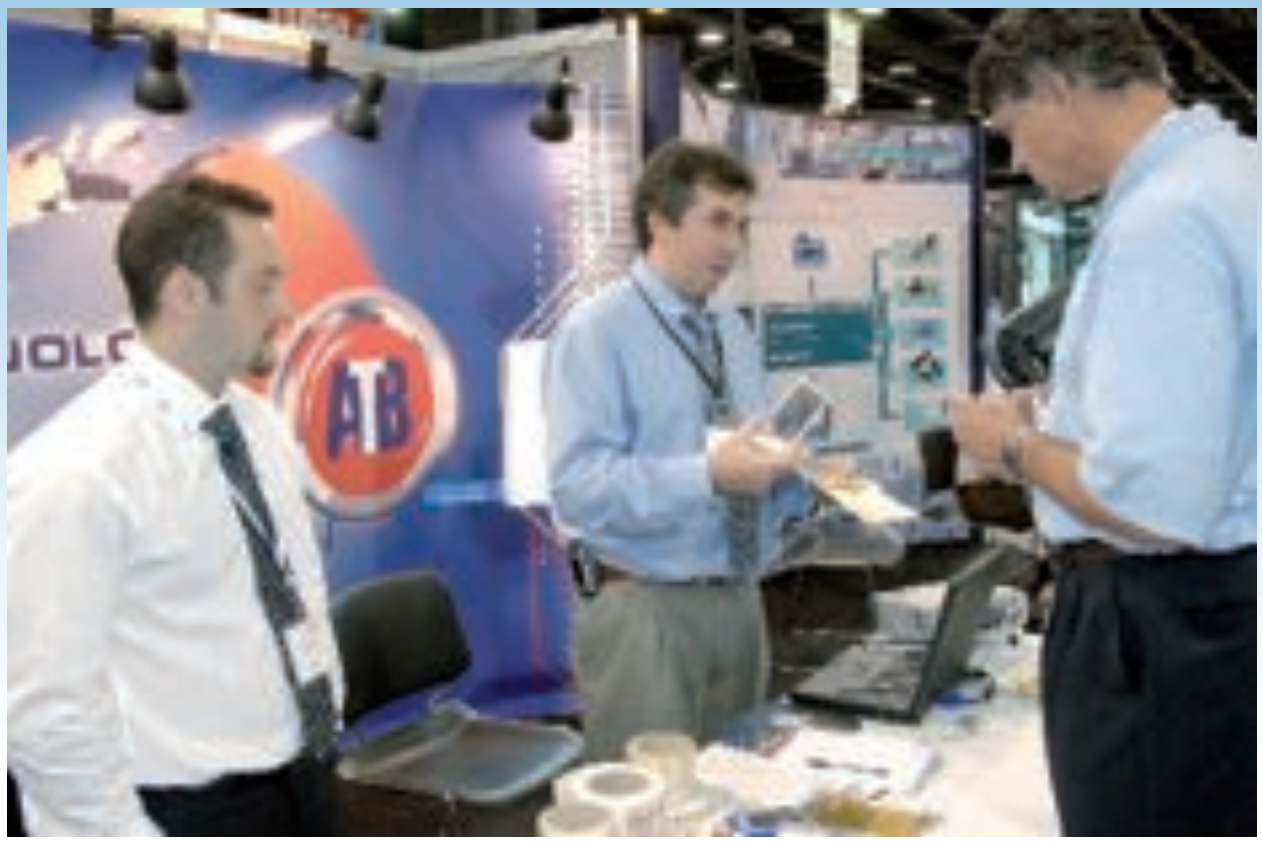


Israel-based ATB-Group-TSYN's security solution proved to a massive hit at the show

'We have had a great deal of interest in our product,' he continued. 'We spoke with SICPA Securink, who said that it was the most exciting product of the whole show. We have had interest from a sporting goods manufacturer; Underwriters Laboratories, the largest electric certifier in the US; and the R&D group from a huge currency printer.

'There has also been a lot of interest from South America and Japan, among other parts of the world. I had ten invitations to Mexico in one day alone, and Procesos Gráficos para Publicidad, one of the largest converters in Mexico, believes that our product could be hugely successful in South America.' You can read more about ATB on page 153.

Atlantic Zeiser showed its new Tagline RFID personalization system. By using eight read/write heads simultaneously, the Tagline is capable of carrying out full quality control at the same time as the encoding of the tags. Using the machine, labels can be printed with variable data or with additional security features without any loss in speed.

The company is currently working on adding further functionality to the machine in its factory in Germany. Daniel Rhodes, system sales, reported: 'There has been very good interest in the machine.'

bielomatik demonstrated its new Qualifier T-165, a smart label replacement and encoding machine; and the TLA-165 E, a transponder and label attaching machine.

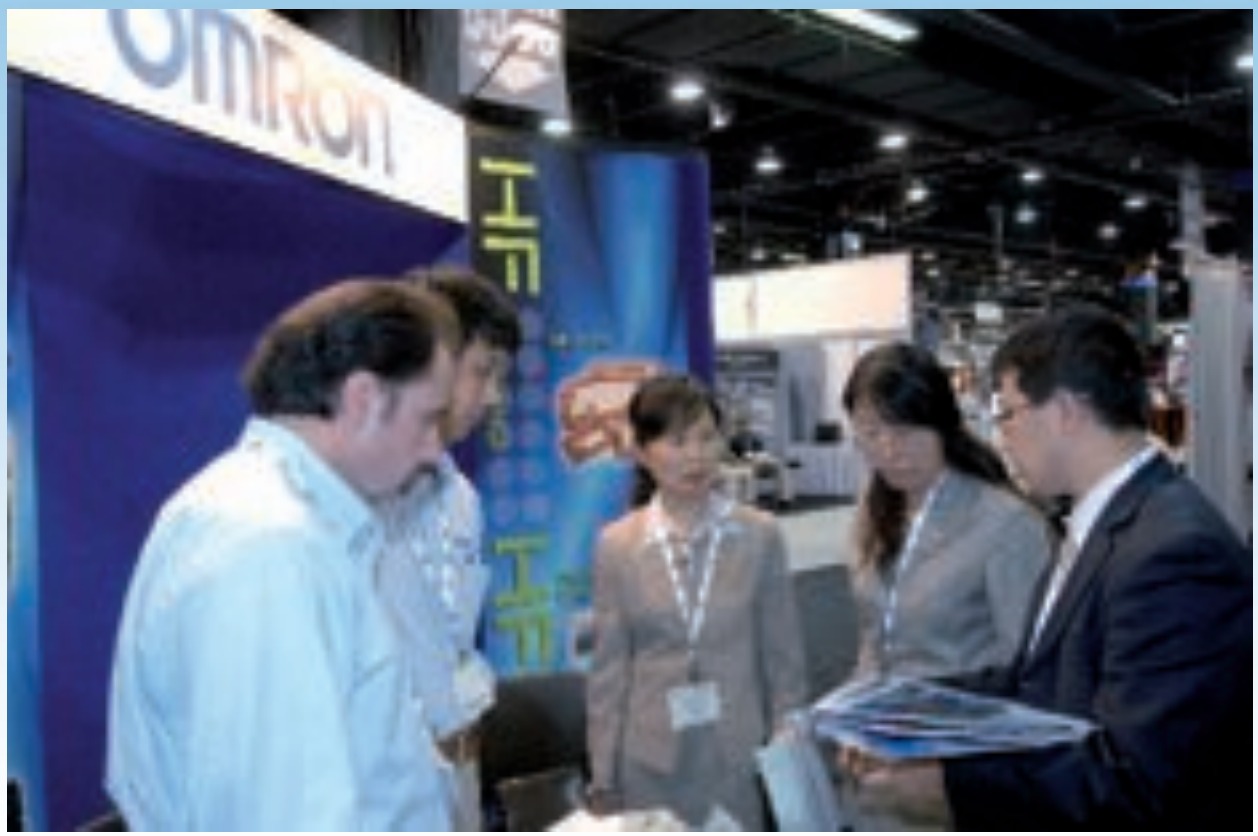
The Qualifier T-165 was developed as a result of converter's demands for 100% functional smart labels. The pre-selection of inlays before lamination does not necessarily ensure this quality level, as defects and loss of performance can occur during the converting process. The Qualifier tests, removes, and replaces defective labels at production speeds of up to 60 meters per minute.

The TLA-165 E is a high-speed transponder and label attaching machine which allows the converter to continue to utilize features on existing presses such as adhesive applicators and die cutters.

'I am very happy with the quality of visits we have had,' said sales manager Jürgen Rexer. 'The RFID industry is gaining momentum and growing steadily – which you can clearly see from the interest at the show.'

UK-based flexo press manufacturer Edale launched its new flexible converting machine – the Lambda. The press can be configured as an RFID solution, with an RFID inlay module supplied by Tamarack. Each Lambda is bespoke built, with typical applications including RFID insertion, booklet insertion, security applications, multi-layer, scratch-off, automotive, medical and R&D.

KSW Microtec launched the thinnest flexible temperature data logger in the market. The KSW-VarioSens temperature data logger is a semi-active RFID transponder in a label format, which measures the temperature with an integrated sensor and records the data by means of the paper thin environmentally-friendly battery. It is even able to evaluate measured data and save only the data which is of relevance.



Omron showed its Gen 2 Loop, Gen 2 Ninja, and Gen 2 Wave inlays

Melzer celebrated its 50th birthday at Labelexpo Americas. The company demonstrated its Smart Label/Smart Ticket machine, which can replace a defective RFID transponder before it is attached to the product. The machine can test 20,000 RFID transponders per hour, and all faulty transponders are taken out before they go into the preprinted web.

Amongst other products, Mülbauer showed its CL 15000 label converting machine, designed for fully-automatic production of sticky RFID inlays, self-adhesive RFID labels or RFID paper tickets.

'There has been a great deal of interest in this machine in particular,' said Emmanuel Vasquez, who works in the company's Virginia sales office. 'We have also been approached by many people from Latin America, particularly Mexico and Colombia. That market is looking to learn more about RFID.'

Inlay manufacturer Omron showed its Gen 2 Loop, Gen 2 Ninja, and Gen 2 Wave inlays. The Wave is designed for generic use, and can be used anywhere in the world. The Ninja is specifically for item-level tagging, and is particularly popular with the pharmaceutical industry, while the Loop is designed for unfriendly products.

'We have had a lot of label converters coming to us who are interested in learning about RFID. The market wants education,' said David Chose, business development manager.

Like many others at this year's Labelexpo Americas, Chose also reported strong interest from Latin America: 'Due to the interest we've had from this region, we are thinking about setting up a strategic partnership there.'

Schober USA unveiled its STP (Smart Tag and Ticket Processor), which incorporates the company's second Generation RFID technology with the ability to read HF, UHF, and EPC GEN 2 tags. The STP product line is ideally suited to contactless readable tickets for public transportation, entrance/access authorization, security identification, and airport baggage tracking tags, pallet and case tracking, and asset and supply chain management.

SATO, supplier of OEM print machines, introduced its new M8485Se RFID OEM print engine. The machine can read, write, and print smart labels and tags that have embedded RFID transponders.

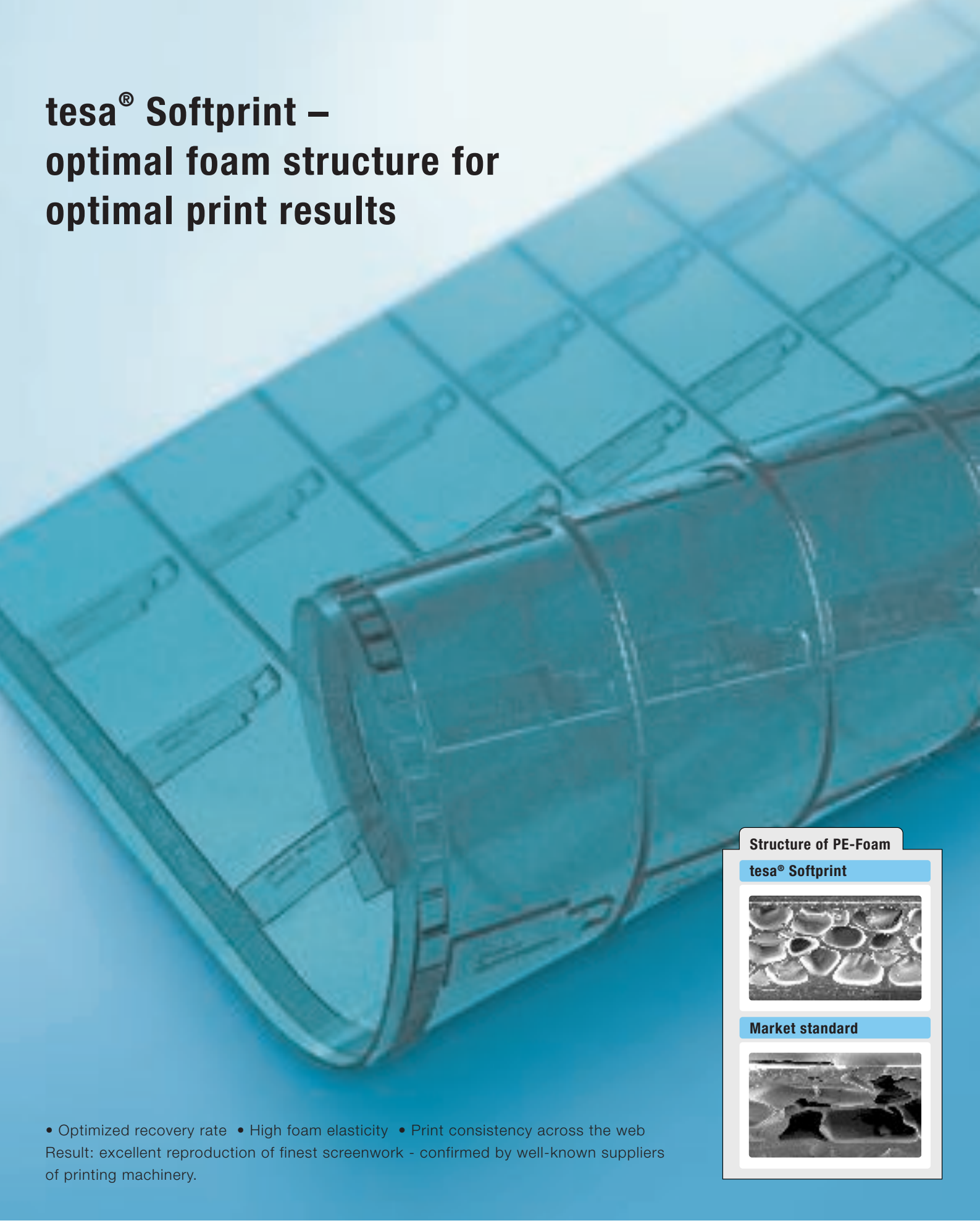
The company also demonstrated its entry level print-apply engine, the Cle Series of printers, RFID thermal labels, and the MB200i printer – the newest addition to SATO's wearable mobile printer line. All of SATO's products are now Gen 2 ready.

Marketing communications manager Nikki Aurin said: 'We have received an interesting mix of visitors – it's been a great show.'

tesa was promoting its Scribos range of products for authentication and brand protection. The company has created a form of labelstock that can be laser engraved with data – which has been used for technical information for the automobile industry. It features a security solution that causes it to self-destruct if tampered with.

'We are now a major player with the Department of Defense – since their mandate a year ago about products containing a certain amount of information,' said Joseph Prunier, strategic market manager. 'We supply laser-inscribed indestructible tags that can withstand almost anything.' ■

tesa® Softprint – optimal foam structure for optimal print results



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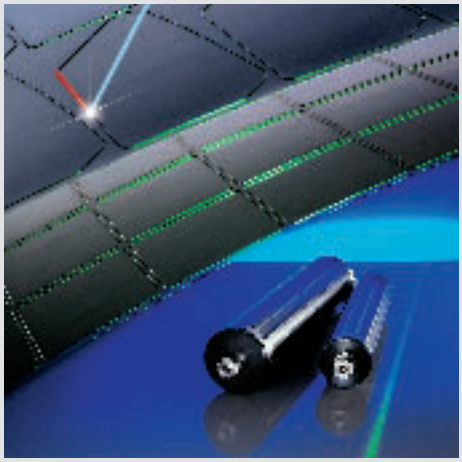

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L-r: Jeff Duran, marketing manager of Graphic Marketing Systems, outside 'The Short Run Cafe'; MACtac's roaring 20's restaurant 'MACtini's'

Standing out from the crowd

The city of Chicago provided inspiration for some interesting stands at Labelexpo Americas. **James Quirk** reports

With around 450 exhibitors at Labelexpo Americas, it was important for companies to stand out. Some did so by creating stands with a difference – and the city of Chicago, where the event took place, provided ample inspiration.

Pressure sensitive label material supplier MACtac's booth featured a roaring 20s theme – with the stand kitted out as a restaurant named 'MACtini's'. Cut-out figures completed the scene: a boy selling a newspaper outside; two gangsters guarding the entrance; and a brass band, dressed in white tie, made up of pictures of real MACtac employees.

'Every year we have a theme for our stand,' said Tom Lynch, director of marketing, printed products, 'and being in Chicago we thought the roaring 20s theme would be fun. It's a great place for people to come and have a drink and talk to us.'

MACtac introduced several new products at the show, including direct thermal and laser pharmacy labels, and the all-new ultra-removable adhesive.

'The show has gone really well for us,' continued Lynch. 'It's a great opportunity to meet with a lot of our customers and see suppliers.'

Graphic Marking Systems was another company to take advantage of the city's history. Demonstrating short run printers at their booth, the staff called themselves the 'Short Run Gangsters', and the stand was modeled on the restaurant from the film The Godfather.

Marketing manager Jeff Duran and his colleagues were dressed in gangster suits and hats, complete with self-adhesive prints of machine guns stuck to their suits. The restaurant bore an uncanny resemblance to the famous scene where Michael Corleone, played by Al Pacino, shoots Sollozo and McCluskey at point blank range, and even had printed-out cutlery and plates of spaghetti on the tables, and the company's product listing on the menu.

Graphic Marking Systems demonstrated digital short run printers from Gerber and Matan with integrated die-cutting and small footprints. The company also showed samples of its specialty materials, including Convex vinyl for motorsports, Tuff-Cover 9-year UV laminate, and High-Bond metallic polyesters.

'Short runs are becoming increasingly important – personalization is the trend,' said Duran. 'We are trying to educate people as to why thermal hits the short run market perfectly.' ■

Harley competition

The popular winner of this year's Harley Davidson competition was Tom Kessler, vice president of production at Heartland Labels. Popular because Tom had already got as far as the last ten finalists four years ago! Tom was accompanied by his wife Danielle.

Tom told L&L he would be riding the bike the 200 miles to his home in Marshall, Illinois.

To win the Harley, contestants have to get a card stamped by the sponsoring exhibitor companies: main sponsor Contract Converting, then Dynic USA, Praxair, Maxcess, GiDue, IST, Sonic Solutions, Sericol, Harper. Ten finalists are chosen, and in a dramatic finale, are each given a key – only one of which lights up the Harley's headlight.

For hardcore Harley fans, the bike was an 1200 Sportster Iconic V twin design. It was assembled up the road from Chicago in Milwaukee.

Congratulations Tom!

New Products

AMAGIC Foils
New cold foil in 12 shades

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

Commercially introduced in the late 1990s, cold foil has become an integral part of flexographic printing and has gained worldwide acceptance in the label industry. AMAGIC's KOLDfoil formulations are available for the cure-tru or conventional cold foil printing process and are in stock for immediate delivery.

Rayven
Durable inkjet label and tag stock

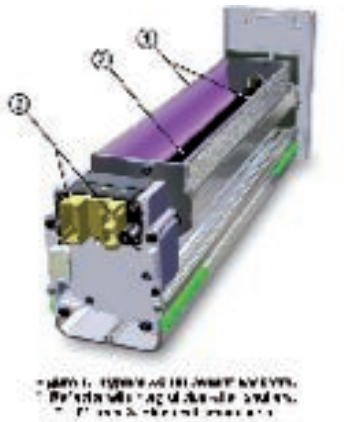
Rayven Inc., a provider of laminating, coating and converting services, has unveiled a new line of durable inkjet label and tag stock.

They are compatible with Primera and VIP Inkjet label printers, as well as all desktop inkjet printers, and are topped with Rayven's proprietary water resistant inkjet coating.

Both new durable inkjet label and tag stock are available in bright white, ensuring that both color and black and white printed images 'pop,' or stand out. Both high- resolution photo and text images can be printed on the stock.

Developed from a tough 2 Mil polyester core, the label stock is produced in master rolls at 54" and slit to customer specification. It contains a permanent acrylic pressure sensitive adhesive and is backed by a 3.2 mil white densified kraft paper liner.

GEW
UV lamp head



GEW has announced the development of a new UV lamp head cassette design that provides 'significant productivity increases while significantly cutting press down-time and electrical consumption costs'.

The XC, 'extreme cure' UV cassette is designed with a fully focused dichroic coated aluminum reflector with integrated clamshell shutters. The design ensures a broad UV output spectrum across both the UV and IR (infrared) range, which maximizes curing power. The electrically actuated shutters automatically protect the substrate when stopping the press. The XC Cassette is currently available for GEW's existing range of VCP, eCP and NUVAplus models and the recently launched, e-system Mini.

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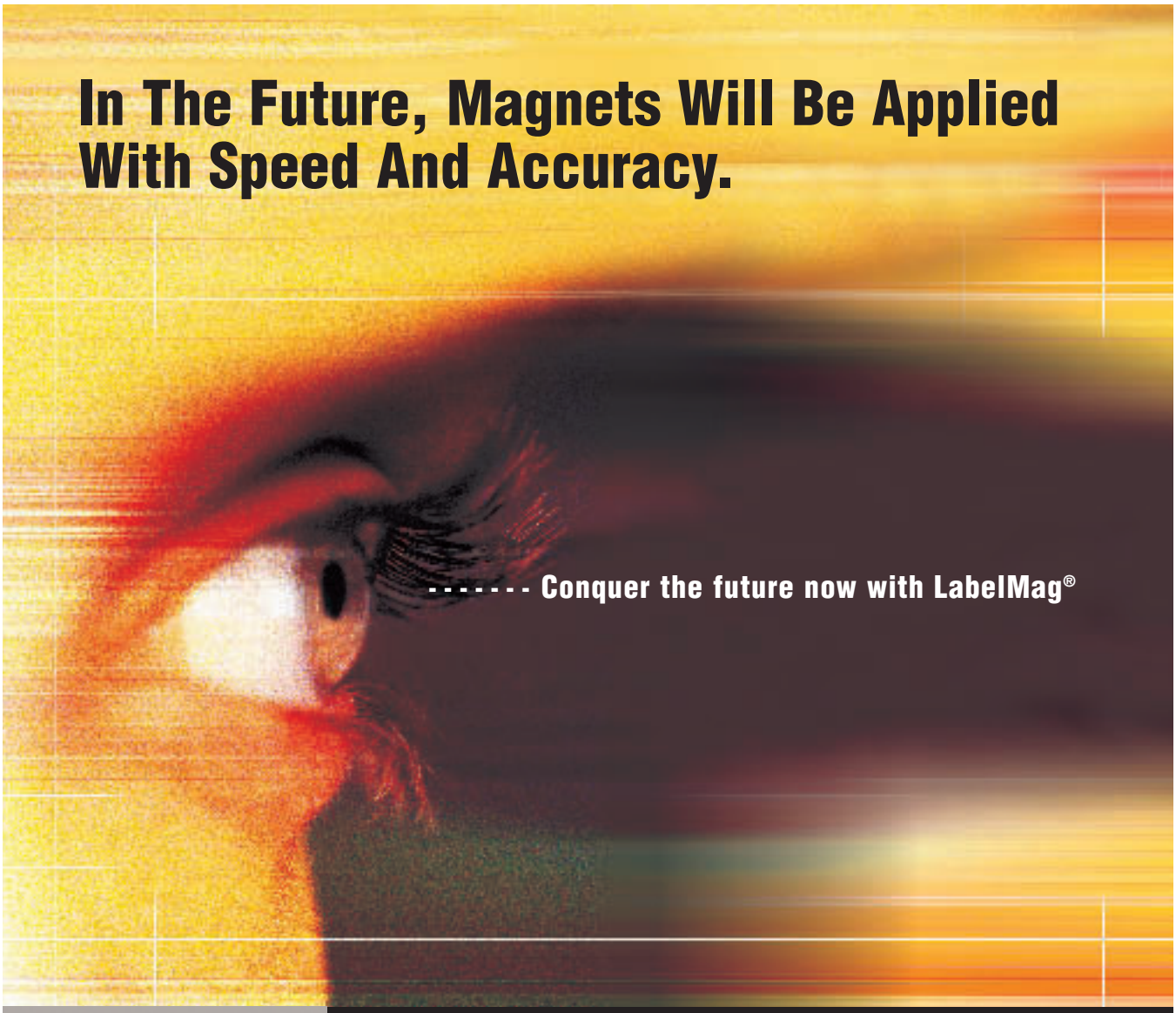

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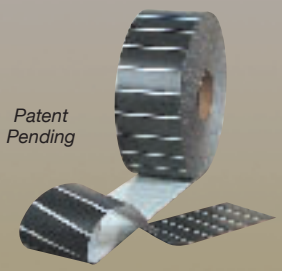

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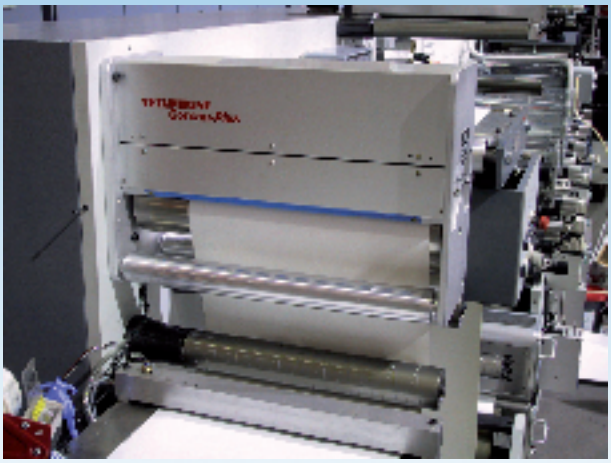

HP Indigo
DigiPrime 4431 coating

HP has announced the extension of the substrate range for its HP Indigo industrial digital presses through the availability of a new primer solution.

While HP Indigo presses can print on a wide range of paper, plastic, self-adhesive and filmic materials, those that are not optimized for digital printing during manufacture require coating prior to printing to ensure optimal ink adhesion. DigiPrime 4431 can bring materials into a substrate portfolio which was not previously suited for digital printing.

DigiPrime 4431 primer, from HP coating partner, Michelman, Inc., has a much longer shelf-life and a lower applied cost per square meter than earlier Topaz 10 coating. Michelman is a global manufacturer of coatings for the paper and film industries and an established supplier of primer solutions for HP Indigo digital printing applications. It is also water-based, has low VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) content and is imperviousness to humidity.

Vetaphone
New development for Corona station

Vetaphone has recently made another new development for its Corona stations for the label and narrow web market: a new special coating.

'We always pay a lot of attention to what our customers value in our products,' said Jan Eisby, sales manager at Vetaphone. 'Easy maintenance is essential in a hectic production hall; therefore we assign many resources in constant maintenance improving.'

The new special coating makes it easier to clean the Corona station, which will lighten the maintenance process in general. Jan Eisby added: 'The customers in the market for Corona equipment require the newest developments to improve the quality of their products.'

Stora Enso
Pressure-sensitive label paper for breweries

Stora Enso Global Speciality Papers has launched UniSet SA, a new wet strength pressure-sensitive label paper for breweries, UniSet SA is specifically designed and tested for optimal performance in all facets of label production, from printing, lamination, die-cutting and matrix stripping, to label applications using automated high-speed pressure-sensitive labeling equipment.

UniSet SA's enhanced paper characteristics support complex white and metallized beer label designs and its improved paper rigidity aids in the rapid and clean release of labels from liner substrates.

Schober USA
Vector line of die-cutting modules

Schober USA has introduced its new Vector line of die-cutting modules for the punching, perforating, or cross-cutting of various product patterns. This technology can be easily integrated into existing roll printing presses or converting machines. Base module includes servo drive, web register and shaft encoder for master machine. Working widths are available from 260 mm (10 1/8") to 1420 mm (55 3/8") with speeds to 500 m/min (1640 ft/min).

A heavy duty modular frame with two pairs of high precision bearing blocks ensures precise alignment. Dynamically balanced super-CR anvil cylinder is hardened and ground. Cutting rotor is dynamically balanced and features dual knives for higher production rates and greater precision. Drive includes register mark sensor and control system, rotary transducer for master machine, and servo-motor with gearbox and control unit. An operator panel is included along with a PC monitor and board. All electrical components are housed in the NEMA 4 cabinet.

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Manter leads the way with digital label collection

The success of HP Indigo's 'ws' press series has justified the decision of Spanish materials supplier Manter to develop a range of specialty, value-added digital papers. **James Quirk** reports

At last year's Labelexpo Europe in Brussels, three years of collaboration between Manter and HP Indigo came to fruition as Manter's HP-certified Digital Label Collection hit the market for the first time.

Manter, part of the Fedrigoni Group, has pioneered specialty paper for high-value products for more than 60 years, especially in the wine & spirit and gourmet food sectors. The move to supply papers, films and coatings for digital printing has not changed the company's core philosophy: 'Added value is not sustained merely by material aspects,' says Juan Gil, director of marketing and national sales. 'It is something more: a great level of detail that helps you to understand, in a subtle yet tangible way, the authenticity of the product. At Manter, we believe in this.'

The phenomenal success of HP's ws line of digital presses has created a market for companies such as Manter to fill: there are now enough digital presses in action around the world that specialty ranges of papers, films and coatings are more than justified.

'Manter is offering the market an opportunity to maintain profitability and differentiate its products with exclusive papers that are specially treated and certified for digital printing with HP Indigo technology,' says Christian Galí, product manager of the Digital Label Collection.

The tendency towards short runs in the printing market has accelerated in recent years. Nowadays, 66 per cent of jobs are for fewer than 50,000 units, and 35 per cent are for fewer than 25,000 units.

'People increasingly want specialty products and more variety,' says Pere Espelt, Manter's commercial director. 'Print runs are getting shorter, and printers are taking note. To distinguish yourself from the competition, you have to do something different.'

The specific characteristics of digital printing – short runs, variable data, personalization, and little preparation time – make it an ideal market for differentiation. 'Because of the flexibility that digital offers, it's a sector with a massive future,' says Espelt.

Manter's Digital Label Collection is essentially a tool to help its clients achieve this differentiation. On-line application of the digital coating means the company has greater autonomy and can assure competitive prices, while extending its digital treatment ability to any product in the company's portfolio. The company maintains a minimum stock at its production facility that allows it to supply converters with any product within 48 hours.

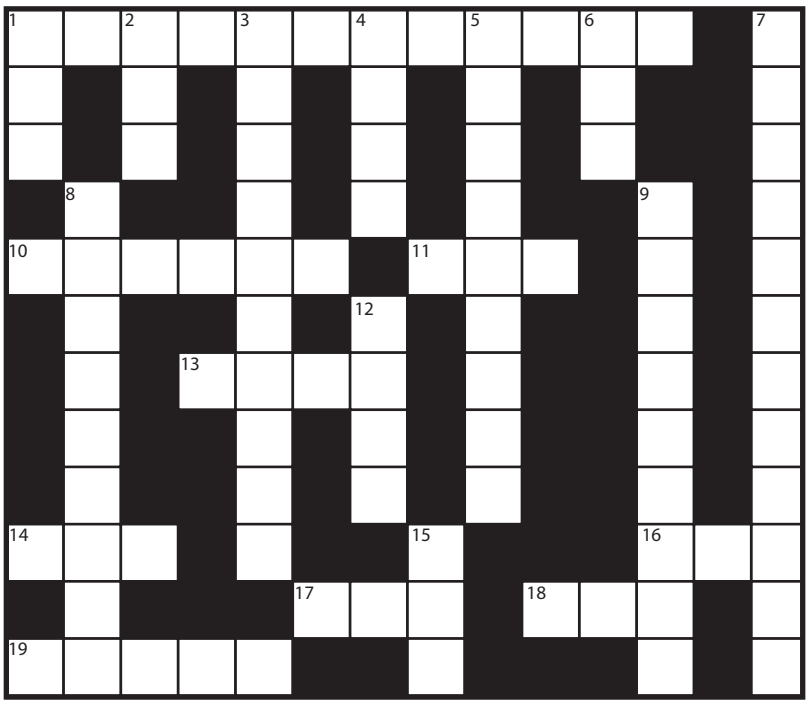
As in markets all around the world, digital printing is on the rise in Spain. 'Last year in Spain we installed four digital presses,' says Enric Martínez-Abarca, HP Indigo sales manager for Iberia. 'We think the 2006 figure will be around ten.

(L-r): Christian Galí, marketing department and product manager of the Digital Label Collection (below); Pere Espelt, Manter's commercial director; Enric Martínez-Abarca, Iberian sales manager, HP Indigo; and Juan Gil, director of marketing and national sales, Manter

'The advantage of digital technology is its productivity, its range of applications,' he continues. 'A run of less than 2,000 meters can produce at least two to three times more than a conventional press, for the simple reason that there are no start-up delays. All the material that is supplied by a manufacturer like Manter is productive – waste is marginal.

'This line of specialty products gives segments of the market which have never contemplated digital printing the ability to take that route. The Digital Label Collection perfectly adapts to labels of any high-value product such as wine or gourmet food.' ■

If you can't complete this crossword...



DOWN

1 The individual element in the halftone printing process (3).

2 The contact point between two driven rollers (3).

3 The image transferred from the printing plate or cylinder to the label substrate (10).

4 Occurs when the adhesive squeezes out from under the backing in a pressure-sensitive laminate (4).

5 The process of raising a design or image above the label surface using a set of matched male and female dies (9).

6 Estimated time of arrival (3).

7 A set of characters or bars in a bar code which represents both alphabetic and numeric characters as well as symbols (12).

8 The areas of a printed image which are nearest to white (9).

9 Metal roller or drum that is cooled internally with water (5 and 4).

12 Abbreviation commonly used for capital letters (4).

15 Label placed inside the mold before a plastic bottle is blown (3).

ACROSS

1 A photoelectric instrument that measures reflected or transmitted light on colors or printed products (12).

10 A term used to describe various printing defects, such as spots or imperfections in the printing (6).

11 International Organisation for Standards (3).

13 The administration in the US Department of Labor that ensures a safe and healthy workplace (4).

14 The acronym or abbreviation used for primary colors of light (3).

16 A method of reading (scanning) printed text copy with software capable of recognizing and converting the scanned images into an electronic equivalent (3).

17 Original equipment manufacturer (3).

18 Thickness measurement of thin materials used in some countries (3).

19 Material to be printed or converted. Also referred to as the substrate (5)

Flexible dies for Africa

Apple Die, one of the US' largest manufacturers of steel rule dies, is opening a plant in South Africa specializing in flexible dies. **James Quirk** reports

When a company seeks to expand its operations on an international scale, South Africa may not always be the first country that springs to mind. But Apple Die, one of the largest manufacturers of steel rule dies in the US, is opening a plant in Cape Town in conjunction with a local supplier – and the strategic location may help the company to serve even more markets.

Thanks to distribution deals with US-based Bunting Magnetics, and then Apple Die, The Engraving Company (TEC), based in Cape Town, has become the premier supplier of flexible dies in South Africa over the last two years. The success of its partnership with Apple led to Barbara Wambold, general manager of Apple Die, and Antron Hendricks, managing director of TEC, to decide that a new plant was justified.

The decision to go ahead was made at Labelexpo Europe in Brussels last year, and the official opening of Apple Die SA took place on October 12, with Barbara Wambold and Jim Ippolite, Apple Die president, both present.

'Four years ago TEC was manufacturing solid rotary cutting dies,' explains Hendricks. 'We wanted to become a one stop shop for the local market here in South Africa – a "total tooling solution" – but we lacked flexible dies and magnetic cylinders.

'We began to search frantically – and talked with Bunting Magnetics in the US. We suggested becoming their local agent in South Africa and they welcomed the idea. The partnership flourished.'

A mutual friend recommended Hendricks contact Apple Die. By this stage, TEC was looking to add flexible dies and magnetic cylinders to its product range – as rotary cutting dies and rotary foiling cylinders were all the company was supplying to the local market.

'We began to supply Apple's flexible dies and magnetic cylinders,' says Hendricks. 'Great turnaround times and low prices were refreshing and new in South Africa – and as a result we have become the leading supplier of flexible dies in the country.'

The success of the partnership prompted a visit from Wambold. 'After last's years Label Summit in Singapore, I flew to South Africa for a week,' she says. 'I visited customers with Antron, and could see the need in the market. We were supplying the market there through TEC, but delivery times could be a problem when customers needed the dies very quickly.'

The two met again in Brussels during Labelexpo Europe, and the decision was made to open the new plant.

'The idea was that TEC would source a certain amount of equipment locally,' she continues, 'and Apple would supply the rest. To be honest, I didn't think it would take off as well as it has, but Antron has a great knowledge of rotary dies. Their customer base and our die knowledge is a great combination.'

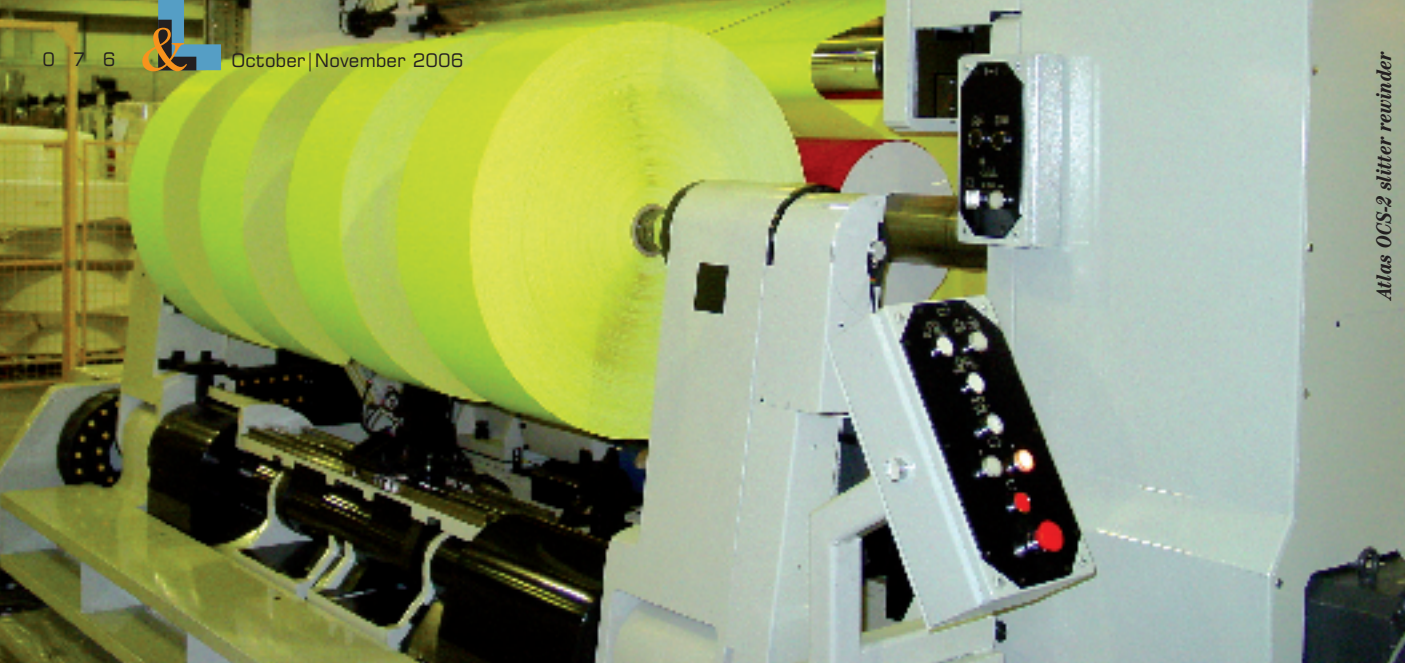
'Barbara made it happen,' says Henricks. 'We had established a good, trusting relationship, but she made the effort to come to South Africa to spend time with me and our clients.'

In June of this year, Dave Lancaster, flexible die plant manager of Apple Die, flew to South Africa to spend two weeks training the staff at TEC. 'By the end of his time with us, we were producing dies he was happy with,' says Hendricks.

The new plant will increase Apple Die and TEC's domination in the South African marketplace, as Hendricks explains: 'The biggest problem that South Africa has had is that only the bigger companies could take the flexible route. Conversion from solid to flexible dies is expensive – as magnetic cylinders are very costly. Previously they have only been available to companies with deep pockets, and the country's economical problems have also played their part.

'The new plant will revolutionize the local market. Now we can close the gap between South Africa and the rest of the world. Conversion from solid to flexible will be made easier because of the local source. I really believe in the potential for this plant.'

'The location of South Africa is key,' says Wambold. 'As well as supplying the local market and the rest of Africa, we are halfway in between the US and Asia. Long term, we will be able to supply the Asian market from here to, and save on transport costs. Fully 97.6 per cent of our die orders ship the same or next day, and customers can use our technology to track their order in real-time. This plant is the benchmark, and success could take us towards India.' ■



Atlas OCS-2 slitter rewinder

Ritrama slitter

The Ritrama Group has commissioned Atlas slitter rewinders for its labelstock production facilities in Italy and in Spain

Bobst Group has confirmed the successful commissioning of two 2 meter wide Atlas slitter rewinders for Ritrama Group at their leading edge labelstock production facilities in Italy and in Spain. An Atlas OCS-2 slitter rewinder was commissioned earlier this year at their factory in Barberá del Valles near Barcelona, following installation of the first machine during the autumn of 2005, at the brand new state-of-the-art Ritrama plant in Caponago, near Milan in northern Italy. This facility is now established as the Group's headquarters and includes fully automated slit reel handling, robotic palletising and packing systems for high volume output of all types of labelstock.

The Atlas OCS-2 slitter rewinder is one of the most successful 2 meter wide machines in the Atlas slitter portfolio, developed specifically for the labelstock industry. The design of the machine has also been recently enhanced in order to process all new types of filmic labelstock. However, it is very simple to operate, with differential rewind shafts, linear tracking of rewind carriages, easy access to the knives and rapid changeovers of slit widths. More than 60 Atlas OCS-2 slitter rewinders have been installed to date, in many locations throughout the world.

The Ritrama Group, with a total of 600 employees and seven production plants – three in Italy, two in the USA, one in the UK and one in Spain – is today the largest privately owned self-adhesive company in Europe. The company was founded in 1962 by Arnold Rink and is now managed by the second and third generations: Tomas Rink and his sons, Ricardo and Ronald.

The company runs twenty coating lines using emulsion, solvent based and hot melt adhesives on both filmic and paper substrates, from thin gauge sensitive films to heavier weight paper and board, on filmic or paper release liners.

The Atlas slitters are the first 2 meter wide machines to be installed at Ritrama and operate at speeds of up to 500m/min (1640ft/min). The machines feature automatic knife positioning and male blade cleaning systems. At the Barcelona facility, the OCS-2 is integrated with a fully automated slit reel unloading and handling system which provides very high volumes of production.

> "The robots are able to handle large finished rewind reels which can be individually labelled for customer identification"

In Caponago, robots control pick-and-place palletizing operations with automatic delivery of interleaves between the layers of palletised rolls. The robots are able to handle large finished rewind reels which can be individually labeled for customer identification.

The Atlas OCS-2 is a center surface type winder with rewind diameters up to 1150mm (45in) from parent rolls of up to 1600mm (63in) unwind diameter. It has automatic web tail cut-off and tape down and an automatic core loading system, for either 70 or 152mm (3in or 6in) ID cores.

'We are so pleased with the performance of both the Atlas slitter rewinders that I would recommend these machines to any labelstock manufacturer,' Ricardo Rink confirmed. 'There is no doubt that our recent increases in productivity and improvements to slit reel quality have been largely due to the technology provided by Atlas and the excellent performance of their machines.' ■

Success Begins with the Finish

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PLA: The future of plastic in a post-petroleum world

Can corn-based films ever replace petroleum plastics? **Sandra Boga** reports on the latest developments in PLA films and their application in the labels field

Hard to believe as it may seem, corn is already the basis for countless plastic products under the banner of Polylactide, or PLA. This promising corn-based polymer was invented to substitute the conventional petroleum-based plastics and usher in the era of biobased products.

The idea was initiated in 1997 by the joint venture of plastics giant Dow Chemical, and Cargill, an agricultural company. Cargill subsequently bought out Dow's interest in the project and renamed the company NatureWorks.

This product uses the sugar in corn known as dextrose, which is fermented and distilled into lactic acid, then transformed into pellets to become NatureWorks PLA. The entire corn-to-resin production process is claimed to use 68 per cent less fossil fuel than conventional plastics and once transformed into plastic will take about 45 days to fully biodegrade.

The product was first introduced in 2004 and recent research study shows that the market for PLA is expected to grow 10-15 per cent between 2005 and 2010.

A wide range of corn-based plastic products now exist. For example BIOTA spring water is, as its slogan states, the 'World's first Planet Friendly bottle'. BIOTA, based in the USA, uses NatureWorks PLA for both the bottles and their pressure-sensitive film labels. Last November Waitrose supermarket launched BIOTA's sister bottle, Belu Natural Mineral Water, which is the UK's first PLA-based bottle. Other companies who have taken to 'being green' are Del Monte, Coca-Cola, Newman's Own Organics and now Wal-Mart.

PLA can be formulated into shrink-sleeve, pressure sensitive

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"The inherent film properties of PLA, such as clarity, gloss and printability, can help package designers create labels with outstanding shelf presence"

Frankenfoods?
European consumers have strongly resisted genetically modified foodstuffs, and this has caused trade frictions between the Bush administration and the European Union. Some 30 per cent of US corn supply is genetically modified, which has left some potential PLA customers concerned about their products being tainted by the 'Frankenfoods' association. In reality, no GMO corn molecules actually end up in the PLA products.

or cut-and-stack labels, and according to Brian Glasbrenner, business development manager at NatureWorks, they are all high performance products.

'The inherent film properties of PLA, such as clarity, gloss and printability, can help package designers create labels with outstanding shelf presence,' says Glasbrenner.

In terms of surface adhesion the labels will readily accept standard coatings, inks and adhesives. 'The print surface accepts many ink formulations, providing excellent definition of graphics,' Glasbrenner adds. 'High clarity lets the product shine through for an attention-grabbing, "no label" look.'

For PLA shrink films, Glasbrenner comments, 'lower temperature shrink initiation means shrink performance is more predictable and fast label application is possible. It also means that food products are exposed to less heat during packaging, which can be an important advantage for temperature-sensitive foods like dairy products. '

David Zutler, BIOTA's chairman, agrees about the exceptional clarity and gloss. 'The clarity is beautiful and works as well as or even better than petroleum-based plastics.'

These nature-friendly labels are claimed to be just as adaptable as normal plastic; can cling tightly to any bottle shape and are able to extend to cover necks, caps and lids. Glasbrenner continues, 'PLA Cut-and-stack labels deliver better graphics, full water resistance and durability.'

SpectraGraphics was one of the first US label manufacturers to offer labels made from corn. An initial worry was that the PLA film had a shorter shelf life than conventional film, and must be used for printing within 90 days. But their primary concern was whether ink would adhere to the corn-base film.

VP Kevin Briggs recalls that at first, 'you could scratch the ink off the labels'. But soon they were able to find ink formulations to accommodate the labels. 'Few labeling companies have figured out how to print on corn-base film,' adds Briggs, 'but I perceive it as something that will keep growing.'

Other companies have made their own PLA-based film products, such as EcoVantage, a pressure-sensitive film manufactured by Green Bay Packaging, described by marketing manager Patricia Mulvey as 'a corn-based film which helps nourish the earth long after its shelf life'.

Earthfirst TDO shrink film is another product produced by Plastic Suppliers and is proving to be a success, as John Murray, sales manager, states, 'As a replacement for PETG, OPS and PVC in the shrink film market it is a true performer. The performance characteristics of the film have been spectacular. It has excellent clarity, good gloss, low haze and a shrink value of 75 per cent with a very receptive surface. It will change the shrink market as we see it today.'

Technical performance is one thing. What about PLA's much touted environmental credentials? Here, much confusion exists on the difference between 'biodegradable' and 'compostable'.

Plastic Suppliers' John Murray puts it like this: 'Sustainable and compostable are the terms that should be associated with the film, as biodegradable is something that most products can do over time. PLA is (environmentally) much better than petrochemicals as it is a sustainable product and is compostable, but only in industrial compost sites does it meet the criteria for the compostability.'

Murray is referring to the optimum heat and light conditions needed to decompose, which are clearly not found in your back yard. Worse, few consumers have access to controlled compost sites. The US only has 113, while in Europe investment in composting ranges from advanced nationwide programs in countries like Germany and Belgium, to countries where little effort has been made.

Nick Whatmoor, Belu Natural Mineral Water sales director, is optimistic about future plans in the UK: 'We are working on pilot programs to enable every council to soon begin taking this bio-bottle,' he says – but the fact remains that with the low number of compost sites available, bio-plastic runs the risk of being dumped in landfill sites or recycling bins, where it will lack the conditions needed to decompose properly.

Recycling could be a solution, but as David Zutler of BIOTA points out, 'In the US out of 120 billion bottles, 95 billion end up on landfill sites.'

There are alternative reclamation methods on the horizon. Hydrolysis, for example, is a useful form of chemical recycling.

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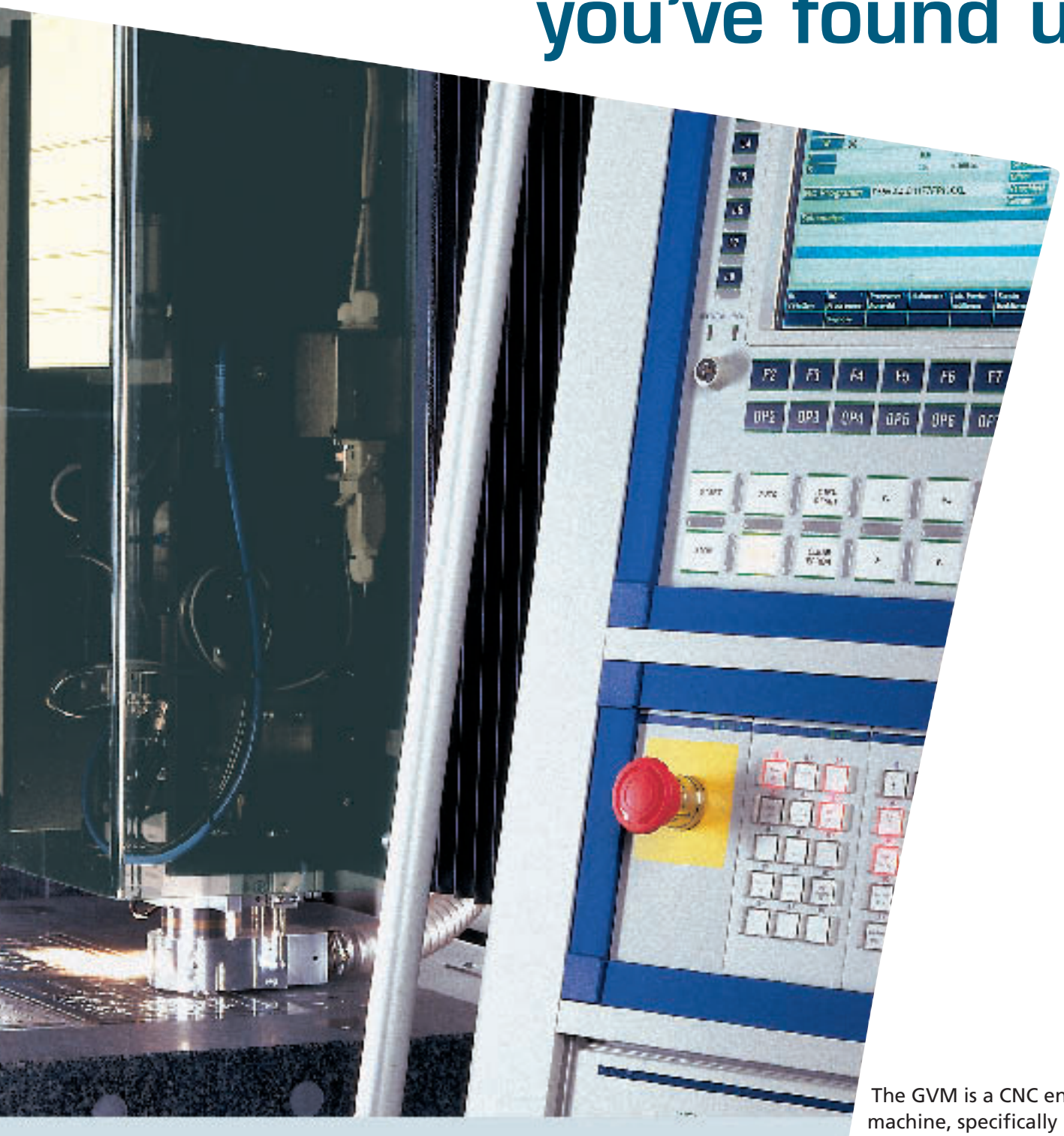

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"Petroleum prices are escalating, there's instability in the Middle East and we have no domestic supply. PLA price has been coming down over time, while petroleum-based products have been increasing"

Zutler outlines the process: 'This takes place in a tank where a heated vat of liquid allows the PLA plastic to break down into lactic acid, which can then be re-used and burned as a renewable energy source. It burns clean and there's no black smoke. Plus since there are not as many composting sites as there should be, we would rather help build more hydrolyzing sites.'

Another worry regarding cornstarch plastic is the cost. PLA is said to be 40 per cent more expensive than petroleum-based plastic.

However, its advocates still view the product in a positive light. 'It is cost effective,' claims Murray of Plastic Suppliers, 'especially with the current state of petrochemicals.'

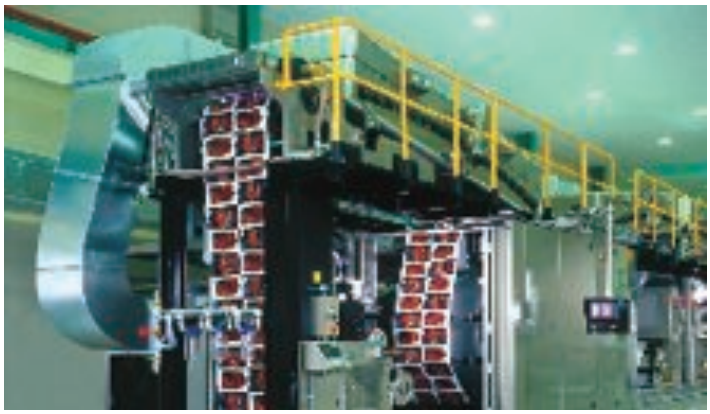
Patricia Mulvey of Green Bay Packaging expands, 'Petroleum prices are escalating, there's instability in the Middle East and we have no domestic supply. PLA price has been coming down over time, while petroleum-based products have been increasing.' The general consensus is that for the time being this 'eco-friendly' manufacturing method is costly, but that with consumer interest increasing, prices look set to drop. 'It does cost a little more, but the planet is worth it,' says David Zutler of BIOTA.

For retailers PLA is an appealing product since it has a 'Halo' effect in attracting ethical and health-conscious consumers. The appeal lies in the idea of packaging from nature, which is clearly illustrated in their marketing slogans: 'BIOTA is committed to Changing the World One Bottle at a Time' (BIOTA), 'We milk the cows and grow the bottles' (Iowa Dairy co-op).

Kevin Briggs of SpectraGraphics says his company has capitalized on these same trends: 'It's expanding our niche into the organic food industry and opened doors to a lot of customers.'

Last year Wal-Mart also jumped onto the sustainable packaging bandwagon, calculating that corn-based packaging could reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by more than 11 million lb as well as cutting its petro-chemicals costs. The world's largest retail company has the potential power to mandate packaging change in the consumer product world.

And, if the plastic performs well, increases market revenue and is at the same time environmentally friendly then why not use it? As Peter Meehan CEO of Newman's Own Organics' has quite rightly said, 'No one has gone to war over corn!' ■



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Pepsico embraces Ko-Pack sleeves

Website http://www.ko-pack.com/

Ko-Pack International is claiming a breakthrough after developing six 'environmentally-friendly' shrink-sleeves and labels, printed both sides in full colour for PET bottle applications.

According to a survey conducted in May 2005, the annual Japanese sales of PET bottled water has reached 16,685M bottles, a figure set to increase in the years to come.

In order to cope with this growth in demand for PET bottles, Government standards require that consumers must be made aware of the need for recycling - a need which requires the film label to be separated from the bottle. Up to now, this has not been easily achieved. The difficulty lies in who should be responsible for making this separation possible: the consumer, the bottler or the label converter. This has remained a major barrier to achieving domestic recycling targets.

This problem has been specifically addressed by Ko-Pack's Yamagata label converting operation, which has combined flexo press developments with their expertise in printing inks and filmic substrates to produce a range of innovative promotional both-sides printed products, specifically for users of PET bottles.

"It is not currently possible for gravure presses to encompass in-line converting functions such as slitting, Sleeve forming and perforating"

The solutions are now being used by leading international soft-drinks manufacturers.

Gravure printing has traditionally been the dominant method commercially available for printing shrink-sleeves, a print process not suited to both sides printing of shrink-sleeve films. Additionally, it is not currently possible for gravure presses to encompass in-line converting functions such as slitting, sleeve forming and perforating - all achievable with Ko-Pack's CI D flexo presses.

Each of the six products include an incentive for the consumer to remove the sleeve label from the bottle. Details of special promotions collectable stickers and games are printed on the reverse side to encourage the consumer to separate label from bottle. Additionally from the point of view of the drinks manufacturer/bottler, twice the amount of space is available for product and market promotions, encompassing special offers, games utilising 'scratch-off ' patches and unique variable data.

One of the first imitational companies to use the Ko-Sleeve products is Pepsico, following assessment by the company's New York headquarters. Since February 2005, Ko-Pack has delivered both-sides printed 'window' labels to Pepsico locations in Poland Spain, Mexico, Turkey, America, Russia and Italy. These labels carry special campaign designs based on the sales promotional objectives of each country.

Explaining the thinking behind the concept, Jun Kobayashi, chairman of Ko-Pack International, said: 'It all began several years ago, when I questioned the reason for only printing on one side of PET bottle labels. I realized that by changing to both-sides printing there would be very significant benefits. Drinks manufacturers would immediately double the space available for product information and national/International promotions,

without incurring additional film costs and consumers would be presented with an incentive to remove the labels and so directly contribute to achieving recycling targets.'

The various types of product in the Ko-Sleeve range can all be printed in up to 6-colours on either side, plus additional features:

- The wrap-around 'window' label is multi-layered with the reverse side incorporating removable stickers
- 'scratch-off' games can be produced on the reverse of wrap-around labels and shrink-sleeves
- lottery games featuring unique variable data can also be shown on the reverse of labels and sleeves
- novelty lens label which utilizes the magnifying concept of viewing an image through water
- chameleon label again utilises the effect of colours of the bottle contents on the label or sleeve design

Jun Kobayashi continued, ' Pepsico have chosen the 'window' label for national product promotions featuring collectable stickers of famous sports people, as well as seasonal Christmas stickers. ' Pepsico has approximately 250 bottlers in over 100 countries. Almost 150 of these are directly accountable to Pepsico and it is expected that nearly all will adopt the 'window' label in future marketing campaigns.

'It is very rare that labels are exported to overseas markets from Japan,' continued Jun Kobayashi. 'I take great personal pride in Ko-pack's capability of being able to supply them to Pepsico bottlers worldwide. The soft-drinks market is very competitive and manufacturers will always continue to look for new and inventive ways to encourage and maintain customers. Double-side flexo printing provides an opportunity to do this and as such will rapidly move into those areas previously served by single-side gravure printing.'

With gravure currently under pressure in Japan from legislation on solvent emissions, flexo is also seen as a more environmentally friendly process.

Ko - Pack has received in 2005 two prizes 'WORLDSTAR' and 'Good Packaging' for the PET bottle Label. 'WORLDSTAR' is the award for packaging excellence, which was awarded by the World Packaging Organization. 'Good Packaging' is an award for a beverage packaging category awarded by the Japan Packaging Institute. ■

"It is very rare that labels are exported to overseas markets from Japan. I take great personal pride in Ko-Pack's capability of being able to supply them to Pepsico bottlers worldwide"

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Ready for REACH?

The chemical and printing industries fought hard to amend the EU's REACH chemicals directive. But as **Sandra Boga** reports, the effects of the legislation could be devastating for European suppliers of inks, coatings and adhesives

After five years of debate and lobbying from the chemicals and printing industries, the final draft of the European Union's Registration, Evaluation and Authorization of Chemicals (REACH) legislation is due to be delivered this month, with implementation to follow next year.

As the legislation currently stands, the chemical industry will have formally to register around 30,000 commercial substances, with detailed accounts of properties, potential hazards and how they are tackled. This forms part of a proposed 11-year program drafted by the European Commission to deal with 'human health and environmental concerns'. The potential cost to the chemicals sector looks set to reach 8.5 billion euros over 15 years.

'REACH is obviously going to be a major factor as regards to the whole of the chemical industry in the future, and inks are affected as part of this industry,' says Niklas Olsson, global brand manager at XSYS Print Solutions.

Although 'public health' concerns are one factor in the European Commission's proposals, a less remarked motivation is to increase the competitiveness of Europe's chemical industries. The Commission believes that the current regime of sporadic testing of new chemicals stifles innovation, as manufacturers opt to use cheaper, older and more 'user friendly' chemicals. They hope REACH will force European manufacturers to invest in R&D to find better alternatives to existing products, and thus become more globally competitive.

But Paul W. Verspoor of the Sitmae Consultancy estimates that at least 10 per cent of chemicals will disappear from the market, and this could have a major effect on the ink, varnish and adhesives sectors. 'Inks, varnishes and adhesives often contain between 20 and 40 different substances,' says Verspoor. 'With a deleselection rate of over 10 per cent the substantial proportion of these products will need to be reformulated and re-introduced in the end-user production processes.'

The Commission concedes the likelihood that 'some substances will not be registered because manufacturers will not consider it worthwhile to pay the cost of registration.' However, the Commission finds it 'highly unlikely' that essential chemicals will disappear without being substituted.

Niklas Olsson of XSYS is not so sure. 'A number of raw materials will either be withdrawn completely or increase markedly in price in order to take account of the costs involved in carrying out the detailed registration requirements. The former will lead to a heavy cost burden on the industry in terms of reformulation.'

Specialty products are likely to suffer the most, and these include flexible packaging inks, screen printing inks, specialty adhesives and products used in security printing.

'The situation still exists where printed articles will be able to be imported into the Member States from non-EU countries using raw materials not available to ink-makers in Europe, since they will not have been registered,' points out Niklas Olsson. 'This puts the European printing industry, and therefore the ink makers, at a severe technical and commercial disadvantage.'

Two industry groupings were formed to lobby for amendments: the CEPE, representing European paint, printing ink and artists' colors companies, and Chemi Platform, which includes AFERA (The European Association for the Self Adhesive Tape Industry), FINAT (self adhesive labels), FPE (flexible packaging) and Integraf (general printing).

Their efforts had some success in reducing the administrative burdens imposed by the first draft of REACH. Amendments introduced by the Council of Ministers included a single pre-registration phase for substances, and assessing the registration obligation for small volumes according to potential risk. The FPE worked with the Commission on research which revealed the

Niklas Olsson, global brand manager, Xsys Print Solutions

"There should be no registration of already regulated substances, better definition of exposure categories and stronger orientation of data requirements"

effects of REACH on end user industries.

But although some progress was made, the European Parliament complicated matters by insisting on stronger authorization procedures.

Christof Bachmair, senior manager at Wacker Chemie AG, says: 'By no means must the authorization procedure be further tightened. The goal must be the safe use of substances – not substitution at any cost.' Bachmair says that the current provisions put EU manufacturers at a 'considerable disadvantage'.

FINAT's Arianne Vijge concurs that despite a reduced administrative burden over the first draft, additional costs due to re-formulation will still be apparent.

Christof Bachmair concludes: 'Major progress has been made in terms of practicality and cost efficiency…(but) in our opinion several key issues are still unresolved. There should be no registration of already regulated substances, better definition of exposure categories and stronger orientation of data requirements.'

At this stage there seems very little possibility of significant amendment to REACH, and the chemical industry is already taking preparatory measures.

'We are currently updating our database for substances and formulations not extensively analyzed,' says Bachmair. The British Coatings Federation is preparing guidance for members on the initial steps that should be taken to prepare for REACH and CEPE is developing use categories and exposure scenarios for coatings and inks manufactures and their end users.

What are the likely long-term effects of REACH? Firstly, it will impose a considerable burden in terms of cost, administration and reformulation. 'The main concern is that there will be significant internal costs in the resource needed to carry out the various initial demands – such as environmental impact assessments on a downstream user,' says Niklas Olsson. 'There is still the possibility of an inconsistent approach in terms of disclosed toxicology between suppliers of similar raw materials and as yet there is no defined means of ensuring commonality.'

Paul W Verspoor of the Sitmae Consultancy fears that REACH will oblige the users of chemicals to apply 'over-restrictive and non-workable safety measures' in the workplace, to comply with expensive storage requirements, and to live with 'exaggerated new environmental requirements'.

Leon Rodenburg of Eastman Chemical Company goes further in stating that the entire REACH process is unnecessary, 'The European chemical market is among the safest and one of the most highly regulated in the world,' argues Rodenburg. 'The industry strongly supports the human health and environmental protection goals…but we believe the current-risk based approach is far more timely, focused and balanced.'

One controversial side effect of the new regulations could be an increase in animal testing. 'For higher volumes, animal testing may be necessary,' concedes the EU Commission in a press release.

The stark fact is that the chemical and printing industries will have to face the upcoming challenges of REACH head-on. 'We have to accept that the legislation will come into force next year, and therefore we need to be pro-active in getting ready for the change,' concluded Niklas Olsson of XSYS. ■

Back from the brink

Two years ago, Top Flight Andina S.A. was on the point of closing down. So how did the company turn itself into one of the most important label printers in Colombia? **James Quirk** reports

Two years ago, TOPASA, a Colombian subsidiary of Top Flight Corporation, was on the brink of closing down. Poor management and a disgruntled work force had seen profits plummet and customers driven away.

It hadn't always been this way, however. TOPASA was founded in 1974 and for a long time was a successful business. It was the first company in Colombia to have flexo presses, and also had offset and screen capabilities. TOPASA was labeling bananas exported to the US and dominated the tag market for the apparel industry.

In the 1980s, the company acquired two new Top Flight-made five-color presses with three die cutting stations and the revolutionary UV curing system. TOPASA began to move its customers from offset presses to the new flexo technology.

But when the competition began to move into the country in the 1990s, things started to go wrong. In less than a decade, the company lost three million dollars in equity and a huge warehouse worth 600 thousand dollars to a supplier. Its liabilities amounted to two and a half million dollars. Neither the banks, the customers, nor the employees had confidence in the recovery of the company. TOPASA was in deep trouble.

TOPASA was owned by Top Flight Corporation and Vincente Ferrer, a respected entrepreneur. This partnership also owned ARclad, the biggest label stock manufacturer in the country, and they turned to Luis Carlos Lopez, who was working for a distributor of ARclad, to reverse TOPASA's fortunes. 'I had been working successfully with them for more than 20 years, and had the knowledge and background in label stock and printing,' explains Lopez.

> "If the workers don't know what is happening, it's like watching a game of soccer with no score – senseless"

Lopez immediately targeted two areas for improvement – organization and personnel. 'The first thing that had to be done was to get rid of the bureaucracy, so we eliminated about 30 unnecessary jobs. We promoted the best workers and fired the ones that were here because they had known one of the managers, but didn't know anything about printing.'

Crucially, Lopez and his team began to rebuild relationships with the disenchanted employees. 'It was the most important thing,' Lopez maintains. 'We started to work with the people. After a company has been in trouble for so long, it is hard for the workers to believe that everything is suddenly resolved. We talked them into helping us take the company into the black.

'We treated them right. We began to give them snacks twice a day, for example, and talked to every individual to explain to them what we were doing. To me, if the workers don't know what is happening, it's like watching a game of soccer with no score – senseless.'

Luis Carlos Lopez (left) with his son Carlos Andres Lopez: 'He is the visionary'

"It is not the big fish that eats the small; it is the fast that eats the slow. We want to become the fastest label converter in the world"

It was also necessary to streamline the company's production and operations: 'We implemented an inventory control system to recover all the stock that had been sitting there for years, and reduced it by 400 per cent. We also started a disciplined maintenance program for our presses and built a production planning system. This pushed our on-time delivery rates up to almost 80 per cent, and we are working on reaching 100 per cent.'

These strategies have reversed TOPASA's fortunes, and the company's growth is now at around 15 per cent per year. 'We are also making 15 per cent in net profit per year,' says Lopez, 'and I believe we are in the top three label manufacturers in Colombia. The only obstacle we still face is the lack of cash flow due to the payments we make to cover the company's old liabilities. But we are on our way to the top, and fast.'

The Latin American label market is growing quickly. A recent survey conducted by Tarsus Exhibitions and Publishing, organizers of Label Summit Latin America, and Conversión magazine, suggests that it can anticipate growth of between ten and 16 per cent in 2007, double that of the global average yearly growth of five to seven per cent.

In Colombia, TOPASA must compete with global companies like Paxar and TANN who have bases in the country, as well as successful local manufacturers. 'Paxar has most of the Colombian label market of thermal transfer labels and wax ribbons,' says Lopez. 'TANN is another great label manufacturer; they have deep pockets but are very smart when it comes to investing in new technology. I'm honored to have them as my number one competitor.'

'The Colombian label market is very developed due to multinationals like Unilever and Procter & Gamble, among others, who have established operations here,' continues Lopez. 'These companies demand great quality, competitive prices and on-time delivery, which force the label companies to be at the cutting-edge of technology. But our company has an advantage over the larger ones, because we can make fast decisions in real time, whereas any change the big multinationals make has to be approved, which might take months.'

'Colombia is not as advanced as Mexico or Brazil,' he continues, 'but we are ahead of Venezuela, Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia. We are also an export industry, due to our short distance from the US, so most companies export labels to the States. America loves good quality and cheap labor.'

The survey also highlighted what Latin American label converters regard as the main opportunities for product diversification and business growth in the future. The top two responses, digital printing and security printing, papers and inks, both fit in to TOPASA's portfolio.

TOPASA decided to move into digital in 2005. 'It was my son who insisted we went digital – he is the visionary,' says Lopez. 'The Colombian label market is fast evolving into a medium to short run market. We have only 40 million people here and the segmentations of the market are a reality. We decided we needed to show our customers that the company had changed, and demonstrate a bit of muscle, so we came up with a project to acquire an HP Indigo press. After six months of studies, cost analysis, and all kinds of marketing research, we bought it in February of this year.

'The press attracted jobs immediately. However, I believe that the current finishing systems available in the market are not suitable for the short run market: we

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"The outlook is bright for TOPASA. Rescued from the brink of closing down, the company now has a consistently rising turnover"

have to print over 70 meters on top of production due to waste in the finishing process. This created a huge downfall for the local market, because if we charge our customers for the waste we will end up charging the same as we would in conventional flexo. Therefore, we have been working with very low margins on the digital press.

'There is another side to this coin, however. The press gave us prestige among our customers, which helped us land the single biggest account in the country, Terpel, despite the fact that no labels will be printed with the Indigo press for this customer.' Terpel is the biggest motor oil manufacturer in Colombia, and, in terms of sales, the fourth biggest company in the country. Other key customers of TOPASA include Castrol Colombia, the BP company for the country, and Inveralimenticias, one of the biggest food conglomerates in Latin America with plants all over the continent. 'You can see their products with our labels in more than 80 countries around the world,' says Lopez.

The move into security labels is a reflection on the local market: 'Colombia is a country with all the counterfeiting in the world,' says Lopez, 'so security labels are an interesting business approach. We started developing a new security label with ARclad, our number one label stock supplier. The label has the same concept as the famous VOID substrate, where you peal the label and the words VOID would appear – our product is similar, though we can make it with any name, brand, or warning message that the customer wants.'

The outlook is bright for TOPASA. Rescued from the brink of closing down, the company now has a consistently rising turnover and, in the form of Carlos Andres Lopez, son of Luis Carlos, an ambitious future: 'My father and I have been working day and night for two years to get here,' he says. 'We want TOPASA to sell more than labels: we want to sell a concept, which will be the reason for our growth and why we are heading towards being the number one company in Colombia and the Americas. That concept is quality and on-time fast delivery. It is not the big fish that eats the small; it is the fast that eats the slow. And we want to become the fastest label converter in the world.'■

News in brief

Kodak and Dantex partner on flexo CTP

Kodak and Dantex have formed a strategic partnership which combines their expertise in flexographic computer-to-plate (fCTP) technology.

Kodak will badge its Thermoflex fCTP plate-making system in the Dantex livery and Dantex will bundle Toray's Torelief Precision digital plates. The joint venture is designed to provide a proven digital 'package' for end-users, although the Precision digital plates will work on any fCTP system. The Torelief Precision digital plates are capable of producing a screen range of 1-95 per cent at 200dpi.

Flexibles converter enters label market

US flexible packaging converter Prime Graphics has expanded its capabilities into shrink sleeve label technology.

'Since entering the flexible packaging industry, we have significantly grown our present markets, primarily beverage, food, personal care, medical and household consumer product companies,' says Bill Hunter, president of Prime Graphics. 'Based on this success, we have elected to enhance our position in the marketplace with shrink sleeves – one of the fastest growing segments of the flexible packaging industry.'

Flexible food packaging is more than a $12 billion industry in North America with shrink sleeve labels growing at a rate of up to 18 per cent per year.

Stork announces dispensing MBO

The Stork Prints Group has announced a management buyout of its dispensing activities.

The new company, GSE B.V., is taking over all existing Stork Prints sales, maintenance and work in progress agreements as well as all staff directly involved in the dispensing activities. Stork Prints will act as agent for the GSE B.V. dispensing products in the textile printing market, making use of its global distribution network.

Mr Anne Lourens, Mr Henk Hummelink and Mr Maarten Hummelen, involved with the business since its inception with Stork Prints, are sharing ownership of the new company and are determined that existing customers should experience no interruption to service or product supply.

Management changes within the existing team will see Anne Lourens assume the role of managing director. Maarten Hummelen moves to become marketing director and Henk Hummelink has been appointed as finance director.

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Laser coding revolution

National Label of Pennsylvania has revolutionized its coding and marking business, with a low-powered laser solution from Datalase.. **Katy Wight** reports

Conventional lasers are an established method of applying variable data to products, but a new wave of laser technology is reinventing the coding market and it's not just end users who will benefit. Datalase is a materials science company specializing in color change chemistry technology, based in Cheshire, UK, and its PackMark solution is giving label converters new application possibilities and the chance for a bigger slice of the variable data value chain.

Datalase opened an office in Atlanta this year and has had significant interest in the PackMark technology from converters in North America. The company has worked with four major label printing operations, that were looking for an alternative to inkjet and thermal transfer coding.

'The early applications in the US include the pharmaceutical market, food and beverage,' explains Kevin Murray of Datalase. 'In the pharmaceutical industry it is all about patient safety and anti-counterfeiting and the drive towards this new technology is coming from regulatory bodies like the FDA. They want improved quality of information on pharma products for track and trace applications. The incumbent methods of date and batch coding – inkjet and thermal transfer – do not have a high enough resolution and the images do not look as clear and crisp as a laser image.'

The laser used in the PackMark solution can achieve a very high resolution due to its small 'spot size' (over 600 dpi). The codes and images produced are therefore very sharp and easy to interpret. The laser has the added benefits of being able to work very quickly, it requires no consumables, is very low

"You can mark through a film, so that the marking is under the laminate and the pharma industry is using this on leaflet labels in some cases"

maintenance and clean. End users are buying the lasers and sourcing the laser-accepting label stock from label printers who are able to print the coating on to labels with a flexo press. Some converters have bought lasers themselves and are coding and dating labels as an extra service to customers.

'In the pharmaceutical market, there is an indelible tamper-evident solution that is becoming a big success,' adds Murray. 'You can mark through a film, so that the marking is under the laminate and the pharma industry is using this on leaflet labels in some cases. The mark is overt, but it is tamper-resistant and permanent. You can't change what is there without damaging it.'

Interest in the Datalase solution from the food industry is again driven by safety standards. End users want to see high quality codes that they can trust. The beverage industry began to move away from the standard coding techniques to laser ablation about five years ago – for example the Budweiser 'born on' date. With high speed bottling lines running at 1,000 bottles per minute and higher, the established coding methods just couldn't keep up and laser ablation was the only acceptable high speed process. But when the breweries began to move from paper to film labels, they started to have difficulties with the ablating power of the laser.

'Datalase uses a much lower-powered laser that provides a good contrast, without damaging the label material. We have an application in Europe with a major beverage end user who is using PackMark on film labels. The CO2 laser can mark 1,000 characters that are 2-3mm high, per second. There are few applications that Datalase cannot meet for speed. Furthermore the latest generation of lasers can now run speeds up to 1500 characters per second,' says Murray.

The PackMark coating is licensed to global ink manufacturers such as Sun Chemical, Siegwerk (formerly SICPA), Xsys and RadCure. Each of these organizations is supplying Datalase 'inks' in UV flexo, water-based, solvent and offset formulations. The converter just needs to dedicate a separate station on press for coating patches onto the labels. Black or grayscale Datalase images are currently available, but colors are in development.

National Label of Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania, began using the Datalase technology with its pharma customers, but has found other applications in security printing and the health and beauty market.

'We produce a large quantity of labels which are imprinted by the pharmaceutical industry with expiration dates and lot number information,' explains Neil Sellars, Director of Product Development & Marketing at National Label. 'We spent a few years looking for a coding that was laser reactive through a laminate. We produce many multi-panel labels and they need a laminate over the top. Lasers are very popular in the pharmaceutical industry because of the speed, cleanliness and control of the image, but we couldn't laser ablate through the laminate, as the ink would have to be on top of the laminate in order to function. Hot stamping

is also popular, but this needs a lot of maintenance and the numbers can rub off, again because they are on the surface of the laminate. With PackMark, there is no way that the image can be scratched off, and you can actually peel off the laminate, and the DataLase number will still be in tact.

'In fact, we recently used the technology in a security gaming piece. We used the ink to create an image area and put a serial number and/or an alphanumeric code in the space. We then laminated it to clear films with a fugitive adhesive and fired through the laminate. You couldn't mess with the number or scratch it off, it was completely tamper-proof.'

Sellars also explains that Datalase has an aesthetic advantage over conventional coding lasers, which use a dark block of ink to ablate. Datalase gives you a positive image. The company has successfully moved the technology over to its OTC (over-the-counter) drug customers and is now seeing a further transfer across to the health and beauty industry, which makes up 60 percent of National Label's sales. The company uses both flexo and screen to add the Datalase ink to substrates, and after buying a laser to monitor quality control, it now applies variable data such as sequential numbers for customers.

'This technology is much faster than conventional labels for high speed pharma,' explains Sellars. 'There are also environmental benefits, as the process doesn't produce the same kind of by-products and you don't have to exhaust any fumes. Pharmaceutical companies do not want there to be any possible contaminants. We have had a very positive response from our customers and some are changing lots of their SKUs across to the process. But the pharma industry is typically slow to react to changes because they require extensive approvals.

'It is a great system and a great product. I think it has been the most notable breakthrough in imprinting in the last decade. There have been improvements in inkjet and lasers, but not a step change like this.'

Datalase has built customized labs and demo facilities at its corporate headquarters in Widnes, in the UK and has recently opened a demo centre in Atlanta. It invites converters who would like to come and test its full complement of laser application solutions. ■

New applications

'An interesting new market that we are looking at is "late pack customization",' explains Kevin Murray of Datalase. 'Ingredient panels, multi-language, promotions – when these require changing or are out-of-date, brand owners have got to go back through the supply chain. They would love to have an online solution to make these changes quickly. Traditional processes like inkjet don't achieve the necessary quality and true digital print is too expensive for production lines. You need something hi-res and high-speed.'

This solution could enable end users to keep inventory down and shorten their time to market. The company has also spent a large amount of time developing its CaseMark solution, which would completely replace the logistic labels added to cases and boxes as they leave their point of departure. The end user would buy a case which already has a patch of Datalase ink added – or a 'vitual label' as the company calls it – and information such as barcodes, batch numbers and logos could be added directly on the tertiary packaging as it leaves the plant. The company claims that this can amount to significant saving for the end user, who no longer has to pay for the labelstock, thermal printheads and TT ribbons.

Gilmour & Dean to take dedicated UV press with double coaters

Scottish label printer Gilmour & Dean Ltd is to take delivery of a Heidelberg Speedmaster CD 74-6+LYLX-F in December. The new press will be UV dedicated and will come fitted with Prinect ImageControl spectrophotometry which combined with Prepress Interface will enable full closed loop colour control.

The six color press with double coaters, towers and interdeck UV drying plus double extended delivery replaces two older SM74s.

'We have calculated that owing to advances in technology and machine operating speeds since our last acquisition, combined with the introduction of a selective shift operating pattern, we are looking to substantially increase our throughput,' says Andrew Rankine, business improvement manager. 'This upgrade to our printing controls and flexibility will go a long way towards helping us maintain the stringent quality standards we and our customers in the wines and spirits industry expect and also offers opportunities of development into other related products.'

Gilmour & Dean has extended its services beyond high value added labels to include whisky tubes and box wraps as well as an ever increasing range of other related promotional work. The Speedmaster CD 74 can run a wide range of materials up to 0.8mm thick and the sheet guidance with the AirTransfer system mean stocks are transported at speed in a safe, no contact, mark-free manner through to the press delivery.

Gilmour & Dean's work with the wines and spirits industry means it is more often producing labels with a traditional or antique look using bespoke colors to create individual effects. The double coater on the new press will enable the company to offer contrasting varnish effects as well as improved metallics and other applications they are intent on developing.

An increase in the use of metallic and plastic substrates has prompted the Scottish label specialist to opt for a dedicated UV press to complement its existing UV and conventional facility, all inks being supplied by Sun Chemical.

With two Prinect workflow modules in place, Prepress Interface and ImageControl on-press spectrophotometry, the company will not only be able to measure and keep accurate control of colour within a set job but also from job to job, a feature which is especially important for point of sale products and where there is a requirement for repeat continuity as there is at Gilmour & Dean.

'This connectivity together with information retention enables a great deal of valuable time saving for press preparation,' says Mr Rankine. 'That time saved goes into production.'

The press will be installed at the end of 2006 and as well as on site training, selected operators will be going to Heidelberg in Germany to receive hands on training. ■

Wal-Mart launches packaging reduction plan

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. has announced plans to measure its 60,000 worldwide suppliers on their ability to develop packaging and conserve natural resources. This initiative, scheduled to begin in 2008, is projected to reduce overall packaging by five per cent. The announcement came at the conclusion of the Clinton Global Initiative in New York City.

In addition to preventing millions of pounds of trash from reaching landfills, the initiative is projected to save 667,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. This is equal to taking 213,000 trucks off the road annually, and saving 323,800 tons of coal and 66.7 million gallons of diesel fuel from being burned. This initiative will also create $10.98 billion in savings, just from a five per cent reduction in ten per cent of the global packaging industry. Wal-Mart alone is poised to save $3.4 billion.

'Packaging is where consumers and suppliers come together and can have a real impact both on business efficiency and environmental stewardship,' said Wal-Mart CEO H. Lee Scott. 'Even small changes to packaging have a significant ripple effect. Improved packaging means less waste, fewer materials used, and savings on transportation, manufacturing, shipping and storage.'

On November 1, 2006, Wal-Mart will introduce a packaging scorecard to more than 2,000 private label suppliers. This is a tool that will allow Wal-Mart buyers to have all the information about packaging alternatives or more sustainable packaging materials in one place, allowing them to make better purchasing decisions.

On February 1, 2007, tools and processes will be made available to all of the company's global suppliers. For 12 months, these suppliers will learn and share results within this process. And beginning in 2008, Wal-Mart will measure and recognize the entire worldwide supply base for using less packaging, utilizing more effective materials in packaging, and. sourcing these materials more efficiently through a packaging scorecard.

Scott added, 'When you bring the capabilities of the entire supply chain together, the ability to make a difference really pops. There's a multiplier effect. Instead of just looking at what Wal-Mart can do alone, we have the opportunity to inspire thousands of companies and millions of customers, as well.'

Wal-Mart's packaging vision began to form when the company partnered with suppliers to improve packaging on its private label Kid Connection toy line last year. By reducing the packaging on fewer than 300 toys, Wal-Mart saved 3,425 tons of corrugated materials, 1,358 barrels of oil, 5,190 trees, 727 shipping containers and $3.5 million in transportation costs, in just one year. Now Wal-Mart is taking what it learned from Kid Connection and applying it to the more than 160,000 products that are seen globally by 176 million customers each week.

Wal-Mart Sustainable Packaging Value Network, a group of 200 leaders in the global packaging industry, is leading the project. This group includes representatives from government, NGOs, academia and industry.

On-pack promotions prompt product sales and brand selection says survey

Eighty-five per cent of the UK population admits that they have been prompted to select one product brand over another as a direct result of an on-pack promotion, according to a vox pop survey by Alcan Packaging. The results highlight the continued consumer drive for added value and the fact that the British public has become increasingly bargain savvy. This would suggest that brand loyalty is increasingly difficult to secure.

Despite the high percentage of people selecting a product due to on-pack promotions, only 68 per cent admit to having responded to one. This would demonstrate the desire to achieve value for money when purchasing a product, but a lack of inclination to invest the time and effort to gain the reward.

These observations are further supported by the results seen in promotion type preferences, as Lynne Quincey, UK communications manager, Alcan Packaging explains: 'The research demonstrates that "instant win - inside wrapper" promotions and "scratch-card" style options are the most appealing to consumers. "On-line gaming" promotions and "token save and bid" gimmicks are far less popular, suggesting a desire for promotions to offer instant gratification and the lack of enthusiasm for more complex, interactive options – a factor that brand owners may wish to consider when planning promotions.'

100% Inspection

Dr Stephan Krebs, founder of Nyquist Systems and now head of the Print Inspection business unit at Erhardt & Leimer, assesses the current state-of-the-art and future developments in 100% inspection systems

Web viewing systems are standard today on almost all printing presses. They also play an important role during make-ready for sporadic control of critical parts of the image. The size of the images on display is rather small given the resolution of the area cameras, but the images may be blown-up with the zoom function.

These last few years, on the other hand, 100% print inspection systems based on line cameras have become widely used in parallel to the web viewing systems based on area cameras. I would like to look at the application potential of this new camera technology.

What is meant by 100% print inspection?

Quite frequently 100% print inspection is thought to mean that 100% of all defects will be detected. Naturally this is not the point as a control system can only detect defects of a certain specified size. 100% print inspection simply means that the print web is being inspected continuously over the entire width and at a specified sensitivity. The sensitivity itself depends substantially on the camera resolution.

What types of cameras are available today?

Camera technology has seen an astonishing development recently. Not so long ago the highest possible resolution was 2000 pixels. Today monochrome line cameras are available with over 8000 pixels. Color line cameras too have evolved. Though actually most of the color line cameras have a resolution of 2000 pixels, the 3-chip technology has considerably increased their line frequency and image quality. In addition, their industrial suitability has been significantly broadened by the novel interface technologies now available. It is no longer a problem therefore to bridge distances of up to 10 meters between camera and processor by just using a standard cable.

Possible defect sizes

The minimum defect size which can possibly be detected depends on the camera resolution and on the web itself. In the case of controlling a coated surface it can be presumed that there is a homogeneous distribution of web contrasts. When upper and lower threshold values are set, variations from these values as small as one pixel can be detected. However, the situation is somewhat different in print image control.

In order to reliably detect a one pixel defect within a text field the neighboring pixels must also be considered. Practice has shown that the smallest detectable defect size is about 3 x 3 pixels. Figure 1 shows the resolution of a letter with 6000 pixels and with 2000 pixels. If, for example, the horizontal line in the letter 'e' had been dropped, making the 'e' resemble a 'c', it becomes quite obvious that a control system operating with 2000 pixels would probably not catch the defect.

Figure 1: (L) enlargement at 6000 pixels, (R) enlargement at 2000 pixels

Operating speed of a modern print image control system

The capabilities of a modern print image control system are not only determined by the given system resolution. Rather they are a matter of up to which web speed print image control is able to detect a specified defect size. There are three system dimensions which determine the size down to which defects will be detected: the web width, the web speed and the minimum defect size to be detected. These three factors interact with the camera resolution and speed to give the capabilities of the inspection system.

Figure 2 shows the web speed which can be reached at a given web width if a modern camera with 6000 pixels and a line frequency of 25 kHz is used. The values of the table presume that there is an identical resolution all through the web – both crosswise and in the direction of the web run. It is possible to increase the web speed by increasing the resolution and thus the defect detection size in the direction of the web run. In this case the pixels are no longer referred to as 'square' but rather as 'rectangular'.

Such an application presumes, however, that the image processing computer can handle an immense data volume. The 6000 pixels resolution camera mentioned above generates up to 160 million pixels per second. This bottleneck has been eased considerably these past years by the dynamic development of the PC sector.

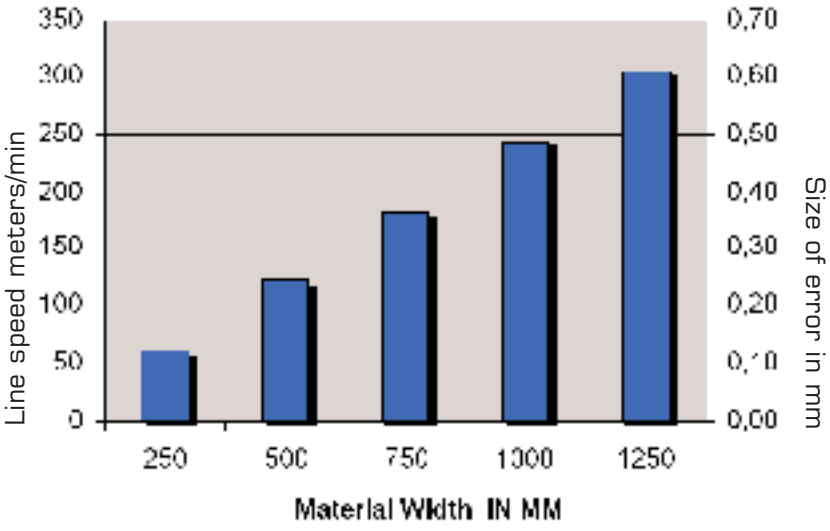


Fig 2: Web speed and minimum defect detection size across the web width if pixels are presumed 'rectangular'

New workflow concepts

The first part of this article described the capabilities of different control systems. The second part will take a detailed look at applications for 100% print image inspection control.

In principle, print image control can be used within the standard workflow at any printer's:

- **Prepress:** This is where the artwork required for the print job is being prepared. Various proofing systems will make sure that the final print in fact comprises all the elements of the original pdf file.
- **Press:** This is where the web will be printed. 100% Print Inspection will detect

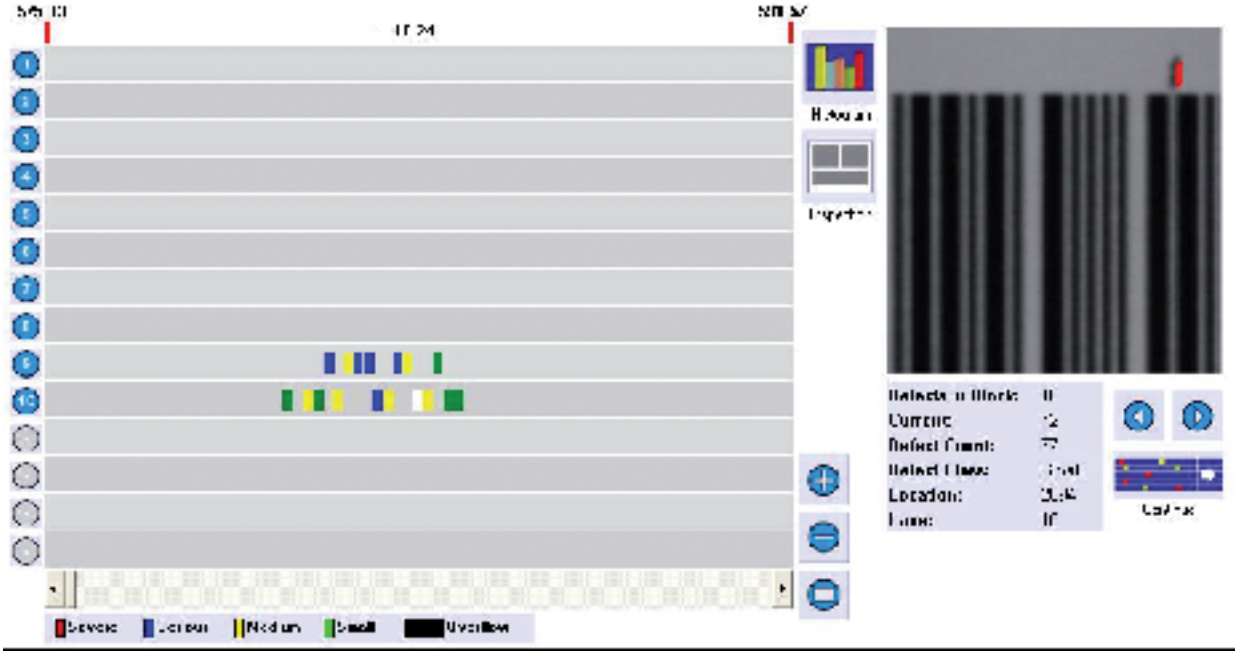


Figure 3: Part of a 'Roll Map' showing a selected defect image at the right

possible defects. This inspection has an immediate impact on the amount of waste created.

- **Finishing:** This is where the printed rolls are processed on a rewinder. At this stage 100% Print Inspection is frequently applied in order to make sure that only perfect material is being shipped to the customer.

The rapid development of memory capacity and processing speeds in the PC sector have contributed enormously to making 100% Print Inspection suitable for all print inspection jobs within the workflow.

What does this mean? Whereas in the past the defective image was just shown on a monitor, today it is possible continuously to document the entire inspection process and to make this inspection protocol available to the printer during production as a so-called 'Roll Map'. The operator is thus in a position to identity critical, repetitive defects and to make a well-considered decision as to whether the machine should be stopped or not.

Figure 3 shows a 'Roll Map'. Areas will be defined across the web in which defects will be displayed with a rectangular symbol. By clicking on the rectangle the defect image for which the rectangle stands will be displayed to the right for further analysis.

Biography

Dr Stephan Krebs (s.krebs@erhardt-leimer.com) has worked for over 15 years developing electronics and drive engineering systems. In 2003 he founded Nyquist Systems in Toronto, Canada, which specialized in the development of print image control systems. In 2005 Nyquist was acquired by Erhardt+Leimer, since when Dr Krebs has been responsible for E&L's Print Inspection business unit.

What happens with those defects which have not been considered during the print process though they have been detected? As all defects are stored in the 'Roll Map' memory, this data is readily available if required for further print processing on the rewinder. This availability is the real benefit of the inspection system. Defects can first be analyzed on the 'Roll Map' and decisions can be taken before finishing as to whether a detected defect is of any relevance or not. The 'Roll Map' will be edited accordingly and the re-winder will be programmed to stop only at those relevant positions.

This so-called 'Scheduling'leads to increased productivity compared to the finishing process which uses print image control on the re-winder. With the latter, the re-winder is stopped at every detected defect and the operator is called upon to make a decision before finishing continues. If the defect is considered irrelevant, the operator has wasted about 30 seconds. If irrelevant defects occur more or less frequently, these stops will either reduce productivity or the operator will have to reduce the sensitivity of the print image control system. This decision, however, considerably influences the quality of the control process.

If 'Scheduling' is used an absolute web position must be known so that the defects listed in the 'Roll Map' memory can be clearly attributed. For this purpose it is frequent practice to apply a position code at the rear of the web using a print mark. To assure optimum use of the re-winder, care must be taken that the position code can be detected even when the re-winder runs at maximum speed.

The following table summarizes the benefits and drawbacks of print image control on a re-winder and on a press:

"Today, somewhat static algorithms are still the state-of-the-art given the extremely high number of pixels which must be handled by somewhat limited computer capabilities. In the future we forsee increased use of 'adaptive' procedures"

Re-winder:

+ Final check of outgoing roll
+ Usually there is one re-winder for several printing presses
- Permanent Stop and Go causes frequent pseudo defects. Therefore, it is usually necessary to reduce the sensitivity of the print image control system.
- Generally the personnel are not so familiar with PC operation.
- Usually the print image control system is slower than the max. speed of the re-winder.
- As the printing process is already concluded, waste can be reduced only at the expense of quality.

Press:

+ Continuous web movement reduces pseudo defects, so print image control can operate at high sensitivity settings
+ The personnel are already familiar with operation control by PC
+ The speed of print image control more or less equals the speed of the printing press
+ The use of 'Scheduling' optimizes re-winder efficiency
+ Significant waste reduction as defects are handled prior to winding
+ Highest productivity
- A separate print image control system is required per printing press. The system pays for itself quickly as it contributes greatly to waste elimination.
- The use of 'Scheduling' requires a marking code.
- As there is no final control on the re-winder process control must be strictly correct.

Summary

100% print image control is a relatively young technology, and further developments in camera and computer systems can reasonably be expected to lead to exciting new developments in the quality management of label and printing.

Today, somewhat static algorithms are still the state-of-the-art given the extremely high number of pixels which must be handled by somewhat limited computer capabilities. In the future we forsee increased use of 'adaptive' procedures. Networking within the workflow and the integration of data management functions will also have to be considered for 100% Print Image Control in the future.

An inspector calls

Label converters are increasingly prepared to invest in sophisticated inspection systems previously the domain of wide-web converters. **Andy Thomas** reports on the latest inspection solutions for press and rewinder

The narrow web industry is increasingly adopting advanced inspection systems in an effort to reduce waste and to implement total quality control regimes. This is driven by decreasing run lengths and the use of more complex and expensive substrates, as well as end users' demand for zero defects.

Inspection cameras are being placed both on the press and on the rewinder – sometimes both – and new technology links the on-press inspection cameras to the rewinder control system, automatically delivering defective labels to the splicing table. In a further refinement, the latest systems allow quality control personnel to assess the seriousness of faults identified by the camera and decide if they are sufficient to make the label unsellable.

Narrow web press manufacturers now offer a wide range of OEM inspection solutions on their machines, while the major slitter-rewinder manufacturers have teamed up with inspection systems specialists to demonstrate increased automation and precision in finding and removing defective labels.

Rotoflex, for example, demonstrated systems illustrating its close relationships with AVT and Nikka Research at Labelexpo Americas, while Arpeco showed a Tracker Premier model incorporating the AVT Helios 100% Vision inspection system installed both in-line with the rewinder and in an electronic workflow link to a Gallus press.

AB Graphics (ABG) has gone one step further with the acquisition of inspection specialist flytec Spezialmaschinen. ABG had worked with flytec for a number of years, incorporating their optical vision inspection systems on its slitter/rewinders. Flytec specializes in pharmaceutical label inspection systems and vision camera inspection systems. At Labelexpo Americas ABG showed an Omega machine equipped with a Flytec 2000 Vision System for 100 per cent pharmaceutical label inspection and rewinding, along with an SR1300 slitter/inspection/rewinder with AVT's Helios web inspection system.

The OEM manufacturers themselves are continually pushing forward the technology envelope.

For example, Advanced Vision Technology (AVT) has been further developing its PrintVision/Helios, 100 per cent Automatic Inspection solution for rewinder and press applications. New developments include the MasterRef module, which provides Master Verification during setup using approved 'Golden' master images; the Reflective Support Module for inspecting highly reflective material; and the Clear-on-Clear module for inspection of clear labels sealed on clear liner.

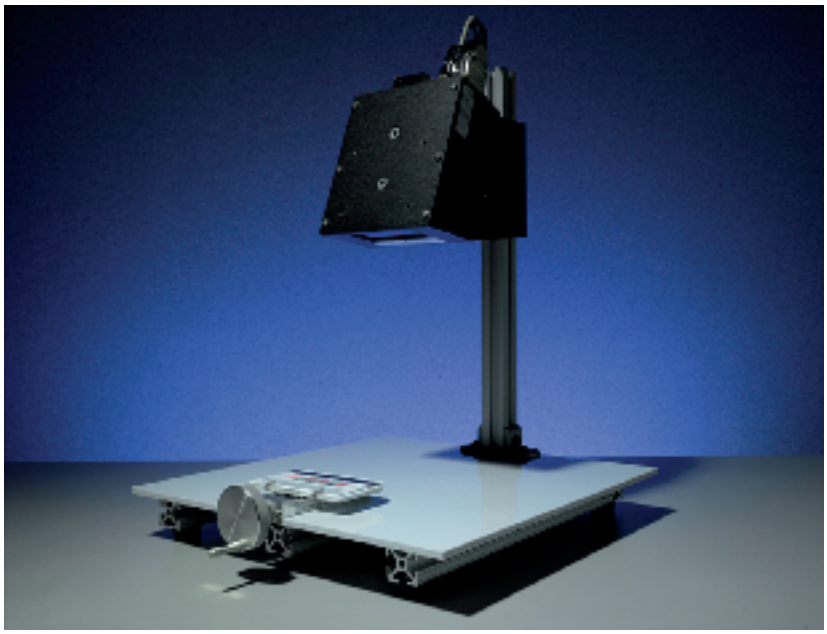
AVT pioneered the development of press-to-rewinder workflows with its WorkFlow Link, which offers a bridge between press camera and rewinder, enabling efficient defective-material removal using on-press defect detection data. The latest development is PrintFlow Manager, designed to manage quality control information from the manager's desktop computer. After on-press inspection, a 'virtual roll' is created which allows quality control personnel to make a final decision which 'defective' labels can be let through and which are to be removed. The edited data is then sent as control data to the rewinder.

To complete this workflow, AVT has integrated its PrintFlow SQL database module for archiving job parameters and defect information, including defect location, master and defect images, and job quality statistics.

A new player in this area is Erhardt + Leimer (E&L). In 2005 E&L acquired Nyquist Systems in Toronto, Canada, which specialized in the development of print image control systems. Nyquist founder Dr Stephan Krebs is now responsible for E&L's Print Inspection business unit, and the first technology to emerge from the new division is the Nyscan system.

Nyscan aims to cover the entire converting workflow, and consists of three modules. The Image Inspector:2 verifies make-ready against the client-approved electronic artwork. At the end of make ready, the camera on the press captures a reference image, which can be immediately compared to the approved PDF artwork by Image Inspector:2. Acceptance parameters established for each custom job control the comparison. Any commercially unacceptable deviations are highlighted for the operator so that an informed go/no go decision can be made.

The Nyscan Web:Inspector: 2 on-press camera utilizes the



Compliance-Pro line of High Speed Bar Code Verifiers

"After on-press inspection, a 'virtual roll' is created which allows quality control personnel to make a final decision which 'defective' labels can be let through and which are to be removed"

same defect identification parameters as set for the Image Inspector. It reports defects by location on the web, categorized by severity, and stores the information in a 'Roll Map' database. The Roll Map can be viewed during production to stay on top of defect trends and can also be used for quality reporting and process monitoring.

Linking the workflow to the rewinder is the Roll:Scheduler:1 editor package, which allows the operator or QC person to see every defect recorded and decide whether or not it needs to be repaired. A mouse click can override stopping for one defect, an entire class of defects or an entire area of the web. The defects are not deleted from the Roll Map but are simply set to a 'suppressed' state. Using the edited Roll Map and code marks printed on the web by Web:Inspector:2 on the press, Roll:Scheduler positions the remaining defects for resolution by the operator. Additionally, once the roll is on the machine and Roll:Scheduler is controlling the machine, the history of each stop is recorded to give a log of corrective actions.

We see continued progress in 100% web inspection systems. BST Pro Mark, a popular OEM inspection choice on narrow web presses and rewinders, has added the Shark defect management software package to its armoury. Shark will perform 100% inspection of webs up to 500mm, identify missing print, reverse type fill-in, splash, spots, mis-register, hickeys, dirty print, web crease, haze, scumming, smudges, streaks, hairs, die-cut variations and incorrect matrix removal. The system is claimed effectively to identify random and repeating defects and is suitable for use on all kinds of substrates, including highly reflective materials.

Have you seen our résumé lately?

- 1973 Flexible Die developed by PS Kang (Patented)
- 1984 Stainless steel Xynaflex die introduced
- 1991 Slit-over-perf label dies introduced
- 1998 SDP™ Stamp initial production (Patented)
- 1998 Programmed machined microperforations introduced
- 1998 Introduction of pin stripping in magnetic cylinders
- 2001 Computer-to-Die field tested
- 2002 Easy Feed PC™ dies successfully run the first time (Patented)
- 2004 Braille added in-line to folding cartons

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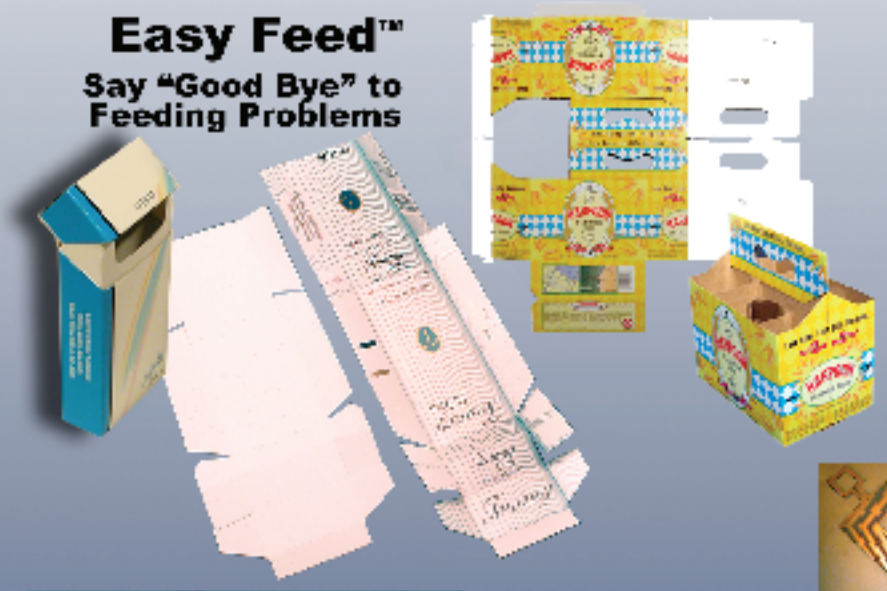

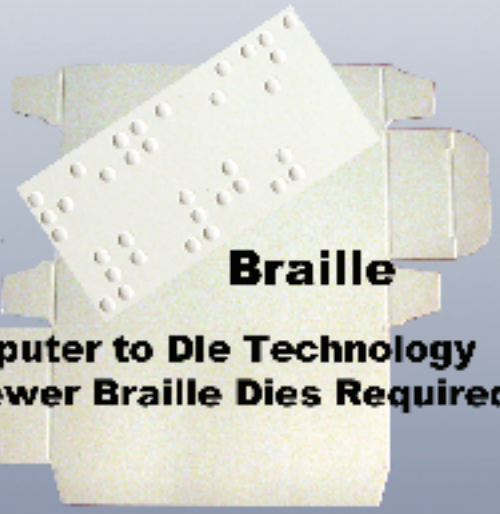

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Computer to Die Technology
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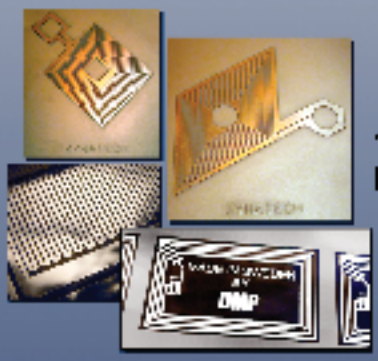

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DMP Method is
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Security Printing

Precision Etched Dies
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Etched Perforations

to 0.020 inches
Eliminates costly machined ties

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E-mail: info@xynatech.com
Web Site: www.xynatech.com

"IntegraScan uses a single high resolution camera to verify data integrity of every label, ticket and narrow web document in real-time"

An interesting new development from BST is the Premius LeX, which is designed to combine the advantages of systems which sample the web and 100% inspection systems. The Premius LeX performs automatic print defect detection on the entire print repeat, but at intervals of around 1.5 seconds. It monitors color in CIElab to a tolerance of ±1.0 delta and verifies bar codes to international ISO or ANSI specifications. The converter can document the entire quality assurance process and generate roll or job reports.

For specific verification of text, Lake Image Systems is now producing its IntegraScan system designed for narrow web, label and ticket production. IntegraScan uses a single high resolution camera to verify data integrity of every label, ticket and narrow web document in real-time during any variable printing process. As well as checking presence and legibility of text, IntegraScan also checks the correct position of elements such as sequence numbers and bar-codes while providing formal reporting to prove the integrity of production.

On-line bar-code verification of label rolls and sheets remains a critical inspection application. Among recent launches of dedicated equipment is Complete Inspection Systems' AccuProof Bar Code Verification System, which allows users to scan and match codes on-line. Users can set the level of quality that they will allow to pass during the production process. The latest version of the AutoProof Pro Imaging Suite allows users to scan and compare materials and press sheets up to 54 (137 cm) x 54 (137 cm) inches in size.

In response to demand for easy to use, high volume statistical ISO/ANSI methodology bar code inspection, Inspection Systems has added a Desktop model to its Compliance-Pro line of High Speed Bar Code Verifiers. The Compliance-Pro Desktop model is targeted at printers/converters with multi-press stations who want a single inspection station. Features include automatic storage of exportable data by date, including production line, operator, job ID number, etc. The system will cope with high volume inspection over multiple production lines, and is designed with a fixed angle for consistent results.

We are also seeing interesting advances in sensing equipment. Tri-Tronics Company, Inc. for example, has just introduced a line of miniature photoelectric sensors designed to perform in tight locations. The rugged Mini-Eye sensors are waterproof and enclosed in high-impact plastic housings for use in hostile environments. They are also immune to indirect ambient light and strobes. The sensors are available in thru-beam, retro-reflective and proximity models for performing object detection such as web break detection, counting and inspection. They can be configured with infrared or red LED light sources, and NPN or PNP output transistors, quick disconnect or potted cables, and can be operated in either Light 'On' or Dark 'On' modes. ■

100 per cent inspection

Companies introducing new 100% inspection technologies include:

- PC Industries, whose RX Series is designed for installation on press or inspection/rewinder. It features 21CFR Part11 compliance, audit trail documentation, 2D bar code reading, OCV sequential number checking and color monitoring
- TruColor Vision Systems' API 100 100% inspection system detects all types of random and repeatable defects on any web width
- Isra Surface Vision now has a high-speed, 100% print inspection system based on the company's Smash Web Processor. Defect images are classified according to type, size and location. Inspection results are stored in the system database, which enables retrieval of defect reports and the creation of comprehensive defect statistics with selectable search and sorting criteria. The company's Data Mining software is optional
- Nireco America's BCON3000NW 100% Print Defect Detection System features an on-line color monitor, holographic inspection, and zero color distortion
- eltromat has just started commercial production of a new 100% inspection system. Print check 7000 can be configured with single or multiple cameras, and has been successfully field-tested by Austrian packaging converter K. Heyer, retrofitted to a Cerutti nine-color rotogravure press. Image analysis is performed in real time, checking the printed image independently of production speed and substrate. The system immediately shows register offsets, doctor streaks, printer dropouts and scumming and informs the operator of any deviations from the specified quality standards.

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Digital gains

Digital printing and finishing technology empowered new entrant Logo Label Printing to extend its services in innovative ways. **Sandra Boga** reports

If customization is the future of label printing, then digital printing and finishing technology is the catalyst. Label printers are increasingly striving towards offering bespoke products, to differentiate themselves in the market and create exciting new revenue streams.

With no previous industry experience, Logo Label Printing, based in North Carolina, USA, leveraged the power of digital technology to create a niche, customized product for its customers – bottled water with personalized labels.

'Our initial strategy was to provide a higher quality bottled water, custom labeled, at pricing competitive to commercially available bottled water,' says Dave Grossman, COO, Logo Label Printing. 'As we grew, our marketing and sales strategy evolved in that we are not selling bottled water, and therefore not competing with bottled water sales. We approached our clients with the notion of helping to promote them by designing custom labels that were unique. As a result we were actually selling the label rather than the bottle and the critical nature of commodity pricing became secondary. Now that we are in the printing business we are custom labeling soaps, lotions, shampoo, ketchup bottles, tea cans and much more. There is no limit.'

Over a three-year period Logo doubled, then tripled, its sales of custom labeled bottled water, becoming one of the largest suppliers in North Carolina. 'We were on the verge of doubling our sales again when the business was acquired by the company that supplied us with the bottled water. In addition, we shipped our product to businesses all over the country at pricing that was significantly higher than the customer would have paid a local supplier. The reason was the quality of the label design and the ultimate value it held for the customer,' adds Grossman.

'Our biggest problem was getting commercially printed labels in a timely basis and at the level of quality that our clients and we expected,' he continues. 'We then sold the logistical part of our business and invested in a high-end digital production concentrating on label design and printing for the custom bottled water industry.'

After eight months of research and investigation, Logo chose the HP Indigo digital press printing system and the Rotoflex Vericut as the finishing solution that they would use. Six months on, they seem to be pleased with the decision: 'There are just not enough adjectives to describe the support that HP and Rotoflex have provided,' says Grossman. 'The staff were patient considering that not a single person in our company had any previous experience with commercial printing equipment or processes. Everything was new to us including the language used in the printing business, the suppliers, the equipment and the business itself. Now we are servicing more than a dozen custom label bottle water companies as well as co-packers of salsa's, sauces, and other products.'

Print technician Brad Greenwell operates the Rotoflex Vericut 2

'Over a three-year period Logo doubled, then tripled, its sales of custom labeled bottled water, becoming one of the largest suppliers in North Carolina'

Rotoflex's recently introduced Vericut 2 incorporates modules

Owners Cay Bacen, Tim Dates and Dave Grossman

"The Rotoflex Vericut system allowed us to purchase just what we needed at this point with the knowledge that we can upgrade at any time"

including semi-rotary die cutting, spot coating, cold foil, hot foil embossing, rotary sheeting and stacking. The die cutting system is versatile, covering partial repeats as well as full rotary applications with quick tool change. Die throw-off allows the operator to save time and material by positioning the cut on the first impression.

The hot foil stamping option includes a 19-inch repeat magnetic cylinder, uniflex die plates, automatic registration control and servo-driven tool and draw station.

Foil saving is available. The flexographic printing unit has a 19-inch repeat printing plate cylinder for spot varnishing and printing, with automated first impression positioning.

'This state-of-the-art technology gives our clients options,' says Dave Grossman. 'We take pride in offering the highest quality stocks and inks producing labels that far exceed customer expectations. The Rotoflex Vericut system allowed us to purchase just what we needed at this point with the knowledge that we can upgrade at any time. The bottom line is we were able to realize an opportunity through some powerful partnerships with industry leaders such as HP and Rotoflex. Like them, we care that our clients be successful, because our success will grow with theirs.' ■

News in brief

Manter moves to new plant

Spanish specialty paper manufacturer Manter, part of the Fedrigoni Group, has moved to a new plant in Girona, Spain, just six kilometers from the company's former offices in Sarrià de Ter. Set in an area of 38,000 square meters, the new facilities will allow Manter to triple its potential productivity.

Spanish version of Encyclopedia to be launched next year

A Spanish version of the Encyclopedia of Labels and Labeling Technology is due to be launched in time for next year's Label Summit Latin America, taking place in Sao Paulo, Brazil, May 15-16.

The Spanish version of the Encyclopedia, a Labels & Labeling publication, will be published in association with Conversión magazine, the leading industry magazine in Latin America.

Two and a half thousand copies will be published, and orders can be taken from the start of next year.

The original edition of the Encyclopedia was published in 2004, and it has since been translated into Chinese and Turkish. Written by industry expert Mike Fairley, it is the first and only book of its kind for the label, product decoration, web printing and converting industry. With over 220 diagrams and illustrations, the Encyclopedia provides an easy-to-use global reference guide.

GRE completes global circle

GRE Digital Solutions has announced the formation of GRE Digital Solutions, Inc. in Philadelphia, USA, thus completing its circle of global sales and service facilities around the world. The company will provide sales, marketing, engineering and service support for its wide range of digital printing and converting systems throughout the Americas.

Dr Jules Farkas, managing director, stated: 'Everyone associated with the graphic arts industry worldwide is aware of the significant growth in the use of digital printing. As a major supplier of digital printing heads and complete converting systems, it was necessary to have personnel in place in key locations to support our customers globally. With the completion of the Philadelphia headquarters, we are ensuring customer support anywhere in the world. Philadelphia will compliment our operations in Switzerland, Hong Kong and China.'

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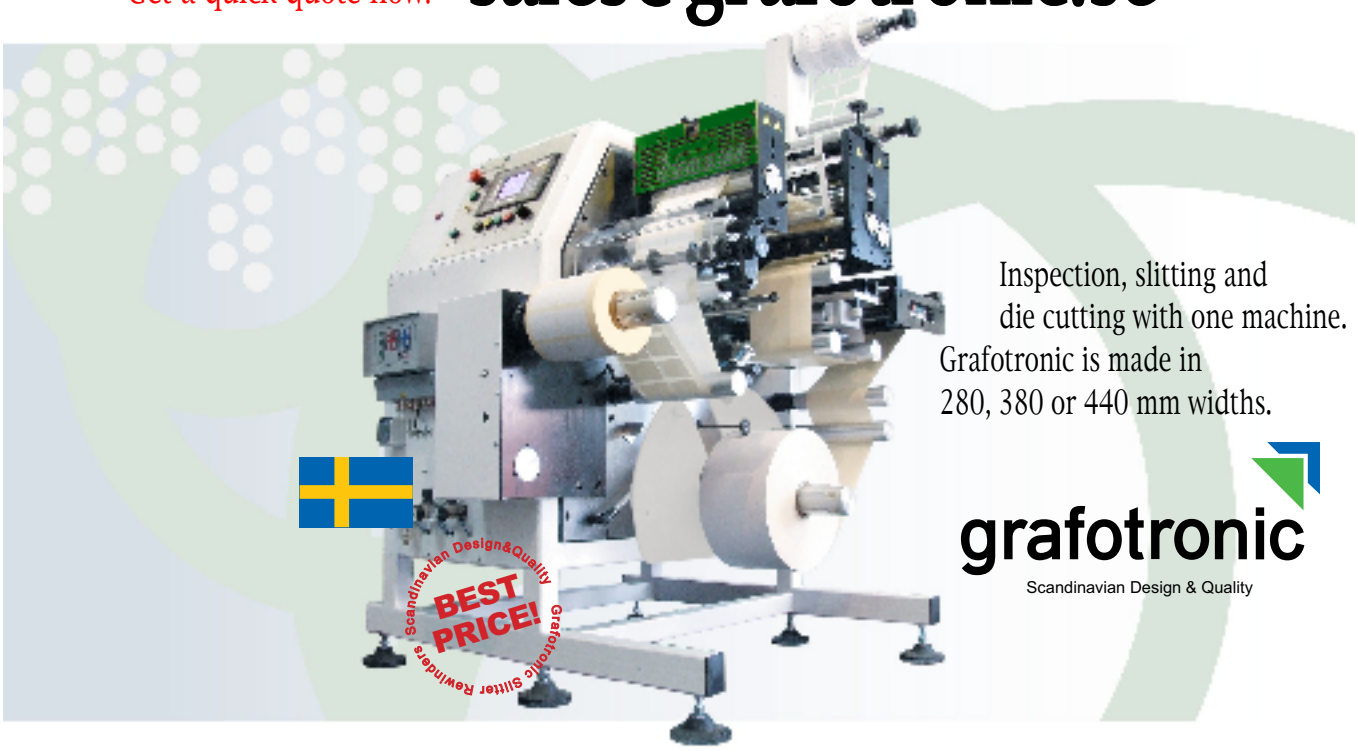

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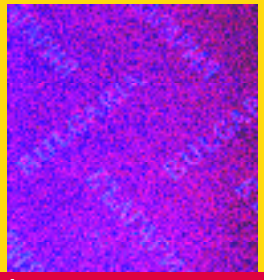

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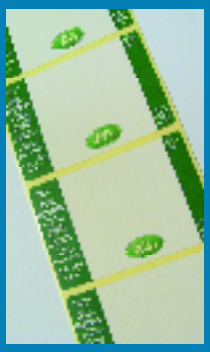

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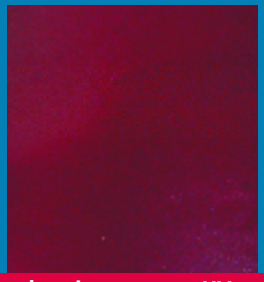

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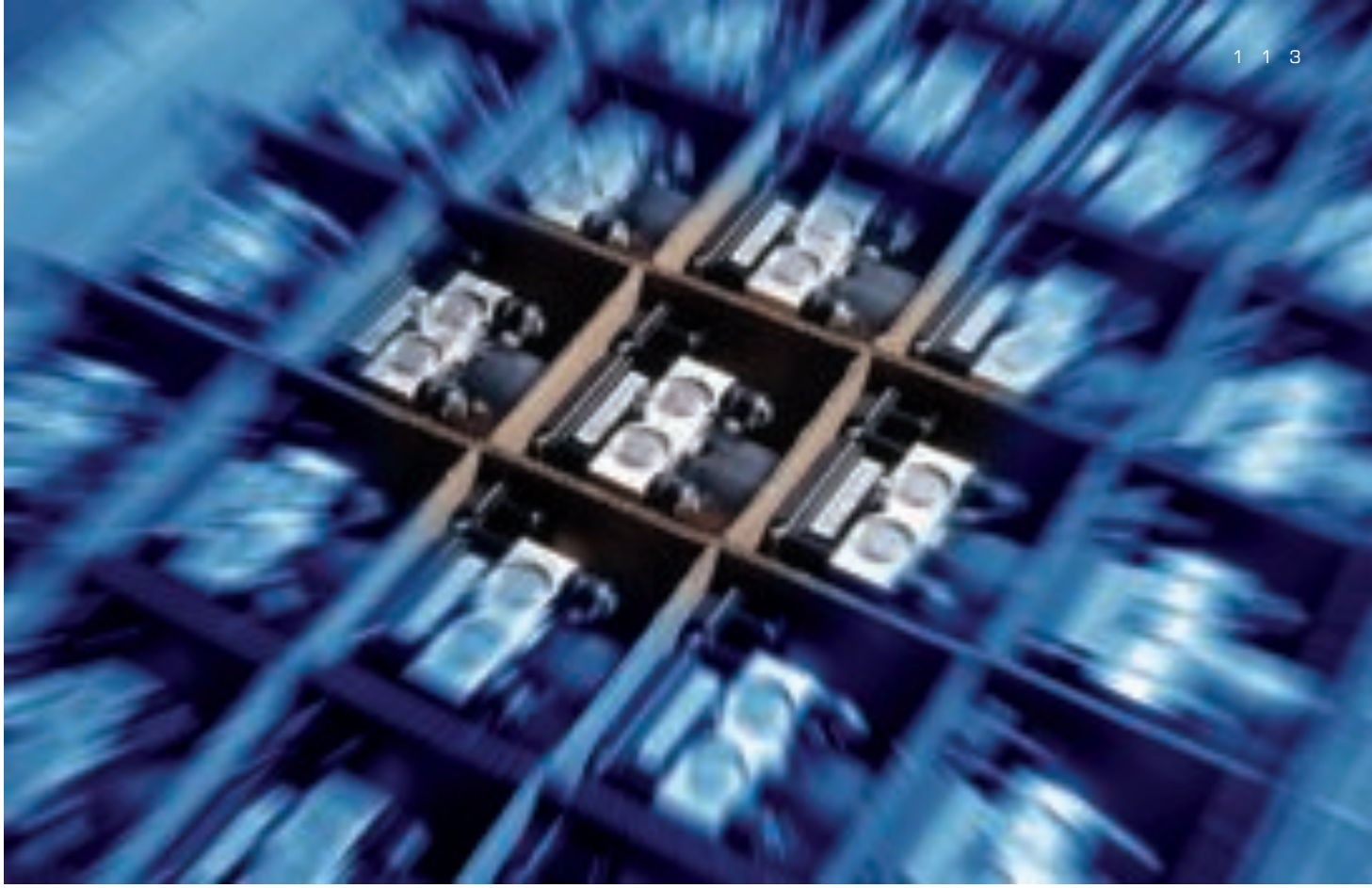


Integrated converting

Robert Bosch in Hungary is labeling its power-tools using an integrated line from Eltex which prints, cuts and laminates barcode and ID labels in one pass. **Sandra Boga** reports

Eltex has used its experience in adhesive technology and surface protection to develop a system which integrates thermal transfer printing, cutting and laminating into one line. The Eltex 7500 is designed primarily to convert barcode and product identification labels.

'High-quality and resistant self-adhesive barcode labels or type plates for industrial use are created in the interplay of adhesive, foil and laminate, and the right thermal transfer ribbon for the thermal transfer printer,' comments Wolfgang Leihe, Eltex managing director and developer of the system.

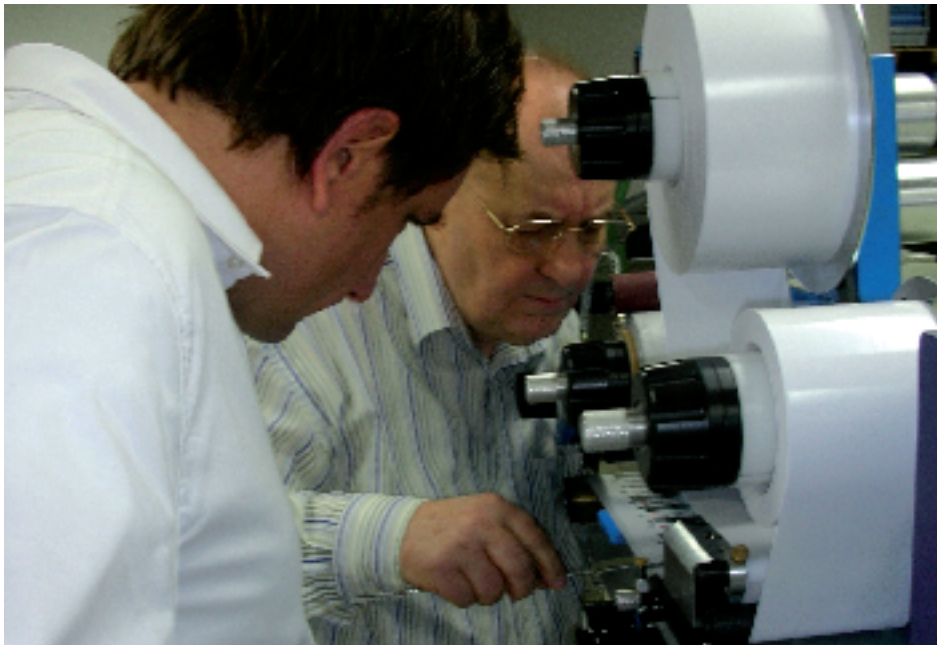
The Eltex 7500 is now in use for this type of application at power tool manufacturer Robert Bosch's Hungarian plant, where it is outputting half a million labels a week.

Peter Katona, production manager at Bosch's Miskolc plant, has been working with the Eltex system for seven months. Along with the production of sand-blasters, he and his team are responsible for labeling the whole range of Bosch tools, from hammer drills through cutters and saws to cordless rechargeable screwdrivers. Because at least three labels are required for every tool – a type label, one with production data and an adhesive label for the packing – things soon mount up.

> "The Eltex 7500 is able to cut and laminate small batches without complications and just as economically as large ones"

The volume of 500,000 labels each week means that Bosch Hungary has to print, cut and laminate round the clock, according to Peter Katona: 'We use the Eltex 7500 on work days in several shifts, 24 hours per day, and on Saturdays we work an 8-hour shift as well.'

The sheer quantity of labels is not the only challenge. The crunch is the batch sizes for the labels. Bosch has to label large quantities of different power tools in small batches for different



The Eltex 7500 is in action at Bosch labeling power tools

"The fact that changing the settings for the Eltex 7500 takes less than ten minutes is a great help to us. Flexibility is everything today"

markets. For example, along with batches of several thousand, sometimes batches of just a few hundred are required.

It is here that the Eltex system, with its short set-up time, has proved most valuable, according to Peter Katona: 'The Eltex 7500 is able to cut and laminate small batches without complications and just as economically as large ones. We have to react quickly and be able to change both the label size and the batch size at short notice in order not to endanger compliance with the production process. The fact that changing the settings for the Eltex 7500 takes less than ten minutes is a great help to us. Flexibility is everything today.'

The need for flexibility is one of the reasons why Bosch Hungary will not consider ready-to-use screen printed labels. 'Screen printing is too expensive for our purposes,' points out Peter Katona. 'We would always be dependent on the printers, and we simply couldn't integrate this into our production process.'

Katona says that traditional printing technologies cannot be used economically with smaller runs because of long set-up times, extensive set-up material and additional costs for the masters and the printing plates. Katona is looking for the Eltex 7500 to pay for itself in the first year.

Surface protection of the labels was another important reason for Bosch to choose the Eltex system – Eltex has several patented processes for making surface-protected labels as well as considerable expertise in adhesive technology.

'The color fastness of a label is an enormously important aspect,' Katona points out. 'Bosch attaches considerable importance to compliance with its corporate design, and the company colors are quite simply part of this design's material components.'

Katona says that the Eltex is an easy system to maintain. 'System maintenance is not complicated. When we started working with the Eltex 7500, someone from the company was here for two days to provide us with a detailed introduction to the system. This is why we can solve most problems ourselves, on the spot. And this is absolutely vital, because a rapid reaction is essential in view of the important position of labeling in the overall production process. If we have any really complicated problems someone from Eltex is here within 48 hours.' ■

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Servo drive for quality

Narrow web converters boast that their latest presses are servo driven – but what does that mean, and what difference does it make to web control, asks **Darren Kaye,** business development director for the OPM label converting Group

Servo (or electronic) driven presses are becomingly increasingly popular with narrow web converters. The technology behind servos is not new, although only in the past few years have narrow web operators insisted on including it in their requirements for new machinery.

The electronic motors in servo drives are fixed directly to the print cylinder. With no mechanical gears or central drive shafts, each print head can be driven independently, co-ordinated through a computerised control unit.

There are three main advantages of a servo drive: improved control and conversion of complex materials on the press; quicker set up times and reduced wastage.

We specialize in short run packaging, often for market trials or consumer testing. Our clients want innovative packaging, and we are constantly pushing the tolerances of substrates that we can manage on the press.

As an example, we produced on our servo Nilpeter FA 3300 a technically challenging flow wrap product for sports nutrition company LA Muscle that achieved Best of Category award at the FlexoTech awards. It was printed on a very thin flexible film. The material was 'high slip', which would have been a struggle on a conventional press.

Film-based labels and foils look fantastic as converted packaging, but as unsupported base materials they can be very difficult to control, and are prone to stretch and slip on press. This directly affects print registration and reliable repeat lengths.

With a flow wrap packaging item like this, our client also had to be confident that the press would provide a precise repeat length, so that their packing line could achieve product sealing at the precise repeat interval.

It's in this environment that a servo press really comes into its own. Each servo drive uses electronic feedback from its print head. It makes thousands of subtle adjustments per minute to the tension of the material running across the print press.

For the LA Muscle packaging, the servo meant that we were able to minimize unnecessary stretch, and ensure that we achieved very fine detail in terms of registration. Also, the degree of control that the servo provides meant that the color accuracy and ink density lived up to every subtle detail in the original artwork and repro.

The digital capabilities of the servo, and its computerized control unit, also means quicker set up times. Production set up time is critical to the economics of any conversion business – especially when you are managing short runs.

The digital memory of a servo press offers a pre-register capability where the print plate automatically rotates to a pre-determined position. This means that when the press is started it is already in near-perfect register.

Darren Kaye, business development director for the OPM Group

The tension control of a servo driven press also enables converters to increase their presses up to optimum running very quickly.

Finally, material costs are important to any converter, especially one dealing with high value substrates and short runs. For OPM, short servo set up times mean that there is little waste. The press achieves perfect registration much quicker and waste substrate at start up is very small. This has cost benefits which we pass onto clients.

Set up speeds are reduced and initial registration capabilities are first rate. The consistency of the servo drive also means that production speeds can be ramped up quickly with no damage to the substrates – especially flexibles. ■

Servo Drive and the intelligent press

Although servo technology is important, it is the development of 'Intelligent' presses that will really propel the industry forward, argues **Federico d'Annunzio,** managing director, GiDue

As a press manufacturer, we are often called on to give our perspective on servo driven and digital technologies and how they apply to today's in-line presses. I believe it is worthwhile addressing the issues raised and some of the mystique surrounding both servo driven and 'Intelligent' digital technology. Some of the most common issues raised are discussed here and are based on our experience and installations in the global market we participate in.

The future is in presses based on an 'Intelligent' platform where servo drives are utilized to link press operating parameters to a digital storage and operating data retrieval system – where every press variable is under control and not left to the choice of the operator.

The press is 'Intelligent' to the level of helping the operator not to make mistakes and to record good performance and reproduce accepted operating parameters for following repeat orders. In this case the operator becomes a press supervisor more than a press operator, whose job is now to manage print productivity and quality output rather than concentrating on basic operations such as printing pressure, registration, job set-up and other basic tasks which are managed by the 'Intelligent' electronics of the press.

The press then becomes fully integrated with the MIS of the company and becomes an interactive tool in the hands of the production manager, who can plan and change orders even at the last minute without risk of communication error as all information arrives directly to the operator PC screen.

One should think of the operator interface as a modular on-press MIS system linked to the printing company's own MIS system. The press then becomes an electronic interface for the operator as it receives the job orders directly from the plant or production manager and becomes the intercommunication tool to achieve a true paperless workflow.

> "The future is in presses based on an 'Intelligent' platform where servo drives are utilized to link press operating parameters to a digital storage and operating data retrieval system"

The PC interface and data management system stores all production data including register, plate pressure, tension control, anilox selection, color density and ink management, so that job parameters can be reproduced for consistent and exact job repeatability independent from press operator intervention. The 'Intelligent' press can also carry Ethernet communication standards, making the press open to any internal or external communication flow on a global or multi-plant basis.

Servo advantage

What is the role of servo technology? Its most obvious benefits are superior register and tension control, which gives higher product quality and a reduction in waste. Because servo drives are essentially digitally controlled drives, the demands on both operators and management are significantly reduced since print parameters of each run can be stored in a digital file which can then communicate with the company's MIS and be further linked with a visual inspection option.

Pre-register capabilities, in combination with Intelligent Register functions, are also a distinctive feature of servo technologies, which greatly reduce waste during set up operations and at the same time become predictable and reproducible.

The same issue of reduced and predictable waste, independent from the operator, guide servo technologies in the print pressure adjustments for flexo, and in the ink and dampening adjustments for offset. Even the best operator today cannot compete anymore with the efficiencies and the automated performances of Intelligent presses.

Servo technologies also enable better control on the overall quality performance, with closed-loop feedback instruments such as inspection cameras, color sensors etc. Visual inspection from the operator is less critical, and a lot of servo-driven technologies help to measure and correct errors automatically.

So servo and digital technology have enabled narrow web, in-line presses to improve both the converter's business performance and end product.

Let's address the term 'narrow web'. The earlier distinctions between narrow, mid and wide web presses are distinctly fading. Just a few years ago a typical narrow web press had a web width of 250 mm (10 inches) and a maximum speed of 100 m/min (45 ft/min). Today it is common to see narrow web presses printing and converting a web width of 500 to 600 mm (20 to 24 inches) at speeds from 180 m/min (600 ft/min) up to 280 m/min (900 ft/min).

These press speeds are better achieved with multi-point servo drives, which evenly distribute the drive load on the press, with much better control on drive accuracy. In addition, the use of servo drives on some press models eliminates the age-old problem of flexo gear marking caused by incomplete meshing of cylinder and roller gears. The elimination of gears also allows many converters to process a wide range of substrate callipers, without affecting the print quality.

Additionally, an increasing number of presses we supply incorporate combination printing and converting. The marriage of flexography with screen, gravure and lithography provides label printers with a greatly increased converting capability.

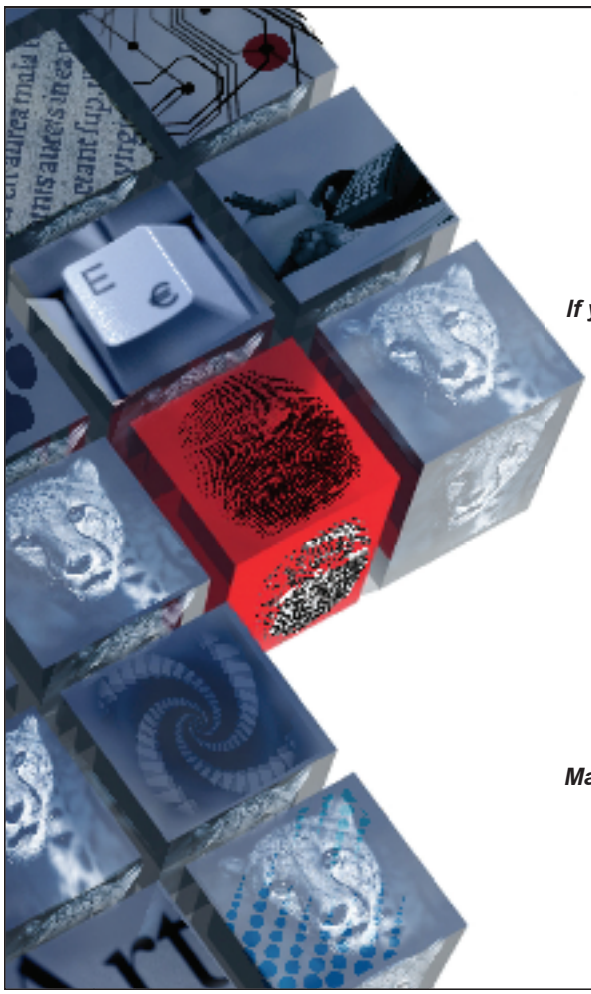
"Even the best operator today cannot compete anymore with the efficiencies and the automated performances of Intelligent presses"

Here servo and digital technology is a natural fit. All these factors drive the move to digital and Intelligent control technology that is beneficial for short run, faster changeovers, greatly reduced lead times and an overall improvement in supply-chain management. Also, the increased demand for today's sleeve equipped presses greatly favor the use of servo drives and Intelligent electronic control.

We supply presses with as little as two and up to eight servo drives per print head. This is very much dictated by the intended end use of the press. Today's European packaging customer expects a very high level of product quality plus a wide range of additional converting options, which makes electronic servo technology an obvious choice.

As more and more suppliers provide servo drive equipment this will become an off-the-shelf component greatly simplifying maintenance and drive change-over. At present, equipping our presses with servo technology actually increases the cost of manufacturing the press. I believe that as servo technology becomes more of a standard, the cost of these drives will come down. This will probably not reduce the cost of the press but will help us keep prices at reasonable levels and partially off-set the continuing increase in component costs we are experiencing.

We are sometimes asked about retrofitting and here we must be careful and use common sense. I believe it is greatly beneficial to install servo drives on the in-feed and out-feed of a press. This will significantly increase tension control thereby improving registration. However, I would caution against adding servo drives to other areas of the press. First, the installation of servo motors to mechanically driven prints units would usually require cutting out sections of the rear frame and possibly require the re-shafting of cylinders and rollers. From my experience, if a printer has an older style gear-equipped press, they are probably competing in a tough market with older technology. It would make sense to sell off the older press and put the returns towards a modern, digitally driven machine for all the advantages previously discussed. ■



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Making plates

The changing quality and workflow requirements of the narrow web printing industry are placing new demands upon plates and platemaking technology. **Andy Thomas** examines the latest developments

Advances in plates and plate-making technology can propel a print process to new levels of quality or enhance workflow in a significant way. A good example is the development of offset CTP and (semi-) automated plate loading in the 1990s. More recently we have seen new flexographic plate technologies such as 'point light' illumination and ablation computer-to-plate help revolutionize what can be achieved on properly specified flexo and UV flexo presses.

Even letterpress printers can now join the digital party with the development of plates from suppliers including Flint (formerly BASF Printing Systems) and Toray-Dantex which incorporate an ablation layer which can be imaged directly on flexo CTP devices. Results from the field show extremely promising results in terms of superior dot formation and increased detail in shadow and highlight image areas.

We are seeing a raft of new products which help printers and trade shops handle mixed workflows of digital and analogue plates.

Degraf SpA, for example, has launched a new wash-out unit, the Concept 505 DW, designed for the production of analogue and digital flexographic plates on the same piece of equipment.

The Concept 505 DW (digital washer) will process digital or analogue flexographic plates up to 132 x 203 cm. The processor is equipped with a prewashing section, which removes the carbon layer from the digital plates. The solvent used to remove this layer is collected in a tank, which is separate from the rest of the circuit. This approach means that the washing solvent is always free of contamination.

An integrated solvent densitometer inside the unit's hydraulic circuit measures the percentage of polymer in the washing solvent, topping it up with fresh solvent when the values exceed those programmed or saved during the machine's set-up phase.

The first Concept 505 DW was installed in January of this year at NuMaber, a trade shop based near Treviso, Italy. NuMaber installed a second unit in May.

"We are seeing a raft of new products which help printers and trade shops handle mixed workflows of digital and analogue plates"

Products have also appeared to allow converters to process digital flexo plates with water wash equipment. Toyobo's latest product in this field is the Cosmolight DS (CTP), able to produce one per cent halftones at 200 LPI. The product is claimed to show outstanding ink transfer and compatibility with co-solvent ink.

The next challenge for flexography is to reduce the length of time (and the quantity of chemicals) involved in making plates. Although ablation CTP produces excellent quality dots, it takes the same amount of time and chemicals to produce the finished plate as analogue platemaking.

One response is thermal processing, pioneered by DuPont with its FAST system. FAST eliminates the use of chemicals and can reduce platemaking times by anything from one third to one half by eliminating exposure, chemical washing and drying steps. It uses a non-woven fabric (developer roll) to remove non-polymerized plate sections with the aid of controlled pressure and temperature levels and develops plates up to 90 – 120 cm. There are models for both digital and conventional plates.

There is still a debate about the lifetime of FAST plates

compared to solvent plates, as well as the plate quality compared to the best solvent systems. Keith Postle, operations director at BP Labels, which recently purchased a CDI system, comments: 'The question we want answered is "What quality benefits does FAST plate processing offer?" Speed is important if you need to make plates and put them on press very quickly, not something that is critical to us. Therefore assuming costs are comparable, FAST would have to offer a quality benefit over solvent processing, and that is the interesting question!'

A recent convert to FAST is Czech label printer S&K Label, which invested in a FAST 1000TD digital system. Karel Sehnal, executive officer of the company, reckons that the FAST system has reduced platemaking times from 2.5 hours to less than one hour per plate. 'There's always a press being set up or taken down, and we can slot in "rushes" and "panics", explains Sehnal. 'At the end of the day, that's what builds customer loyalty.'

MacDermid recently launched its own thermal platemaking system in a format dedicated to the narrow web sector. The LAVA 2530 Plate Processing System is claimed to generate press-ready plates in less than an hour. It uses MacDermid's specially developed Digital MLT photopolymer plate material which can be processed either in MacDermid's thermal unit or in conventional solvent-type processing systems.

A new approach to reducing flexo plate processing steps is direct engraving of the plate material. As a technology, laser engraving has been around for a long time of course, typically imaging low resolution rubber mats for solid colors and simple graphics.

Today, developments in laser power and software control, married to a new generation of ablatable materials, have dramatically improved the dot quality achievable by direct engraving, to the extent that Mark Andy, Codimag and MPS all showcased laser-engraved sleeve workflows on their latest presses at Labelexpo Americas in Chicago.

"Developments in laser power and software control, married to a new generation of ablatable materials, have dramatically improved the dot quality achievable by direct engraving"

Stork Prints has been at the forefront of these developments, adapting systems it already sells into the textile market for flexo platemaking. Its latest offering, aimed directly at narrow web users, is the Helios 6010, which is capable of producing flexo, Rotamesh rotary screen and letterpress printing formes on the same machine. The 6010 images to resolutions up to 2,540 dpi, using adjustable laser power to allow more control over dot formation.

Because there are fewer variables than for a conventional imaging/exposure/washout system, plates engraved for repeat jobs from the same digital file should be more-or-less identical.

To optimize the pre-production workflow, Stork has formed an alliance with Artwork Systems, under which all its engraving systems will be fully compatible with the Nexus RIP. The two companies have established a working group dedicated to further development of the software and workflow for laser engraving technology.

'Direct laser engraving clearly represents the future of printing forme production,' enthuses Guido van der Schueren, Artwork Systems' board chairman.

A recent purchaser of Stork's Helios engraving system is Swedish label and flexible packaging converter Laritryck. 'The

Plate news

- Performance Enhancing Cylinders (PEC) from Nu Tech Coatings is a unique narrow web cylinder coating technology which absorbs the vibrations which cause gear marking and banding. In addition to impression latitude, PECs allow for plates to be mounted directly to the cylinder with .005 tape. Nu Tech says the durable surface of the PEC is resistant to knife cuts and designed for easy mounting, stripping, and remounting of plates. Plates mounted on a PEC will take an impression set, which typically occurs at 1/4 to 1/2 a turn on the impression cylinder past kiss impression.
- Kodak has launched its Thermoflex Narrow Flexo-Offset CTP system, first announced at Labelexpo Brussels last year, which allows the imaging of flexo, letterpress, offset plates and film on the same device. 'We're seeing more and more crossover between flexo and offset printing,' explained Bob Dalton, product manager at Kodak GCG, at the launch. 'Narrow web printers are investing in offset and/or combination presses to expand their service offering, whereas commercial printers are buying flexo presses to move into multi-substrate printing.' The system can load any plate size up to the maximum 762 x 762 mm (30 x 30 in.) for flexo, and 762 x 744 mm (30 x 29 in.) for offset plates, with the option of imaging multiple plates simultaneously.

John Wojcik,
Production Manager
Heartland Label Printers

"The presses just run smoother with Martin equipment."

Heartland's production manager, John Wojcik, was looking for ways to track cost, cut waste, and improve profit margins. "About 60% of our cost is in the substrate," says Wojcik, "so controlling substrate waste was an issue. Martin Automatic worked with us to reduce our waste and increase our overall productivity. They analyzed our needs, made recommendations, and projected a very attractive yet conservative ROI on their solution."

Wojcik installed four Martin MBS-05-16-40 butt splicers on his 10" and 13" Mark Andy presses, and began to track the results.

"It's like running an endless roll! We have gotten greater throughput and improved quality."

"This was a decision made for the long term," says Wojcik. "This investment is going to add value for years to come."

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"'Direct laser engraving clearly represents the future of printing forme production,' enthuses Guido van der Schueren, Artwork Systems' board chairman"

Stork Helios system gives us high printing quality at a low price, and with very low consumable costs,' says Johan Ripa, Laritryck's managing director. 'Its user friendliness enables us to significantly speed up the plate-production workflow and boost responsiveness.'

The company had previously been buying digital ablation flexo plates. 'The complexity of the flexo platemaking process meant that, if a problem occurred with a printing plate, it could be many hours before a replacement was ready and printing could resume,' says Johan Ripa. 'Stork's direct laser engraving system has eliminated such problems, taking as little as 20 minutes to make the plate, enabling production "on-demand".'

Another company at the forefront of direct laser engraving is Lüscher Flexo, which strengthened its position with the acquisition of the assets of engraving pioneer ZED.

The first 3M FlexPose!direct 603 laser engraving system was installed at leading offset repro house Carey Color Inc of Cleveland, Ohio, USA, as the company's spearhead into the flexo market. Carey Color is using the FlexPose!direct primarily for sleeve making for flexible packaging, but also for corrugated pre-print, labels and dry offset.

'We have limited our sales due to the overwhelming response of clients and material manufacturers,' comments company president Gary Moravcik. 'So far we have not only met, but have exceeded our expectations of both quality and productivity. We have been asked to do testing on McDermid, Toray, BASF, Miraclon, Bottcher, Fulflex, Ligum, PolyWest, DuPont and A-Korn materials, including elastomers, polymers and silicone.'

Taking CTFP in-house?

Narrow web converters long ago took film-based letterpress and flexo platemaking in-house. The equipment was relatively inexpensive and easy to operate. However, label converters who switched to digital flexo plates for some or all of their work have generally relied upon specialist repro houses who could afford the more expensive laser imaging equipment and related digital workflow kit.

Today, the major imaging equipment manufacturers have developed specialist, 'entry level' fCTP systems designed to encourage narrow web converters to take digital platemaking in-house.

Esko-Graphics, for example, has introduced its CDI Spark 2120 Cyrel Digital Imager, which can image digital photopolymer plates, ablative film, or polyester-base letterpress plates up to 533 x 508mm (21 x 20 inches). Fully variable resolutions range from 2,000 to 2,540 pixels/inch to give screen rulings up to 80 l/cm, with halftone imaging from 1-99 per cent. A full size plate is imaged in 16 minutes at 2,000 ppi. It comes optionally bundled with Esko's Scope software.

Kodak GCG, meanwhile, offers its ThermoFlex Narrow digital imager in a 'converter' package which includes the Prinergy Powerpack workflow suite and on-site startup assistance.

RIPit Imaging Systems, Inc. and Anderson & Vreeland, Inc., were showing at Labelexpo Americas a high quality 'entry level' direct to plate flexo system with advanced workflow automation

- For narrow web letterpress printers transitioning to flexo, Toray-Dantex has developed the Torelief Rapidoflex water-washable hybrid letterpress-UV flexo plate. The company says the plate incorporates all the familiar characteristics of the Torelief family of plates and can be processed in standard Torelief plate processors. Also new from Dantex-Toray is the Torelief LR plate, specifically formulated for long print runs. Torelief LR is made from a more flexible hard polymer, which means fewer hairline cracks.

- Plate mounting and proofing specialist J M Heaford has developed a 'through the lens' target illumination system. A small circle of LED light projected onto the cylinder from each camera provides a pre-positioning guide and improves the image clarity of the register marks on the plate, resulting in faster and easier mounting.

- Flint Group Printing Plates – formerly BASF Drucksysteme – has put its new production plant for flexo plates into operation in Willstätt, Germany, increasing capacity by more than 30 per cent. Willstätt will become Flint's plates technology center, and the printing plates R&D department will be moved from Ludwigshafen to Willstätt by the end of the year.

functions which looks ideal for converters looking to take fCTP in-house. The system consists of a specially-engineered combination of RIPit's OpenRIP Flexo 5.0 software and Anderson & Vreeland's FlexoLaser CtP solution.

RIPit engineered exclusive screen sets specifically optimized for the FlexoLaser series, claimed to provide a sharper dot and cleaner halftones, resulting in printable highlight and shadow dots.

'The flexo market rightfully expects that sophisticated technologies will come down in price,' says Lenny Mizusaka, North America Flexo Division sales manager for RIPit. 'That time has come, because we've combined the best of both worlds in FlexoCtP. Anderson & Vreeland's hardware and our software mesh together beautifully in what tests show to be a very easy to install, elegant, and cost-effective system.'

RIPit's OpenRIP Flexo 5.0 provides workflow automation for the FlexoLaser hardware as well as the system's imaging engine. Its SmartDie function, for example, will automatically apply pre-assigned output specifications such as step & repeats, plate distortion, and traps and bearer-bars. The FlexoLasers are compatible with all commercial ablative masked photopolymer plate materials, whether solvent or water-wash, with no limitation to plate thicknesses. The 'Piccolo' model is specifically designed for label and narrow web applications.

One label converter to take digital platemaking in-house is BP Labels, based in Cardiff, Wales, which in August installed a CDI unit with Esko Graphics software, representing an investment of £100K.

"Our aim is to push the boundaries of flexo to the point where we are able to seriously challenge the traditional position of litho as the dominant quality process"

'Our new Cyrel Digital Imaging (CDI) equipment will enable us to make higher quality plates,' explains Keith Postle, operations director at BP Labels.

'Our aim is to push the boundaries of flexo to the point where we are able to seriously challenge the traditional position of litho as the dominant quality process. The associated software will also allow more sophisticated file manipulation, all of which will give ever greater consistency and further improve our service to our customers. Plus, with the new equipment, we can remove more chemicals than we previously could from the process, which is very important to us as we continue to think of the environmental issues involved and reduce our carbon footprint.' ■

- Kodak and Dantex have formed a strategic partnership which combines their expertise in flexographic computer-to- plate (fCTP) technology. Kodak will badge its Thermoflex fCTP plate-making system in the Dantex livery and Dantex will bundle Toray's Torelief Precision digital plates. The joint venture is designed to provide a proven digital 'package' for converters, although the Precision digital plates will work on any fCTP system. The Torelief Precision digital plates are capable of producing a screen range of 1-95 per cent at 200dpi.

- Agfa's new :Energy thermal plates can be used on any 830 nm thermal platesetter and can be processed in virtually any processor with the: Energy Developer unit. The plate is daylight safe for manual systems. The :Energy Elite plate is claimed to run at least 250,000 impressions unbaked – and up to 350,000 – in combination with UV inks, aggressive press chemicals and alcohol substitutes. The plate is capable of reproducing 1 – 99 per cent dots at 200lpi, as well as FM screening and Afga's own 340lpi Sublima screen.

- Toyobo's latest analogue water-wash flexo plate is the Cosmolight NS, capable of producing 1 per cent dots at 175 LPI. The plate is compatible with co-solvent ink.

- Agfa has asked L&L to clarify that the AquaFlash flexo plates launched in North America two years ago are no longer in the company's catalogue. The plates are produced by Toray and Olec, which continue to support them in the USA.

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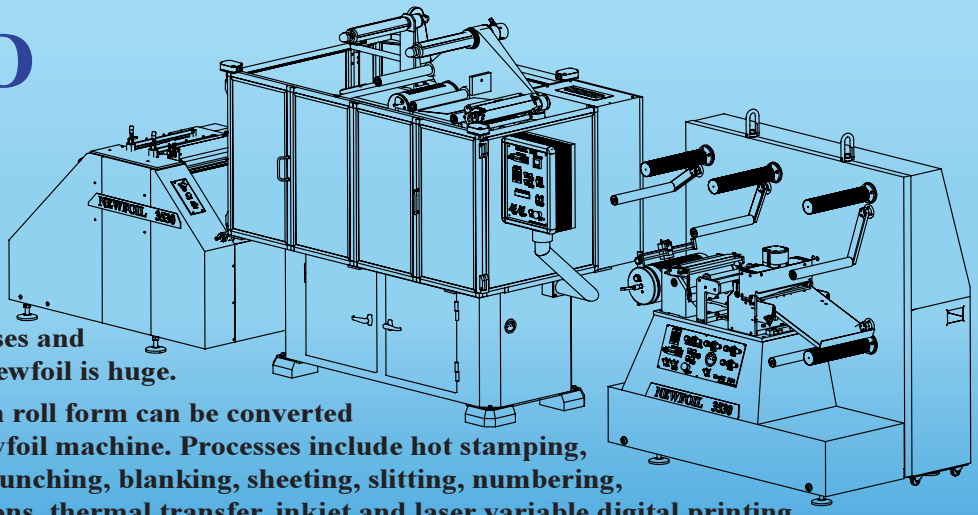

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Digital labels expand variable markets

High volume, personalized label production is opening up new markets in the interface between labels and forms for Topflite Print Management Service since the installation of a Nipson digital print system. **Katy Wight** reports

Combining labels with variable data provides a powerful marketing and communication tool to drive business. Personalized labels can play an integral part in boosting direct mail response rates by standing out in crowded mailboxes. At the same time, applications such as business and shipping forms benefit from easy-to-apply, tailored information associated with unique barcodes, numbering and customization, making for a fast, accurate, and efficient means to transfer information. For label providers, digital personalization is an emerging trend that offers the opportunity to provide an essential element to an information-driven economy.

This trend has played an important role in the growth of Topflite Print Management Limited (TPM) in Farrington Gurney, near Bristol, UK. Using Nipson's flash fusion digital printing technology, which allows personalized digital print on virtually any material, the company has built a strong presence in markets ranging from direct mail to security labels to business forms.

To grow in a wide range of markets, TPM must be able to print variable information such as bar codes, personalized addresses, and other variable form data on special substrates and complex documents.

Challenging substrates can range from pressure sensitive labels, to plastics and foils, to fully integrated envelope mailers and multilayered courier documents. To achieve this flexibility, TPM uses a Nipson black and white digital printer. The continuous fed digital printer employs a combination of flash toner fusion and magnetography, allowing TPM to personalize labels at high speeds and with great efficiency.

'Flexibility and efficiency are key values in what we offer our customers. Having the technology to deliver that flexibility in a cost-effective manner is essential to growing our business,' says Mike Broadway, managing director at Topflite Print Management. 'The Nipson press is an important part of our digital production business because it allows us to print on a wide range of substrates in very high volumes while keeping costs low.'

"For label providers, digital personalization is an emerging trend that offers the opportunity to provide an essential element to an information-driven economy"

The diverse range of substrates has enabled TPM to grow a diverse client base by increasing the company's print volumes year after year as individual markets fluctuate.

'We live in an age of information and the label can be a vital player if it can be efficiently and flexibly produced. Dependable, rapid output is essential to keep up with many of the new and more complex applications that are out there,' says Mike Broadway. 'The Nipson printer has been great in terms of letting us profit from just about any label job that comes our way.'

These applications have included hazard labels made from plastic, airline baggage tags, and courier labels. The demand for bar codes and personalized information has increased since data and the tracking of data have become a core part of doing business in the 21st century.

Integrated Applications

Variable labels on integrated documents such as ballot papers, tax forms, and direct mail are other applications that TPM has recently seen grow. Combining glues, plastics, and, at times, tipped-on cards, these applications are the ultimate in integration and provide convenience and accuracy.

'Convenience is a huge factor with an integrated mailer incorporating a personalized label,' says Paul Broadway, sales director. 'An integrated label is also a way to ensure the accuracy of data, whether it's for postal voting or for a direct mail application. These documents require human interaction and, at the same time, minimize the risk of inaccuracies that always exists when people handle documents. We can produce these documents seamlessly because of flash fusion digital print.'

Adding barcodes to labels is essential to many of the applications that TPMs customers demand. The company can convert labels made of virtually any substrate in roll or fanfold pack format. TPM has worked with its customers to leverage the use of barcodes and unique numbering in a variety of applications.

'Bar-coding and labeling are the perfect integration of unique and scannable identification combined with an easily applicable vehicle,' says Paul Broadway. 'We market the fact that we have a high-capacity system that can add variable information to all types of adhesive material. In other words, there are no limits to what a bar code can be applied to. From plastics, to pressure sensitive labels, to documents with an integrated hologram – we can print it. This message of flexibility is very important to our clients because it expands their idea of how barcodes can be used.'

TPM's Nipson 7000, which utilizes a combination of flash fusion and magnetography, is used to print the majority of its personalized labels. Flash fusing does not heat the printed substrate, allowing for easy throughput and finishing of a wide range of stocks, including heat-sensitive and/or self-adhesive materials as well as plastics.

The Nipson system uses a metal print drum instead of plastic. A metal print drum is a more durable option for printing labels. If a label peels while printing, it can simply be removed from the drum, the drum can be cleaned, and production can resume. A plastic drum would have to be replaced completely at considerable cost in terms of both money and time. The Nipson 7000 owned by TPM has a speed capacity of 400 A4 pages a minute with an 18" (450mm) print width.

'Nipson technology is an ideal way of personalizing labels because it has very little impact on the material that you run through it,' says Mike Broadway. 'It is also a very durable system, which is important to keeping our productivity up.

> "Labels are incorporating more materials and elements in order to increase the integrity of the information they carry. As this industry grows, we are prepared to grow with it"

Today, we're running the machine 24/7. It's the kind of production capacity we need to satisfy this growing market.'

TPM is escalating its market reach by expanding applications for labels. The company has seen labels used in direct mail as well as for security applications incorporating holograms, foils, and RFID technology.

'Information is becoming more complex and so documents are as well,' says Paul Broadway. 'Labels are incorporating more materials and elements in order to increase the integrity of the information they carry. As this industry grows, we are prepared to grow with it.'

Nipson and the labels market

Nipson has a niche position in the high volume production of personalized labels. The company has two models aimed at the label market. The VaryPress 400 can be run in-line with a flexo press, applying black and white variable data at up to 410 feet/min. For off-line applications, typically for over-printing a finished web, there is the VaryPress 200, which runs at around 230 feet/min and can incorporate other converting modules like pin-fed reels.

The basic technology behind Magnetography is the use of a magnetic drum to attract toner. Robert Stabler, president, Nipson America, cites the advantages: 'It can run very fast because it can clear the image off the drum faster than any other toner-based technology. With other technologies, the toner is positively and negatively charged, which means that you can only get one particle in each area. With magnetography you get lots of particles attracted – think back to when you were at school and imagine a magnet attracting iron filings. This gives you a very dense black.'

Stabler says that the biggest advantage of magnetography is that with cold flash fusion the substrate doesn't get heated and you can print on virtually any substrate in roll form – both heavy and light.

Nipson recently trialled the system on non-tearable materials like Teslin, and is looking at security printing – of microtext for example – on a range of difficult to print security substrates. ■

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Baker Self Adhesive Labels has installed an HP Indigo ws4050 in its converting facility and plans to sell digital label stock to other printers in Europe from its Coating Center of Excellence. **Katy Wight** reports

Baker Self Adhesive Labels of Walthamstow, East London, is in the midst of a digital revolution spurred on by a close partnership with HP Indigo. The label converting business has just installed the very latest HP Indigo ws4050 digital offset press, while its materials division has become an HP Indigo Coating Center of Excellence. This family-owned company has been handed on to its second generation and the Baker team is looking to the future with its new capabilities. Managing director Steve Baker is excited at the prospect of building the business with new short-run and variable data applications, along with the promise of growth into new market sectors and beyond the UK's borders.

'Baker Labels has always been a short to medium run specialist,' he explains. 'We have focused on being versatile in terms of the kinds of products and services that we offer. We run between five and six jobs on each flexo press every day, so digital really fell into our way of thinking.'

Steve's father Roy Baker started the company in 1973 and retired six years ago. Today, under Steve's management, Baker Labels works predominantly for the trade and a large percentage of the business are either flexo label printers or sheetfed offset operations. The company has three Nilpeter flexo presses (5-color 2400, 6-color 2400 and an 8-color 2500), offline rotary screen and hotfoil capabilities, and a semi-rotary Delta press used for short run work – a second Delta is no longer needed with the advent of the ws4050.

'When we first started looking at the original ws4000, we made up our mind that we were going down the digital route, but it was just not commercially viable at that time. Even now it is borderline, but we thought that now would be the time to get into the market and get to know the technology. The next generation of presses will be viable and that's not too far away.

'We gave ourselves time to look at all of the figures and over a period of eight months we studied the full cycle time of every job going through the plant. For some of our shorter run jobs we were getting ridiculous average print speeds of around 12m/min. We realized that the speed of the digital press was not going to be an issue. It would just be taking short run work off our flexo presses. The ws4050 fits in with some of the types of runs that we do, but it may not be a press for every kind of label printer. The capability has got to fit in with your business and you've got to work with it.'

As a result, the digital press is taking freeing up capacity on the Nilpeter presses and allowing the team to pursue more longer-run work. Since deciding to go digital, Steve has spent the past two years putting the right people in place and building a young and enthusiastic team. Both general manager Martin Bay and repro and digital department manager Neil Marchant have played key roles in driving the digital project forward. The company is now focused on accelerating through that learning curve and pushing the boundaries of the press capabilities.

'I just love the idea of digital technology,' says Baker. 'The set-up, the consistency, the exactness – you can control it and it becomes more of a science than an art. You can achieve amazing quality with the latest combination presses, but there is a tremendous amount of skill required and the prepress has to be

L-r: General manager Martin Bay, managing director Steve Baker, and Neil Merchant, digital/repro manager

perfect. Put digital up against conventional printing, and technically you have got a better product. This press is very clever and we really want to push what it can do. We have a good relationship with HP Indigo and we want to be involved in all of the new developments.'

The team has been working on microtext and duplex constructions, and intends to exploit the press for its variable data capabilities. The ws4050 is not a fast press, but Baker argues that in certain cases only digital will do the job.

'We just did a job that required consecutive numbering in a PMS color,' he explains, 'and that is a job that we would have had to turn down in the past. That's where digital scores. One job required 6,000m of consecutive numbering and we have quoted for eight million labels for an application that has to be printed digitally. In these cases, speed is an obvious issue, but if digital is the only answer and the customer is willing to pay for it, then we will print it.'

The company has recently begun to generate work from London-based advertising companies that need top quality marketing materials and samples at the drop of a hat. The company still faces the challenge of getting the right kind of work in and getting its message out to the right people. Steve Baker explains that they have fought against negative end user perceptions of digital print – often tainted by previous bad experiences – but are using the product to speak for itself. The ability to send full press proofs on the fly has certainly won them some business, and they are trying to keep their margins high. 'We don't want to just be a "busy" company, we want to make money,' Steve says, explaining his fear of margin erosion.

The company also invested in an Omega Digicon finishing line from ABG International with foil block, UV varnish, laminating and die cutting, which he says is, 'a brilliant piece of equipment', due to its ease of operation. The team manages color with the Esko Kaleidoscope package for Indichrome or often with Yours Truly, the system that comes with the press.

Baker Self-adhesive Labels has allied itself to HP Indigo even closer than most digital converters. Steve Baker's father began slitting materials, at first for the company, and then for other converters when he started the company. Eventually Baker Labels became a small distributor for Fasson and built up a separate materials division. Today, Baker Materials inventories over 400 specialty labelstocks from Fasson, Madico, DuPont and Polyart and has an annual turnover that rivals the label company. It was this experience that led the company to become an HP Indigo Coating Center of Excellence.

The company invested in an ABG International Omega Digicoater digital coating line, clean room and software for quality control, and is now coating for its own digital division and other companies that are looking for a specific material. The larger label stock suppliers can only offer a limited selection of Indigo coated material types and will only sell substantial quantities. Baker can coat any of the labelstocks that it carries and could provide as little as 250 linear meters. The company is also aiming for two-day delivery throughout the whole of Europe.

'We are looking for the niche areas,' explains Steve Baker. 'The last three jobs that we coated included ultra-destruct PVC, clear void film and hi-spec polyester with anti-tear. As digital print grows, it will start eating into traditional markets and converters will need more Indigo coated products. We're here and we have the flexibility to coat what you want and deliver it quickly.'

Baker Labels' new digital capabilities – both within the label converting operation and in the materials division – have certainly invigorated the company and the whole team are looking to the future.

'I was struggling to see what lay ahead in straightforward label printing. Where was the exciting future for the medium-sized companies? I have got a vision of four or five digital presses running different materials, and as files arrive electronically, they get posted automatically to the press. This is what's happening in flatbed digital. It's going to be a smaller company, but you're increasing profitability. It's a new era of labeling.' ■

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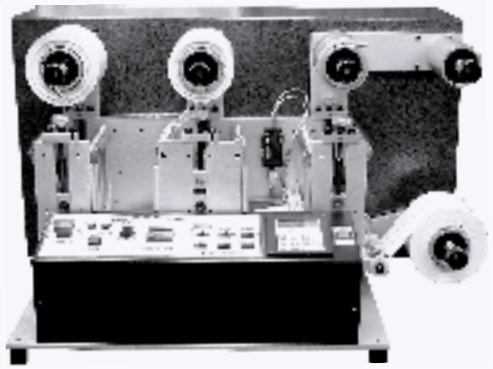

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Bridging cultures

Erol Zafer Akbas, MD of successful Turkish label converter Doga Etiket, spoke at the FINAT World Congress about selling to label buyers in different cultures. **Priya Roy** reports

'The world is much smaller as a result of advancements in communication technologies, information systems and ease of transportation' says Erol Zafer Akbas, managing director of Doga Etiket, one of Turkey's most successful label converters.

Of course he is right, and today there is much more selling across cultural boundaries for companies like Doga, whose clients do business on the borderline between 'western', 'eastern' and 'Slavic' cultures. If converters can manage these cultural differences, then there are great business opportunities. 'Countries that had never been considered major participants in world trade, have suddenly emerged as major economic powers,' notes Akbas.

Before family-owned company Doga moved into label production in the 1990's, Akbas worked hard to understand the requirements of this developing market. Doga purchased the most highly specified letterpress in Turkey at that time, configured with five letterpress plus one flexo unit, screen and hot foil. Because this equipment was more advanced than what was generally being used, it attracted top Turkish end users.

Doga learned that even in its home territory, there were different requirements in terms of run lengths, for example, between the South, East and in Istanbul. Some customers preferred to buy just-in-time to reduce risk of default on their payments. The company coped with this by buying semi-rotary presses and printing smaller quantities.

Looking to extend its business into Romania brought Doga up against obstacles of a different nature – language and body language, which later proved a problem once again in Russia. Akbas noted that packaging aesthetics were of more importance in this country than in Turkey. Designers worked without the normal cost limitations and customers were prepared to pay for what they got.

To help overcome the language barrier a native Romanian interpreter was hired, an 'intelligent and capable woman', who helped the company through a successful exhibition which resulted in a number of sales leads.

Erol Zafer Akbas, MD of label converter Doga Etiket

"We were sharing the export truck with another company, and the company's products were somehow very valuable and the truck was hijacked with our export labels. Another batch was printed immediately and shipped by air"

It quickly became clear that a local office with Romanian employees was required, but Doga was not generating enough revenue to support it. This reduced the company's business in the country.

When moving into Bulgaria, Doga was anxious to avoid making the same mistake, and began working with a local representative from the beginning. The company's international office – boldly named Doga International – opened with just one employee. To cover costs, the same employee was used to market granite stones – another product manufactured by Doga at its factory in Istanbul. These steps turned Doga into a market leader in Bulgaria, a country, like Romania, where aesthetics and innovation were demanded from label suppliers.

Doga took full advantage of its geographical position as a bridge between East and West, attending local exhibitions which attracted companies from Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Dealing with the Middle East was another challenge. The cultural differences here revolved around pricing and delivery, and 'more patience' was required in negotiations, according to Akbas. On the other hand, aesthetics were not as important to these companies as in the Balkans and Black Sea regions; price was the key.

Akbas says that understanding Arabs' body language on top of their verbal communication offers hints as to the success or otherwise of one's proposals.

Doga also deals with Ukrainian, Georgian and Russian customers, all of whom have a deep technical knowledge of self-adhesive and wet-glue' labels and insisted on 'superb design'.

The biggest problem Doga faced here were 'last-minute' changes in order quantities, delivery times or designs. The company soon adjusted to this: 'you should forget about altering their delivery deadline once it is given to you', is the advice offered by Akbas.

Akbas also learned that these customers do not immediately trust business partners. It requires time and a number of deals to be concluded, after which a customer will be loyal and committed. Akbas found that customer visits to Doga's factory were important tools to build trust.

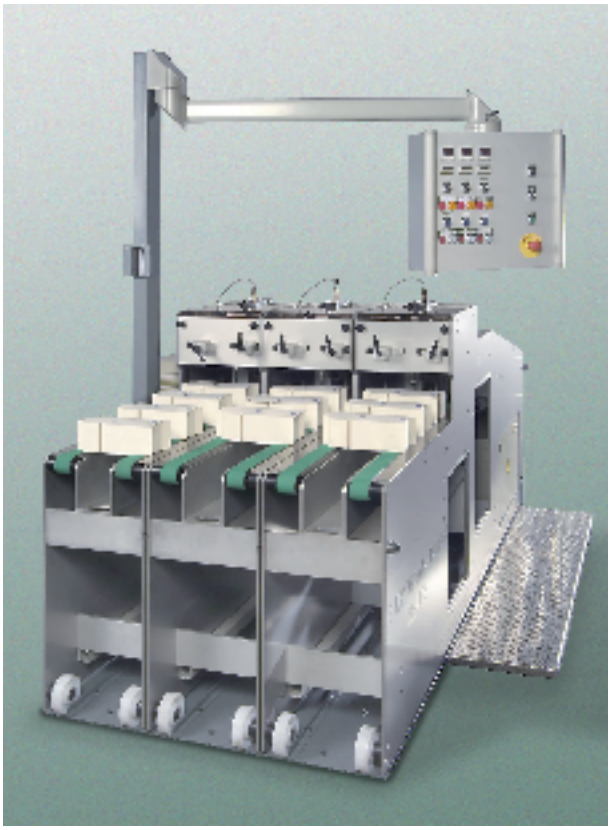
Understanding culture, and the way companies do business in the CIS, posed particular problems. Akbas explains – seemingly from hard-won experience – that 'Russians really like to talk business on the dinner table and every time something is achieved, you have to toss a drink…probably a strong vodka and you end up being drunk and accepting everything they say! This is the culture and you have to conform to it! It is not easy for many people to be as strong drinkers as Russians.'

The language barrier also proved a difficulty. There are many different interpretations of the Cyrillic language, meaning that one Russian phrase can be interpreted differently in Georgian or Ukrainian dialects. For this reason, a local interpreter was hired once again. Label text approvals were gathered from the client directly. These approvals frequently arrived late, requiring overtime to complete the job on schedule. Akbas says you need to stay alert for further changes even once approval has been given.

Another problem faced by Doga in working with Ukrainian and Russian companies was transportation, particularly shipping companies' 'loose' schedules, which were liable to change from day to day. Akbas relates another, rather unexpected problem:

'We were sharing the export truck with another company, and the company's products were somehow very valuable and the truck was hijacked with our export labels.' Another batch was printed immediately and shipped by air. The client must have been happy – and probably blissfully ignorant of the hijack incident – as Doga continues to do business with them today.

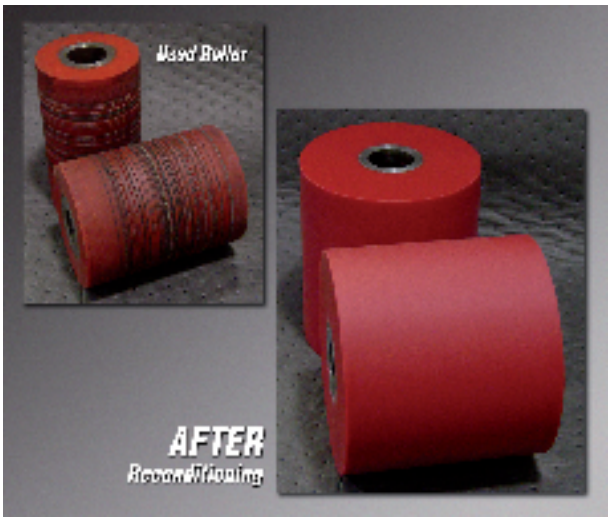
New products



Schober USA
AutoStack modules

Schober USA has introduced AutoStack modules to count, stack and separate die cut blanks quickly and efficiently – even under adverse operating conditions. They work well with a variety of materials, including cardboard, paper, laminates, and more, making them an ideal addition to converting machines and flatbed presses. Advanced laser technology provides exact product counting for white and other materials. Independent driven blank stacking trolleys allow the counting, stacking and separating of individual product streams, and trouble-free operation. Presetting the trolleys off-line allows operators to achieve instant make ready. Base module includes cross register and connections to take up the format related blank stacking trolleys.

Working widths from 260 mm (10 1/4 in) to 1,450 mm (57 in) are available. Stacking speed is 10 cycles per minute at a pile height of 100 mm (4 in). All electronic components, wiring, electrical cabinets and PC-based control are included. Unit requires a 6 bar compressed air supply with consumption of approximately 100 l/min.



Vi-Cas Manufacturing
Roller reconditioning service

Vi-Cas Manufacturing now provides a roller reconditioning service for all types of rollers – in long lasting polyurethane, or silicone for high-temperature applications. 'Rollers from all types of equipment can be recoated to original equipment specifications at a fraction of the price of new,' the company said in a statement. 'Durometers from A20 (very soft) through D60 can be applied to existing cores. In addition to reconditioning of used rollers, Vi-Cas offers new rollers to customer specifications. Vi-Cas can manufacture rollers from supplied drawings, or reverse-engineer rollers from supplied parts.'

Stonecube
Virtual proofing

Print visualization specialist Stonecube has launched PrintDevizor Pro, a design and print visualization tool that delivers virtual proofing of special finishes and inks can now wrap round as well as wrapping up. Having mastered the ability to wrap and display the impact of 2D artwork around a 3D folded carton or box, now new PrintDevizor Pro version 2.1 can preview the very different effects exhibited by metallic inks and other special finishes when printed on a cylindrical label or surface.

Take artwork from any standard creative software, select a material, including plastic, which can be shown as opaque or transparent, and add any special effect, from embossing, spot varnish, foils, metallic inks, textures or die cutting. New PrintDevizor Pro v2.1 will take 2D artwork and in one neat maneuver literally wrap and display your printed sheet as a full or partial cylindrical shape at the touch of a button.

New products

SATO America
Lt408 OEM Print Engine

SATO America has announced the introduction of its latest OEM Print Engine, the Lt408. The new Lt408 is designed to meet the needs of the entry-level print apply market.

The Lt408 OEM Print Engine is the ideal print apply solution for small to mid-sized manufacturers looking to automate the labeling process on low-throughput, labor-intensive production lines. Although the applications are low-throughput, the combination of a high performance, 32-bit, RISC CPU and 16MB of RAM, enables the Lt408 to efficiently output even the most complex label formats.

With its unique plug-in interface design, which allows for a wide variety of host communication options; its large LCD display and icon-driven user interface for easier and more intuitive operation; its bi-directional ribbon drive for greater ribbon compatibility; and its use of SPL, SATO's industry-leading programming language, the Lt408 OEM Print Engine delivers on its promise.

Event diary

October

15-18 Graph Expo and Converting Expo, Chicago, Illinois, USA
17-19 Digital Print World 06, London
23-25 Munich Adhesives and Finishing Symposium, Munich, Germany
23-24 Ink Jet Academy: Theory of Ink Jet Technology, Barcelona, Spain
24-25 DIGIPACK, Paris, France
24-27 Scanpack, Gothenburg
25-27 DecTecT06 Europe - Labelling, Product Decoration and Packaging Conference 2006, Amsterdam
26-28 Sino-FlexPack 2006, Shanghai, China
29 CPP Expo/Pack Expo International 2006, Chicago, USA
30 Coating and Drying Technology Seminar, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA

November

2-3 Adhesion Technology Seminar, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA
7-8 Pressure Sensitive/Self-Adhesive Technology Workshop 2006, Amsterdam
9-11 Visual Communication, Italy
14-17 Print Land 2006, Lviv, Ukraine
14-17 Smart Label Summit Europe 2006, Amsterdam
15-16 Verpackung Nord 2006, Bremen, Germany
15-16 Smart Label Summit Europe, Amsterdam
21 Adhesive Technology Seminar, Amsterdam
22-23 Verpackung Sud 2006, Ulm, Germany
29-30 Label Summit South China, Guangzhou

December

6-9 India label Show, Delhi, India
11-14 India Pack
20-23 Print, Pack & Paper Expo Shanghai 2006, Shanghai, China

L&L competition

The global reach of L&L

Send in your photos and win a copy of the Encyclopedia of Labels and Labeling Technology

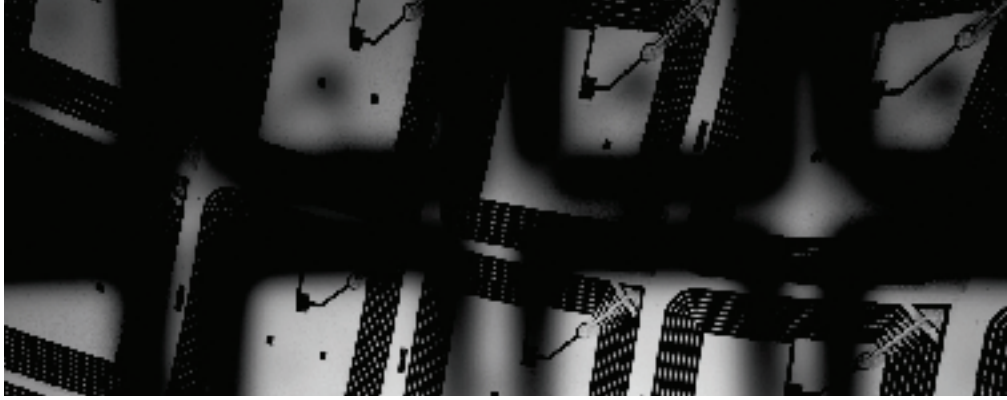
Labels & Labeling is offering you the chance to get your picture into world's leading label magazine and win a free copy of the Encyclopedia of Labels and Labeling Technology.

Simply send in a photo of yourself holding a copy of the magazine in an exotic location, and you could be a winner! In each issue we will print the best photo, as judged by the L&L team – every issue is a new chance to win.

We will also feature photos of the L&L staff – and to kick off we have industry expert and L&L founder Mike Fairley in front of the pyramids of Teotihuacan in Mexico. Also pictured is our advertising manager Tim Gordon, relaxing by Lake Lucerne in Switzerland.

Email your photo to pics@labelsandlabeling.com, and you'll be in with a chance of winning the industry's first and only book of its kind for the label, product decoration, web printing and converting industry. Written by Mike Fairley, who has over 25 years of industry experience, the Encyclopedia provides an easy-to-use global reference guide, illustrated with over 200 images and diagrams.

Good luck and happy snapping!



Smart Label Summit Europe

If you're interested in finding out about the latest developments in smart, smart active and RFID labels, you need to attend the European Smart Label Summit in November. **James Quirk** previews the Labelexpo Global Series event

Smart Label Summit Europe, which takes place on November 15-16 in Amsterdam, is unique in its strong focus on the capabilities of all smart label technologies, not just RFID.

The autumn conference will explore the size and scope of the European smart label market and offer delegates the chance to learn about the huge opportunities available to their label businesses and customer base through adopting this technology. The event will also enable delegates to network with leading experts, industry peers, and European brand owners, and will provide a platform for identifying new business opportunities and commercial partnerships.

Smart Label Summit Europe has attracted top speakers from some of Europe's leading brand owner organizations in the retail, healthcare, IT and FMCG sectors. Experts from Pfizer, Tesco, Woolworths, Marks & Spencer, Unilever and Hewlett Packard, will be taking center stage in Amsterdam in November, to share their predictions, insights and expert advice with senior-level delegates.

On the first day of the conference, Chris Adcock, president of EPCglobal Inc., will deliver the keynote presentation and discuss the role of standards in helping international retailers to expand their business beyond their home markets. He will also analyze the commercial opportunities emerging from Central and Eastern European countries. Tim Marsh, technology manager in the global packaging division of Pfizer, will demonstrate how drug safety and tracking can be improved.

Experts from key European retail groups will give presentations, using recent examples which will help delegates to understand the practical elements to implementing this technology in the supply chain. James Stafford, head of RFID at Marks & Spencer, will highlight how the UK retail chain is using item-level tagging to improve customer service and business efficiency in its clothing and food departments.

Rene Bakker, logistics director at Schuitema, a leading retail group in the Netherlands, will present a case study to delegates about how smart labels can be used

> "Some of the new technology innovations include smart dust, microwire, nanocodes, biometric identifiers, and even nanocoatings that can make paper waterproof"

to grow a retail business. Schuitema owns the Dutch supermarket chain, C1000, which has hundreds of outlets across the country. His presentation will show how RFID/smart labels can reduce fresh food wastage in the supply chain and improve operational processes.

Running alongside the Smart Label Summit is a tabletop exhibition with exhibitors from across Europe attending, including: Avery Dennison, HP, Timestrip, bielomatik, Domino Printing Sciences and Picosoft, to name but a few. A 'How to' Masterclass will also be run by label expert Mike Fairley.

Why now?

The world of smart, intelligent and clever labels is changing fast, and it's not just RFID that is driving the market. New developments in smart active label solutions are expected to have a major impact on the food, retail, drug and medical fields in coming years, while smart intelligent labels will further impact on the logistics, drinks, chilled products and related markets.

Just look at some of the new technology innovations in the pipeline for the label and packaging sectors: smart dust, microwire, nanocodes, biometric identifiers, and even nanocoatings that can make paper waterproof. And this is just the beginning of new product opportunities that will have a major impact on many label user sectors – and even consumers.

Undoubtedly, of all the new developments, RFID smart labels look set for the most rapid growth in 'smart' technology over the next few years as the retail, pharmaceutical, airline baggage handling, fashion, media and logistics sectors agree or finalize standards and start mass implementation of UHF or HF technology into their markets. Within all these sectors, RFID will make automation easier, offer extra data security and enable dynamic information to be integrated with the product. Certainly, major benefits for end users are already becoming well proven.

Some forecasters believe that by 2015 around 1,000 billion item-level tags will be sold annually, and 99.5 per cent of these will be in the form of labels. In addition, the growth of smart active and intelligent labels is expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2010. These statistics provide reason enough for label printers and brand owners to learn about the benefits of adopting this technology for the efficiency, profitability and future of their business.

While Wal-Mart and other international retail groups have been the major driving force behind RFID smart labels for pallet and case labels in the retail supply chain over the past couple of years – with a steady and rising growth in tag volumes – it is now the pharmaceutical industry that is looking to be the next to track and trace goods (in this case, every pack of medication throughout the whole supply chain). Pilot programs have

"Another key sector where RFID is now being introduced is for airline baggage handling. Projects are already well under way at Las Vegas, Hong Kong and Amsterdam airports"

already been initiated by drug manufacturers and others in the supply chain, with full-scale implementation anticipated by 2007.

Similarly, the fashion and apparel sectors are also looking to use RFID smart labels for tracking every item of clothing, not just in the supply chain but for inventory control and out-of-stock situations. Again, volume usage of both HF and UHF technology is anticipated during 2007, with a number of projects now ramping up for full implementation.

Another key sector where RFID is now being introduced is for airline baggage handling. Projects are already well under way at Las Vegas, Hong Kong and Amsterdam airports to improve customer service, baggage security and minimize baggage mishandling. The adoption of standards by the airlines will provide a high volume, high growth potential for label converters over the next few years.

Key to the successful implementation and growth of RFID in all these markets are issues such as tag costs, total smart label applied costs, performance and yield of tags, specifications and guidelines to be followed, volume smart label production and supply chain efficiency – all important for the smart label converter. Most of these issues are now becoming better understood and the latest smart label manufacturing equipment and system integration procedures are much advanced on just a year or so ago. Undoubtedly potential RFID smart label converters should be able to invest for the future with some degree of certainty.

Add to all these advances and applications in the use of RFID smart labels, the latest developments in time and temperature indicating labels for the food and drug industry, the introduction of odor and oxygen scavenging labels for food freshness, the latest advances in antimicrobial and bacteria-detecting labels for the medical, hospital and food industries, new product authentication solutions with biometric identifiers and color change labels for chill and freezer cabinet products, drinks and medical applications, and the world of labels is definitely becoming ever smarter.

The potential for new technology to enhance the automation of handling, storage and shipping, provide proof of process control, keep food fresher for longer, minimize wastage, speed up checking and high speed reading and provide new brand protection and authentication features, is now immense. This is a potential which label users will not wish to ignore if they want to reduce costs and add value to their products.

Commenting on the importance of this technology, Roger Pellow, Smart Label Summit managing director, said: 'We look forward to staging this important conference for European printers and brand owners in Amsterdam. It's essential for the industry to be better informed about the technologies that will have a massive impact on the future of their business. The event will be very informative and will give delegates the chance to take away new knowledge and apply it to their businesses.'

DAY 1: WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 15 2006

09:00 – 09:15

Chairman's welcome and introduction

RFID smart labels: global developments and integration experiences

09:15 – 09:45

Keynote address: EPCglobal – delivering value through global standards

09:45 – 10:15

Case study: Using smart labels in the supply chain to grow retail business

10:15 – 10:30

Delegate Q&A

RFID in the global supply chain

11:15 – 11:45

Case study: The future of smart labels and RFID in the pharmaceutical industry

11:45 – 12:15

Case study: Find out how effective RFID is in the global supply chain

12:15 – 12:45

Case study: Obstacles and opportunities for RFID at all stages of the production supply chain

12:45 – 13:00

Delegate Q&A

14:30 – 15:30

Panel session: Current and future developments in RFID and smart labels from the end-user perspective

The future of case and item level smart solutions

15:30 – 16:00

Case study: How Marks and Spencer is using RFID to improve customer service and business efficiency in clothing and foods

16:30 – 17:00

Case study: The world's first item-level tagged store

17:00 – 17:30

Providing secure, reliable, product traceability

17:30 – 17:40

Delegate Q&A

DAY 2: THURSDAY NOVEMBER 16 2006

09:00

Chairman's introduction to day two

How can smart and intelligent labels enhance label functionality

09:15 – 09:45

The latest advances in smart, smart active and smart intelligent labels

09:45 - 10:15

Better communication through smart packaging labels

10:15 – 10:30

Delegate Q&A

11:15 – 11:45

The benefits of smart labels to the chilled goods market

Manufacturing, integrating and implementing RFID smart labels

11:45– 12:45

Panel session: RFID Inlays – today and tomorrow

12:45 – 12:55

Delegate Q&A

14:25 – 14:55

Becoming a successful RFID smart label converter

14:55 – 15:25

Low cost RFID – opportunities and markets for the converter

15:25 – 15:40

Delegate Q&A

16:10 – 16:40

Progress to volume item level tagging

16:40 – 17:10

'How to' manufacture RFID/smart labels

17:10 – 17:25

Delegate Q&A

17:25 – 17:30

Chairman's closing remarks

{SMART LABELS
infinite **possibilities**

More than compliant

A computer hardware manufacturer's project to meet Department of Defense RFID mandate provides an interesting case study of RFID implementation. **James Quirk** reports

When MPC Computer, the third largest supplier of computer hardware to the federal government, set out on the path to compliance with the Department of Defense's (DoD) RFID mandate, the company knew what it wanted – a fast, efficient solution, planned and implemented as quickly as possible, and with minimal disruption to current processes. The company also wanted a solution that allowed it to scale up its automated operation in the future.

It might have been a demanding wish-list, but it was all made possible by systems integrators Enterprise Information Systems, Inc (EIS), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Domino Printing Sciences plc.

Like other suppliers to the DoD, Idaho, USA-based MPC, a subsidiary of HyperSpace Communications, Inc, wanted to avoid non-compliance issues disrupting its ability to continue to serve the DoD, or create a roadblock for the payment of invoices. The DoD mandate required that MPC comply in three ways – ensuring cartons and pallets arrived with the appropriate RFID labeling as well as with the appropriate UID (unique identification) marking, and submitting invoices in electronic form to the government's payment system, WAWF (wide area workflow).

As its partner MPC chose Dallas, USA-based EIS, a specialist systems integrator experienced in developing and implementing compliance solutions tailored to DoD specifications. Specifically, MPC settled on EIS' Compliance 1st solution, a full-service RFID package covering all aspects of compliance, from an initial analysis of a company's existing practices through RFID education and readiness reviews to tag placement testing and all the necessary hardware and software.

MPC's week-long installation of EIS' Compliance 1st solution started with EIS specialists giving an initial RFID seminar to the MPC team members working in all affected functional areas, from material handlers to IT managers. The seminar addressed the basics of RFID technology, the essentials of the DoD mandate and how RFID works with shipping and receiving processes, providing a solid foundation of education that enabled every team member to understand and implement the technology – a critical component to the successful deployment of RFID technology.

The next step was to outline the processes affected by the RFID implementation, mainly MPC's order fulfillment process. To determine where RFID would be most effective in its application, the EIS RFID analysts shadowed MPC team members to pinpoint the points of activity for data collection throughout the order fulfillment process, which was highly integrated with MPC's Oracle business system.

To achieve compliance, MPC's solution had to go beyond simply slapping on an RFID tag at the end of the shipping process. It involved transferring the appropriate data from the Oracle-based system to the DD-250s – the vital material inspection and receiving reports – that serve as detailed packing lists for DoD shipments, then to the RFID labels that identify the shipments location and order number, then to the UID labeling that identifies the unique product and finally to the WAWF in order to receive payment from the DoD.

EIS analysts started at the beginning by backing up to the point where this data first becomes available, and completing an RFID readiness review detailing the processes and environmental factors that would affect the installation. EIS traced the various data inputs and outputs and where the hand-offs for that data occurred throughout the process flow. By identifying these critical steps for MPC, EIS provided a roadmap that allowed both MPC and EIS to determine how best to revamp the current processes to produce and submit the necessary RFID-enabled information to the government.

Once the new process was solidified, EIS started to design the actual RFID system. Taking into consideration all of MPC's requirements, EIS brought together a system that used Symbol's MC9060-R RFID handheld unit for tag validation, Printronix's

RFID enabled printer for label generation, Alien Technologies' circular and linear antennas for tag reading, and Mil-Pac Technology software for label and form generation.

Once all the components of the system were in place, EIS carried out a series of tag placement testing sequences to ensure the system would provide the necessary RFID compliance. Achieving the most accurate, maximum read rates requires consistent tag placement that allows for the optimum transmission of the RF signal, and so EIS fixed RFID labels to several sample products from the MPC line of computer equipment and ran them through RFID portals using dollies, fork trucks and pallet jacks. The results enabled EIS to determine the best placement for the tags and then develop documentation to make sure MPC employees followed the correct labeling procedures.

MPC's implementation of EIS' Compliance 1st solution is a 'stand-beside' RFID solution that does just that – it stands beside and works alongside existing processes with minimal disruption. The software EIS specified to assist with label and form generation was developed by leading software compliance provider Mil-Pac Technology and provided a manual interface for automated label printing and creation of the DD-250s. The Oracle system generates the DoD order data and pushes that to a user that then enters the data into the Mil-Pac Technology interface to generate the DD-250s, print UID and RFID labels, and submit its invoices via the DoD's WAWF.

An MPC spokesperson said that EIS' Compliance 1st 'has really lived up to its name. It gives you RFID compliance quickly and easily – but then goes beyond that. From our point of view, we initially sought only to find a solution that provided immediate compliance to the DoD mandates, but throughout the project EIS analysts identified areas that could automate MPC's compliance process. Knowing that this was a future possibility, they have developed a system for us that will easily scale to more users and increase automation.' ■

Smart Label News

KSW Microtec launches flexible temperature data logger

KSW Microtec AG, the German company from 'Silicon Saxony', has launched the thinnest flexible temperature data logger in the market. The KSW-VarioSens temperature data logger is a semi active RFID transponder in a label format, which measures the temperature with an integrated sensor and records the data by means of the paper thin environmentally-friendly battery. It is even able to evaluate measured data and save only the data which is of relevance.

The water-repellent surface and the self-adhesive backside mean that an RFID temperature data logger can be used directly on every single product.

New aluminum RFID inlay from Omron

Omron RFID has announced the availability of a new aluminum HF inlay which is ideally suited for security and asset tracking applications such as library and access control.

Omron has more than 20 years of experience providing copper inlays for the RFID market. The announcement introduces Omron's new aluminum-based inlay, V730S-D13-PO1. This credit-card sized inlay is compliant with the ISO15693 HF standard for 13.56MHz frequency and achieves comparable performance with the copper version of the same size inlay. Omron said it will continue manufacturing copper inlays for the HF market alongside aluminum.

Smart Label News

Confidex to provide 125 million contactless tickets to Chinese railway operator

Confidex, the RFID tag design and manufacturing specialist, has announced that Guangshen Railway Company Ltd, part of the world's largest public transport operator, Ministry of Railways of China, has selected Confidex as the supplier of contactless limited use tickets. Under the five-year contract, Confidex is to provide 125 million RFID tickets, with deliveries to start in October of this year.

The contactless ticket order is one of the largest single orders for RFID tags ever and positions Confidex as the new global market leader for limited use RFID tickets. In order to fulfill the contract, Confidex will establish a subsidiary, XinTag, in Guangzhou, China. Confidex's RFID ticket products will be marketed under the XinTag brand.

Timestrip develops new label technology for vaccines

Timestrip Plc, which develops and markets unique label technologies, has announced that it has developed a label that is capable of recording whether temperature sensitive products have been accidentally frozen during transport or storage.

The iStrip is a patent-pending label which undergoes an irreversible color change when exposed to freezing temperatures. Developed in response to demand from the pharmaceutical industry, iStrip is designed to be mass-produced at low cost and to be fully integrated into the packaging of products such as vaccines, protein based pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs and fertilizer.

Accidental freezing of Diptheria, Tetanus, Pertussis and Hepatitis B vaccines, and combination vaccines, can compromise their immunological potency. Recent studies in the UK, USA, Canada, Pakistan, Malaysia, Hungary, Mongolia and other countries have found widespread freezing at many levels of the vaccine distribution system. The high incidence of this problem and the resulting health risks have made the monitoring and elimination of accidental freezing a priority for organizations such as WHO, UNICEF and PATH (Program for Appropriate Technology in Health).

PakSense announces availability of temperature monitoring label

PakSense, Inc., an innovator in sensory solutions for packaging, has announced mass availability of its TXi temperature and time monitoring label.

PakSense TXi Labels are flat, about the size of a sugar packet, and can record time and temperature data for up to eight weeks. LED alerts provide visual indication if the customer's temperature specification have been breached and all data obtained by the label can be downloaded and graphed. PakSense TXi Labels provide insight into what happens to products during distribution and enable users to make better quality and safety decisions. They were recently named the runner-up in the 2006 Wall Street Journal Technology Innovation Awards in the Technology Design category.

Labels are encased in food-grade packaging and can be either attached to cartons with adhesive or laid directly on product. They are pre-programmed with acceptable temperature range specifications by PakSense and can be customized for each product application – such as meats, seafood, produce or pharmaceuticals. The customer or their supplier simply snaps the corner of the label to activate it and attaches it to product prior to shipment.

'The PakSense TXi Label provides a simple approach to monitoring product temperatures at reduced costs compared to other solutions,' said Michael Ito, president of Coast Produce Consolidation in Los Angeles, California. 'This technology and application is the most revolutionary product to enter the cold-chain market in the past ten years.'

Industry addresses item-level use of RFID

AIM Global, the industry trade association and worldwide authority on automatic identification and mobility technologies, has published its position on 'Item-level RFID Tag Frequency,' which is the latest in an ongoing series of 'Position Statements' about major issues facing Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technologies and solutions.

AIM Global's RFID Position Statement on item-level tagging emphasizes that 'AIM Global supports the appropriate use of RFID for item-level identification by providing supply chain efficiencies, a safe and secure food chain, pharmaceutical authentication and e-pedigree, and accurate product recalls.'

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Label converters should be developing smart label solutions for a smarter and more profitable future.

Countering the counterfeiters

Israel-based ATB-Group-TSYN developed a security technology that was a phenomenon in Eastern Europe. Now it's moving into the US, as **James Quirk** reports

Counterfeiting is a global problem. EU-backed website 4IPR.com (For Intellectual Property Rights) estimates that annual lost revenues worldwide are now approaching 1,300 billion US dollars, a figure which equates to 7-8 per cent of world trade. In Europe, over 20 billion Euros is lost each year in the clothing & footwear, pharmaceuticals, and wines & spirits sectors alone.

It seems that nowadays anything can be replicated. Inexpensive computers, scanners, printers, and even digital cameras, have made reproducing a brand owner's label or packaging easier than ever.

But in Eastern Europe ATB-Group-TSYN has produced a security technology that has had great success in allowing the consumer to easily identify the genuine article from the fakes. Now the company has opened an office in New Jersey, USA, to serve the North American market.

Twenty years ago in the former USSR, scientists developed a technology that allowed them to create an image inside a 2-3 micron polymer layer that can only be seen with a polarized film. They moved to Israel where they were able to commercialize the technology some years later.

Now this same technology is offered by ATB in the form of hidden images called Latentograms and Unigrams. The Latentogram is a polarized covert image applied to a reflecting layer. They can be made as self-adhesive labels of various shapes and sizes with visible and hidden images, as well as laminating film and hot stamping foil. They can contain textual or graphic information as well as hidden numeration. Using a hologram as the reflecting layer creates the Unigram, which can be used in the production of high security documents and tax labels, for example.

The image can be integrated into any surface, so potential applications are varied. The technology has already been used in the liquor industry as well as numerous applications for the Government of Belarus. ATB is in talks with several pharmaceutical companies, and the technology has been approved for use in the garment industry, after passing tests for washing and ironing.

The validity of a product can be easily determined using an authenticity identifier – a simple plastic card with polaroid film. The consumer passes the reader over the

{SMART LABELS
infinite possibilities

product, and if it's genuine the hidden image is displayed.

'It's a technology that anyone can use,' says executive VP Vadim Yesepkin. 'It's very easy to identify: either you can see the image through the identifier, or not. It is also cheap, as there is no need for equipment or machinery.'

But this simplicity belies extra levels of security that the company has developed, but is holding back for future use. 'Nowadays if something comes into widespread use, eventually it will be counterfeited,' admits Yesepkin. 'At the moment it is not possible to replicate our product, but you never know what will happen in the future. For this reason, we have two extra levels of security, already developed, that we can bring in at any time to safe-guard ourselves from being counterfeited.'

The technology was used by the Belarusian government in tax stamps, and was integrated into tickets for the Davis Cup tennis matches in Eastern Europe. It has been used in Belarus and Russia in monthly passes for public transport, which resulted in one city in Belarus seeing a 40 per cent rise in ticket sales within two months. Megkoff vodka in Russia integrated the technology into its labels and experienced a 15 per cent increase in sales.

'It can also be useful for internal control,' says Yesepkin. 'One Russian vodka brand, which I can't name, had two factories: one headquarters and one licensed factory. They were told that the labels would be supplied to them, and that they couldn't print them themselves. The licensed factory put up a great deal of resistance. We found out that they had been manufacturing three times more vodka and selling it on the side, without declaring it. The whole management was fired.'

'We worked with a hologram printer who integrated our technology into his product, and it created a whole new client base for him. His production went up from two to three thousand square meters a month to over 60,000.'

ATB's factory is in Minsk, Belarus, and a second is under construction in Vilnus, Lithuania. 'It's a good location because it's in the EU,' says Yesepkin. The company's headquarters are in Israel.

'We have only been acting within the boundaries of Eastern Europe so far,' continues Yespkin, 'but now we are ready to move into different markets. We want to expand into the rest of the world from our new office in the US.'

Latin America is another market where ATB sees potential for its technology. 'We hadn't thought about Latin America until attending Smart Label Summit Americas in Miami, which was attended by many people from that region,' says Yesepkin. 'Now it is a market we want to break in to.'

The company is looking to integrate its technology into existing labels at production level, as an added security feature. 'We don't want to take business away from people; we want rapid development alongside established companies,' says Yesepkin. 'At the moment we are big in Eastern Europe, but we are small in the rest of the world.' ■

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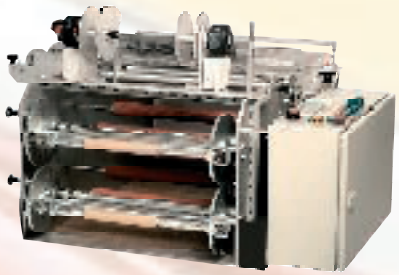

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Smart solutions

Smart packaging is coming of age, but label converters will need to develop new skill sets to commercialize the technology and open new market opportunities, says **Lawrence Gasman,** principal analyst at NanoMarkets LC

New technologies are turning garden variety 'packaging' into 'smart packaging.' Among other functionalities, smart packaging can sense the environment and react to changes, offer track-and-trace capability in the supply chain, detect the presence of pathogens in packaged material and convey information to the user through a variety of means. A recent study published by my company NanoMarkets explores the opportunities in smart packaging and forecasts that by 2011 the smart packaging market will be worth $4.7 billion.

A number of drivers favor the increasing penetration of smart packaging, including changing consumer demand patterns, changes in demographics, increasing demand for anti-counterfeit solutions and the need to ensure the freshness and usability of packaged foods and pharmaceuticals. For brand manufacturers, smart packaging opens the prospect of creating or reinforcing brand identities through the use of high-tech features.

Printable Electronics

Although smart packaging involves a very broad range of new technologies, printable electronics seems to be of special interest, since – to state the obvious – printing is already an intrinsic part of the packaging industry. NanoMarkets believes that three types of printable electronics products are likely to have a critical impact on the smart packaging market over the coming decade. These are RFID, power sources and displays.

The most important of these in terms of impact will be RFID. Indeed, it is impossible to bring implementation of RFID down to the level of the individual package without RFID being printed. RFID antennas are currently being printed, but not yet the circuitry, which is mainly created using low-end silicon semiconductor technology. But various firms are now pursuing fully printable RFID using organic materials or silver inks. Other firms are looking at printable power sources. Many implementations of smart packaging would today use standard batteries, but printable batteries and printable thin-film photovoltaic cells are perhaps a couple of years away from commercialization, and seem to promise radical reductions in the cost of power sources for smart packaging if sufficient volume demand materializes.

> "Conductive inks have come a long way in terms of environmental and chemical stability, but they could be better"

Frankly, smart packaging is not an application that most display technology developers are thinking about right now, but we believe in the long run there is considerable opportunity here. Displays can serve as an unavoidable feature of packaging and can provide such important features as detailed usage directions or simply enhance brand image – moving images of superheroes on toys and breakfast cereal packages, for example.

With all that said, it is important not to be too optimistic about the prospects for printed electronics. The technology is in its early stages. Conductive inks have come a long way in terms of environmental and chemical stability, but they could be better – easier to use, for example. And there are open questions as to which is the best printing technology to use – gravure, silk screen, ink-jet and other techniques have all been used to create electronics.

Also, for printed electronics to be viable in the smart packaging market, very low cost points must be achieved. There is much talk about the one cent RFID tag and considerable hope

"The US government has already issued guidelines for the use of electronic pedigree systems for the pharmaceutical supply chains"

that printable electronics could bring this about, but nobody can be sure of this. And while sophisticated sensors would find a ready market in the smart packaging sector, the focus of sensor research is more on making sensors more sensitive to a wider range of substances rather than reducing the costs considerably. Partly for this reason, printable sensors have not had much attention from commercial firms, although there is a lot of interesting university research in this area.

Who will smart package?

In addition to technological immaturity a lot of work needs to be done on how best to implement some of these newer types of packaging. To have it work will require that printers require new skill sets, for example. Printing electronics is quite different to printing graphics. With graphics the point is to make the end result look good. With printed electronics, the objective is that the end result actually works. To make smart packaging work, experts in packaging, printing, materials, electronics, IT and marketing must all be brought together and somehow empowered to speak the same language. This has proved hard to do so far and many of the firms that we have talked with who have been involved in smart packaging have used the word 'frustration', in describing their experience so far. But few of them doubt the long term worth of their smart packaging projects.

No wonder then that the penetration of smart packaging is still quite low. However, there are major trends in the economy and in society that will change this.

Consider the food and beverage sector, where NanoMarkets expects to see greater penetration as the result of greater health consciousness and demand for easy-to-cook meals. Freshness systems are the most important application area for smart packaging in this sector and there are several kinds currently available. These include freshness indicators, which are smart labels that indicate the freshness of food through some kind of color change. Although not widely used at the present time, NanoMarkets expects that manufacturers will soon start lowering the cost of such systems which will jump start the market.

Meanwhile, other kinds of smart labels which serve as time-temperature indicators (TTIs) are finding increasing use in supply chains for foods that are highly temperature sensitive. Among the smart packaging solutions for freshness, TTIs are expected to witness the sharpest growth in sales in the next five years. Nonetheless, there are still some issues that the manufacturers of TTIs need to resolve. As usual these include cost issues. But there is also the issue of accuracy of the TTIs themselves.

Yet another kind of smart packaging for the food and beverage industry is made up of anti-pathogen packages that detect and warn the user of the presence of serious bio-contamination. However, providing cost effective anti-pathogen packaging that can detect more than one kind of pathogen is currently a major challenge, although it has attracted the attention of a few firms.

Another important area for smart packaging is in the pharmaceutical industry. The advantage that this market offers is that the value of smart packaging can easily be established. One of the major factors driving smart packaging in this area is the need for reliable data in clinical trials. Here compliance packaging can help ensure that drugs are taken in accordance with the protocols of the trial. Compliance packaging is also needed for the growing numbers of senior citizens in developed countries, but to create a mass market, it will have to be priced much lower than that currently used in clinical trials.

Authentication issues are – for obvious reasons – even more important with pharmaceuticals than they are with food and beverages. The US government has already issued guidelines for the use of electronic pedigree systems for the pharmaceutical supply chains. These systems may use RFIDs or bar codes that record the details of every transfer by wholesalers and re-packagers, until the final sale or use of the drug. Alarmed by the increasing cases of fake Viagra, Pfizer has announced in January 2006 that it will use RFID tags on all Viagra bottles in the US to authenticate the products. Meanwhile, TTI labels are already being used on medicines packs, which indicate through a chemical reaction, when the product undergoes a heat abuse in the cold supply chain. However, the indicators currently used for commercial purposes mainly on vaccine vials, are not accurate solutions. RFID-based indicators, currently produced in low volumes for trials and evaluations, have proved accurate and have indicated freezing damage.

The future

Other areas that we expect to adopt smart packaging over the coming five years or so include the cosmetics industry and the toys and games industry. The prohibitive cost is not an insurmountable problem and will be overcome as printing and other technologies become more sophisticated and as the organizational infrastructure is put in place to implement smart packaging at the converting and printing, product development and retail levels in the supply chain. ■

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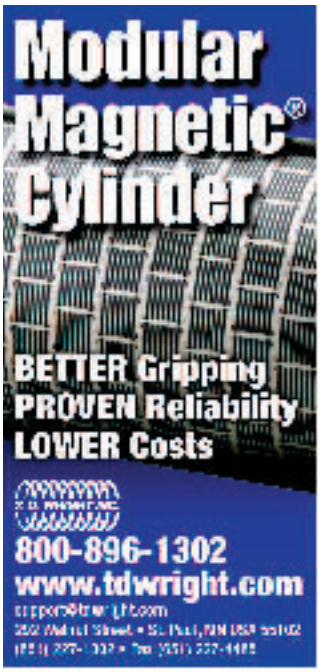

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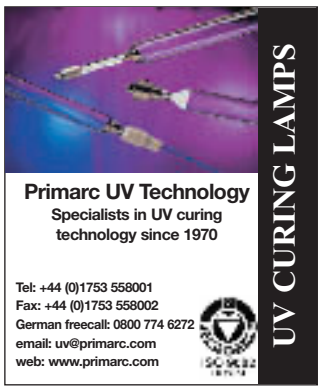

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