

— EST 1978 —

# LABELS & LABELING

THE WORLD OF PACKAGE PRINTING

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What makes for a good workplace and why is it positive for business?

## FOOD LABELING

Pandemic turns focus to safety

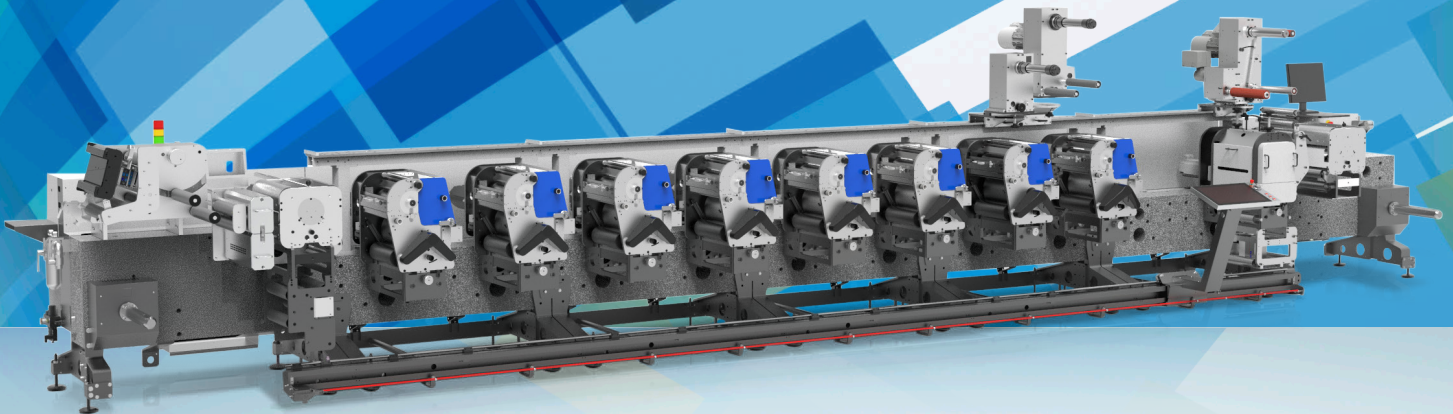
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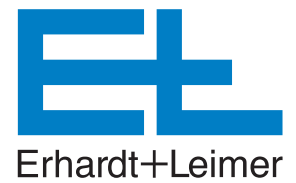
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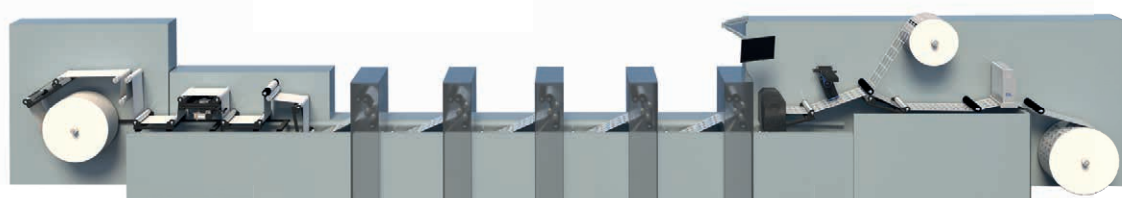
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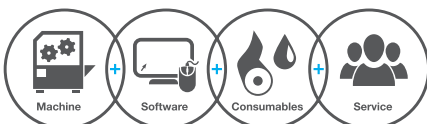


DM-JETLINER



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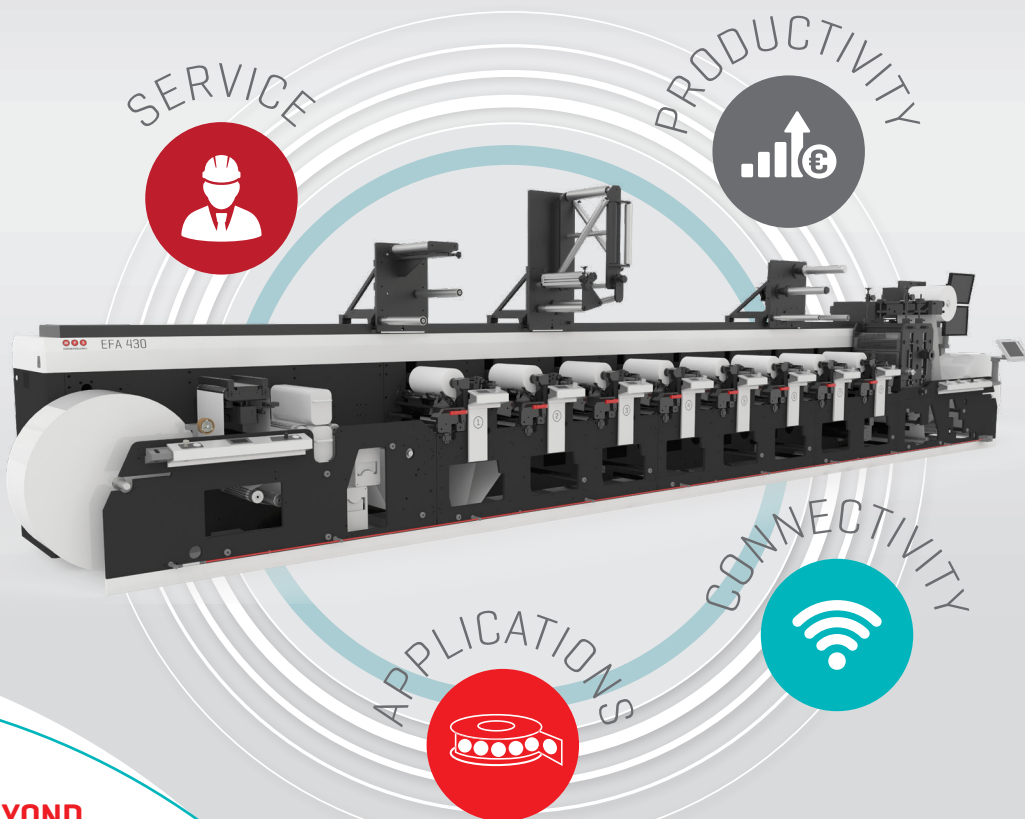


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# L&L

## – Meet the team

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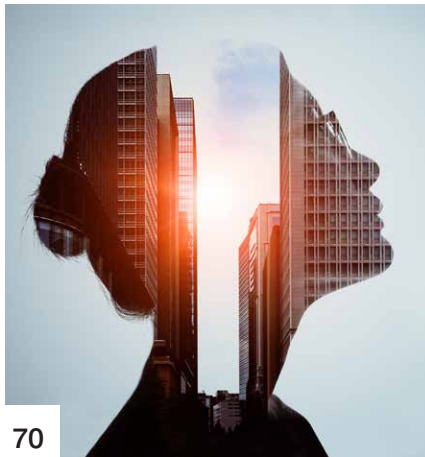
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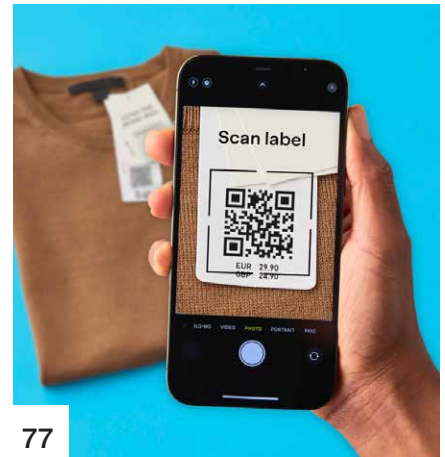
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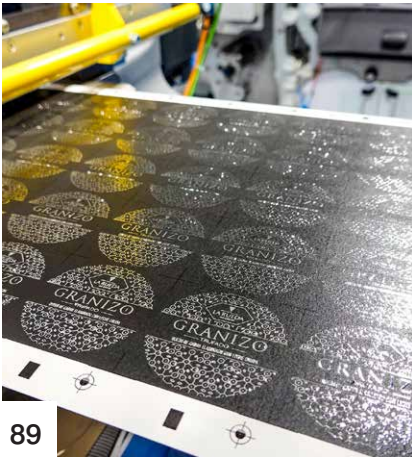
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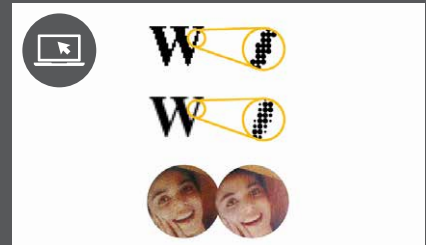
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### Digital printing (Label Academy)

Processes, technologies, terminology and investment requirements



### Avery Dennison launches atma.io (video)

Max Winograd explains the benefits of new cloud technology



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



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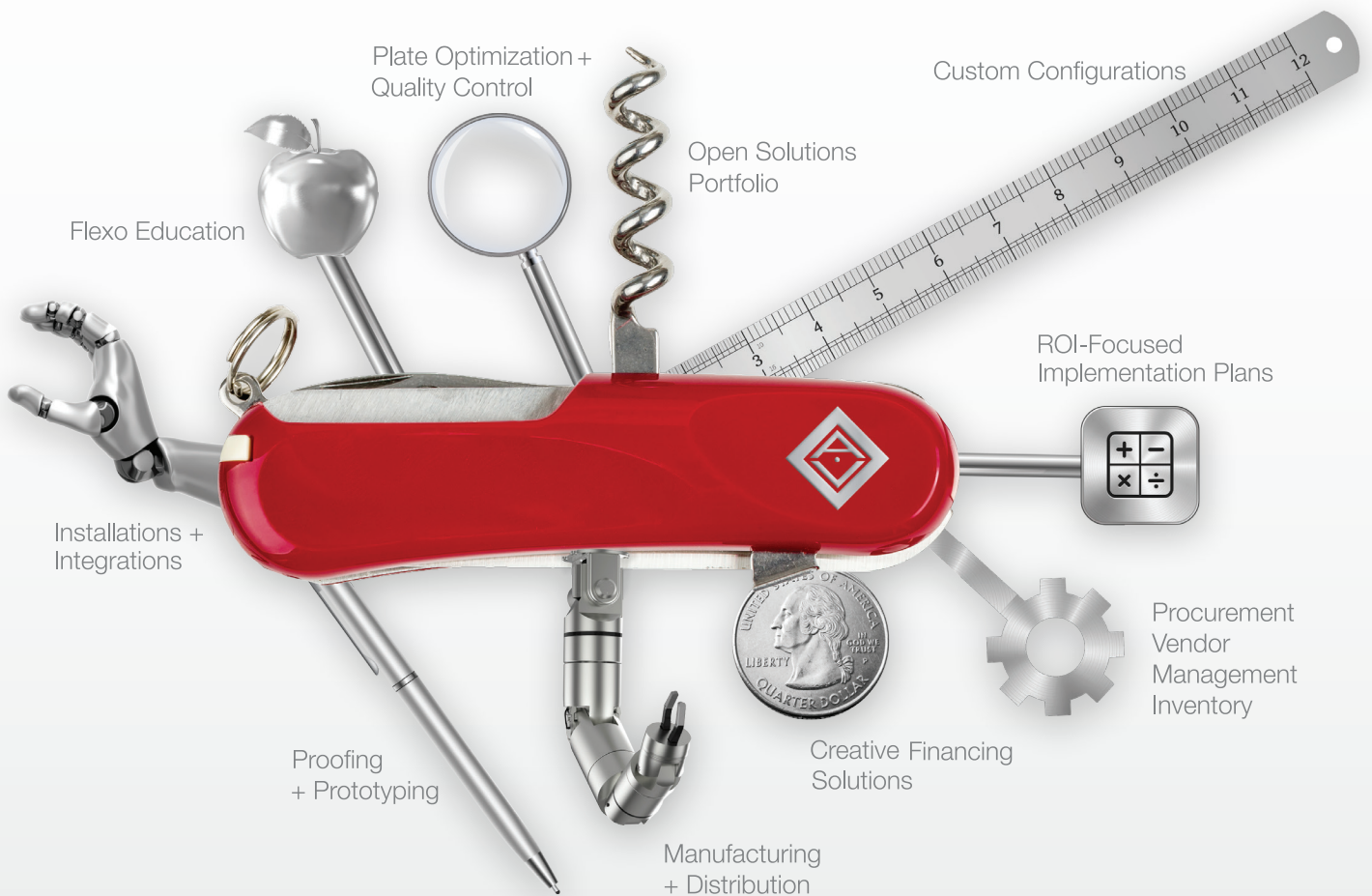
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## L&L looks back (L&L issue 3, 1998)



**P31** Andy Thomas-Emans joined press manufacturer Codimag's 20th anniversary celebrations during an Open Day organized at the company's factory outside Paris, France. Codimag organized a competition for the best label produced on its Viva presses and unveiled the latest developments for the new Viva 340 press system.



**P37** Mark Andy was also celebrating. The US manufacturer marked its fourth year of establishing itself as a significant supplier of modular flexographic printing presses in Britain and Ireland. It had by then sold 100 flexo presses to small and medium-sized companies, giving them the ability to compete with big market players.



**P81** In L&L's cover story, Neil McDonough, FLEXcon's president and CEO, revealed that the company's success was guided by its continued focus on solving challenges one application at a time and by developing pressure-sensitive film products that offered greater aesthetics, higher performance, and easier processibility.



**P94** Mike Fairley visited GRE Engineering Products, a Swiss company pioneering new and niche market solutions for label converters. The company offered varnishing, laminating and coating units, a microprocessor-controlled web transport, rotary hot foil stamping, hologram insertion, foil saving units and matrix shredders.

## Size matters

### Editor's note

**T**LMi's latest Market Watch report, produced with the consultancy LPC and analyzed in this issue by Andy Thomas-Emans, makes for fascinating reading.

Amid a host of thought-provoking revelations, it shows that – despite the pandemic – sales revenues increased for 72 percent of the surveyed converters, with 19 percent reporting sales declines. As per the Finat Radar report, which asked similar questions of European label converters, growth and decline were largely dictated by which end user markets the converters serve. The food, beverage and household chemical sectors surged amid consumer habit changes brought on by the pandemic; entertainment and hospitality, automotive and durables all experienced significant declines.

The figures are more

positive than expected, but the underlying trends makes sense. Where it gets even more interesting is the variation in sales growth or decline among converting companies of different sizes.

TLMI's Market Watch divided converters into four categories depending on annual sales. These range from the smaller companies with annual sales under 6m USD (22 percent of the sample), to 6-15m USD (33 percent), to 15-35m USD (25 percent) and the large converter and converter groups with over 35m USD annual sales (20 percent). The study shows that converters with highest growth rates fell mainly into two categories: the biggest (annual sales over 35m USD) or the smallest (sales under 6m USD).

LPC's Jennifer Dochstader and David Walsh speculate that small and large converters are more 'generalist' – servicing

multiple end user segments – compared to mid-sized converters who tend to specialize in fewer end user categories. This leaves the smaller and larger converters less vulnerable to the collapse of specific sectors.

So diversification is crucial, but is it enough? In this issue's Q&A, Isidore Leiser, CEO of French converting group Stratus Packaging, talks about the issues faced by family-owned businesses looking to compete with converting groups backed by the deep pockets of private equity investors.

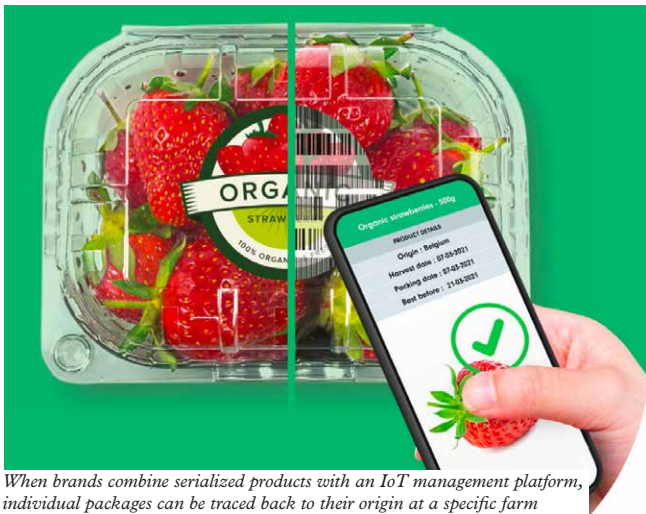
With six factories and a turnover of more than 50 million EUR, Stratus is firmly in the 'large converter' category as defined by TLMI. Serving food, beverage, cosmetics, pharma and industrial chemicals, and with no single customer accounting for more than 5 percent of its revenue, Stratus is

well-insured against a drop in a particular segment.

But further growth is imperative, says Leiser, and the company is seeking acquisitions outside France. The question is how that growth should be managed – in particular how to leverage the ability of the family-run business to take a longer-term view of investment returns. The All4Labels group has already shown that family run businesses can compete with the biggest private equity groups; the likes of Stratus and Grupo Lappi (see previous issue) are trying to do the same. How the battle between these two models develops will be fascinating to watch.

James Quirk  
Group managing editor

# News



When brands combine serialized products with an IoT management platform, individual packages can be traced back to their origin at a specific farm

## MCC and Digimarc collaborate

*Food traceability and recycling initiative with Orkla*

Multi-Color Corporation (MCC) and Digimarc have partnered to serialize product packaging and labels with Digimarc barcode in support of food safety and traceability initiatives.

According to the US Department of Agriculture, recalls in the food industry cost approximately 29 million USD per occurrence. To help mitigate the impact of these recalls, MCC and Digimarc have co-developed a hybrid printing method in which Digimarc Barcode can be printed in large volumes.

Plastic clamshells containing berries, for example, can be serialized with a Digimarc-enhanced label produced by MCC's hybrid printing process. Quality control procedures ensure Digimarc is scannable throughout the supply chain. When consumer brands combine serialized products with an IoT management platform, individual packages can easily be traced back to their origin at a specific farm, as well as across the entire supply chain.

'Traceability is essential for consumer brands and food manufacturers to promote consumer safety, mitigate risk and gain real-time insight into raw materials and product locations in farms, warehouses, logistics and distribution centers,' said Matthew Thomas, business development manager, MCC. 'MCC's rich expertise in the area of digital and hybrid printing brings Digimarc's serialized identities to life and at scale. It's a partnership that is perfectly positioned to impact the food supply chain of today and the future.'

MCC is also a member of the HolyGrail 2.0 project, and the company is using an additional application of Digimarc – non-serialized digital watermarking identities – with its client Orkla, a supplier of branded consumer goods in Europe and India, to improve the sortation of plastic and promote a circular economy.

'With Digimarc digital watermarking, we can alter how people view waste. For example, when a bottle is empty, it becomes unwanted – something to be discarded. Now imagine if, instead of just throwing this away, the consumer could scan the bottle with their smartphone and be shown new possibilities,' said Pavel Komurka, packaging innovation and sustainability coordinator at Orkla. 'We could present ideas and provide examples, from reuse options to new products created at the end of a recycling stream. With Digimarc, we're able to explore an exciting new world of opportunities.'



Hammer Packaging currently operates two facilities in West Henrietta and Rochester, New York

## Fort Dearborn acquires Hammer

*Acquisition to enhance both companies' product offering*

Fort Dearborn Company has acquired Hammer Packaging Corporation to further expand its geographic footprint, capacity and capabilities. Hammer Packaging currently operates two facilities in West Henrietta, NY and Rochester, NY.

The acquisition will increase both companies' capabilities and product offering, including cut and stack, in-mold, pressure-sensitive, roll-fed, shrink and stretch sleeve labels, as well as flexible packaging.

Jim Hammer, president and CEO of Hammer Packaging, said: 'In order to continue our growth and thrive, we made the historic decision to join Fort Dearborn Company. I am excited about this new chapter in Hammer Packaging's journey and believe it is only the beginning of a great future for the Hammer Packaging Company, our customers and the Rochester community.'

'We look forward to working with our Hammer Packaging associates and continuing the legacy they've built,' added Fort Dearborn Company CEO Kevin Kwilinski. 'We're also very excited about the growth opportunities this acquisition presents and look forward to the addition of their expertise which will be an excellent complement to our strengths. We have a heritage of growth through private and family-owned acquisitions and will continue to seek opportunities to better serve our customers.'

## Fortis Solutions acquires Total Label

Fortis Solutions Group has acquired Total Label, which has locations in Whitefish, Montana, and Memphis, Tennessee, to further expand its geographic reach. Founded in 2004 by Janet Farris and Chris Farris, Total Label provides PS, extended content and booklet labels using flexo, letterpress, digital and hybrid printing. It primarily serves the agriculture, health, beauty, nutraceutical, home goods, food and beverage markets. Both founders will remain in leadership roles. John O. Wynne Jr, CEO and president of Fortis Solutions, said: 'The acquisition of Total will further augment our product portfolio while expanding our geographic reach to the Pacific Northwest. I'm looking forward to working alongside Janet Farris and Chris Farris and the Total team to continue their growth trajectory.'

# News



*The service is taking advantage of a new, extended warehouse management system to maximize efficiency*

## Omet launches spare parts department

*New department aims to ensure customers' productivity*

Italian press manufacturer Omet has launched a new spare parts department with dedicated service for supplying original parts for new and older lines of its products. According to Omet, customer feedback shows new department has 'already been appreciated by the market for the efficiency and speed of its services'.

'Our goal is to ensure our customers' productivity always at the highest level,' said Marco Pagani, spare parts department manager at Omet. 'With this aim, we created a specific warehouse for the supply of spare parts, and we guarantee express shipments the same day we receive the request. Also taking advantage of the work of our foreign branches, we work every day to get the right spare part, in the right place, at the right time.'

The service is taking advantage of a new, extended warehouse management system to maximize efficiency. Further digitalization of the service is planned for the near future, in addition to direct contact and visits to customers' facilities.

'Reliability is one of the pillars on which Omet has built its reputation,' commented Marco Calcagni, sales and marketing director at Omet. 'We make increasing investments in customer care and in active policies towards customers because market satisfaction is our priority: our machines and our services must bring efficiency, productivity, and profit to the customer's home.'

## Domino launches AR support app

Domino has launched an augmented reality (AR) application, SafeGuard AR, to provide real-time, remote visual support for customers worldwide and strengthen its service capabilities with efficient production line fixes without the need for on-site visits. 'Uptime and overall equipment efficiency are of the utmost importance to our customers. When unplanned downtime is due to coding and marking equipment, it can be both costly and frustrating for them,' said Eddie Storan, head of global service at Domino. 'As coding typically sits towards the end of the production line, a faulty system can have a huge impact through the wasted stock and rework, with the added commercial and brand risk of product recalls and punitive fines.'

## News in brief

### Mactac acquires Duramark Products

Mactac has acquired Duramark Products, previously known as Ritrama USA. The acquisition consists of the company's Minneapolis, Minnesota and Moore, South Carolina facilities. Both locations will be rebranded under the Mactac name, creating one of the largest pressure-sensitive adhesive (PSA) suppliers in North America.

### Vetaphone expands in Asia

Vetaphone has increased sales and service support in Southeast Asia, appointing as agents Thailand-based FPT Engineering Company, Vietnam-based Song Song Co, Malaysia-based Colorblend and Indonesia-based Merindo Makmur.

### MPS expands facilities

MPS has added a 1,600sqm building to extend production capacity and secure space for future growth. MPS experienced rapid growth following a move from previous headquarters in Didam to more modern facilities in Arnhem, the Netherlands. It has now invested in a new facility located across the street from the current headquarters.

### Resource buys New England Label

Resource Label Group has acquired New England Label, located in Andover, Massachusetts.

### Fedrigoni rebrands

Fedrigoni's self-adhesives division, previously known as Arconvert Ritrama, has been renamed Fedrigoni Self-Adhesives.

### GM appoints new agents

Grafisk Maskinfabrik has appointed three new agents: Graw in Poland, Global Graphics in Kuwait, and Alphaprint in Brazil.

### GEW appoints Italy agent

GEW has named Fornietic as its sales and service agent in Italy. The existing service partner, Spark Solutions, will support Fornietic and continue to provide technical field support.

### Dantex offers K+B products

Dantex Group has teamed up with Kocher + Beck for finishing options in the Dantex Pico range of digital label presses.

### Daetwyler partners with Sandon

Daetwyler USA has partnered with Sandon Global. Daetwyler will provide sales, marketing, distribution and after-sales services support for Sandon Global's anilox technologies.

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# New Products



**01** *CX30 and CX50 digital presses*  
**Zeikon**

Zeikon has developed two new presses for label printers operating on middle capacity, between 20,000-40,000sqm or 30,000-55,000 MSI in all end-use segments, but particularly the pharma, food, wine and spirit sectors. They are positioned between the 3030 REX and 3050 REX entry-level presses and the higher-end CX300 and CX500. Both can be upgraded for higher speeds, from 20m/min (65ft/min) to 30m/min (98ft/min) with the Zeikon CX300 or Zeikon CX500; and for greater width, the Zeikon CX30 (330mm or 13in) can be upgraded to the Zeikon CX50 (520mm or 20.47in) or the Zeikon CX500. Both presses use Zeikon's QB dry toner available in CMYK, red, blue, green, orange, extra magenta, super black, plus technical colors such as one-pass opaque white, UV, and reflective clear, as well as colors produced at the customer's request.

**02** *EkoCure Ancora inks*  
**Flint Group**

The new UV-curable ink range for food, pharma and cosmetic labels, as well as flexible packaging, is compliant with indirect food contact regulations. It ensures thorough ink anchorage and identical color quality results under LED and mercury lamps, as well as low migration results on both unsupported film and label substrates. These properties have led to compliance to the Nestlé guidance note on packaging inks (2018), current GMP, the Swiss Ordinance on Materials and Articles (SR 817.023.21), and the EuPIA Exclusion policy, The Plastic Regulation (EU) No 10/2011. New inks are formulated at the same strength as their mercury-curable counterparts, making color-matching simple when switching to the new ink. Furthermore, it is possible to run the Dual Cure inks with existing pure mercury-curable inks in different positions on the press for the same job.

**03** *LR250 inspection rewinder*  
**Grafisk Maskinfabrik**

GM has launched LR250, an entry-level inspection rewinder, featuring a missing label detection system. For more demanding applications, such as pharma labels, the LR250 can be configured with a video camera for 100 percent advanced print inspection and verification. The LR250 can process label rolls up to 250mm (9.8in) wide at a production speed of 200m/min (656ft/min). It comes with a two-way rewinding capability, integrated web guide, and a label counter as standard. The adjustable splice table features pneumatic splice clamps and can be fitted with a splice detector. The option to integrate a video camera upgrades the machine's capabilities to include a full print quality inspection. GM has partnered with BST eltromat and Nikka Research to offer 100 percent quality inspection for printed labels.

**04** *FireJet and FireEdge Explorer NIR lamps*  
**Phoseon Technology**

The new near-infrared (NIR) lamps are said to offer significant technology advances for curable adhesives, 3D printing, and pinning on low migration applications. The FireJet NIR Explorer offers high power in an air-cooled package. The 20mm wide window spreads the energy wider for a larger dose and exposure time in high-speed applications. The FireEdge NIR Explorer is a smaller version, offering roughly a fifth of the output power with a 10mm wide rod lens.

*Galacryl 89.501.14*

**Actega**  
Actega has launched Galacryl 89.501.14, claimed to be the world's first soft-touch effect decorative coating for laminate tubes. According to Actega, it solves previous issues of long-term scratch, abrasion and stain resistance.

# New Products



05



06



07



08

## 05 Dissolvable labels

### Acucote

Acucote has expanded its portfolio of sustainable products with the introduction of a water-dissolvable adhesive and two dissolvable paper stocks. These new products are designed for any type of application requiring a temporary label. They are ideal for the food service industry, and more specifically food rotation labels. DS1 is a water-based acrylic emulsion adhesive designed to disperse in either cold or hot water, leaving zero residue. DS1 adheres to metal, HDPE and other LSE plastic containers. Acucote's newest dissolvable papers – 40# Water Soluble Litho and 47# Water Dissolvable Direct Thermal – dissolve completely when immersed in water. The combination of DS1 with these dissolvable papers sends less material to the landfill and consumes less energy because the label does not need to be processed in a recycling facility.

## 06 3800 Series

### Colordyne

The new retrofit is a full-color digital print engine running up to 246ft/min (75m/min). It can be configured for CMYK production with the option to add white, spot, extended gamut, and dual white for higher opacity. The engine is designed for additional color channels, up to seven, to be added at any time. In addition to the legacy equipment print widths of 8.5in (216mm) and 12.75in (324mm), the 3800 Series UV Retrofit is available in 4.25in (108mm) and 17in (432mm) configurations. The new retrofit transitioned the clamshell chassis design into an automated vertical lift system. This change provides users with more automated functionality, including print positioning and splice detection. Automatic maintenance is another feature that can be added to the retrofit print engine during the initial acquisition or as an optional upgrade after installation.

## 07 Digital Series iQ hybrid press

### Mark Andy

The new Digital Series iQ hybrid press is built on the Evolution Series flexo platform with an integrated Domino N610i UV inkjet module. It can be configured with up to seven UV inkjet colors (CMYKOV+WW). Hybrid converting components can be integrated to meet specific requirements. Print stations, semi-rotary die-cutting, rail system and in-line slitting are options selected by some early adopters. The press achieves speeds up to 230 ft/min (70 m/min) in rapid production mode and integrates Esko and Global Graphics software, including ScreenPro for workflow and digital front-end processes.

## 08 Pit-Stop die-cutting unit

### Tecnocut

The Spanish converting machinery manufacturer has launched a Pit Stop die-cutting unit featuring E-Diffsystem electronic variable adjustment to enable faster

swapping of magnetic cylinders. According to Tecnocut, the new system enables magnetic cylinder changeover in less than 30 seconds. 'We knew other systems on the market were able to change cutting tools quickly, but after studying them we noticed there were several parts of the process that could still be further optimized. This is what we have been doing for the past two years. Adding products such as the E-Diffsystem and pneumatic pressure control has allowed us to achieve extremely high-quality standards in cutting,' said Tecnocut's Pol Estrada.

## Circus Pro inlays

### Avery Dennison

The new NFC inlays enable secured brand protection technology requiring an encrypted digital 'birth record' for packaged products, a trusted product identity validation service, and platform-agnostic consumer engagement capabilities for customers.



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# New Products



**09** *PlaetoVPL plate loading system*

**Alphasonics**  
Alphasonics has launched PlaetoVPL, a plate loading system designed to maximize the throughput of its PCX range of plate cleaners while maintaining a small footprint. Traditional plate cleaners can be operated either manually or via an infeed conveyor, but, says Alphasonics, neither is ideal: the former is labor-intensive and the latter is limited and dependent on the length of the conveyor. The new system has been specifically designed to minimize the footprint while enabling up to 30 plates to be automatically fed into the PCX unit before re-setting itself back to a start position, ready for the next load. PlaetoVPL is suitable for companies with a high volume of plates to clean daily. It is situated in front of and coupled to the PCX plate cleaning system and features a fully automated loading mechanism, meaning

there is no need for an operator. It is available in five widths, from 450mm to 1,400mm, offering a variable speed and minimum capacity between 15-30 plates (depending on width). Optional extender racks are available for greater capacity.

**10** *Elite Complex digital converting system*  
**Bar Graphic Machinery**  
BGM has entered the final development stages of its new Elite Complex, a flexible and compact digital finishing system, and has already secured several orders. Elite Complex is a high-speed re-register die-cutting converting system, developed with a small compact footprint and a DieNamic semi-rotary die-cut unit, achieving speeds of up to 110m/min. Dispro compensation software is also available as an option. Other options will include in-line lamination, and a registration in-setter for the process of peel and reveal. The new machine

can be equipped with BGM's new flexo print station, also currently in development. It is a versatile, quick-change print station, which can be used as a spot register station or simple flood coating station.

**11** *Barcode printer upgrades*  
**TSC Printronix Auto ID**  
TSC has made several changes across its barcode printer and print engine ranges, introducing new models, advances in security, wireless connectivity, remote management, and printhead management. More powerful and adaptable wireless connectivity options in the newly improved printers includes wireless 802.11a/b/g/n/ac and Bluetooth 4.2 modules enabling faster roaming and greater productivity. The MX Series, MH Series, and PEX Series have all been upgraded with new electronics to improve their operational performance. TSC has also added two 6in industrial thermal transfer printers to its MH261 Series.

**12** *Retro-reflective films*  
**Mactac**  
Mactac has developed retro-reflective films for warehouse applications and industrial labeling, enabling long-range barcode scanning. The films are made from a polyester material embedded with glass beads that enable barcode scanning from up to 50ft. Retro-reflective films feature long-term indoor durability and up to two years of outdoor durability. 'The glass beads give the retro-reflective polyester films a light silver appearance and allow barcode scanning from a distance, making them great for warehouses and applications where pallets or products are stacked and harder to reach,' said Mactac's Cassandra Semonin. The films are top-coated for enhanced printability with thermal transfer and flexo.



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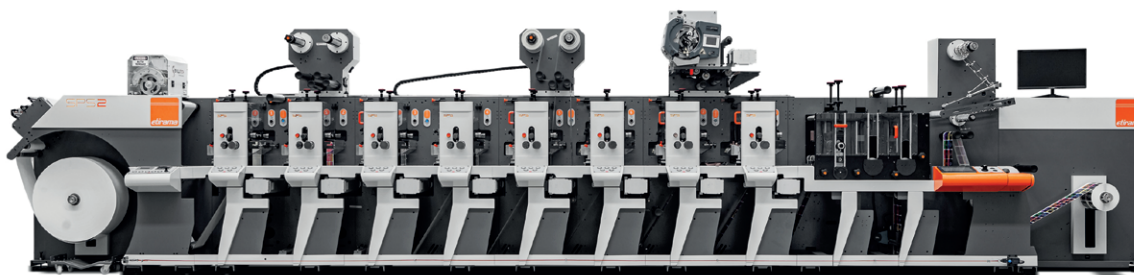
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# Installations



**01 Nilpeter FA-22**  
**MP+H Packaging, UK**  
 The new FA-22 complements the existing press portfolio at MP+H Packaging, providing additional web width and allowing more flexibility with product sizing. The press further enhances the converter's production quality for print, register and color control, complemented by 100 percent in-line pharma inspection, including color control software. 'As a business, our focus is high-grade pharma and medical work, and this new Nilpeter press will go a long way to help us keep up with the demand brought about by Covid-19 in the medical industry,' said Marc Bradley, managing director of MP+H Packaging.

**02 MPS EFA 340**  
**MDM-Flex, Russia**  
 MDM-Flex's first 10-color, fully automated MPS EFA 340 servo-driven flexo press, with a 340mm print width, includes an

automated print control system, UV dryers, capabilities for thin monofilm printing, and several converting options positioned on the rail system. It will help the converter to speed up production and focus on printing high-quality self-adhesive labels and flexible packaging. Alexander Anfimov, MD of MDM-Flex, said: 'Technological capabilities, a well-known brand name, positive reviews from printers, favorable price, and high-quality service were our criteria for choosing a new press. How it would print on thin films and extensible substrates was also extremely important to us. After in-depth research and machine test experiences, we decided on the MPS EFA 340.'

**03 Mark Andy Digital Pro 3**  
**Print Point, Czech Republic**  
 Print Point has installed Mark Andy's toner-based digital hybrid press to add label production as a new revenue stream. 'Until recently, we had no experience

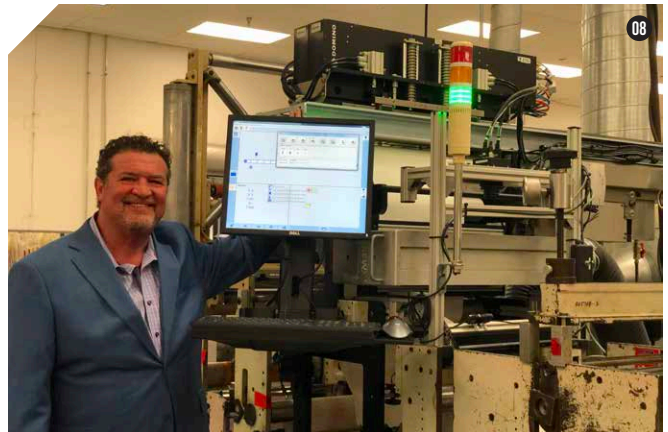
with label printing, but the Covid-19 pandemic and the market change it caused had a big impact on our activities,' said Jan Svejda, CEO of PrintPoint. 'Due to a lockdown, many stores have been closed, which resulted in lower sales of advertising materials. Therefore, we needed to find new sources of revenue. We decided to enter a completely new field of label printing as well as cardboard packaging production. We estimate that during the first year of using Digital Pro 3 new, label-related products' share in our total sales will reach five percent.'

**04 HP Indigo 25K**  
**Trigon Digital, India**  
 The HP Indigo 25K digital press installation with a 30in printing width will allow Trigon Digital to venture into customized pouch, shrink sleeve and IML printing on a large scale. The new equipment features an in-line slitting option, which will enable

the company to print label media of widths up to 30in and then slit in-line to smaller rolls for further finishing. With the HP Indigo technology, Trigon Digital will be able to support brand owners with innovative solutions in packaging while supporting them throughout the product development process – from prototype to marketing test samples to production and shelf. Trigon is a long-standing partner of HP, having invested in the HP Indigo 6900 press in 2018.

**Colordyne 3800 Series AP – Retrofit**  
**CP Printing, USA**  
 CP Printing acquired its first Colordyne system, the 3600 Series AQ – Retrofit, in 2014. In January 2021, CP Printing secured the 3800 Series AP – Retrofit powered by Memjet to bring in additional digital capacity while also offering an expanded range of material and enhanced print durability.

# Installations



**05 Screen Truepress Jet SAI S**  
**Links Labels & Tapes, UK**  
 The UK converter has invested in a 5-color Screen Truepress Jet L350UV SAI S to respond to a market need for shorter lead times and increase color consistency across its production. 'The Screen Truepress SAI S 5-color came out as the winner because labels printed on this machine look flatter and vibrant,' said MD Darren Dutton. 'Initially, we didn't think inkjet could meet our quality standards. However, we found that the Screen Truepress Jet SAI S 5-color does. It brings inkjet print quality to the level of flexo printing.' The press' quality and speed were crucial for Links Labels & Tapes during the coronavirus pandemic, when it received a large number of print orders for Covid-related medical labels for hospitals and testing purposes. By year-end, the company had printed more than 40 million labels for UK's National Health Service.


**06 Enprom eRR40**  
**Olympus Print Group, UK**  
 Enprom's first UK order for its eRR40 dual doctoring system is from Leeds-based Olympus Print Group, which will use the eRR40 as a bi-directional inspection and rewinding system for shrink sleeves. In this capacity, the eRR40 consists of a compact unit with integrated unwinder and rewinder, designed to unwind and rewind the material and detect defects. 'With a highly specified off-line ABG Digicon 3 already playing a key role in our digital print division, we were expecting the engineering and quality of the eRR40 to be equally impressive – we weren't disappointed,' said Adrian Brown, managing director of Olympus Print Group.

**Dantex PicoJet**  
**Beau Labels, USA**  
 Beau Labels' purchase marks the first high-volume print system sold by Dantex to a US-based customer.

**07 Grafisk Maskinfabrik, DC350**  
**Ikonprint, Denmark**  
 Ikonprint's investment in a fully integrated converting line results from the latest trends for in-line finishing, as digital press speeds keep increasing. 'We needed more speed and faster job rotation. Now we have doubled our speed as the new DC350 runs up to 140m/min, and it can keep up with flexo printing jobs. And our non-stop turret rewinder is a daily time saver,' said Thomas Nielsen, CEO. 'With the modularity of our new line, we are well prepared for the future.'

**08 Domino K600i**  
**Abbott Label, USA**  
 The Texas-based converter has increased its digital printing capacity with the installation of the Domino K600i dual bar digital UV inkjet printer. This purchase joins Abbott's existing Domino N610i digital UV inkjet press, purchased in

February 2020, and Abbott's HP Indigo WS6600. Upon the first Domino installation, John Abbott, president of Abbott Label said: 'We have been completely satisfied with the HP, but we wanted to jump into the inkjet market as we believe it better serves the markets we sell into. We are presented with many consecutive barcode opportunities. In some instances, we are unable to capture those with the HP. Our costing models with the Domino have led us to believe we can be extremely competitive on consecutive barcode work. We expect that the Domino will make us better equipped to respond to our customers' needs. We will be going after numbering jobs and high color long runs without needing plates.'

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## The Mike Fairley column

### An enhanced duty of care

*In the post-Covid world, employers must pay closer attention to staff well-being*

There can be little doubt that the past 12 months or so have been a very different and challenging time for many in the label industry. Some end-user sectors have done better than others, but on/off lockdowns, furlough schemes, working from home initiatives, sudden changes to the way employees work, materials and product supply issues, Covid test and trace, self-isolation, travel restrictions, and much more, have all provided some unprecedented demands and requirements on label converters and industry suppliers.

**“It should not be forgotten that employers have a fundamental duty of care for the physical and mental health and well-being of their workers”**

Many employees have had to make quite significant changes to their daily lives, some at relatively short notice, including how and where they work – whether that’s hours, location, or even being able to do their job at all. Nobody knows how long this situation will last and, although there may be glimmers of hope for things to start improving, it’s clear that the impact around the world will be felt for many months, maybe years, to come.

Label businesses and their employees have been forced to adapt quickly to the challenges they have been presented during the periods of lockdown. They have often been faced with making quite tough decisions, and perhaps having to initiate or plan for a variety of different outcomes as lockdowns, supply challenges and the spread of Covid that has rapidly progressed to impact on pretty much all countries.

However, with global vaccinations now increasing and lockdowns proving to be largely successful, many label businesses and their employees will hopefully be looking towards some gradual return towards normality over the coming months. But what will the new normal be?

Employees that have spent many months working from home or on furlough may be concerned or reluctant to once again be traveling to a workplace every day. A workplace they may not have even seen in a very long time. Some will undoubtedly want to know whether their employers are changing company thinking about the opportunity to possibly continue with flexible and remote working.

How will they react to once again having a line manager watching over them? Have there been changes to the working environment while they were away? Will employees still remember the factory and office safety and health rules and manufacturing

practices when they return? Is their workplace Covid safe? As lockdown measures begin to lift, employees will be looking to their employers to provide guidance on these and other matters during these, still, uncertain times.

Most employment legislation usually states that employers have a duty of care. They cannot force employees to return to work if it is unsafe. There is therefore a duty on employers and their HR professionals, and the employees themselves, to ensure that the workplace is safe – especially if changes to working practices have been implemented – their role in the health and safety process, and the need for everyone to be involved and work together in making those decisions.

Decisions about returning to work should certainly be made in a non-discriminatory way. A new risk assessment for a return to non-lockdown working conditions should perhaps be prepared which links clinical (Covid) vulnerability risks to more specific workplace safety risks. There is also a need to be aware of the risks of increased workplace tensions and disputes that may arise from changes to workplace practices and working arrangements, and from fear of infection on return.

Going back to how employees and label companies exactly operated a year or so ago is probably not going to happen. A year or more on from the first lockdowns there will certainly be things that are different. Adjusting to these changes can, and most likely will, present challenges to label company employers and their workforce. Challenges that may now also have to include increased emphasis on things such as mental health and well-being.

#### Impact

Apart from the working environment, there have been numerous studies and reports in recent months about the impact that lockdown, job insecurity, financial worries, not being able to travel, work, eat or drink out, socialize, meet family and friends – even work colleagues – have had on mental health and well-being. Depression and mental illness have become far more common in society and, sadly, there have been increased cases of suicide.

It should not be forgotten that employers have a fundamental duty of care for the physical and mental health and well-being of their workers. However, recent research has shown that only around half of all companies have employee well-being on their senior leaders’ agendas. This needs to change. Health and well-being in a post-Covid world needs to be more of a core element of any HR strategy, and more central to the way an organization operates.

As already mentioned, this has been especially critical during the global health emergency that the pandemic has created, where many employees find themselves working remotely, isolated from friends, family and colleagues for long periods of time, and anxious about their health and well-being.

There will certainly be some employees that may still be worried

about catching Covid if they start to travel and mix with colleagues again in the factory, particularly if they come into contact with elderly relatives at home. Should they come to the plant if they have a cough or a temperature and, if they do come with possible colleague perceived Covid symptoms, what will the management do. Will they be sent home and told to self-isolate for at least 10 days from when the symptoms started?

Certainly an increasing number of medium to larger companies are already introducing their own internal Covid testing programs at the workplace, which focuses tests on symptomatic individuals. Remember however, it is a voluntary decision for employers to run testing programs for their staff but, if done correctly, testing can provide confidence to both workforce and customers in the workplace and may help to protect and enable business continuity.

There are a few different types of swab or saliva Covid-19 tests that can be used at work, as well as pulse oximeters that measure the saturation of oxygen in red blood cells that can be attached to fingers, forehead, or ears, and simple devices for temperature testing. None of the tests are particularly expensive. Employers considering or running Covid testing programs can nowadays obtain guidance from a number of organizations on the legal obligations and best practice to follow.

As lockdown measures begin to lift and employees start to return to work – full or part time – they will be looking to their employers to provide an updated risk assessment and to provide guidance on any changed working practices (safe distancing, sanitizing, wearing of masks, screens, etc), possible Covid testing procedures, new or altered safety procedures, improved health measures and today, also including enhanced mental well-being.

This later area has become even more important as we move to

### Industry welfare

Before focusing on the world of labels, Mike Fairley studied the psychology of work and the social psychology of industry during his time at university, before researching accidents and illnesses in the printing industry, leading to him writing a book on Safety, Health and Welfare in the Printing Industry, and contributing all the printing section for an edition of the Encyclopedia of Occupational Health and Safety published by the International Labor Office in Geneva.

a post-Covid world. Recent research has highlighted that less than a quarter of employees said their company regularly engaged with them on issues of mental health, while a staggering 14 percent of employees had experienced suicidal thoughts and around 15 percent said they had mental health problems in the workplace. Women in full-time employment are nearly twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time employed men. How do these figures compare to the label industry? Do we know?

### Well-being

In today's world, the promotion of well-being at work through personalized information and advice, a risk-assessment questionnaire, and possible seminars, workshops and web-based materials, can all help to encourage returning to normalized working become reassuring and more attractive.

But what else can the label industry do to make work more attractive as lockdown eases and some kind of normal working returns? Obstacles that may hinder or prevent a return to




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## “Promoting health is no longer seen as an initiative that yields ‘soft’ results”

normal working should be identified, ideally in conversation with employees. Should a return to work or normalized working be staggered, rather than all arriving on the same day and at the same time? What strategies are being introduced to minimize any ongoing health risks in the workplace?

Talking of health risks, many companies perhaps have a small kitchen area for employees to make drinks or prepare snacks. Great. But a recent study found that taps are the most contaminated areas in a kitchen, bin lids carried the highest levels of E-coli, while kettle handles carried more harmful bacteria than a toilet seat. In a post-Covid world greater cleaning attention and sanitizing might be welcomed.

Undoubtedly some temporary, medium or longer-term adjustments may need to be made to improve health and well-being in the factory – and explained to employees. Safety, health and well-being may well need to be both an initial and longer-term priority in tomorrow’s label world.

Underlining the importance of the areas mentioned above will be of help and encouragement to employees. There is little doubt that placing an emphasis on employee health and well-being contributes greatly to an employee’s overall engagement within the company. Promoting health is no longer seen as an initiative that yields ‘soft’ results. Instead, health promotion can ensure that employees actually want and like to be at work. Over time, this has

a significant impact on the company’s performance. Often health improves many areas of the business. Areas that not only improve production, but help to improve profitability as well.

To reiterate, employee confidence and acceptance of a new normal in the post-Covid world will come if they all are engaged, listened to, and their concerns acted on and, if changes to working arrangements or shift patterns are being proposed, do they meet the principles of employment law. If not, the changes may end-up creating disputes, ill-feeling, resentment, or even a possible breach of contract. Consultation and discussion are key to creating a work culture that promotes health and well-being through all aspects of their lives.

Various studies have shown that happier and healthier employees regularly outperform those who are in organizations which do little or nothing to promote health and well-being. This is important to note, because for a long time many managements believed that investing in employee health and well-being schemes would be a waste of money, yielding little rewards for the company. That is certainly no longer true in modern society.

A year or more of Covid restrictions and lockdowns has undoubtedly highlighted the issues of mental health, mental illness, anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. How many employers in the label industry have actively engaged with their employees on their ongoing safety, health, welfare and well-being in the past? And how many will be doing so in the new post-Covid world of tomorrow? It’s an interesting and important question.



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## The Andy Thomas-Emans column

### New brand workflows: challenge and opportunity

*As global brands increasingly adopt automated workflows across their supply chains, label and packaging converters must find ways to integrate*

A recently announced tie-up between X-rite/Pantone and global packaging supplier L&E International demonstrates the direction of travel for brands as they look to automate and standardize workflows – in this case color management – across their supply chain.

It clearly demonstrates how critical it is for label and package print converters to understand how these systems are evolving and what skills and technology will be necessary to embed themselves seamlessly into these new workflows.

### “The future will be all about data transparency”

The future will be all about data transparency. Converters will be expected to make their data automatically available to brands on the platforms they specify, and across a wide range of subjects from stock availability to compliance with sustainability and labor policies. What can we learn about this fast-approaching world from the L&E deal?

L&E International is packaging supplier to a number of key global brands, including Adidas, Walmart, Amazon (APASS vendor in Asia) and Target. The company runs package design, engineering, testing and customer service operations across 14 countries, with millions of finished packaging pieces delivered throughout North America, Europe and Asia on a daily basis. The company works with over 300 associates in Southeast Asia.

L+E International decided to standardize color management across its own and its suppliers' operations using X-Rite's ColorCert Suite as the central print quality control platform. ColorCert will be used across all L&E locations to monitor, control, and report packaging quality to brands and suppliers across China, India, and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

ColorCert will operate in conjunction with PantoneLive, a cloud-based digital color standard database, to communicate accurate and achievable colors for package printing.

ColorCert Suite provides a set of cloud-based digital tools which will allow L&E's packaging technologists to define color requirements and collect press-run color data, while coordinating and reporting color performance across the supply chain. L&E will be able to measure color values during production, compare them with the expected target, and access reports for actionable advice to improve results.

ColorCert ScoreCard Server provides L&E with a single dashboard for instant job scoring and reporting print performance. When ColorCert is implemented across all L+E's suppliers and manufacturing facilities it will validate and monitor packaging quality and report compliance to brands.

Vikas Gupta, director of Creative Solutions & Development for

Asia at L&E International, tells L&L that the company had been looking at standardizing and automating its print quality control systems. 'We quickly saw ColorCert's potential as a print quality control platform that could provide us increased visibility into our color performance while also delivering real-time data to help us optimize manufacturing efficiencies and reduce waste,' says Gupta.

PantoneLive syncs directly with ColorCert to give L&E access to digital Pantone and brand packaging color libraries for accurate color regardless of substrate, printing technology, or ink type. This will enable the L&E team to reduce packaging makeready times by targeting realistic packaging colors before going on press. Using the Pantone digital packaging libraries will reduce the rework and press sampling associated with matching physical references on different packaging materials.

What else can we learn from the L+E website about required compliances? L&E clearly states its dedication to 'internationally accepted compliance guidelines for environmental and human rights policies and holds FSC chain of custody for all its manufacturing operations, which are all subject to strict third-party auditing annually'. So this gives a broad idea of the kinds of certifications and workflows required from the company's supply partners.

#### New data platforms

This same push towards new data platforms can be seen in Avery Dennison's launch of atma.io (read more on page 77), a cloud-based platform which assigns a unique digital signature to any product. This will allow brands to simultaneously hit a range of goals including consumer engagement, brand protection, and increased operational efficiency. The atma.io platform currently contains over 10 billion individual items and adds over 50 new connected products every second.

Adidas is utilizing the cloud-based platform in its Infinite Play initiative, which allows the company to buy back products and give them a second life.

atma.io is a highly versatile system which allows recognition of a product's digital signature to be activated by a range of different 'digital triggers' including UHF RFID, NFC or QR codes.

Label converters supplying the fresh food and pharmaceutical sectors, where temperature compliance is critical, should note that atma.io is already being deployed for supply chain traceability, including real-time temperature monitoring for individual Covid-19 vaccine vials.

The ability of converters to engage with these emerging digital platforms will start assuming ever-greater importance.



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



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# Aligning leadership with business process

*Cross-functional teams can facilitate a company's shift to continuous improvement, writes Paul Brauss*

To implement continuous improvement in a business, the leaders must cause the fundamental change, including how the business is managed. This change is facilitated by implementing 'Cross-functional teams' (CFT) for each of the major processes

Business leaders often have a hard time grasping the concept of aligning the leadership function to the business processes of the company. When organizations are looking to continuously improve, it's easy to get stuck in the silos of functions rather than processes. This roadblock to improvement is a typical phenomenon. The best way to overcome the mental roadblock starts with an exercise of mapping the process. It can be done with traditional flow charts or value stream mapping, keeping in mind the more visual the exercise the better the input. I like to use large easel pads and handwrite the steps and encourage the area being mapped to step up and help identify problems. The discovery is enlightening.

I've spent many years walking the pressroom floor and designing equipment to help improve the productivity of printing. I've learned that there are many workarounds on the print room floor that are driven by upfront inconsistencies. This knowledge was important to formulating my continuous improvement assessment, leading me to start my review by examining the sales quoting and order launching process steps that are referenced as 'pre-order'. I've discovered if there are three people in the pre-order process departments or thirteen, it is quickly discovered that everyone completes the process task a little differently. This is not intentional, but usually the result of people having to work around some barrier in the process: a gap in the person's training, or a lack of understanding of the downstream impact that inconsistent performance has on the operation. As part of the mapping process, I use sticky notes to highlight identified differences in the process from person to person or barriers in the process or quality issues within it. With packaging and label printers it is also amazing to learn that even after the order is received, the

**"I don't care who works for who, because the answer shakes out logically from proper process execution"**

steps to communicate the correct data to the graphic engineers and the print shop are plagued with inconsistencies as well.

Sometimes these inconsistencies or gaps in information force the order entry group back to the customer for approvals and other information, delaying the release to the order fulfillment process by days. The order entry group has no concept that these issues impact cycle time and jeopardize achieving committed shipping dates to the customer. The consequential workarounds include shop floor expediting, added costs for purchasing expedites of raw material, air shipment to the customer, and overtime. The costliest impact is when a salesperson has to get involved with customer complaints from late shipments or has to go back to the customer because key information on the order may be missing. The loss of a salesperson's productivity impacts future orders, revenue flow, customer relationships and competitive threats. The issues become a huge circle of rework for the enterprise.

## Focus on process

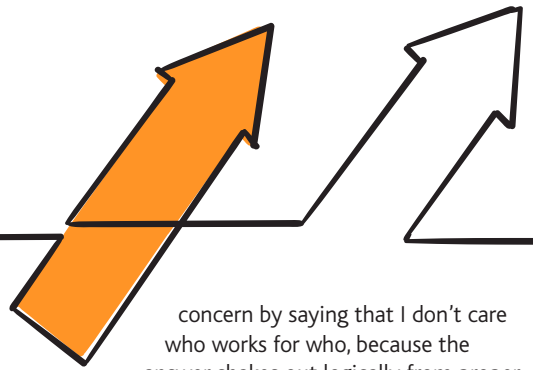
A hierarchy focus on 'functional' areas rather than process leads to a perpetuation of the problems uncovered and a slow response to improvement. The goal of leadership driving continuous improvement is to change emphasis by implementing a focus on process and then aligning leadership to that process. When I bridge this topic with senior leaders the most compelling question raised is concerning the potential organizational structure changes. I recognize that most organizations hate the formality depicted in an organization chart. I diffuse the

concern by saying that I don't care who works for who, because the answer shakes out logically from proper process execution.

The more important question is, do leadership team members understand their responsibility as it relates to the business processes? Most leaders do not think of their responsibility in this way. What matters is that there is clear and transparent communication and execution of the tasks required to complete each of the business steps and the handoff from one process step to the next is high in quality and fast in completion. The expectation for leadership is to understand the steps in the process they are responsible for and understand what happens when the process is not consistent and full of workarounds.

A quick check of your organization's process is to review how many times the processes are completed correctly the first time. How many job packets have errors? How many datasheets from order entry are completed and correct the first time? How many times has a job stopped before it can proceed with confidence that the information is complete and correct? How often are dies put away dull, how often are plates not cleaned properly? Does an order need to be expedited because inventory was off? All of these issues cost time and are an indication of the process's first pass yield (the percentage of actions that are completed correctly the first time according to specification). You may be surprised to learn that even if a department completes its processes correctly 90 percent of the time that when you multiply all the process steps at that performance level you quickly get to a very low overall first-pass yield score. Most organizations just starting their continuous improvement focus have a process first pass yield of under 30 percent.

I was taught many years ago that improvement implies culture change. All organizations operate with a set of values and procedures based on the paradigms of the people who lead it. These paradigms evolve based on experiences and the environment. When change occurs, it is influenced by the people who lead the



change process. To implement continuous improvement in a business, the leaders must cause the fundamental change, including how the business is managed. This change is facilitated by implementing 'Cross-functional teams' (CFT) for each of the major processes. The purpose of the CFT is to play a major role in improving competitiveness by identifying waste and removing barriers from the specified business processes. These barriers exist within functional areas and also between functional areas. Processes are related with each process having a supplier (input) and a customer (output) and they frequently cross-functional lines. Traditional functional silos prevent these processes from being optimized and rarely focus on the quality of the handoff. The first benefit of the CFT approach to problem-solving is that it maximizes the intellectual expertise of an organization. The power and ability of a team to solve problems and remove barriers are usually much greater than that of a single individual. Second, the cross-functional aspect of a team adds another dimension of diversity. Team members from outside a particular function generally bring objective viewpoints that can significantly impact the team's ability to arrive at creative process solutions.

Each CFT has a leader and typically high-level processes become the responsibility of an executive member of the president's staff. The pre-order process, typically run by the VP of sales, is responsible for all process steps from customer engagement through order handoff to the operation. Product development process, typically run by the VP of engineering, is responsible for a market analysis for products and gate control of the development and product launch. Order fulfillment process, typically run by the VP of operations, is responsible

for the process steps from handoff of the order to the company through shipment and ultimately collection.

The rest of the CFT members come from finding the necessary process experts inside the company that understand the impact and can bring value to improving the process. The purpose of a CFT member is to play a major role in helping improve global competitiveness by identifying and removing barriers from a specific business process. Using the pre-order team as an example, the most likely members would include someone from the sales organization, accounting, order entry, quoting, engineering, and the master scheduler. In a process focus structure representatives with knowledge throughout the business process bring perspective. Because the CFT is run by the appointed executive, decision points on suggested improvement can be instantaneous.

**Clear goals**

The key to successful CFT performance is the establishment of clear goals with a clear strategic focus. The team needs to build performance expectations that align with metrics on the production floor and are predominantly focused on cycle time, first-pass yield and productivity. The team environment gains the involvement of its members, engaging participation from all levels of the organization. An organization that has adopted the cross-functional approach is respectful of the participant's time. Meetings are held once a week for one hour. The meetings are structured to review key metrics, gather and update on kaizen (a defined improvement project with a defined start and stopping point) activity, and assign individuals to identified problems to be tackled before the next meeting. In my training, I call this a tier-three meeting because it only occurs once a week and

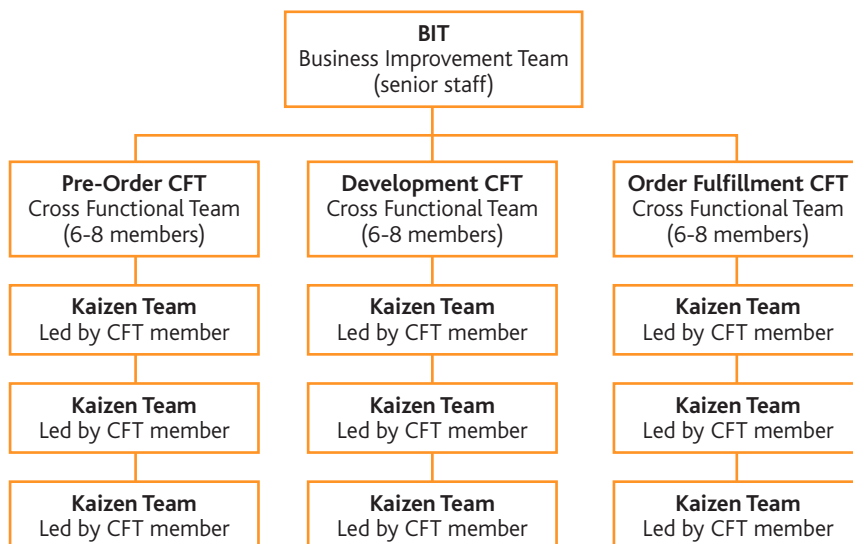
*How a Cross-functional team works*

- Cross-functional team of Business improvement team decides a problem exists
- CFT leader picks a kaizen team leader
- Team leader enlists cross-functional kaizen team members
- Kaizen team analyzes the problem and writes clearly stated objectives
- Key problem analysis tools include:
  - Process maps – determine non-value-added activities to be deleted
  - Brainstorming problem areas
  - Fishbone diagram to find root cause problems
  - Identify needed solutions and get buy-in
  - Implement solutions and track using three Ws (who, what, when)
  - Determine measure, if applicable
  - Write new or revise the current procedure

builds on activity and support need, and brought forward from unresolved shift start-up meetings (tier-two) or daily production board reviews (tier-one).

The CFTs report into the CEO/COO. The group of CFT leaders along with the CEO, and perhaps an external expert, form the business improvement team. The business improvement team empowers the CFTs they created to identify and remove barriers to processes that are wasteful and inhibit performance. Employee involvement is amplified and recognized as they quickly resolve issues with kaizen teams.

The final obstacle to managing a process-focused organization with cross-functional teams is the perception of a conflict with a traditional management structure. This obstacle is overcome when the team members realize that meetings are short and focused. Other meetings are canceled altogether. The CFT meetings are scheduled and designed to respect a person's time, focus on key metrics and celebrate success. Each meeting ends with meeting minutes and defined actions. Individuals are happier with focus, recognized results, and the fact that their team completes tasks quickly. The CFT becomes the driver to cultural changes focused on operational excellence.



Hierarchical organization structure for cross-functional teams



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

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# The importance of share-worthy packaging

*The shopping and buying experience no longer ends at the un-boxing stage; for millions of consumers, the experience now includes sharing, writes Vicki Strull*

When it comes to product purchasing over the past 15 months, one of the effects of the pandemic is that e-commerce outpaced in-store shopping for the first time in history. This buying behavior forced brands to kick it up a notch (or lots of notches) when it comes to influencing the digital buying experience. The shopping and buying experience no longer ends at the un-boxing stage; for millions of consumers, the experience now includes sharing.

**“A key factor is for brands to understand the overlap between real life experiences and the virtual world – and that people want both. How can brands leverage that overlap? With their print and packaging”**

How do the things we see in Instagram stories or our Facebook feed end up online? What makes a consumer decide to share? And most relevant here, how can brands extend the consumer's joy of product sharing with packaging that's also 'share-worthy'?

Let's start with who is doing all this sharing, and let's talk about your online activities. How many times a week do you typically post online? Take a minute to mentally add up your activity on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok – whatever. Me? I post a story or article every day on LinkedIn, and a few times a week on the other platforms. So call it 15 posts a week.

Here's the next question: how many posts do you actually read? Think about the past 24 hours; when you're scrolling, what are you liking, sharing or clicking? I know it's hard to track because we go through posts so quickly. For me, I'm going to guess I read about 50 posts a day.

Facebook users spend an average of 58 minutes per day on Facebook; Instagram users just slightly less, at 53 minutes. So I think it's fair to say that we spend a pretty significant portion of our waking hours consuming content online. It's not that any of us should be surprised by this. The Netflix documentary, *The Social Dilemma*, is all about our online lives, its impact on everything from what we buy to who we vote for, and forecasts about future media use. It must have resonated with us, because in September 2020, *Social Dilemma* was the first time a documentary took the top spot as the most popular movie on Netflix.

And while there have been decades of predictions about how we will consume digital content, not all of them have come true. One particular conversation comes to mind; it's a comment made by the then CEO of Microsoft, Steve Ballmer, in 2008. Ballmer, who always speaks in very grand language and hyperbole, was being interviewed by *The Washington Post*. He said: 'There will be no media consumption left in 10 years that is not delivered over an IP network. There will be no newspapers, no magazines that are

delivered in paper form. Everything gets delivered in an electronic form.' As we all know, that prediction didn't happen. Why?

What Ballmer and the tech world didn't anticipate was how much we as humans crave the real world. While the ways in which we enjoy and participate in the virtual world certainly has grown rapidly over the past decade, we still want connection, touch, and face-to-face experiences. In fact, Instagram was created as a platform to share real world experiences in an online world. Ballmer didn't anticipate that foundational human need to experience things in the real world – like newspapers and magazines and all the print and packaging people like you and I create on a daily basis.

Social media is just one way we consume digital content. Also consider the rise of new(ish) media. For instance, the way that we watch TV. There are dozens of streaming platforms, and the content we choose to watch is heavily influenced by data analytics and computer technology. Nearly 80 percent of what we watch on Netflix is recommended to us based on our viewing habits. And consumers like that. It feels very personal. We feel 'known' even though it's done by an algorithm.

Technology has blurred the boundaries between the virtual world and the real world. It didn't eliminate one, as Ballmer predicted; it's not a zero-sum game of one or the other. It's created a sense of overlap between the virtual and the real world.

I don't know that anybody truly anticipated our level of participation in these digital platforms, and the way in which we participate with different products, with different brands, with different events every day. What's driving all that participation? It's because any of us can create content – pictures, stories, videos, animation – and anyone can share an experience.

## Print and packaging live in the real world

Brands that embrace that level of participation and recognize how valuable it is will gain a real competitive advantage. A key





**“In addition to creating packaging that aligns with a brand’s messaging and quality, now we must design packaging that’s share-worthy”**

#### Designed for sharing

Digital printing has elevated the consumer experience with customization and personalization. Scroll through Instagram or Facebook right now and you’ll see videos of people clapping, jumping up and down, or squealing with excitement when they receive a package that’s personalized with their name on the outside or a note on the inside or free samples included, based on their previous purchases. That’s a pivotal moment when consumers feel as if the brand is engaging with them on a personal level. It’s an experience far beyond simply plucking a packaged product from the shelf.

What does all this mean to marketers, brand owners and designers? As a designer myself, I’ll tell you: the goal has grown. In addition to creating packaging that aligns with a brand’s messaging and quality, now we must design packaging that’s share-worthy. It’s a goal that can impact the bottom line: sharing products (and packaging) online is really one more way of posting a product review or endorsement.

And when it comes to building brand trust, consumer reviews are the number-one influencer. Brand trust, in turn, builds consumer loyalty and sways buying decisions.

In that context, it’s easy to see how important packaging design is to share-worthiness. The enhancements brands use may be the very things that encourage someone to share. In fact, for some products, people talk about the packaging as much or more than the product.

Consider the boxes that Apple products come in. Recently, thousands of people who called themselves ‘collectors’ posted their stacks of spot-varnish, high-gloss white iPhone and MacBook boxes.

You can find the same obsession with the iconic orange boxes of the Hermes brand. And the piles of Nike boxes that sneakerheads hoard. Consider the Boomerang images of people opening and closing a magnetic box because they love the feel and sound of it. These strategic designs are exactly the reason why packaging takes center stage in user-generated content and product posts. It creates another touchpoint for brands to connect with their consumers in real life and in the virtual world. A tactile, memorable, share-worthy touchpoint at that.

What’s next? In part two of this series, I’ll cover in-depth my three strategies for designing share-worthy packaging: 1) Align online. Align the design and packaging you’re creating in the real world to ensure it works really well in an online environment. 2) Create packaging elements that are interactive or hands-on, so the un-boxing experience is not only exciting for the consumer to share, it’s exciting for the viewer to watch. 3) Create customization.

Whether you customize the outside package, the product’s case or the materials inside, consumers love to feel known, seen and supported by brands.

factor is for brands to understand the overlap between real life experiences and the virtual world – and that people want both. How can brands leverage that overlap? With their print and packaging. Print and packaging, of course, are of the real world, and yet they are shared millions of times a day in the virtual world. And not just by influencers, bloggers and celebrities, but also by everyday consumers. That’s why packaging is so crucial for brands; it can easily become a secondary reason – or even the primary reason! – that consumers are excited to share their IRL (In Real Life) experiences with their online friends and followers.

When you take a look at how our online participation has evolved, there does not appear to be an end in sight. Facebook has grown to 2.7 billion users. Instagram has about half that. And TikTok has nearly doubled during the pandemic, to 689 million users. If you aggregate all that, we’re looking at billions of people posting on a regular basis.

One of the biggest changes from a brand perspective is that brands are no longer the ones creating the most trusted content; the influence is coming from user-generated content. If I post about a product I love, no one’s asking me to post it. No one’s paying me to post it. I’m posting it on my own because I feel like sharing something that I’m excited about. And because social media is so visual, when someone shares their latest product find or raves about a brand, the post is usually accompanied by an image or video. And what’s front-and-center in that photo or video? The packaging.

People aren’t just holding up the sweater they bought or their favorite protein bar or their new pair of sneakers; they’re recording and sharing the entire un-boxing experience. They are literally talking about the packaging! That’s why packaging can no longer be just about keeping the product safe during transport or protected from the elements; packaging is a valuable piece of the brand story and consumer experience.

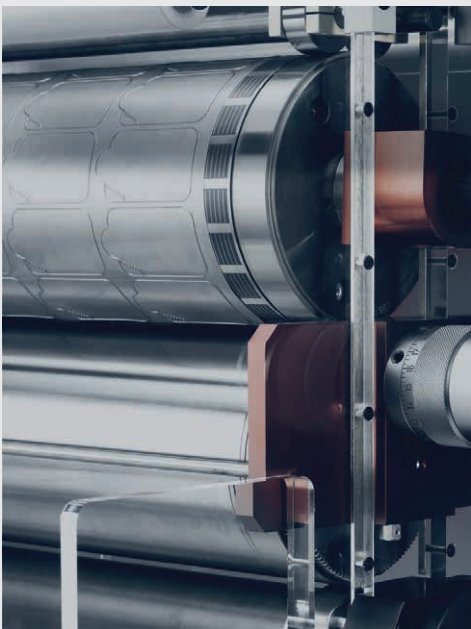


*Vicki Strull is a packaging designer, strategist and speaker who advises top-tier and emerging brands on how to leverage the power of print and packaging within opti-channel marketing strategies. Join fellow trendsetters at [vickistrull.com](http://vickistrull.com) or follow Vicki on LinkedIn @vickistrull*



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# Redefine your growth strategy

*New tactics are needed for the post-Covid world, writes Bob Cronin of The Open Approach*

Labels and packaging have always been important facets of our customers' businesses, be it housing for barcodes, ingredient information, product display/protection, or simply carriers for high-impact visual merchandising and branding. But their perceived worth by the buyer has changed. While end users are now expecting more from the label or package (better messaging, safety/tamper resistance, ability to clean/sanitize a purchased product, trackability, etc), some of our customers think they should cost less.

This is not because these customers believe we're not as important. Rather, it's trickle-down thinking as they remain in recovery mode. Some industries have been able to adapt their business model (and operational expenses) to Covid-19 better than others. And some have simply not caught up. The continual evolution and ping-ponging of regulatory requirements are making it difficult for many to stay in business.

Rather than acquiescing to razor-thin margins, we need to rework these perceptions. During uncertain times, people want confidence. And this can start with confidence in their suppliers. The label and packaging business has always been built on relationships, and we need to return our customers to that thinking. So how do we build, protect, and grow our business now?

## 1. Focus on service/ease of doing business

Every label and packaging company's website talks about customer service expertise. Yet few take any defined or meaningful approach. In an era where customers have gone from welcoming your occasional visit to taking great lengths to avoid proximity, the relationship aspect has tanked. This lack of personal contact makes orders more transactional, and thus the emphasis on cost.

You need to make it easy to do business with you – in today's times. Streamline ordering and RFQs. Leverage your IT team to build personalized landing pages, ordering portals, or digital news feeds with special offers. Keep customers posted on any inventory they have and what they've ordered the same time last year, and provide ongoing email/text status reports of all jobs in process. Make it easy for customers to purchase, track and monitor any project or program 24/7, or explore new product options. Give them multiple contact points so that they can get answers quickly.

## 2. Re-evaluate how you go to market

Print providers in general are historically poor at marketing their own services. And with Covid, traditional connections such as direct sales, distributors, trade shows, and associations have nearly vanished. Additionally, remote workforces mean your direct mail campaigns stack up in the mailroom until someone throws them out. Clearly, you need to change how you go to market.

In a Covid world, you need great digital. First, update your website. Decrease emphasis on your history, equipment lists and industry jargon, and showcase novel and cost-saving solutions. Demonstrate how your specific manufacturing,

substrates, capabilities and handling processes have changed and how they can offer an advantage today.

Second, enhance your social media presence. This is key for current customers, but also vital in attracting prospects. Experiment with all types of posts and measure their effectiveness. Do creative videos. Promote and provide incentives for your customers to follow you. And give them great content that they'll share. Wrap up your digital thinking with consistent and quick email touches. No one has time to read a quarterly customer newsletter.

Feature a success story, provide a limited-time coupon, or offer a contemporary promotional item (hand sanitizer, keyboard cleaner, custom-printed mask, or something you can produce) that will keep you top of mind. Examine every customer engagement channel, and maximize every opportunity.

## 3. Become experts in your customers' business

Nothing makes a label and packaging company quite as successful as its understanding of the customer. Every company in every industry has been affected by Covid — good, bad, or both. Healthcare/pharmaceutical packaging, food labels/packaging, consumer goods, and others need to adhere to CDC/FDA requirements and cautions. Large retailers continue to replace signage and floor decals to meet new standards. Restaurants, hotels, and other hospitality enterprises now need label/packaging items they never did before. These drivers are all affecting how, why, and what label and packaging users are buying. By getting more entrenched in your customers' business, you can better understand what's on the horizon, and help them get more proactive and efficient in their spending.

## 4. Deliver new solutions

Innovation has always been at the crux of the label and packaging business, and is even more important now. When Covid hit, it stopped a lot of us (and our customers) in our tracks, hesitant to make any moves, investments, or changes. But you can't continue to wait for things to happen to your company. You need to start making them happen for you.

Focus on R&D. Are there solutions you can create to solve some of your customers' (or your) new challenges? Can you fine-tune any existing product to better protect, display, or enhance visibility? Are there new label substrates or inks that can help enhance hygiene of the products they get attached to?

If you can't develop innovations alone, consider a strategic partnership or an acquisition. Either way, consider an investment that will improve productivity, efficiency, and throughput. And make sure it directly benefits your customer. Even simple actions to grow during these times will enhance perceptions about your company – and your value.

I hope these considerations provide some fodder as you retool your strategic growth strategy for the new world. My next article will explore specific steps you can take to optimize your customer approach. Growing your business – and thriving – through this strange 'new normal' is possible. Face it positively, yet realistically, and don't be afraid to make changes as you go.



*Bob Cronin is managing partner of The Open Approach, an M&A consultancy focused exclusively on the world of print. To learn more, visit [www.theopenapproach.net](http://www.theopenapproach.net), email [bbrcronin@aol.com](mailto:bbrcronin@aol.com), or call (001) 630 323 9700*



Isidore Leiser is CEO of Status Packaging, one of Europe's leading label converting groups with six manufacturing facilities in France and a sales office in Switzerland. Producing a wide variety of self-adhesive label products, as well as sleeves and in-mold labels, it employs 313 people and had a turnover of more than 50 million euros in 2020. Leiser spent six years as a board member of Finat and will shortly return to the association's marketing committee. Interview by James Quirk

Q&A

**L&L: What has been the impact of the pandemic on the company over the past year?**

**Isidore Leiser:** We adapted quickly. We were open all the time, so didn't lose even one day of production. We implemented social distancing and some staff worked from home. We broke up our shifts to allow cleaning of machines and to minimize as much as possible the risk to our employees. I am very proud that we kept everything open. We had an increase of sick staff at the beginning, but nothing we couldn't manage.

The cosmetics and automotive sectors were down, but this was compensated by food and healthcare products. Overall, 2020 was a good year for the business. We are a resilient company, and the fact that no customer represents more than 5 percent of our turnover means that we are very stable.

We like a challenge and we rose to it. We did better than in 2019, which was a year without such problems. We have to learn from the experience and take the lessons of what we did well into the future. So we had a good year and are grateful for this growth, because it has been a very challenging environment for our employees. I am very thankful to them.

**L&L: How important is the return of trade shows for your business?**

**IL:** Trade shows are very important. They allow you to get a lot of information in a very short time, to really see the machines in action and to get to know people from different companies. I have lots of good contacts and friends in the industry, and to be able to speak to lots of them, to understand their problems and how things are going, is very important. Without trade shows and industry events, communication is more like a video game than real life. If you are running a business, you cannot make mistakes. You need to see the products, see the people, see the companies you are buying from. It is easier to make mistakes if you are not doing these things in person. A trade show is a great way to gather information and save yourself a lot of time.

I truly believe that people are really eager to return to these events. We are in a business where people and personal relationships are very important – it is very hard to build personal relationships virtually.

**L&L: In what technology have you invested in recent years, and what new technology are you looking at for potential future investment?**

**IL:** We have invested a lot in digital presses from HP, such as the latest 8000 and 20000 machines, because we are a strong believer in digital printing. But we still invest a lot also in flexo – the market will not only be digital: lots of work will still be produced by

flexo for cost reasons.

Last year we installed multiple finishing systems from A B Graphic. We have also invested in a combination machine with both flexo and silkscreen. We are active in most of the end-use sectors in France, so we always try to invest in the latest technology. It's another reason why trade shows are so important: our suppliers are constantly evolving and producing new technology, so we have to stay up to date and see what the next thing is we should invest in.

We have invested in machines to insert RFID inlays into labels, for example. We have been producing RFID labels for some years but wanted to invest in more sophisticated equipment to allow greater precision and to produce better results for our customers.

We use all of the major print processes. Our strategy is to try to understand our customers' needs, for self-adhesive labels or sleeves or IML, and to find the right printing process which can fulfill their needs today and also for the future.

We are also investing heavily in the digitalization of pre-press, and are planning

to install a new ERP system. To manage all those very small orders, you have to be organized and integrated. And because of the pandemic, with some people working from home, it is important to have systems in place which allow them to access information without being in the factory.

We will integrate our machines into the new ERP system, to allow our customers easy access to information about their orders. Increasingly, I believe we are a service company rather than a production company. The customer needs a lot of data. We need the information we gather from order intake, quality control and production to be precise and to be automated as much as possible. The fact that we have different factories with the same ERP system means that if there is a problem, we can move a job from one site to another very quickly, with the specifications immediately accessible without someone having to manually input a second order into the system.

The market is changing very quickly and we have to adapt: information is key in today's world.

**“I think for a company of our size to stay the same is quite dangerous – we have no choice but to grow. So we are looking to expand outside France”**



*Shrink sleeves are a core area of Stratus' production*

**“I truly believe that people are really eager to return to trade shows. We are in a business where people and personal relationships are very important – it is very hard to build personal relationships virtually”**

**L&L: What is the breakdown between your different areas of production, and which end user sectors are seeing most growth?**

**IL:** Self-adhesive is the biggest part of the business, then IML is almost 10 percent and sleeves around 6-7 percent. We export around 20 percent of our turnover, mostly to customers who have factories in France and also in neighboring countries.

**L&L: After multiple acquisitions in France over the years, do you envisage expanding your manufacturing capabilities abroad?**

**IL:** Yes, we are looking to produce labels somewhere outside of France. We are actively looking to acquire converters in other countries. Last year we looked at 10 different companies and made three offers, but have not finalized anything yet. We need to grow. We are a 50 million EUR company, and still a family business. You can see there is consolidation in the market. But we cannot grow at the same speed as the private equity groups, who look for results in a few years and then sell – we can operate on a longer time frame. We are also much more integrated. Our companies really work together as a team, rather than separate businesses that we buy and sell. But we continue to look for acquisitions. We need to grow because our competition is growing and our customers are growing. They are asking for new products and we want to give them better service. We are still a family-owned business but more international groups are arriving in the French market. So the market is changing very quickly and we need to adapt. I think for a company of our size to stay the same is quite dangerous – we have no choice but to grow. So we are looking to expand outside France and to be able to offer our customers the same products, the same quality, the same service, the same label look in different regions of Europe.

**L&L: When you look for an acquisition, what aspects of a company are the most important?**

**IL:** The most important thing is that it be complementary, in terms of technology and sector, and also in terms of giving added value to our customers. It is also important to have a fit with the owners of the company also, because I am here for the long term – it is important to create something together and grow the company that we acquire, both for us and for them. That is why it is also difficult for us to be in competition with private equity investors, who might only be there for three or four years: we have a different approach, a longer-term perspective. We are thinking about the added value both for our employees and for our customers.

**L&L: What initiatives has the company undertaken to improve the environmental sustainability of its production?**

**IL:** It is hugely important subject. We only have one planet. As an industry we have to face the fact that there are aspects of our production that are not environmentally sustainable. For example, we stopped using solvents a couple of years ago. We are certified to French environmental regulations. We have implemented many measures and have invested a lot. We promote our environmental initiatives and we offer each customer a more environmentally sustainable option compared to what they are using at the moment. We measure our waste and try to reduce it every year.

Two years ago we also began to collect liner waste from some customers at some of our sites, but progress is difficult because as an industry we don't really have a proper answer or initiative to solve this problem.

Customers are asking for sustainability, but they don't want to pay the extra price for it, which is really sad. This is the reality. Everyone is talking about sustainability but not so many people are doing a lot about it.

Our lean manufacturing programs have also helped to reduce waste as well as increase productivity. Lean manufacturing is a state of mind: everyone in the company is involved, not only machine operators. We all think about how we are working, how can we make things better. How can we also lower the risk of accidents. How can we minimize the production of poor quality labels, which can be a big waste. Everyone has to be involved, and our employees must feel able to give us ideas about their work space, about how we can improve it and make their work more efficient. We have to constantly try to progress and improve; to try things, even if there is a risk of failure. So this is the mentality that we try to implement in all of our factories.

**L&L: How does Status recruit new employees and invest in their development?**

**IL:** To invest in and develop employees is one of the most critical



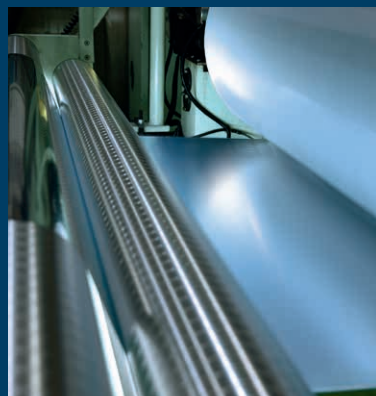
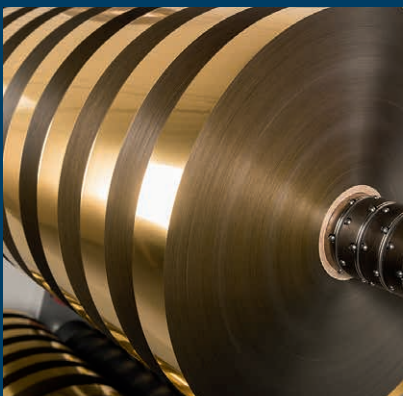
Stratus runs six factories in France and a sales office in Switzerland

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Production floor at Stratus Health and Beauty

aspects of business today. It is not easy – and I know from speaking to my peers across Europe that they say the same – to find good employees and to retain them. We train staff in-house, but also sometimes use an external training company which helps us. We use internal promotions to help create a career path.

We are in a profession that, in general, is not very well known. The industry needs to work on attracting young people, who perhaps do not know what a label printer is. It's a big challenge and very important. Anyone can buy a machine. You go to Labelexpo and you buy a flexo or a digital press. But good employees, who are motivated, who can stand out in a crisis and solve problems – this is much harder to find.

I think there is an image problem. I started my career in consulting, with KPMG. When I visited a company, everyone would listen to me because they saw me as the expert. But today, if I visit a company and say maybe you should change this or that, they think: you are the printer, you should do what I want. So there is a problem in the dynamic of this partnership. As an industry, some of our customers don't understand the potential of the solutions we can bring them – they only see the cost. This is something we need to work on, and it's why organizations such as Finat – where I was on the board, and shortly I will return to be on the marketing committee – are so important for the image of the industry, both to the companies within it and also to our customers outside it, who don't understand its complexity and the way we can help them.

**L&L: How do you see the label industry evolving over the next decade?**

IL: We have spoken about the environment – this will become more and more important. And also digitalization – not only for digital machines but also flexo presses. Everything will be more and more digitalized, from pre-press to the set-up of the machine, the invoicing; everything connected to the ERP. Robotization and automatization will also increase. R&D will produce more and more complex products: labels with RFID and enhanced functionality. Consolidation too is a continuing factor, because we are very fragmented as an industry.

**L&L: You became CEO of Stratus in 2007. How has your leadership style evolved over the years?**

IL: I joined Stratus from KPMG, which for me was a very good experience. But it was a wake-up call when I joined the label industry. Consulting is a beautiful business because you are always right. If your customer does well, then everything you told them was correct. If not, then they did not follow your advice correctly. But once you are running your own company, then you see real problems, problems I had not faced before: problems with personnel, with unions, with motivation. I loved consulting, but it is not your company. If you make a mistake, it is not the same thing. Stress levels are higher when it is your company.

It has been a learning experience. When you start a new career you



Examples of work produced by Stratus

**“The market is changing very quickly and we have to adapt: information is key in today's world”**

have to learn, you have to make some mistakes. I am still learning. So it is a continuous evolution. We have to adapt, learn from our employees, and constantly evolve. Because the industry is changing, society is changing; there are always new challenges. But I think that is positive.

Every day is different; I do not have a regular routine. Because of Covid, I travel much less than before. I used to visit different factories from Monday to Wednesday – now I am running the business from behind my desk, through a screen. One has to adapt. But it's also a little scary – I hope that we can return to real life.

**L&L: What are your interests outside of work?**

IL: My biggest interest is sport. I don't play anything well, but I love running, swimming, cycling. Luckily, I was able to do most of these things during the lockdown. And I also love to help with Scouts organizations. I was a member when I was a child. During the lockdown, one of my sons was still running a Scouts group and a lot of benefit came out of that. We can speak about our problems due to the pandemic, but really the biggest problem has been for children. So to be able to think about something else was great for my son and it helped him, and it helped the other kids too.



Isidore Leiser was a panelist at the Virtual Label Summit in 2020. View the session through L&L's Label Academy subscription service at [www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy)

# NEW PICOJET 254 DIGITAL INKJET FROM DANTEX



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- Corona Unit
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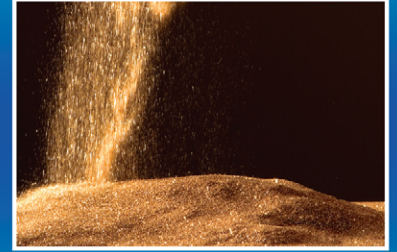
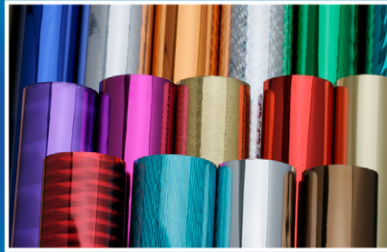
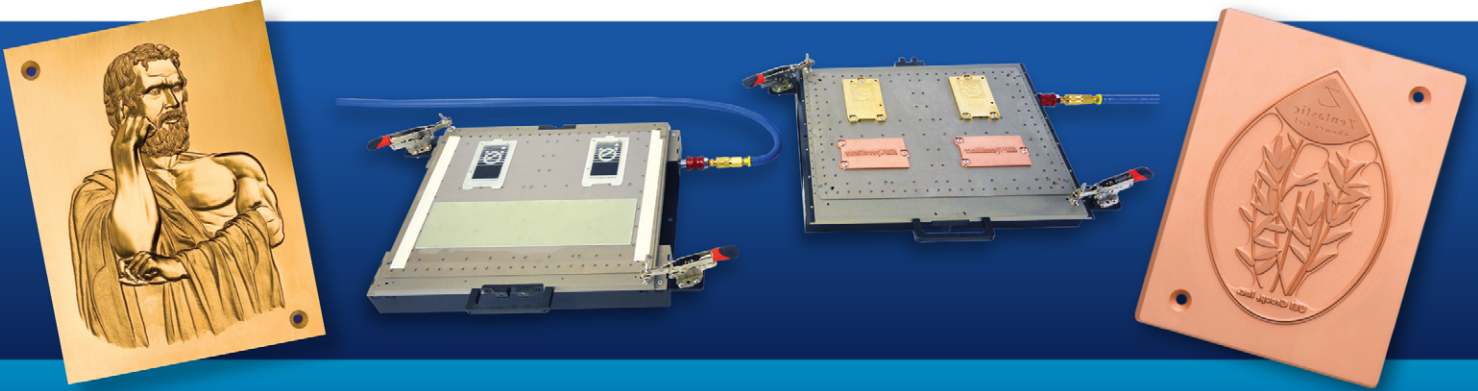
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# Protecting brand assets

*The role of the label and package print industries in combatting brand piracy was examined in a Label Academy master class. Andy Thomas-Emans reports*

**T**he Label Academy's third virtual master class covered the state of the art in brand protection and anti-counterfeiting technologies.

As James Bevan, director of consultancy Vandagraf, noted, the scale of the global counterfeiting problem is terrifying. According to OECD figures, counterfeit and pirated products are valued at USD 509 billion, representing well over 3 percent of world trade. But even these figures are likely a gross underestimate of the true scale of counterfeiting activity, said Bevan, since they only represent export seizures by customs, not counterfeits which circulate in domestic markets. Furthermore, the OECD figures cover mainly consumer and pharma products, potentially leaving out industrial component counterfeits such as microchips, auto and aero-related products.

Footwear represents well over one fifth of all counterfeit seizures, followed by clothing, leather goods and electrical appliances. A shocking 7 percent of counterfeits are medical equipment and pharma products.

Bevan pointed to the exponential growth of online retailing, magnified by the impact of lockdowns during the Covid pandemic, as a major driver of counterfeit products, including Covid test kits and PPE.

Regular L&L contributor Vicki Strull, branding consultant at Vicki Strull Design, looked at how packaging – particularly in the context of e-commerce sales – can help reassure consumers they have received an authentic product.

Strull pointed out that factors such as robustness of the packaging construction, choice of substrate, print technology, color consistency and use of advanced finishing techniques combine to give the consumer an expectation of quality which can be used as a benchmark when a product is delivered.

Strull pointed to embellishment in particular as a way for brands to distance themselves from fake products, which are always produced as cheaply as possible. These features should be photographed in high resolution and shown clearly on the social media or web page as a reference for the consumer.

Given that footwear represents the biggest category of counterfeit goods, it was fitting to hear about the industry's response from Christina Mitropoulos, director of brand protection and manufacturing initiatives at the American

Apparel & Footwear Association.

Representing 360 member companies from manufacturers to brands and retailers, the AAFA's Brand Protection Council (BPC) focuses particularly on the proliferation of counterfeit goods found on online marketplaces and social media platforms.

## Technology response

Paul Dunn, chair of the International Holographic Manufacturers Association, demonstrated how holography has evolved to become an integral component of sophisticated multi-layer security systems.

After talking about new technology developments such as the use of nano-level optical structures, he used a sophisticated security label developed for the Tonino Lamborghini brand as a case study. This label is constructed from a high security tamper-evident substrate and includes, along with the hologram, alphanumeric numbering (Unique Identification number, or UID) and a QR code.

The labels are applied to Lamborghini swing tickets and warranty cards, which themselves incorporate advanced anti-counterfeit print techniques and spot UV security varnishes.

Using OpSec's Insight platform all shipments of the hologram security labels are tracked to Tonino Lamborghini's manufacturers, meaning the location, product traceability and status of every UID is known at all times. As manufacturers apply the labels, they are required to declare within the InSight platform which UIDs have been used.

It allows the active monitoring of online sales channels and can detect patterns of infringing sellers. Consumers participate in the authentication process by scanning a QR code to register their product.

The contribution of digital printing to a brand protection strategy was examined by Moshiko Levhar, EMEA security and brand protection business manager, Graphics Solutions Business, HP. Levhar examined the multi-layered nature of effective brand security systems, taking in forensic, covert, semi-covert (requiring tools such as a magnifying glass) and overt technologies.

Digital print allows a wide range of variable graphic elements to be incorporated into a label, including micro QR codes, serialized microtext, guilloches and human-readable QR codes. Levhar explained that HP works with a number of



Secure QR label used to authenticate provenance

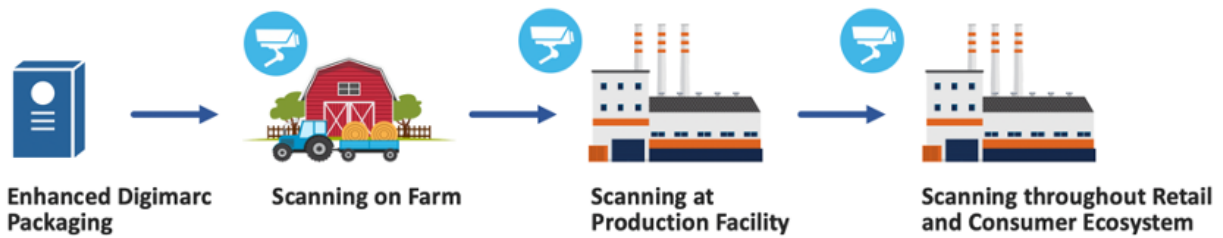
**“Footwear represents well over one fifth of all counterfeit seizures, followed by clothing, leather goods and electrical appliances. A shocking 7 percent of counterfeits are medical equipment and pharma products”**

partners where specific secure technologies are implemented. For example, where anti-diversion rather than anti-counterfeit is the goal, ScanTrust provides its secure track and trace QR code technology.

Covert digital print technologies include printing of invisible yellow QR codes or other serialized text or codes. These can be combined with forensic high end security inks to create multi-layered brand protection systems.

Other techniques HP's partners bring to the table include embedding a secure graphic within a QR code, making it impossible to copy.

A case study protecting a high-value Ginseng brand cited by Levhar involved a combination of unique QR codes and a guilloche symbol which appears both on the pack and on the consumer's smartphone screen, so the two can be compared. This provides both an additional layer of overt security and an interesting way to engage the consumer.



Digimarc chain of custody

**Smart chips and tamper-evidence**

Tony Fazhev, who leads Avery Dennison’s NFC-related activities in Europe, explained the growing number of chip-based applications for brand protection, including seal tamper protection, encryption of product certificates, authentication via smartphone, and authentication of provenance through blockchain integration.

A key benefit of NFC chips as part of an anti-counterfeit strategy is how easily they can be concealed, for example behind the decorated label, on a bottle neck label, or within the closure. Fazhev pointed out how NFC encourages consumers to actively engage with product authentication and supply chain security simply by tapping with an NFC-enabled smart phone, at the same time opening up opportunities to engage with the brand.

One key application for NFC and blockchain described by Fazhev is proving Covid test kit authenticity. Scanning the NFC tag on a smart phone also allows the patient to securely access diagnostic information.

Tamper-evident (TE) labels have long been a key element in the fight against product tampering, and Michael Welch, senior product manager, durables (North America) at Avery Dennison, gave an

in-depth explanation of how they work and key applications.

TE labels work by combining a strong adhesive with tearable face materials. Destructible face materials split into layers or break into little pieces when removed, while Void labels leave behind warning text or logos when the label is removed. TE labels can be either overt or covert depending on whether you are trying to deter theft/tampering or deter counterfeiting.

Welch ran through how different types of adhesive impact the void label, whether permanent, dry peel or no residue, as well as the different types of frangible films and papers.

An important recent development is Amazon’s mandate for sealing and packaging of hygienic products using TE labels. This specifies that TE labels must be opaque, incorporate a logo that cannot be replicated; leave a clear sign of tampering on the product when broken; should be of different color and should not blend in with the surface of the product. The seal should also be sturdy, so the only way to break it is with ‘clear intent’.

A label converter perspective on TE labels came from Dr Adrian Steele, MD at Mercian Labels. Steele looked at how bad actors attempt to nullify tamper evident labels and how these attacks can

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## “Strull pointed to embellishment in particular as a way for brands to distance themselves from fake products, which are always produced as cheaply as possible”

be countered.

His case studies included security seals developed by Mercian for the Royal Mint, which involved a dual layer LabelLock label with bespoke in-register sub-surface messaging and clean branding to confirm authenticity.

In the case of securing a Verifone card payment unit, Mercian added a bespoke halftone message which showed the underlying package color along with sub-surface numbering. A solution for an auto parts manufacturer involved a covert UV blacklight sub-surface message and hidden color shift inks.

### Taggants and watermarks

Secure taggants represent a key vector of development for brand protection strategies. Michael Brice, VP sales and business development at INX International Ink, and Keith Goldstein, CEO of VerifyMe, explained how they jointly developed a system for printing secure covert or overt codes using virtually any conventional or digital printing process.

Inks specially developed by INX incorporate VerifyMe's patented RainbowSecure pigment, which fluoresces at a

particular wavelength when illuminated by the company's VeriPAS mobile authenticator. The RainbowSecure pigment is inorganic with a high degree of lightfastness.

The wider RainbowSecure eco-system adds the ability to detect, track and trace, and authenticate these printed codes or marks via a secure cloud server and to geolocate the product.

INX has tested the ink system with its own NW series of digital label printers and CIJ printers, as well as on conventional flexo and offset presses.

Concluding the master class, Digimarc's 'product evangelist' Jay Sperry discussed the company's item-level digital watermarking technology, which has recently been adopted by the 'Holy Grail 2' project for automated sorting of plastic containers.

Digimarc's technology involves printing imperceptible barcodes onto product packaging or labels (or etched onto the product itself), which can then be detected by automated scanners and a range of other detection devices, including smart phones.

Variable Digimarc codes gives each product its own digital identity, which allows traceability through the supply chain. The digital ecosystem built by Digimarc enables quick validation of product authenticity by customs officers, supply chain staff and consumers.

A key feature of the Digimarc code is redundancy, with images repeated across the label or pack surface, which Sperry says virtually guarantees that the codes can be read in any orientation.



*Paid-for access to all master class presentations can be found at [www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy)*





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# Counterfeit: is your business well equipped to protect brands?



In the battle against fake goods, it falls to print providers and converters to help ensure that brands can stay a step ahead of the threat with a solution that combines industry-leading security features on one press, in one pass.

While the business of counterfeiting may be as old as business itself, the scale and scope of it today is a truly modern phenomenon. Fuelled by the dramatic rise of e-commerce, counterfeiters are infiltrating new marketplaces at record pace, creating hard-to-spot imitations sold on fake websites, reputed e-commerce channels and social media. No longer confined to shady markets and street corners, counterfeiters have the world at their fingertips.

And, with every successful security breach, they get better and bolder. By 2022, counterfeiting is projected to cost the global economy US\$4.2 trillion.<sup>1</sup> In context, that's a 763 percent increase on the first reported estimate of US\$5.5 billion in 1982.<sup>2</sup>

Covid-19 accelerated what was an already alarming trend. As entire countries locked down and global supply chains were uprooted, counterfeiters were able to find and fill critical gaps.

In the first week of March 2020 alone, Interpol seized 4.4 million units of illicit pharmaceuticals.<sup>3</sup> An already lucrative market for forgeries, piracy and product diversion exploded – and the demand for robust, adaptive security solutions has become more urgent and acute than ever.

***“Two-thirds of consumers who have unintentionally purchased counterfeit goods have lost trust in brands.”<sup>4</sup>***

For brands operating in this new reality, maintaining consumer trust has become more complex and challenging. In order to survive, let alone thrive, brands must instil confidence, build loyalty and ensure customer safety. Security breaches cost brands through the loss of product revenue and potential investigations and litigation, but they also

pose serious threats to intellectual property and brand reputation. Two-thirds of consumers who have unintentionally purchased counterfeit goods have lost trust in brands.<sup>5</sup>

When combined with the health and safety implications of a market full of counterfeit medical supplies, automotive parts, toys and cosmetics, it's unsurprising that fighting the fakes is now a critical priority for brand owners. Today, the brand protection market is worth US\$29.5 billion and this is only set to increase as customers seek out more complex, sophisticated security solutions to protect product authenticity and brand reputation.<sup>6</sup> As copycats continue to hone their techniques, hot on the heels of the latest security technologies, brands are seeking new solutions to stay secure.

Put simply, brands are looking to take back control of their products, reputation and revenues – and they need print providers and converters with the right technology in place to help them.

***“It was a necessity to protect our product”***

As the stakes get higher and brands battle to reduce corporate financial losses, intellectual property violations, product diversion, counterfeiting and reputation loss, an advanced digital print security technology is no longer just a convenient add-on – it's an outright necessity.

For Kirk Baumann, President of Baumann Wisconsin Ginseng, digital security provided the only viable solution. After moving into a new, lucrative market in China, the brand faced increasing levels of counterfeit competition. “We get 25% more for our product from Wisconsin, so there's great incentive for other companies to copy our product if they can. Consumers were concerned about how to identify and make sure they were getting the product they're paying a lot of money for.”

Working with Roaster, and powered by HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press, Baumann Farms

<sup>1</sup> The Economic Impacts of Counterfeiting and Piracy, ICC

<sup>2</sup> The Future of Security Printing to 2024, Smithers Pira

<sup>3</sup> Coronavirus sparks a new trend in counterfeit medical items', Interpol

<sup>4</sup> Counterfeit are endemic, and it's damaging brand value', Incopro

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The Future of Security Printing to 2024, Smithers Pira



now incorporates micro focus variable codes, a GPAS-based system, on every package. Each short-run digitally customized bag now features a unique QR code and guilloche symbol, so consumers can verify product authenticity with their smartphones within seconds. "It was a necessity to protect our product," he says.

**A secure future**

Brand protection has shifted focus from detection at the end-point, to prevention at the source. Optical security features that can easily be replicated are no longer enough. A new approach encourages interactions with customers, with digital solutions that incorporate variable data and real-time traceability, enabling consumers, authorities and brand owners to scrutinize product authenticity at every stage of the production line.

But in order to outmanoeuvre counterfeiters and stay ahead of the next threat, the security solution needs to be multi-layered, adaptive and too complex to replicate. Brands are seeking solutions that combine overt technologies which consumers can distinguish themselves, such as watermarks and holograms, with covert and forensic creatures, like track-and-trace and intelligent inks. For a traditional printing press, this requires multiple passes through multiple devices. But with HP Indigo Secure, it's possible to print a never seen before defensive armour on one press, in one pass.

**New opportunities with HP Indigo**

Print providers that can offer digital security services and solutions that protect and guard brand interests more effectively are gaining a competitive edge. Empowered by HP Indigo Secure capabilities, print providers across the globe are tapping into high value opportunities of a booming brand protection market.

For Nosco, a leading pharmaceutical packaging provider, HP Indigo's security solution has enabled them to leverage the growth of the brand protection

industry to drive company profit. "At Nosco, we've been able to develop a whole security business surrounding HP Indigo technology", says Craig Curren, President of Nosco. With data variable printing and invisible inks, their clients can now track products across the supply chain, outmanoeuvring sophisticated counterfeits and combatting product diversions, which are notorious in the industry.

"By implementing all three platforms of digital labels, cartons and flex packs, we've really been able to grow", he adds. The company now services 250 clients per month, printing over two billion labels.

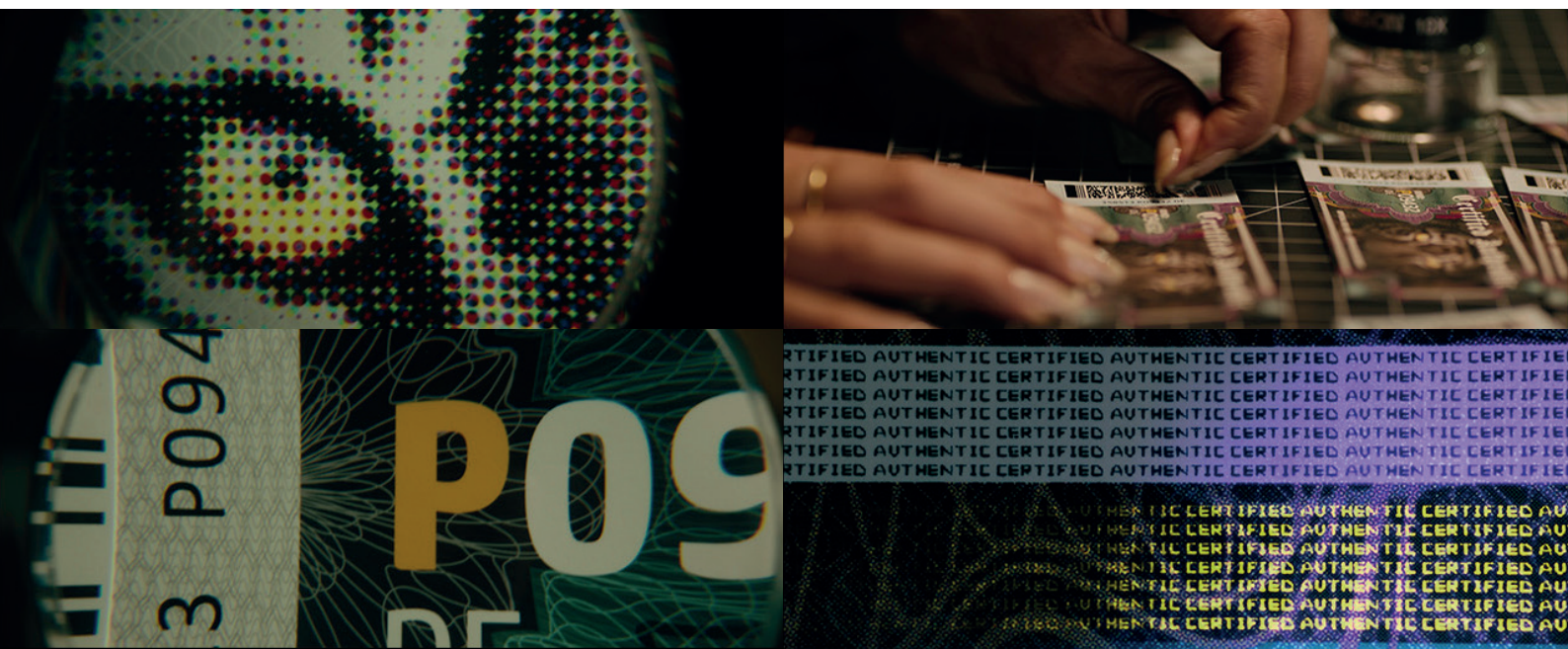
**An adaptive security shield on one press, in one pass**

As one of the world's leading digital printing companies, HP Indigo is at the forefront of digital print security. The firm has developed a continuously evolving set of solutions for security printing and brand protection, based on HP Indigo LEP technology and supported by powerful global alliances.

Proven in the toughest environments, HP Indigo offers print providers and converters the ability to mix and match a wide range of innovative and advanced security elements and designs that are easy to print and hard to copy. Their solutions enable the application of multiple layers of overt, semi-covert and covert security elements to any document, label or package on one pass, in one press.

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# Nutrients secured

*The pandemic has spawned entirely new tasks and challenges for the food label market, topping a long list of factors shaping this segment.*

*Piotr Wnuk reports*

Increasingly, consumers desire information about the health, safety, environmental and socioeconomic characteristics of food products. These traits often cannot be detected by sight, smell, or taste – so consumers must use food labels to select products that meet their needs and preferences.

'Brands only have eight seconds to grab a consumer's attention. A good food label needs to entice a consumer to pick a product among hundreds of others,' says Kim Hensley, senior marketing manager at Mactac, a supplier of pressure-sensitive materials, heavily focusing on the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector.

'A good label, in general, has two main functions: to draw the attention of the shopper to the package on the supermarket shelf and provide the necessary and required product information to the consumer,' agrees Marika Knorr, head of sustainability and communication at CCL Label, one of the world's largest label converting groups. 'And now a third main function has surfaced in the packaging recycling discussion: the label needs to perform well at the end-of-life of the packaging. It must support and not hinder recycling. For this reason, CCL has developed a whole range of labels which we call the sustainable product family.'

'A good food label should provide nutritional facts such as serving size and ingredients as well as properly displaying the brand, clearly stating what it is and including design elements that help it stand out on the shelf,' adds Jay Wittmann, sales operations of intelligent labels at Avery Dennison Label and Packaging Materials.

'Consumers are smarter than ever, and the focus of informed consumers is on a clear understanding of product ingredients, content, and nutritional claims,' agrees Kevin Frydryk, regional vice president of sales and marketing at Resource Label Group, a provider of pressure-sensitive labels, shrink sleeves and RFID/NFC technology, operating 18 manufacturing locations across North America. 'Label information directed at clearly informing the consumer in simple terms will become an expectation for all food products. Brands that are transparent in communicating product ingredients and authenticity will develop an enhanced level of consumer trust that has a favorable impact on brand value.'

'Brand managers and packaging engineers want a label that prints great, is positioned correctly, and has superior, lasting adhesion. In refrigerated labeling, if outdoor temperatures are hot and humid, labels can flag or fall off when transporting from store to home,' adds Kim Hensley. 'In any case, the last thing a brand owner wants is for a label to degrade or come off a package.'

According to Helmut Munter, segment manager for Labels and Package Printing at Durst Group, an Italian manufacturer of digital printing equipment, food labels are mostly inspected at a close distance on the shelf, so they should combine the right balance between appealing design, print quality and delivering information. 'To grab consumers' attention, there are a number of influential design qualities such as the right choice of material, appealing graphics, colors that pop, good readable fonts, and appealing finish,' he says. 'Other important aspects to be considered are migration and food safety that needs to be taken care of, depending on the food that is packed and the packaging itself.'

### Tactile paradox

As in the beverage industry, an increasing number of brand owners specializing in food production are re-thinking packaging design and looking for alternative materials and finishing methods to help them stand out amongst the supermarket competition.

'From iridescent films and metallic substrates that catch the consumer's eye with a flash, to textured tactile printing varnishes and embossing that give off a high-end feel, packaging materials that create a special effect are growing in popularity and, in turn, sales of specially packaged products are growing as well,' agrees Mactac's Kim Hensley. 'With the goal of standing out as much as

possible, we need to help brand owners with product differentiation such as unique adhesives and specialty facestocks to make products stand out and to give the perception of quality.'

Pandemic safety guidelines have changed how consumers behave and make purchasing decisions on the shop floor. Frequent use of hand disinfectants has become a norm and shoppers now avoid touching items unnecessarily to minimize contamination risk. Paradoxically, tactile effects have recently been seen as a trend rapidly growing in popularity.

Matt Francklow, managing director at UK-based pre-press powerhouse Creation Reprographics, is seeing a renewed relationship with touch. 'As a result of the pandemic, we've become a very "hands-off" population, but one unexpected outcome of this is a brand-new opportunity to reconnect with consumers through specialist packaging finishes and coatings,' he says. 'New tactile finishes such as soft touch, rough texture, and paper feel, along with matte and gloss coating combinations, integration of hot and cold foiling, and clever use of spot varnishes, are all proving to be a real hit. We are expecting this uptick to continue and accelerate through the year.'

**“Brands only have eight seconds to grab a consumer's attention. A good food label needs to entice a consumer to pick a product among hundreds of others”**

### Smart sustainability

Durst Group's Helmut Munter cautions that while new labeling trends come and go, the need for clean, smart, convenient and sustainable labels remains as important as ever.

'The number one prevailing trend, which will surely last for many more years, is sustainability and environmental friendliness. There is a noticeable and growing consumer awareness when it comes to the environmental behavior of brands. Most consumers identify themselves as environmentally aware, and an increasing number are willing to pay more for sustainable and recyclable packaging.'

Kim Hensley also sees producing less waste and increasing productivity as long term trends. 'Sustainable labeling options are growing and being asked for every day,' she states. 'The label and packaging industry is moving to implement ultra-thin facestocks and liners to give a greater number of labels per roll and fewer roll changes. This helps achieve productivity gains while reducing material, logistics, packaging and warehouse costs.'

Consumers understand that climate change is not on hold because of the pandemic. Many retailers and brand owners have already published their sustainability goals and guidelines about packaging and labeling to drive design towards more sustainable and circular options.

'According to McKinsey & Company, 79 percent of consumers say they include sustainable packaging in their purchase decisions,' says Pascal Oliveira, director of global business development for the food sector at UPM Raflatac. 'More and more people want to select food that is not only sustainably produced but comes in sustainable packaging. We do not know how long the pandemic will still shake our world, but we can already say that sustainability in food packaging is more than a trend. I believe that sustainable food packaging is gradually becoming the new norm.'

Constructing food labels and packaging that perform well in the recycling chain has led to the development of new technologies including wash-off labels and low-density polyolefin materials that detach easily from PET packaging and can be separately sorted



Food security seals and tamper-resistant packaging are necessary for consumer safety

afterwards.

'The biggest challenge we are working on is to make the label itself more recyclable – ideally in a closed loop,' says CCL's Marika Knorr. 'Many labels are already recycled in mixed polyolefin recycling streams, but it would be great to make new labels out of old ones. A great example is our lighthouse project where we will be investing in technology at our Austrian Völkermarkt site and will be able to recycle stretch sleeves in a closed loop.'

'We are here to solve challenges when it comes to the right solution for the right end-use, all the while keeping aligned with sustainability targets,' agrees UPM Raflatac's Pascal Oliveira. 'One great example is our UPM Raflatac RafNXT+ product range, which is verified by the Carbon Trust and helps to mitigate climate change. As well as great shelf appeal and technical performance it helps reduce CO2 emissions. In general, going beyond fossils is at the core of our sustainability approach, and here we see great value for all players along the value chain.'

If consumers are increasingly interested in the overall sustainability of the products they buy, then the challenge for brands is how to get that story in front of the consumer.

recognition, QR Code) to engage with the consumer to share their brand story and the product's journey.'

'Combining sustainability and connected labeling, as in virtual reality, could be very interesting,' agrees CCL's Marika Knorr. 'Interaction with the packaging can be a great way to educate the consumer about recycling or the packaging's sustainability.'

According to Durst's Helmuth Munter, smart labeling features are being used more frequently to improve food safety via digital data systems for tracing ingredients, vendor supplies, and inventory throughout the production process. Simultaneously, QR codes provide tracking data to improve inventory management, traceability, and a faster response to potential supply problems.

'Consumer comfort in using their personal devices to learn more about products will become commonplace and will become key to developing brand loyalty,' agrees Resource Label Group's Kevin Frydryk. 'Enhanced security provided through chip technology will further protect brand value and enhance long-term consumer trust. Additionally, technology will drive the role of the smart label as a key functional component of the product and its performance in many vertical markets.'



Food labels needs to entice a consumer to pick one product among hundreds

'Brands are starting to use RFID technology to track and trace their product throughout the value chain,' comments Avery Dennison's Jay Wittmann, 'enabling them to show their sustainable practices and prove that no illicit products entered the supply chain. They are also using a combination of triggers (NFC, image

**“As a result of the pandemic, we’ve become a very ‘hands-off’ population, but one unexpected outcome of this is a new opportunity to reconnect with consumers through specialist packaging finishes and coatings”**

**Secured take outs**

Food labeling and packaging became even more critical in communicating health and safety practices as consumers turned to home dining, food delivery and online grocery shopping during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a survey conducted by US Foods, 30 percent of drivers from food delivery services admit to tasting the food they are responsible for delivering. Food security seals and tamper-resistant packaging are therefore necessary for consumer safety.

'The pandemic caused a spike in consumer demand,' comments



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UPM Raflatac's RafNXT+ product range is verified by Carbon Trust and helps to reduce the environmental impact of CO2

## “Enhanced security provided through chip technology will further protect brand value and enhance long-term consumer trust”

Pascal Oliveira. 'People are not able to go out to eat and therefore purchase more food from the grocery store or online for delivery. We have seen food delivery and restaurants utilize labels to seal packaging to give confidence to their customers that they were not opened or altered after they left the store. States are beginning to mandate tamper-evident closures on all deliveries from third-party services – California is the first to mandate this with the Fair Food Delivery Act.'

'We have been selling security labels to deter tampering, defeat counterfeiting, and protect consumers for years. With the recent pandemic, we now have a new group of markets for consumer protection,' notes Mactac's Kim Hensley. 'Food packaging security seals provide a clear indication when fraudulent tampering is attempted and prevents the reuse and re-application of labels. Consumers want to trust in safe food delivery.'

'The pandemic has certainly led to an increased awareness of hygiene, not only of the food in the package but of the packaging itself,' adds CCL's Marika Knorr. 'This has led to the development of materials that have a surface that is antimicrobial.'

The CCL-developed antimicrobial film uses silver ions to destabilize and eliminate the bacteria from packaging. The film can be adhered to a variety of surfaces to provide long-term protection.

### What's next for food labels?

'Overall, the food labeling industry is driven by global population growth, economic expansion, and rising consumption. Food labeling is a stable and steadily growing market and offers great opportunities for the label industry, in which digital print will be an essential technological tool to master current and future challenges,' predicts Durst's Helmuth Munter.

CCL Label believes that sustainability will continue to be a central priority for food labeling: 'The whole industry needs to move towards designing consumer packaging and FMCG products for recycling,' says Marika Knorr. 'This can only be achieved by the collaboration of the whole industry. CCL has joined the key initiatives to drive this change at a larger scale. For example, we

are active in the CELAB consortium that is looking into recycling of liner material and the label itself. We also support the HolyGrail 2.0 project for better sorting, and contribute to several initiatives that are working on improving PET recycling like PETcore. We also signed the Global Commitment of the New Plastics Economy led by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.'

Mactac's Kim Hensley also highlights the importance of sustainability. 'Brand owners and designers seek packaging that supports consumer recycling,' she says. 'PepsiCo, Nestlé, and Coca-Cola promise to boost recycling content by 2025. Organizations such as The Association of Plastic Recyclers is helping with guidelines to make this happen.'

Avery Dennison's Jay Wittmann cites 'smart transparency' as an important trend to look out for. 'That could mean simply being able to pronounce and understand the ingredients within a product, or in the case of some proteins, how it was raised and sourced. We have seen an increase in use cases where brands are able to show the way their products were ethically raised, prove provenance, and prove that the product is actually what the label claims it is by pairing an intelligent label with blockchain technology.'



Pandemic safety guidelines have changed how consumers behave



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# How sustainable is sustainability?

*A deeper look into product end of life practices and a new sustainable packaging movement. Jordan Hart reports*

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**M**ost companies are making an effort to be more sustainable, but it can be hard to know where to start and what product options are best. Between recyclable, biodegradable and compostable materials, the regulations and end-of-life product treatment can be difficult to navigate. As an increase in brand owner demand for more sustainable options puts pressure on both suppliers and converters, what option is truly sustainable?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 'In the past 50 years, humans have consumed more resources than in all previous history.' With the environmental stakes higher than ever, it is not surprising the demand for sustainable labeling and packaging solutions has grown to match.

The push for sustainability truly is consumer led. Finat recently released the 14th edition of its Radar report, which focuses on the European narrow web market. Companies were asked how important it is that their label supplier has an environmental certification; 75 percent of companies responded that it was an important factor when choosing a supplier. Over 25 percent responded that it is 'vital that their label vendors are environmentally certified and only purchase labels from companies with certification'.

This drive for sustainability at the company level starts at the consumer level. During its recent webinar about compostable labeling, Avery Dennison stated that 'Millennials and Generation Z are the driving force behind the sustainability push and as they enter the workforce and become greater consumers the need for sustainable products will grow.'

Millennials and Generation Z are willing to put their money where their mouth is when it comes to sustainability. According to Avery Dennison, 'Roughly 75 percent of consumers are willing to pay an additional 10-25 percent more for products in sustainable packaging.'

While the intent is there, the execution of sustainability efforts may misfire. The demand may be customer driven, but guidance is needed at the corporate level to ensure those good intentions and efforts come to fruition. In the United States the current state of waste leaves a lot of room for improvement. In 2018 the EPA reported that '69 million tons were recycled and 25 million tons were composted'. While this seems promising, the 'total generation of municipal solid waste (MSW) in 2018 was 292.4 million tons', which works out as '4.9 pounds per person per day'. An additional 35 million tons was able to be converted into energy through combustion. However, 'more than 146 million tons of MSW (50 percent) were landfilled'.

While the percentage of waste going to landfill has decreased, from 94 percent in 1960 to 50 percent in 2018 according to the EPA, the overall amount has still increased. The EPA found that generation of waste increased by 204.3 million tons from 1960 to 2018. While recycling rates have also increased in that time span, from 6 percent in 1960 to 32 percent in 2018, this is still offset by the increased amount of waste overall.

One of the primary issues in managing waste, according to the EPA, is the fact that 'no single waste management approach is suitable for managing all materials and waste streams in all circumstances'. There are many diverse approaches to sustainability, including recycling, biodegradable materials and compostable materials. There is no one size fits all solution, but all of these work in conjunction to promoting a healthier planet and more circular economy.

### Recyclable materials

As a simple definition, Because Health defines recyclable items as those that 'can be turned into raw materials that can then be used to make new things without needing to create completely new resources'. Recycling is the most well-known sustainability effort

## “Roughly 75 percent of consumers are willing to pay an additional 10-25 percent more for products in sustainable packaging”

and the most widespread. However, as Fortune magazine notes, the key to recycling is twofold: 'Components must be recyclable, and systems must be in place to put the recycled material back into the manufacturing stream.'

All recyclable materials were not created equal. The Guardian found that recycling aluminum is 'straightforward, profitable and environmentally sound: making a can from recycled aluminum reduces its carbon footprint by up to 95 percent'. With returns like that, aluminum is a desirable material to recycle, as it retains both economic and material value. However, with plastic, the results are not that simple. 'While virtually all plastics can be recycled, many aren't because the process is expensive, complicated and the resulting product is of lower quality than what you put in,' reported the Guardian.

A critical component in the chain is having systems in place to sort and process the recycled materials. An investigation by the Guardian magazine found that in Los Angeles county 'recycling facilities are separating "mixed plastics" from those plastics which still retain value – such as water bottles, laundry detergent bottles and milk jugs – and, contrary to what customers expect, sending them directly to a landfill or incinerator'. Los Angeles is not the only county to do this: many areas all around the US follow the same practice. This reality is a far cry from the idealism which surrounds recycling.

The label industry is making an effort to increase packaging recyclability. As L&L previously reported, more than 85 companies and organizations from the packaging value chain have joined forces to assess whether a pioneering digital watermarking technology can enable better sorting and higher-quality recycling rates for packaging in the EU. Better sorting would greatly increase the quality of recycle, which in turn makes using recycled materials a more attractive proposition.

More companies are committing themselves to using recycled and recyclable materials despite the challenges. Canadian label converter Labelcraft, for example, has committed to sourcing liners which incorporate recycled materials, and to promote recycling at a liner's end of life. Labelcraft's liners are made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper, while its Enviroliner is recyclable at most recycling facilities. Traditional release liners which use a significant amount of silicone are not easily recyclable. This innovation earned Labelcraft a 2020 FTA Sustainability Excellence Award.

EcoEnclose also offers a 100 percent recycled and 100 percent recyclable liner with its Zero Waste Release Liners intended for stickers, product labels and shipping labels.

Finat's Radar report shows that 23 percent of surveyed companies are currently involved in a liner recycling program and recycle all of their liner while 20 percent are involved in a program and indicate that they recycle some of their liner.

### Biodegradable materials

Biodegradable materials open up another seemingly promising avenue towards sustainability. The relationship between biodegradable and compostable can be a bit confusing. If it is biodegradable is it also compostable? If it is compostable then is it biodegradable? The answer is no – and yes.

Because Health defines biodegradable as 'a substance that can break down naturally without causing any harm'. While this does

not seem very different from composting, the key difference is that composting starts with organic (as opposed to synthetic) materials. Every item that is compostable is also biodegradable, but some items that are biodegradable may not be compostable if they did not start with organic materials.

And the simple fact that a material breaks down in the soil does not make it environmentally neutral. A sustainability analysis has to take into account the time it takes to break down, and the fact that those resources cannot be reused.

A stand-out red herring is the term 'bio-based', particularly in reference to plastic materials. The EPA defines bio-based plastics as those 'manufactured from plant materials instead of being made from oil or natural gas.' However, just because these materials are made from plants does not make them automatically safe to decompose in the environment. In reality, reports the EPA, 'bio-based plastics can be designed to be structurally identical to petroleum-based plastics, and if designed in this way, they can last in the environment for the same period of time as petroleum-based plastic'. Like any other plastic, they would need to be designed to be biodegradable or compostable.

#### Compostable materials

Compostable materials require processing in industrial facilities to break down, while in theory, biodegradable materials do not. Compostable items, properly processed, will break down completely and can then be used as a feedstock to grow more resources.

A recent Avery Dennison webinar pointed out the two key characteristics of compostable materials: the time they take to break down – the composting process should be completed in about three months

– and the residue, or lack thereof, left behind. For a material to be compostable, it should leave behind nutrients for plants and have no toxic residues.

The most common compostable plastic is polylactic acid or PLA. It is made from a sugar produced by plants, most commonly corn, and is not recyclable with traditional plastics. When using a compostable material, 'each of the components of the packaging structure, whether it is the base structure, the ink, or the adhesive should be certified individually and then as a complete structure,' according to Kaetitia Kasl, senior product manager at Avery Dennison.

For the end user, the key benefits of compostable plastics include good content visibility, freezer safety and lower energy consumption – or greenhouse gas emission – during manufacture than traditional plastics.

Compostable materials need to meet strict regulations that can vary by country. In the US, The American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM International) is the regulating body that creates the standards while the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) enforces those standards.

EN 13432 is the European certification for industrial composting and ASTM D6400 the North American certification. To qualify for certification to EN 13432, products need to satisfy strict criteria. After composting for three months and passing through a 2mm sieve, materials cannot leave a residue equivalent to more than 10 percent of the original mass. The certification procedure also entails an examination of the resulting compost's effect on plant growth, which indicates any ecotoxicity. The compost produced from certified materials can therefore be used

directly for agricultural purposes.

Many companies in the label industry have risen to the challenge. Avery Dennison achieved "OK Compost" certification for a BPA-free and FSC-certified thermal label material combined with a SX6030 adhesive. Additionally, Avery Dennison's S9500 adhesive meets EN 13432 regulations for industrial composting.

Herma has two adhesive and label combinations that meet EN 13432 regulations. PURE Labels has adhesive labels that are compostable, biodegradable, tree-free, vegan, and comply with EN 13432.

UPM Raflatac has the RafBio range, which includes biodegradable cellulose films, PLA films, paper faces, and a biodegradable adhesive; all of which meet EN 13432. Cellulose film is also home compostable.

And not just materials. HP Indigo has also introduced digital printing inks certified for composting in both home and industrial settings and which meet EN 13432 standards.

#### Concerns with compostables

As we have seen, in order to fully break down, compostable products must be correctly processed at the end of the product life cycle. Unfortunately, the odds of that happening are even smaller than properly handling recyclable materials. The EPA is clear that 'compostable' plastic often only means industrially compostable and cannot be added to a home compost pile; 'Plastic that is labeled as compostable is generally intended to be sent to an industrial or commercial composting facility which has higher temperatures and different breakdown conditions than those found in a typical homeowner's compost bin.'

**"This viewpoint may become the industry standard; that converters are not simply packaging companies, but are also waste management companies"**





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What about recycling the compostable plastic? The EPA also addressed this: 'Compostable plastics are not intended for recycling and can contaminate and disrupt the recycling stream if intermixed.'

If compostable materials cannot be processed at an industrial composting facility, and cannot be recycled with traditional materials, can they just be thrown away to compost in a landfill? While one might expect they would break down and eventually compost themselves, the answer is, surprisingly, no. A landfill is not the right environment to promote composting.

Emma Zang-Schwartz at Because Health describes the difference between an industrial composting facility and a landfill. 'Composting facilities regulate temperature, moisture, and air flow in order to ensure a compostable item breaks down as fast as possible. Composting works best when the items have access to oxygen and are regularly being turned over. A landfill is basically the opposite. It's an anaerobic environment where most of the pile actually doesn't have access to oxygen.'

Until composting can be carried out by consumers at home, it is not a large-scale viable solution. Indeed, some companies are now trying to avoid PLA, the most common compostable plastic, for this very reason. Nature's Path, a family-owned organic foods company that caters to specialty diets, is avoiding all corn-based plastics including PLA because it found them to be 'almost impossible for our consumers to compost'.

As pointed out in the Avery Dennison webinar, while there are benefits to compostable plastic (assuming the right end of life processes), there are also many drawbacks. A particular concern is that compostable plastic 'can be difficult to distinguish from traditional plastic, cannot be used for hot foods or liquids, and needs specific storage environment'. Additionally, all parts of the packaging must be compostable, which necessitates specialty inks and adhesives.

Compostable packaging is a step in the right direction, but only if the infrastructure steps up to match.

### First, reduce and reuse

Reduce, reuse, recycle is not just a catchy phrase. It lists the steps of the packaging waste hierarchy in order of importance. Avery Dennison has a slightly longer waste management hierarchy: 'reduce, reuse, recycle, compost, energy recovery, landfill'. But the first step is always to reduce – both the amount consumers use and the amount of packaging that manufacturers produce.

A company at the forefront of this movement is Loop. Loop aims to change

**“The sustainability movement is an opportunity for smarter design and more innovative packaging choices”**



our 'disposable' packaging mindset and bring back classic business models from the last century: like the milkman delivering milk products door-to-door in reusable packaging.

This idea is the brainchild of Tom Szaky, founder of recycling company TerraCycle. Szaky told *The Guardian* that he now 'wants to apply the milkman model to almost everything you buy'.

With a small refundable deposit, typically a couple of dollars per product, consumers can get their products in sustainable packaging that when empty are either picked up by a mailing service or dropped off in a participating store. They are then sanitized, refilled and sent back to the consumer. According to Szaky, 'Loop is not a product company; it's a waste management company. We're just looking at waste before it begins.'

This viewpoint may become the industry standard; that converters are not simply packaging companies, but are also waste management companies. This change in mindset requires starting with sustainable designs and packaging options rather than trying to manage or recycle waste at the end of a product's life.

Rather than limit design and packaging opportunities, the opposite may be true Szaky believes. 'By moving from disposable to reusable, you unlock epic design opportunities. It forces packaging designers to prioritize durability over disposability.'

Many big-name brands are joining with

Loop while others are following in its footsteps. Dove, for example, is now making a stainless-steel case for its deodorants and selling just the product refills. Dove says the product has been 'made with the planet in mind and is designed to be kept for life'. The refills are, of course, packaged, but Dove states the refills use 54 percent less plastic than a standard stick of Dove. Additionally, the plastic Dove uses is 98 percent recycled, according to its website.

The sustainability trend is not going away, nor should it. If the future is not to be littered with pollution and environmental degradation, the culture of disposable consumerism needs to change. This should be a wake-up call, but not a code red alarm. The sustainability movement is an opportunity for smarter design and more innovative packaging choices.

The package printing industry has a massive role to play in a greener future. The EPA acknowledges that labels and packaging are vital to determining the best end of life options for a product. But rather than look at end of life options, the industry can start designing and producing products that can have a second or longer life. As Loop says, waste management starts at the beginning.



To learn more about Avery's sustainability webinar, visit: [label.averydennison.com/na/en/home/promotional/webinars/compostable-labeling-solutions.html](http://label.averydennison.com/na/en/home/promotional/webinars/compostable-labeling-solutions.html)



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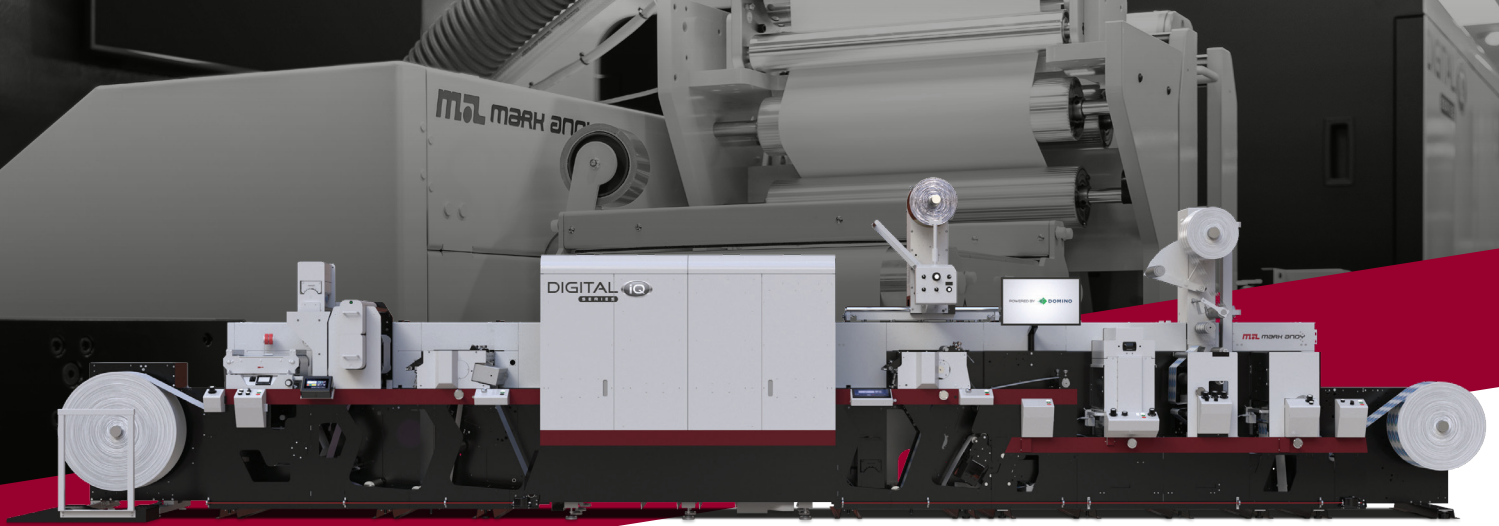
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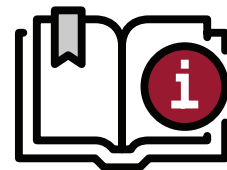
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digital business model?**

# US industry remains resilient in face of Covid-19

A comprehensive survey of TLMI converter members finds that the majority have seen business volumes and employee hires increase over the course of the pandemic. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

The US label industry has proven itself remarkably resilient in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic according to a new report by the consultancy LPC carried out on behalf of TLMI.

The 2020/21 TLMI Market Watch report represents a comprehensive survey of TLMI member converters divided into four categories depending on annual sales. These range from the smaller companies with annual sales under 6m USD (22 percent of the sample), to the 6-15m USD sales category (33 percent of the sample), to 15-35m USD (25 percent) and the large converter and converter groups with over 35m USD annual sales (20 percent).

The background to the report is the greatest US recession in nearly a century, as overall consumer spending in 2020 plummeted in the second and third quarters of the year in the face of lockdowns and stay-at-home mandates.

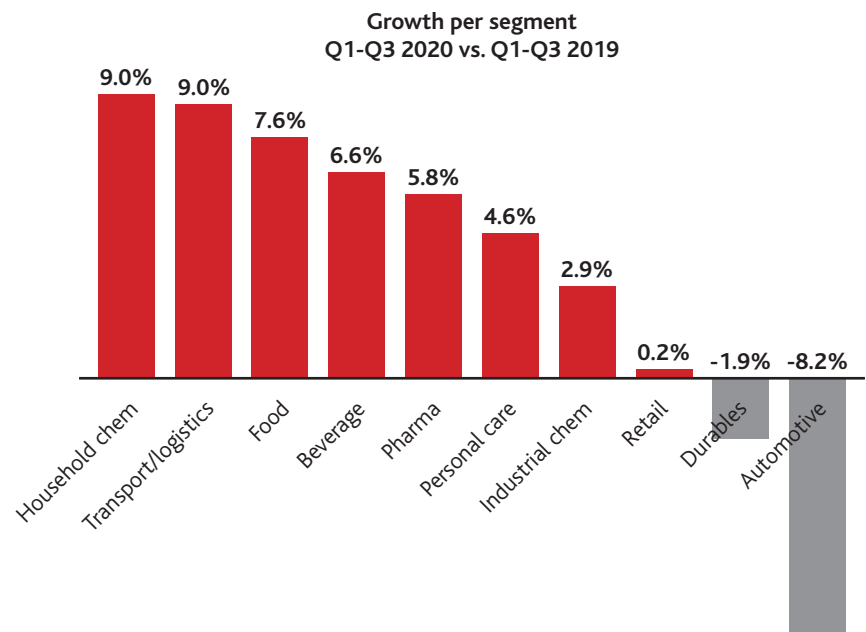
But, in a similar story to Europe – revealed in the last edition of L&L – printed packaging demand surged in some end-use segments while others witnessed drastic contraction rates, pulling and pushing label converter fortunes with them.

The headline figure is that sales revenues increased for 72 percent of the surveyed TLMI converting companies, while 19 percent reported sales declines. For those whose business volumes increased, 23 percent reported 15 percent sales growth for the first three quarters of 2020 compared to the same period a year earlier, while 13 percent reported sales up by more than 20 percent.

The common growth denominator was supplying the buoyant food, beverage and household chemicals segments, while those at the lower end of the growth spectrum more often than not served the segments which experienced steep downturns – entertainment and hospitality, automotive and durables.

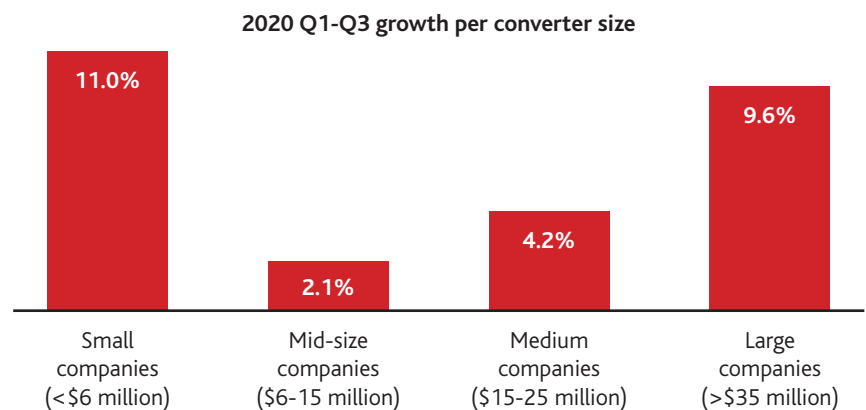
Some converters reported as much as a 17 percent difference between the highest growth segment – household chemicals – and the lowest, automotive.

An interesting observation by authors Jennifer Dochstader and David Walsh of LPC consultancy is that label converters with the highest growth rates fell mainly into two categories: the biggest (annual sales



The household chemicals, transport/logistics, food and beverage segments delivered highest growth for converters during the pandemic while lowest growth rates were in the durables and automotive segments

**“The headline figure is that sales revenues increased for 72 percent of the surveyed TLMI converting companies, while 19 percent reported sales declines”**



We see the most robust growth on the two edges of the converter scale range. Smallest and largest participating converters had highest growth overall

over 35m USD) or the smallest (sales under 6m USD). They speculate that this could be down to small and large companies being more ‘generalist’ – servicing multiple end user segments – compared to mid-sized

converters who tend to specialize in fewer end user categories. This leaves the smaller and larger converters less vulnerable to the collapse of specific end use sectors.

On average the companies that reported

year-over-year growth serviced 4.5 end use sectors, while those that saw a decline in year-on-year revenues service an average of 2.4.

Given that the pandemic has created such a skewed economy, what are the prospects for US label converters as the economy slowly unwinds from Covid-19 restrictions?

To take the hardest hit sector, automotive, the Automobile Manufacturers Association estimates it will take at least until 2024 before sales return to pre-pandemic levels.

On the other hand 2019 production levels are likely to be reached this year as automobile companies rebuild inventory to compensate for 2020 factory shutdowns, suggesting a rebound for converters servicing this sector.

And while many consumers are still pushing back big purchases, once stores begin fully reopening across the US economists project that the demand for consumable durables will pick back up, and even surge in some segments due to pent up demand.

**Employee impact**

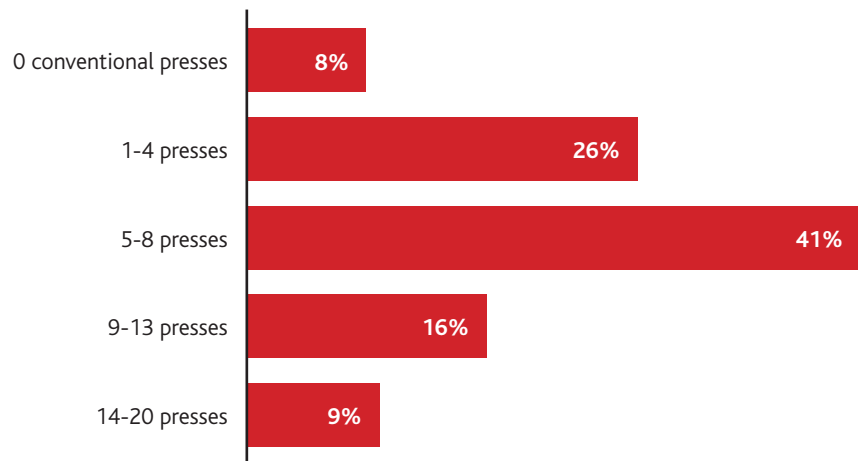
The pandemic very quickly divided workforces into three categories: work-from-home; 'essential' employees who continued to perform critical functions on the production floor; and those either furloughed or laid off.

The TLMI Market Watch survey shows that only 11 percent of converters were forced to lay off employees last year, while nearly half of participating companies said their employee numbers remained the same and 40 percent actually hired new employees to keep up with the surge in demand.

In addition, almost 70 percent of the survey sample indicated they raised pay and/or awarded their employees bonuses in 2020. Large companies (over 35m USD) were twice as likely to give bonuses compared to medium-sized converters in the 6-35m USD annual sales category.

The survey found that most label industry employees are now reporting back to work rather than working from home,

**Number of conventional presses converters have on their production floors**



**“For the first time in half a decade, more TLMI converters indicated they will buy a conventional press than a digital press in the coming year”**

reflecting companies’ now proven ability to keep their workforces safe on site.

**Conventional and digital**

The report makes interesting reading on the current installed press base in the US as well as converters’ future buying intentions.

A key finding is that eight percent of surveyed companies are digital-only facilities with no conventional presses.

On the other side of the coin, one quarter of the survey sample do not have a digital press, while half the sample have only one or two digital machines (note that digital presses in the report are defined as units costing 450,000 USD or more, to differentiate from the ‘benchtop’ class of digital presses).

A clear trend is for the bigger converters and groups to have more digital press capacity, with companies over 35m USD having on average more than four digital presses across their operations. For the smallest companies (below 6m USD) that figure is on average 1.3. Mid-size and medium companies average between 2.4 and 2.6 digital presses.

Digital print in 2020 accounted for one

quarter of converters’ aggregated revenues, which represents a considerable jump in the two years since the last Market Watch survey, when digital accounted for just 17 percent of revenues.

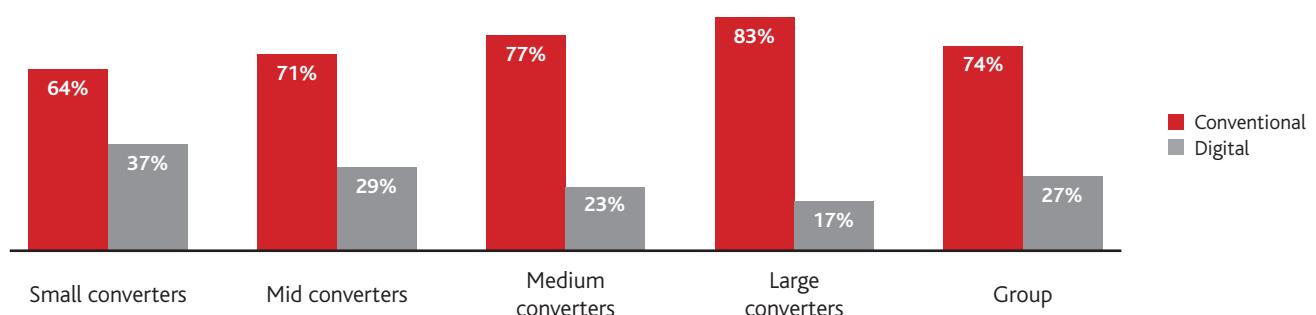
Despite the increasing penetration of digital print, however, conventional remains by far the most important press technology category.

Indeed, the bigger the company, the smaller percentage digital represents in overall revenue generation. So for the largest converters digital represents 17 percent of revenue, which compares to over one third of revenue for the smallest converter group.

The pandemic certainly gave a boost to digital production with the sudden spurt of rush-driven ordering, and digital sales grew by an average 15 percent in the first three quarters of 2020.

Conventional press production also received a boost for more than half of the survey participants. The 20 percent who indicated that conventional press business was down were mostly in the mid- to medium-size category, who mostly serve the durables, industrial chemicals and

**Conventional vs digital revenues for converters by company size**





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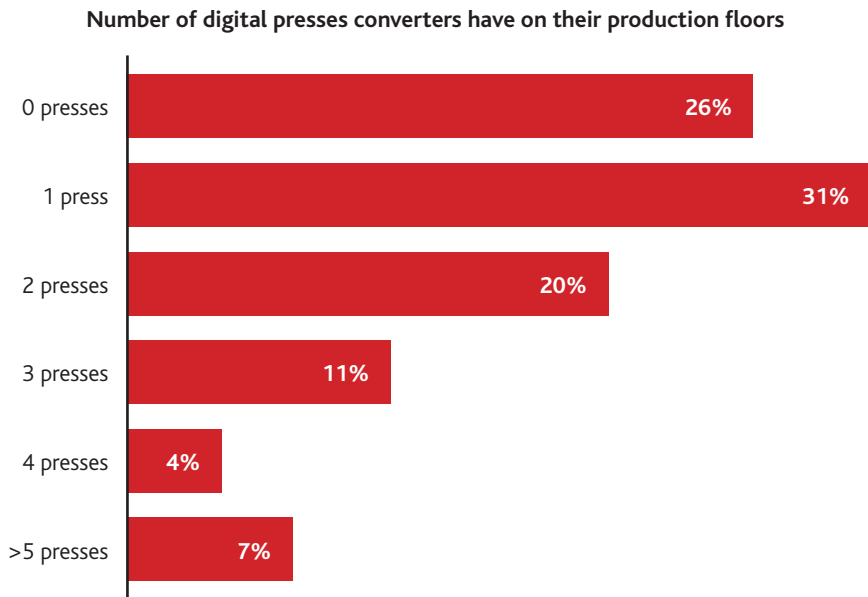
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**“The TLMI Market Watch survey shows that only 11 percent of converters were forced to lay off employees last year. Half said their employee numbers remained the same and 40 percent hired new employees to keep up with demand”**



automotive sectors.

Converters who saw high levels of growth during the pandemic have found their conventional press capacity under pressure due to order surges in medium to longer-run segments. This could well explain the fact that, for the first time in half a decade, more TLMI converters indicated they will buy a conventional press than a digital press in the coming year. This marks a first for the TLMI Market Watch report, which up to now has always put digital in the lead when it comes to purchasing intentions.

For the companies that indicated they will purchase a digital press in 2021, more than 40 percent opted for a toner-based press, with one quarter opting for inkjet and 12 percent for a hybrid (flexo + inkjet)

press – a marked reduction compared to the 2018 survey.

One of the final questions in the Market Watch Converter Survey asks converters what other packaging materials they convert alongside PS labels.

Along with a predictable increase in shrink sleeves, an unexpected finding is a rise in folding carton conversion. At the same time, companies previously converting filmic products like wraparound non-shrink labels, lidding and sachets have moved into more traditional flexible packaging applications like stand-up pouches.

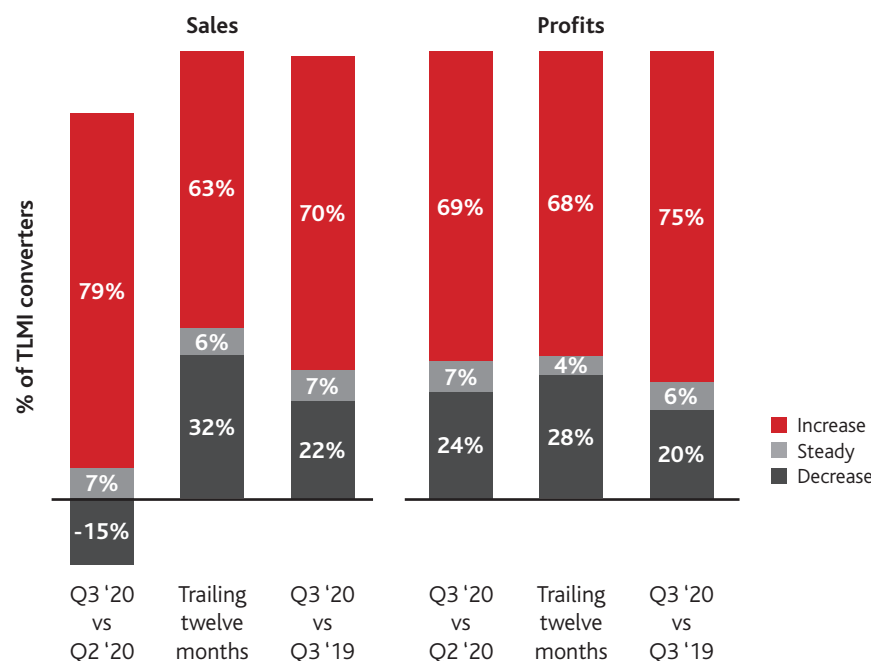
**Converter profitability**

The US economy grew at a historically unprecedented pace in the third quarter of

2020 fueled by a 3 trillion USD pandemic relief package. GDP rebounded at a 33.4 percent annualized rate for the quarter as lockdown and shelter-in mandates eased and more businesses opened.

Against this background, sales for Q3 2020 increased for 79 percent of TLMI converter respondents compared with Q2 2020, with just 15 percent reporting a drop in sales from the previous quarter. Once again, it is medium-sized companies (15-35m USD) who were most likely to report a decline in sales over the survey period.

In comparison, 90 percent of large converters reported sales growth for Q3 2020 over Q2. No large company reported a decline in sales growth over Q4 2020 compared with Q4 2019.



The chart shows sales and profit data for the third quarter of 2020 compared to sales and profit data for the previous quarter in addition to year-over-year outcomes that compare the third quarter of 2020 with the third quarter of 2019

**Roll label report**

Results from the TLMI's quarterly rollstock survey are included in the TLMI Market Watch report. The results largely reflect the findings of the converter survey, with the pandemic driving high growth rates across all primary labelstock categories – 8.8 percent for non-VIP papers, 5.9 percent for VIP papers and 14.2 percent for films. Within the films category white pressure sensitive film had the highest volume growth, up 28.2 percent for the first three quarters of 2020 compared with 2019. Of the paper labelstock categories, direct thermal had the most robust volume growth, up 17.6 percent over the same period.

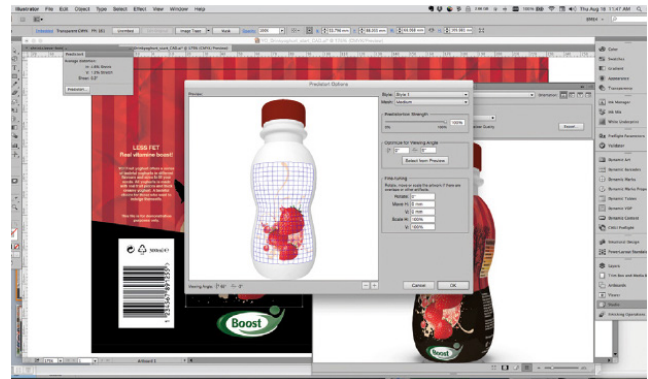


US label industry trends will be examined in more detail in the conference at Label Congress, to be held in Rosemont, Chicago, in September 2021. [www.labelexpo.com/congress](http://www.labelexpo.com/congress)

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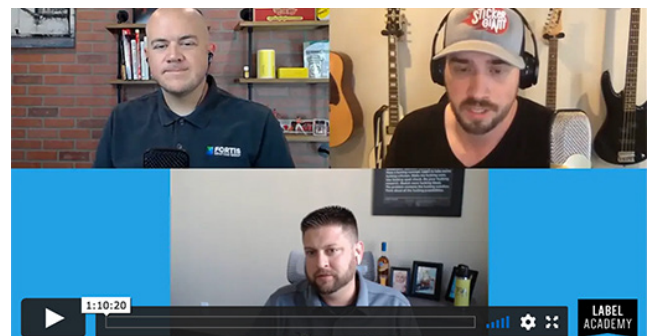
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# What sets apart the industry's best workplaces?

*What makes for a good workplace and why is it positive for business? Jordan Hart reports*

In a year that challenged companies like never before, some have thrived and emerged as the best workplaces of 2020. From an employee perspective, everyone would like to work for a company where they feel valued, believe in the company's mission, and see success from their efforts. From a company perspective, employers should be striving to create a desirable workplace, if not for the employee's personal experience, then for the economic value.

Great Place to Work, in its Fortune 100 Best Trends report, broke down what set apart employee experiences at the best workplaces in the United States. When it studied the qualities that differentiated the 100 best companies from the rest, 'three themes emerge: trustworthy management, innovation and fairness'. While nationally only 58 percent of employees say their company is a great place to work, the statistic jumps to 91 percent at the Fortune 100 best companies.

'Employees at the 100 Best are highly motivated compared to the average US employee, with 84 percent saying people look forward to going to work, compared to just 42 percent of employees in the US workforce,' according to Great Place to Work.

A deeper look into the data gives some insight into what sets these companies apart and makes their employees more motivated. The first area of difference is management. The trustworthiness of managers was significantly higher within the 100 best companies: '83 percent of employees at the 100 Best said management's actions match its words, versus 42 percent of employees at the average workplace.'

If it is not obvious why this is important, the data clearly spells out that when employees have managers that are honest and ethical, 'they're five times more likely to want to work there for a long time, and 11 times more likely to think the workplace is great'. Honesty in management contributes to employee retention in a significant way.

Good management also leads to more innovation. Trustworthiness and genuine leadership play an important role in creating a safe space for new ideas to be exchanged. 'When managers create a safe environment to express ideas and make suggestions, employees are 31 times more likely to think their workplace is innovative,' according to Great Places to Work. Additionally, the 100 best companies ranked 'significantly higher in management seeking suggestions and ideas (83 percent at the 100 Best vs 43 percent nationwide) and celebrating people who try new ways of doing things (83 percent at the 100 Best vs 45 percent nationwide).'

When employees trust their management enough to risk sharing new ideas, innovation can flourish. From the company's perspective, not only does innovation increase but 'employees at innovative companies are four times more likely to say they're proud to tell others they work there, and four times more likely to give extra to get the job done'. That is a significant increase in employee motivation, all from having supportive management in place.

## Pride

Taking pride in one's work and workplace can mean more than

**"They can put a zipline in the break room but if they are treating you like a cog and working you like a dog, it is just window dressing"**

most other job perks, including increased pay. Great Places to Work found that the most influential element of overall satisfaction was pride in both company and work. Its research found that while employees said fair pay makes them 'twice as likely to think their workplace is great', employees who are proud of their work 'are 20 times more likely to say it's a great workplace'. Pride in an employee's work and workplace ranked higher than pay, perks or personal recognition and made employees '20 times more likely to think their company is a great place to work'.

Claire Hastwell of Great Place to Work broke down the more personal aspects of what makes a great workplace: community, trust and caring. In terms of community, employees at 100 Best companies 'express a sense of winning together when times are good – and sticking together when times are tough', according to Hastwell. This leads into the caring element, which became crucial during the pandemic. Companies needed to care for and support their employees more than ever.

The pandemic also forced more trust from companies in their employees. While this research was done pre-Covid, Hastwell found that 'many of the 100 Best Companies trust their employees to work flexible hours and from remote places. This flexibility makes employees more dedicated and engaged because they feel trusted to meet their business goals in a way that works for their life'. For many this year, working from home became a mandate, not a choice. Employers had to trust that their employees would maintain their performance outside the office.

Claudia St. John, president of Affinity HR Group, explains what sets apart a good workplace from an HR perspective. According to St. John, good management is critical. 'The fish rots from the head down,' she says. 'The workplaces that are authentically wonderful have at the helm leaders who truly care about their employees and who are authentic in their consideration for their employees.'

According to St. John, 'If you have a leader who truly cares about employees and understands that they are the most important thing, then you can feel that. Those leaders recognize that different





**“Honesty in  
management  
contributes to  
employee retention  
in a significant way”**

## “Now the number one goal is communicating effectively and authentically with all of your employees. That comes first, and it is hard”

people have different needs, drives, and situations outside of work.’

While true care shines through, conversely, attempts to be a fun workplace without genuinely caring for employees is also easy to spot. ‘They can put a zipline in the break room but if they are treating you like a cog and working you like a dog, it is just window dressing,’ says St. John.

‘Business owners will say, “We care about customer service and being trustworthy and putting our employees first”. Often those are things that are put on a coffee mug or a mouse pad, but if you walk into that space and you don’t feel that they care about those values, then they become aspirational rather than practical and you can end up instilling a lot of resentment.’ Companies should be careful not to overpromise and underdeliver.

To develop a truly caring and open environment, St. John encourages employers to ‘put together a process where everybody from the organization at different levels can come together to discuss what are their own personal values. That is how you will find out what shared values you as an organization have with all of your employees. Those are authentic. Organizations that view the values their employees have as the values of the organization tend to be more authentic than those who are doing it as an Instagram campaign or a marketing strategy.’

St. John also addresses what sets apart companies that transitioned to homeworking successfully. ‘The ones that are doing it well have the managers or supervisors, anyone who is in the chain of command of having employees report to them, checking in regularly and making sure they are ok and that they have what they need.’

These check-ins are not just business-related, but rather to open a dialogue during a difficult time. ‘Even if your employees do not want to share what they are going through, they are going through something,’ says St. John. ‘Leadership needs to do those personal check-ins but also create an opportunity of vulnerability so that others will be willing to share or know that you are not invincible and that they are not alone.’

During 2020 and into early 2021, the days of working together in an office and passing reports over cubical walls are gone. Communication is not an assumed part of the workday, either professionally in the meeting room or personally around the coffee pot. A thoughtful effort must be made to stay in touch.

‘Now the number one goal is communicating effectively and authentically with all of your employees. That comes first, and it is hard. No one has a magic bullet on it but those who are trying are probably succeeding,’ says St. John.

Many companies managed to succeed last year, both in communication and business, despite the global pandemic and less-than-ideal working conditions. Hammer Packaging, Inland Packaging, Steinhauser and Syracuse Label & Surround Printing all received the Best Workplaces in America award from Printing United Alliance for 2020. L&L interviewed each of these companies to figure out what qualified them as best workplaces.

### Hammer Packaging

‘Our employees are our most valuable asset in the business,’ says Kimberley Flynn of Hammer Packaging. Hammer put its money where its mouth is while battling the Covid-19 pandemic. ‘We took

a hard stance on Covid,’ she continues. ‘The minute anybody had a stuffy nose, you weren’t coming in. We knew what that meant for business. Telling production people not to come in meant we were lowering our production capacity. It meant we were low staffed while trying to keep up with a higher demand, but we put our people first.’

Putting staff first also means offering job perks at Hammer Packaging. ‘We have flexible hours and our production workers can swap shifts when needed,’ says Flynn. But in her mind one of the biggest benefits is support for continuing education, something Flynn is currently taking advantage of to pursue a master’s degree.

‘Hammer will cover 100 percent of tuition if it is job-related, which is a huge benefit. With Hammer, it is not only the financial support but also managers asking, “What classes are you taking this semester and how can we work that into your job function right now?” or “Do you want to sit with someone in another department and see how your education can translate?” If you are going to school for something and it means shifting your job in a way that allows you to grow and be happy, we will do that.’

Additionally, prior to the pandemic, Hammer offered onsite wellness that varied from yoga classes to financial counseling. ‘Everything that we do here is based around wellness: physical, mental and financial. We want to make sure everybody has all the resources they need, both in and out of work,’ says Flynn.

Obviously, those opportunities changed during 2020. There were many lessons to be learned in the process of adapting to remote work. ‘Covid taught us different forms of communication. We couldn’t get everyone together in a room anymore, so we implemented video messages. We could subtitle these videos in Spanish or Mandarin to make sure everyone can understand that message from our management; we wouldn’t be able to do that if we were live in person,’ says Flynn.

She continued: ‘If you could work from home, you were working from home. It became really important to find a way to be face to face so every two weeks we had a video message go out. We were early adopters of Teams and Zoom. The day after we were sent home, we were on it chatting together and connecting online.’

‘Managers, of course, were checking in on their employees to make sure they had everything they needed at home, and not just work-related. We were asking questions like “Are you getting to the grocery store?” and “Is there anything we can do to help you?” Hammer’s approach is holistic, so we want to make sure our employees are ok inside and outside work.’

From a business standpoint, Hammer adapted to the pandemic by working with the government. Flynn explains: ‘We worked with state and local governments to ensure our business was considered essential throughout the entirety of the pandemic. Maintaining that status ensured that our associates remained employed. We also gave incentive pay to our front-line production employees.’

### Inland Packaging

Inc magazine surveyed over 150,000 employees about their workplaces and found that ‘Honored companies had a set of baseline employee benefits. Health insurance, dental insurance and retirement plans aren’t extras. They’re table stakes. Employers are also sweetening the employee experience with benefits like longer maternity leave, paternity leave, innovative health and wellness initiatives, and flexible scheduling’. Like Hammer, Inland Packaging is raising the stakes and offering extra benefits to employees.

Kim Young, marketing communications specialist at Inland, explains: ‘We offer opportunities for flexible hours as well as work from home options. In addition to the flexibility, we offer three different plan options for health insurance, as well as vision insurance, dental insurance, 401K with company match, employer-paid life insurance, and long-term disability. Inland also has an employee assistance program, referral bonus program,



# PCC introduces six new product categories to the market

British labelstock specialist Premier Coating and Converters (PCC) has recently introduced six distinctive brands to assist customers with easier and more intuitive product categories for ease of selection and ordering.

Building on the strengths of their reputation for producing market leading self-adhesive PPG TESLIN® label material, PCC have responded to their customer base who have asked for an efficient method of showcasing the many materials on offer. Lee Charles, Commercial Director at Premier Coating & Converters Ltd commented; 'Our customers have a need for precision within the market. Although we have offered our products and services within the industry for over thirty-five years from this site, the wants and needs of our customers have changed and evolved, meaning that our product portfolio need to evolve also.'

## ●:PREMLASER™

The very first brand that was developed by PCC was the PREMLASER™ range of materials. Specialising in both filmic and synthetic substrates, developed exclusively for dry toner printing, this also incorporates luxury metallics and hi-vis fluorescent papers to build a portfolio of laser constructions that have cemented themselves as cornerstones within the industry.

## ●:PREMJET™

Inkjet printing is an area of the industry which is growing significantly every single year. With the constant advancements in machinery, it is only right that there is an equal advancement in material technology which is where the PREMJET™ range steps in. Incorporating BS5609 accredited constructions and PCC's specialist blackout over-laminating solutions creates a brand that can maintain its place as the inkjet market continues to develop.

## ●:PREMIFIX™

The PREMIFIX™ portfolio is where PCC's range of exclusive adhesives really show their strengths. These products are designed with specially formulated adhesives ranging from removable to hi-tack to create single- and double-sided tapes designed for applications including aluminum foil tapes for HVAC, sealing, bonding and fixing.

## ●:PREMDURE™

Durable products have been the foundation of PCC's business for many years. Having a dedicated range of self-adhesive materials that can be trusted in the harshest of conditions was the thought process behind the PREMDURE™ brand. From their renowned BS5609 accredited self-adhesive PPG TESLIN® label material to high strength tag products, these can be utilized when reliability is needed most covering a wide range of print technologies.

## ●:PREMVIS™

Products deigned to stand out from the crowd are the specialty in the PREMVIS™ range. Luxury and decorative labelling are at the forefront of a selection of materials used in applications such as point of sale and food and beverage labelling. From holographic to metallic and fluorescent, these eye-catching substrates are designed to attract attention wherever they are used.

## ●:PREMECO™

It is in the PREMECO™ range where PCC has found growing interest since the brands release. Partnering with Netherlands based Sustainable Adhesive Products BV, has seen the incorporation of the BioTAK® S100 adhesive into their product range. Combining this with a range of sustainable substrates and liners allows PCC to create both fully biodegradable and compostable labelstock.

With the inclusion of these six new brands and their toll coating abilities, Premier Coating & Converters Ltd have ensured that the service they can provide remains as reliable as ever. A continuous improvement program over the past 25 years, with consistent investment in its machinery and staff, has seen their technical capabilities in both coating and converting departments to ensure that reliability and quality are upheld and maintained.

Whilst growth and development are key parts of PCC's strategy their mantra stays very much the same. Steve White, Marketing Manager at Premier Coating & Converters Ltd added 'We now have a more focused approach to our product portfolio. Investment in both machinery and staff has given us the ability to work more closely with our customers on their own development journey, more so than ever before, to ensure that together we can create the perfect label solution for their application.'

wellness program, profit sharing, fitness club member discount, leadership development, recognition for years of service, and financial support for continuing education.'

This commitment to benefits may become the standard for workplaces hoping to attract the best talent. Additionally, in the era of Covid-19, companies who take employee safety seriously will stand out. Inland implemented extra cleaning, social distancing and additional break areas to limit staff in any given area. In the early days of the pandemic, when supplies were hard to come by, Inland produced sanitizer and antibacterial spray in-house.

#### Steinhauser

For Steinhauser, it all comes down to culture. 'We have worked really hard on caring for our team and being present. Creating a feeling of community and kindness from interview stage to onboarding to when I walk the floor every morning and talk to everybody is key,' says Tara Halpin, CEO and owner of Steinhauser. 'It comes down to just caring about people. It sounds so simple when I say it out loud, but it is so important.'

Part of that care comes through being honest, according to Halpin. 'Being transparent has set us apart. We share almost everything with the entire company so that they know how the company is doing and if we are reaching our goals. It establishes trust and helps the culture.'

Opening up about company details to employees was not easy. 'Being a small company, you debate how much should you share or not share, but I need everybody rowing in the same direction so I decided the more information I can give them the better.'

Steinhauser has made conscious efforts to build up its company

**“When employees trust their management enough to risk sharing new ideas, innovation can flourish. Employees at innovative companies are four times more likely to say they’re proud to tell others they work there, and four times more likely to give extra to get the job done”**

culture and is seeing the benefits. This effort includes, says Halpin, 'taking time, even during Covid, to have a meal together'. Those meals look different now with social distancing and health and safety measures, 'but it is worth it because our team really enjoys being together'.

With some employees working from home during the pandemic, communication has increased at Steinhauser. 'Our managers have been diligent with their teams to have regular communication and one-on-one meetings.' Similar to what Claudia St. John says, these meetings are not just business related. 'Everybody is struggling with something – something outside of work – so we want to make sure we are empathetic and understand what people are going through,' says Halpin.

#### Syracuse Label & Surround Printing

'The employee ownership culture is one of the best attributes of Syracuse Label & Surround Printing,' says Kathy Alaimo, president. 'Each employee-owner is a stakeholder and works together to ensure the success of our organization.'

Syracuse works to engrain new employees into the company culture through mentorship. 'Each new team member is assigned a skilled mentor to support onboarding and training in the position,' says Alaimo. In addition, Syracuse tries to promote from within and promotes cross-training to expose staff to other skillsets and pique interest in other aspects of the company.

'We encourage employees to be part of various teams,' said Alaimo. 'Lean Kaizen events assemble a diverse group of staff to interact and develop a comprehensive solution to challenges and promote teambuilding.'

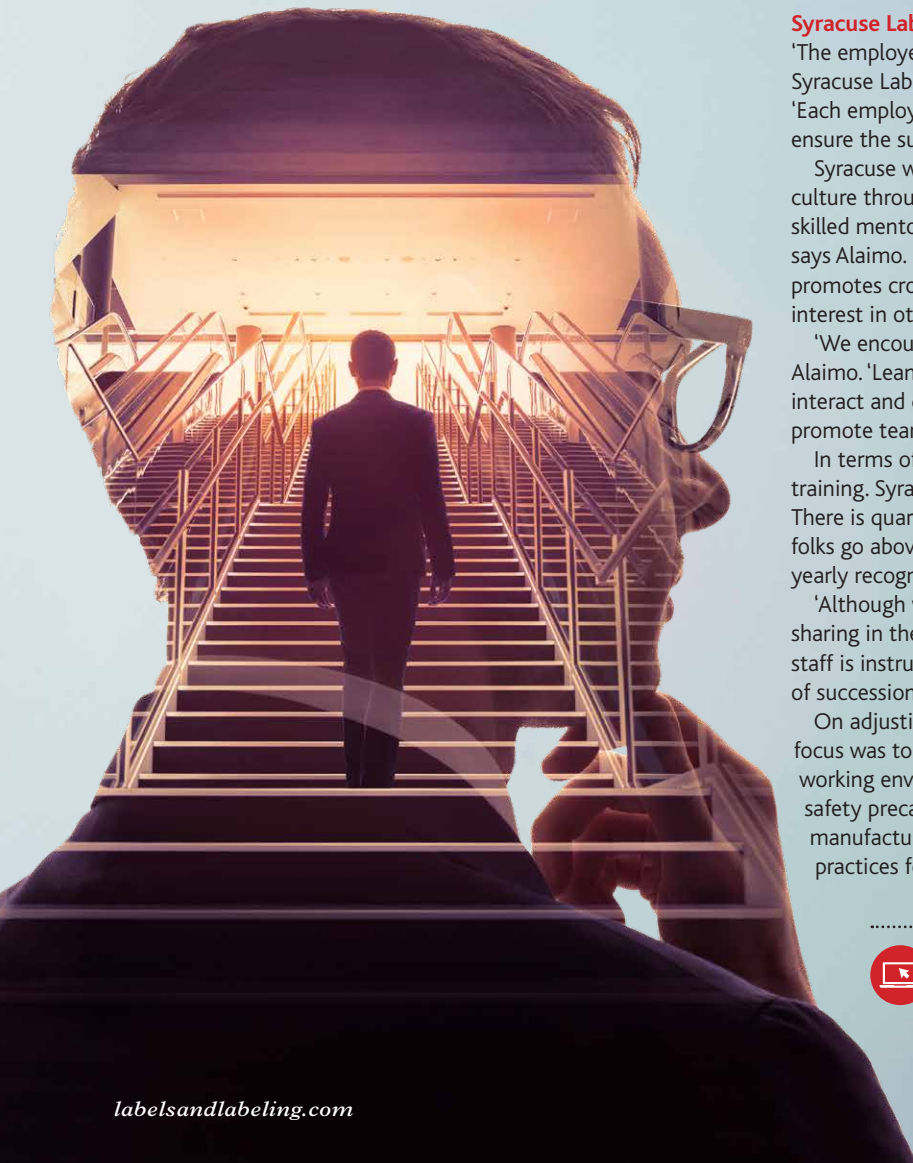
In terms of job perks, Syracuse offers flexible hours and external training. Syracuse also has a strong focus on employee recognition. There is quarterly recognition of good job achievement, 'for when folks go above and beyond in their duties,' says Alaimo. There is also yearly recognition of attendance and years of service awards.

'Although we are 100 strong, we are still a committed family unit sharing in the success and challenges of our members. Longevity of staff is instrumental in promoting knowledge exchange and support of succession planning,' says Alaimo.

On adjusting to working in a pandemic, Alaimo says: 'Our focus was to protect employees and promote a safe, comfortable working environment. We recognized, established and maintained safety precautions from the onset. We also aligned with local manufacturers to collaborate in a cohort tasked with sharing best practices for Covid management.'



To learn more about Claudia St. John and Affinity HR Group, visit: [affinityhrgroup.com](http://affinityhrgroup.com)  
Watch her Virtual Label Summit 2020 presentation at [www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/label-academy)





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# Digital soul for the physical world

*By bridging digital and physical worlds, Avery Dennison's atma.io is set to change the way we look at consumer goods by introducing transparency into supply chains. Piotr Wnuk reports*

In March 2020, Avery Dennison acquired Smartrac, a Dutch innovator in the development of RFID inlays with manufacturing sites in Germany, Malaysia, China and the United States.

Mitch Butier, Avery Dennison's chairman, president and CEO, made a bold statement at the time: 'Smartrac's Transponder Division represents an excellent strategic fit for us, accelerating our strategy to expand our intelligent labels platform across a variety of end markets and customers within the industrial and retail segments, and extending our reach to new channels.'

**“We are now seeing the next chapter of Avery Dennison's digital transformation come to life with the birth of atma.io”**

His forward-thinking sentiments were echoed by Francisco Melo, vice president and general manager of Avery Dennison Smartrac: 'We believe in a future where every physical item will have a unique digital identity and digital life, which will transform the visibility of products throughout the supply chain, all the way to the consumer, helping to improve efficiencies, increase sustainability, and enhance the consumer experience. The capabilities of Smartrac will enable us to continue delivering on this vision across multiple verticals.'

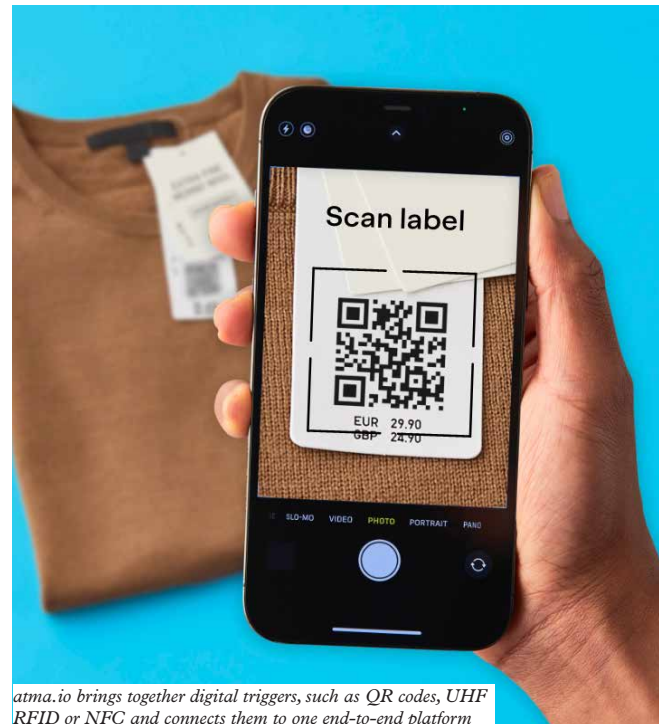
Fast forward 12 months. Avery Dennison launches a mysteriously named connected product cloud, atma.io. Atma is the Sanskrit word for soul; it was chosen to metaphorically manifest a vision where each physical product has a unique 'soul' in the form of a digital ID that stays consistent throughout a product's lifecycle. The .io, meanwhile, is a popular domain used by technology companies to represent a fresh approach. From raw materials to a commercially available product, atma.io sets off to provide transparency throughout the value chain, laying the product's 'soul' bare for all stakeholders to see.

'The journey Avery Dennison has been on is quite a remarkable one,' notes Max Winograd, vice president of connected products at Avery Dennison Smartrac and co-founder of the atma.io platform. 'We are now seeing the next chapter of Avery Dennison's digital transformation come to life with the birth of atma.io. We have been building this digital venture with a start-up spirit but inside of a Fortune 500 company. If you think of a start-up, it is all about making fast decisions, taking risks and moving quickly. We have been able to do that standing on the shoulders of the giant to leverage the value of its global scale and support.'

'Facing a clear need for item-level visibility and the gap in the market, Avery Dennison saw a unique opportunity to set up a new digital venture to pioneer an industry-leading end-to-end connected product cloud,' adds Melo. 'A platform that connects physical and digital worlds by assigning unique digital IDs to everyday items. With atma.io, Avery Dennison is now able to bridge both worlds by coupling our progressive family of digital triggers and labeling technologies with the power of data.'

## Interactive coalition

To summarize, atma.io is a connected product cloud: an end-to-end platform with a wide range of use cases across different markets,



*atma.io brings together digital triggers, such as QR codes, UHF RFID or NFC and connects them to one end-to-end platform*

capable of creating, assigning and managing unique digital identities for every physical item in the world. It offers a smart one-stop-shop, providing the label and digital trigger backed by a software platform that unlocks the power of data for increased transparency.

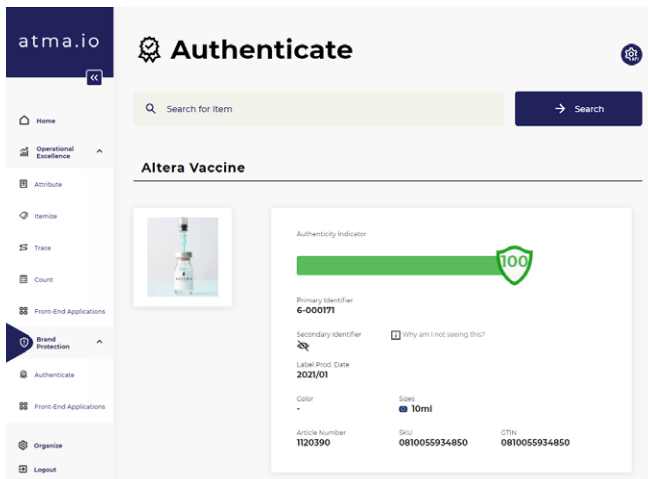
Designed to be open, easily integrated, and system-agnostic, atma.io solves the 'market pain' of supply chains using different digital triggers – QR codes, UHF RFID or NFC – for different purposes and enabling all item-level data to be connected in a single platform.

'Supply chains are complicated and not least because of different technologies that don't "talk" to each other,' explains Melo. 'What we call digital triggers – the label or tag that provides unique product information such as UHF RFID, NFC, or even QR codes – are typically managed by different systems. atma.io brings them together to connect all item-level events and product data in one end-to-end platform.'

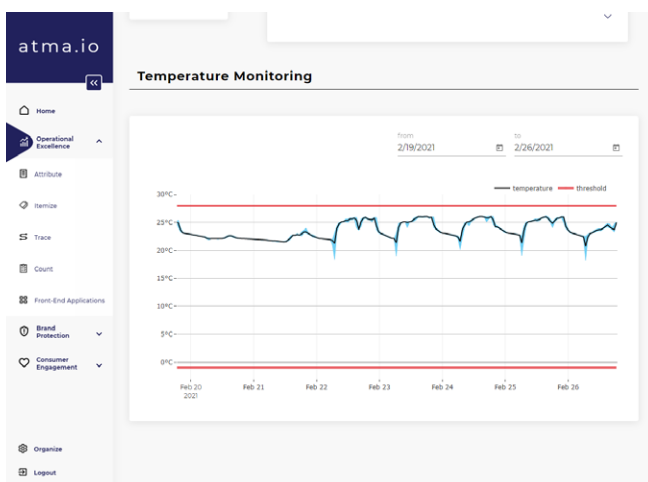
This enables consumers to check anything from product provenance to authenticity. For example, they can access details about care and content instructions for apparel items, obtain expiry and recall information for perishable products, and enjoy unique consumer experiences based on the specific context of each product interaction.

'It is simply empowering consumers to make more informed choices about the products they enjoy. But equally, it's empowering for brands that want to demonstrate transparency to their customers, investors and regulators, and launch new revenue models based on the use or re-use of their products,' says Melo.

The new platform is applicable across every vertical sector imaginable, ranging from authentication, consumer engagement, circularity, traceability, inventory accuracy, expiry date management, real-time item-level monitoring, and so on. It is



The new platform is applicable across vertical sectors ranging from authentication to consumer engagement



atma.io enables tracking of the real-time temperature of products

**“atma.io is currently managing over 10 billion unique items, with over 50 new connected products added to the platform every second”**

already hard at work, currently managing over 10 billion unique items, with at least 50 new connected products added to the platform every second.

Global sportswear brand adidas is utilizing the cloud-based platform for circularity and unique consumer-product interactions.

‘adidas integrated atma.io’s connected product cloud into our Infinite Play initiative to scale our ability to buy back products and give them a second life,’ comments David Quass, global director for brand sustainability at adidas.

‘The program has been the first of many use cases we look to enable with atma.io and Avery Dennison to achieve our connected product vision and our sustainability goals.’

According to Melo, the sportswear giant is in the process of ensuring that every single one of the 1.2 billion products it produces each year will have a digital identity.

‘It will mean that, via its Infinite Play initiative, it will buy back

products from consumers and re-sell them, providing them with a second life,’ he says. ‘In fact, adidas is not alone in using atma.io at launch — we have several other apparel companies in the world exploring how to use it to improve their businesses.’

Besides being chosen for multiple scaled implementations by global brands and retailers, atma.io is also being deployed for food supply chain traceability.

The system is open to third-party sensory technologies for monitoring a product (for attributes such as temperature, humidity and weight), combined with a product’s item-level track-and-trace history to map the end-to-end status of its condition and receive real-time alerts for anything outside of acceptable parameters.

‘We developed a platform to enable tracking of the real-time temperature of products. By implementing that, in for example the pharmaceutical environment, we can now track blood bags going through the blood donation process, or track Covid-19 vaccine vials,’ Winograd expands.

‘We developed a technology to work closely with some unique sensor data at the item level and then connect that data so that, as a consumer, I know that before I take my medicine, I can see that the product is safe, that it was transported at the right temperature every step of the way. As a healthcare provider, I can track my inventory, not just at the existence level, but down to the condition level.

‘This functionality can be easily translated onto other markets, such as food supplier chains, adding tremendous value to product recalls and even predicting product recalls. Knowing that a product was out of the temperature range at some point on its journey allows it to be removed from sale and mitigates a significant amount of risk.’

### Open platform

Melo explains that future development will rely on working with all industry sectors: ‘We recognize that Avery Dennison does not have all the answers to every unique circumstance and use case, which is why the platform is open to customers, third-party developers, partners and even competitors to build their modules within atma.io via our new app store. This will unlock every connected product use case imaginable, and developers and partners can now build on top of atma.io’s platform and unlock new channels for growth.’

The product cloud offers a wide-ranging portfolio of modules to unlock specific use cases and help achieve business objectives like consumer engagement, operational excellence, brand protection and sustainability.

The system is based around Microsoft’s Azure Cloud technology. ‘atma.io is a best-in-class example of how innovation-driven tech partnerships can accelerate the digital transformation of thought-leading brands for a more sustainable and consumer-centric future,’ confirms Chris Dieringer, general manager of retail and consumer goods at Microsoft. ‘Customers will benefit from atma.io’s industry-leading capabilities and cutting-edge scalability enabled by Microsoft Azure.’

Elaborating on the future of this technology, Winograd explains: ‘With tens of trillions of events being captured, we can find out so much more about our planet, about the companies that we purchase products from in just about every single industry, so that we can be more efficient, more sustainable and more trusted.’

Melo concurs: ‘Having atma.io allows us to evolve our solutions to the future. We can make connected products and be the interface between brands and consumers. The future of atma.io will be one where it will become an essential part of everything we do within Avery Dennison.’



For more about the platform go to [atma.io](https://atma.io). For more about Avery Dennison Smartrac go to [rfid.averydennison.com](https://rfid.averydennison.com)



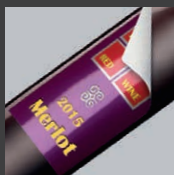


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# The future of Gallus

Following the failure of the Benpac acquisition, Heidelberg CEO Rainer Hundsdörfer tells L&L that Gallus' future lies as a more independent company within the Heidelberg family. Andy Thomas-Emans reports

Over the last year the label industry has been avidly following the fate of Gallus, an iconic company which was one of the original founders and key innovators of the narrow web converting industry.

This story centered on Gallus' changing relationship with Heidelberg, the leading name in the global commercial sheet-fed press market. It begins in 1999, when Heidelberg acquired a 30 percent stake in Gallus with a view to better understanding the narrow web label business.

There was some limited technology cooperation, particularly in the development of offset printing heads for the Gallus RCS press platform, and in some parts of the world Gallus took advantage of Heidelberg's sales and support network to bolster its global operations.

In August 2014, Heidelberg exercised its option to buy the remaining shares in Gallus, and set about fully integrating the company into Heidelberg's global sales and service network. Development of the Gallus Labelfire print engine, integrating FujiFilm printhead technology, was moved to Heidelberg's Wiesloch manufacturing site where it formed a key plank of Heidelberg's broader tilt towards digital across its sheet-fed operations.

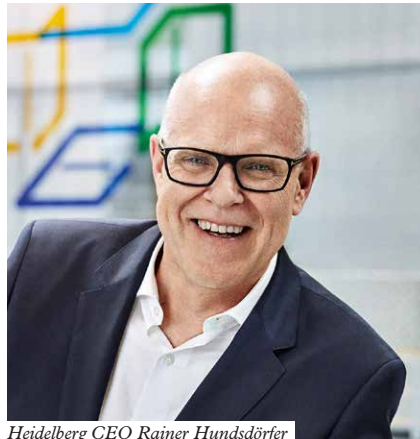
Then in July, Heidelberg made the startling announcement that it had sold Gallus to Switzerland-based Benpac Holding for 120m euros, a deal subsequently passed by the German Federal Cartel office and due to be closed by the end of 2020. The closing date was postponed until the end of January 2021, but when Benpac failed to make the payment on the final deadline of January 29, the deal collapsed, and Gallus remained a member of the Heidelberg group.

How had this situation come about? And where does it leave the Gallus-Heidelberg relationship going forward?

These were the questions that L&L put to Heidelberg CEO Rainer Hundsdörfer and Dr Frank Schaum, head of Business Unit Label, Gallus.

## Covid crisis

According to Rainer Hundsdörfer, the decision to sell Gallus was taken a little over a year ago, as the Covid pandemic was sweeping across Europe. But the subject of Gallus' place in the Heidelberg operation was already under consideration.



Heidelberg CEO Rainer Hundsdörfer



Dr Frank Schaum, head of Business Unit Label, Gallus

**“We learned narrow web label is another market. Sheet-fed and in-mold label is not the same customer base, except maybe just at the top. Full integration had just cost time and money”**

‘We had started a restructuring program in 2019, and one of the aims was to make Gallus more independent, so Heidelberg could concentrate on its core business of sheet-fed equipment, services, software and subscriptions,’ recalls Hundsdörfer.

‘We had already tried to fully integrate Gallus into Heidelberg, because it is close to our core packaging business, but this did not prove to be the right way. We learned narrow web label is another market. Sheet-fed and in-mold label is not the same customer base, except maybe just at the top. Full integration had just cost time and money.’

‘So we wanted to give Gallus back its management independence so it could chart its own growth in a more agile way. We looked for the best of both worlds – where independence was of most importance to Gallus; and where the infrastructure of Heidelberg could be used, for example in Heidelberg's global logistics and sales service.’

The restructuring plan was finalized in March 2020. ‘But this was swept away a few weeks later when Covid threatened the whole industry.’

The Benpac deal did not come out of a clear sky. The company had already taken on Gallus technicians from the St Gallen operation who would otherwise have been made redundant and had expressed

an interest in taking on Gallus' wider manufacturing operations.

‘We had other deals with Benpac, and we had to secure Heidelberg's financial stability, so it was a welcome offer at that time,’ explains Hundsdörfer. ‘In the tight economic situation from Covid it was a logical move for us to sacrifice a good piece of growth business to get us through the crisis.’

Hundsdörfer now insists that Heidelberg's financial situation has greatly improved compared to a year ago because of the cost-cutting and rationalization measures the company has undertaken, meaning there is no further need to sell Gallus.

‘We laid off more than 1,600 people – a program we pulled forward, so saving personnel costs, and we engaged in a number of M&A deals instead of selling Gallus, like getting rid of operations we do not need any more like high-tech coating and chemical companies, divesting Cerm and managing our operational network and capital in a better way. So in the end we could afford for the deal not to go through. We can keep Gallus and we are going back to the original strategy to give Gallus more independence. We are back to square one a year later.’

Hundsdörfer says that in preparation for the Benpac sale Gallus had already moved along the road to independence.



The next step for Labelfire will be both a wider 430mm web and a 250mm 4-color model

### Gallus organization

As part of its new independent position within Heidelberg, all Gallus' conventional machine-related manufacturing will now be located in Langgöns, in Hessen, Germany. There will be no further manufacturing in Wiesloch or St Gallen. St Gallen will now become Gallus' sales, service, demo and digital competence center, while Wiesloch forms the company's digital inkjet technology center, along with ink R&D and digital front-end development.

'The focus for Gallus now will be to push its new products and become more competitive. I am optimistic about what we have already achieved. There is a good possibility Gallus will provide significant growth and contribute nice profits to the Heidelberg group.'

### Digital future

Looking to the future, Hundsdörfer stresses the importance of digital printing to both Gallus and Heidelberg. 'Despite the exit from Primefire, we believe that this is important for the future of Heidelberg and we will be back with new solutions. Heidelberg put a lot of effort in and this is still the best technology in the market. It is important for Heidelberg to save this investment because it will become valuable for the Group in the not too far future, and also very important for Gallus.'

Hundsdörfer confirms that Gallus' digital assets were not part of the Benpac deal – the relationship between Heidelberg and Gallus here was too strong.

'Heidelberg acts as a (digital) supplier to Gallus, but not just a supplier/customer – it's more like family. And we have the opportunity to develop it further. The Gallus Labelfire is not just for printing on flexible packaging materials, but also for folding

**“In the end we could afford for the deal not to go through. We are going back to the original strategy to give Gallus more independence”**

cartons. Now we are closer to Heidelberg's core business again. So we will keep that technology in-house and together improve the performance level.'

### Gallus perspective

Dr Frank Schaum, head of Business Unit Label at Gallus, elaborated on the company's technology roadmap, starting with digital.

Dr Schaum said the next step for Labelfire will be both a wider 430mm web and a 250mm 4-color model. 'We are designing the Labelfire as a modular platform which can be scaled to customer needs, so the customer can build up their own digital system in terms of print speed, colors and width.'

In line with Heidelberg's push towards total service offering, Dr Frank Schaum emphasizes that digital is a business model. 'You have to include a service contract and maintenance and the full range of inks. We can now provide special inks for flexible materials or low migration and we have very good digital white, and printing at 70m/min. It is so important to have ink R&D in-house. Having a digital machine without having ink development in-house does not make business sense. Everything is in one hand.'

Hybrid inkjet-flexo is a major priority. 'So a label with high coverage of ink and can use flexo printing units in the Labelfire. We are fully convinced that the hybrid concept is the way to go. Everybody is testing business models and brand owners have their own ideas facing pressure for more SKUs, marketing innovation and multiple-languages.'

At the same time, conventional print development will not be neglected, insists

Dr Schaum.

'We still have enough applications for conventional printing at the high end with high speeds and long runs. Also for areas of high ink coverage which don't make sense for digital.'

The venerable RCS platform – which remains after 20 years Gallus's high-end machine – has been refitted with a state-of-the-art electronic control system which opens up new multi-web applications. 'This is still our highest automated platform with eleven servos per print unit. We can't add any more,' jokes Dr Frank Schaum.

The Labelmaster remains Gallus' 'bread and butter' machine and the ECS the 'value' machine. 'Our next step for the Labelmaster platform is adding the next level of web width. For that we now bring additionally to the existing widths of 340mm and 440mm the web width of 570mm,' says Dr Schaum. 'This new type brings the Labelmaster on the one hand to more productivity, namely 200m/min on 570mm and on the other hand the capability for more applications like shrink sleeves and flexible packaging. For applications from 670mm web width and even more Heidelberg offers solutions out of its site in Weiden, Germany [Heidelberg Web Carton Converting GmbH]. These machines are more specialized for dedicated applications like card board and can be customized to the customer's needs very specifically.'

The 570mm Labelmaster is currently under development and the first prototype will be delivered in the next few months.



Turn the page for a review of Gallus' High Performance Days event

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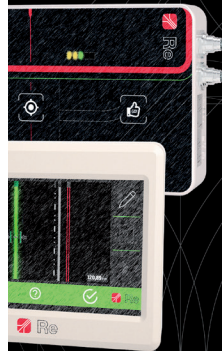
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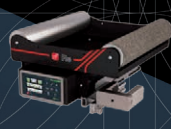
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# Gallus event highlights low migration Labelfire

*A low migration-enabled Labelfire hybrid press was demonstrated by Gallus at its High Performance Day event. Andy Thomas-Emans reports*

Gallus ran its first 'virtual' live showcase in March, with 1,500 people signing up to view multiple press demonstrations at the High Performance Day 2021 event. Over two days Gallus demonstrated a Labelfire hybrid press, a Labelmaster and an RCS430 in addition to three expert breakout sessions.

The main focus was on the Gallus Labelfire hybrid press printing with low migration inks. The low migration configuration includes a nitrogen inerting unit to suppress oxygen at the point of cure and a UV booster to ensure a high level of cure. Built-in sensors monitor residual oxygen levels and UV intensity. This is a relatively new development for Gallus-Heidelberg, and there are currently three presses in the field proving the low migration concept.

Digital business development manager Martin Leonhard explained how Gallus has control over low migration components. The ink is developed and manufactured by Heidelberg, which also controls the digital engine development and front-end workflow. He explained the challenges involved in developing a low migration UV inkjet ink. UV flexo ink manufacturers tackle the issue of migration by increasing the size of the photo-initiator molecules. But this route is not open to UV inkjet ink developers because larger molecules are more likely to block the inkjet nozzles. Achieving low viscosity ink formulation with a low photo-initiator ratio and the smallest possible molecular components is a challenge.

He stressed that the press and inks are just one component of a total low migration system. 'Pre-press is also critical. We use a reduced volume approach, an algorithm which minimizes ink laydown, since what's not on the substrate cannot migrate.'

GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) also has to be followed, which involves all the participants in the production chain including equipment and consumables suppliers and even the print buyer. GMP means the converter needs to keep all low migration components and operations separate from conventional (non-LM) operations, and the whole process has to be documented in a form which is 'legally robust'. Low migration procedures must also be documented throughout the distribution chain.

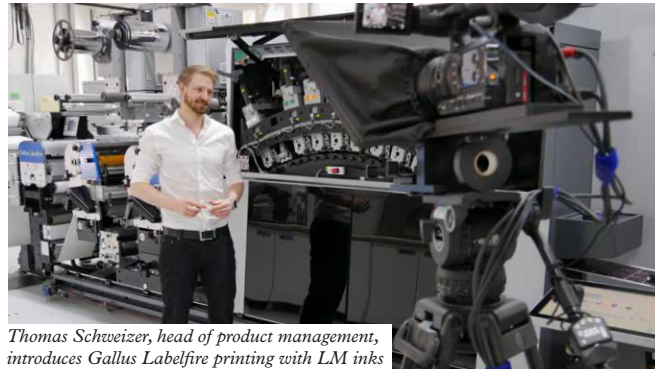
## Digital embellishment

The Labelfire demonstration also allowed Gallus to show off the capabilities of the Labelfire's in-line Digital Embellishment Unit (DEU). The DEU jets at 600 DPI resolution using Ricoh inkjet heads and is a joint development with Swiss company Steinemann Technology and Schmid Rhyner. It can print variable spot matte and

## Conventional demos

The Labelmaster press on demonstration was printing a shampoo label on clear PP material, and was fitted with an integrated Digital Printbar to lay down the opaque white. The Printbar lays down a 10 micron thick film at 600 DPI resolution at speeds up to 70m/min. The Gallus RCS 430 was shown with a Pantec Rhino rotary/flatbed hot foil embossing unit.

A screen breakout session demonstrated the possibilities of metallic doming – applying a metallic foil to screen printing to create engaging 3D effects.



Thomas Schweizer, head of product management, introduces Gallus Labelfire printing with LM inks

**“Gallus estimates the Labelfire breakeven at 7,000 linear meters – compared to around 2,800 linear meters for a stand-alone Labelfire without the hybrid flexo units”**

gloss varnishes and cold foil adhesives as well as creating a range of haptic effects. The demonstration wine label job showed simulated embossing combined with digital cold foil metallic effects.

The addition of the flexo white station allowed Gallus to demonstrate the power of the hybrid approach in extending the breakeven point of the Labelfire against in-line flexo presses. Gallus estimates the Labelfire breakeven at 7,000 linear meters – compared to around 2,800 linear meters for a stand-alone Labelfire without the hybrid flexo units.

The Labelfire demos also showed other aspects of the tight integration with Heidelberg. The front-end (DFE-L) is built around the Heidelberg Prinect workflow, which includes data preparation and Fogra-approved color management. The HMI handles tasks such as job queueing, all hooked up to a server network. Variable data job preparation and automatic data check is also supported. Avery Dennison's Vladimir Tyulpin talked through the substrate requirements for a hybrid press. He said that because UV flexo and UV inkjet inks are from the same family of products, the majority of UV flexo topcoats will be compatible with hybrid printing. The situation is different in the US, however, where top coatings tend to be optimized for the dominant water-based flexo process. Coatings here generally need to be tailored for UV inkjet.

Uncoated papers – for premium food and beverage labels for example – present more of a problem. While UV flexo anchors well, the different ink load and non-contact nature of inkjet can present issues. This requires the use of papers with dedicated inkjet coatings which will not affect the look or structure of the paper.



For background information on the Heidelberg-Gallus relationship see article on previous page

# Ease of operation aids Smyth

*US converter Smyth Companies is about to install its third Nilpeter FA press in as many years. Ease of operation has been key, as Danielle Jerschefske reports*

**U**ntil 2019, Smyth Companies' Minneapolis facility had eight narrow web flexo presses from four different manufacturers. The label and flexible packaging converter was experiencing growth in short runs and anticipated more, so its leadership had become focused on changeover time, speed and throughput.

The company's management teams recognized that its older presses were cumbersome to change over, requiring operator skills which were a challenge to find. The automation built into new narrow web presses was appealing both for operational advantages and operator usability.

Ultimately, to be more competitive, it was time for Smyth to invest in new press technology. The team's objective with its next press selection was to find a partner for its future development in Minneapolis. At the same time, Scott Fisher, president of Smyth Companies, envisioned a fleet of flexographic assets that would meet any of Smyth's customers' extensive requirements. This strategy would also make it easier to train and move operators around the shop floor from press to press.

The first Nilpeter FA-Line that Smyth installed was a 17in 10-color flexo press with laminating and cold foil capability. The focus of the first investment was to take work off the other presses, to shorten changeover time, and to reduce waste. Smyth's data has shown the team that it can put thirty percent more footage through the FA-Line compared to any other asset in the plant.

By 2020, Smyth installed its second Nilpeter FA-Line, also 17in wide, but with 12 flexo printing units and two screen units on a rail, each with its own curing system, plus cold foil and hot stamping units. In June of this year, the converter will install its third FA-Line, moving even closer to the leadership's vision for its Minneapolis facility.

Jim Stark, general manager at Smyth-Minneapolis, says: 'Nilpeter

**“We have two operators running our new Nilpeter presses that have never been operators before. In a short amount of time, they are becoming efficient and effective”**

has excelled in the sense that they are extremely interested in our success. This is what led to us buying the second press within a year, and a third one again this year, because of the support we have and the partnership.'

Scott Fisher adds: 'We see benefits with the FA-Line that we do not see with other manufacturers. One standout feature is the registration. I've never seen a flexo press hold register the way the FA does. We can run up to 400 ft per min [122m/min], and we laugh that the crosshairs aren't moving.'

The machine's ability to hold ultra-tight register can be attributed to the manufacturing process at Nilpeter's US facility. In a traditional shop, presses had been made up of 8-10 pieces of metal. Today, a Nilpeter FA print unit is made from a single piece of steel, which greatly minimizes fractional movement in a printing run. The full unit goes into a large CNC machine. This helps make each unit almost identical, and it requires very little assembly.

Nilpeter's investment in automation has simplified the press manufacturing process to improve consistency, quality and lead time. Each machine is tested to ensure that side-to-side and front-to-back registrations meet the tight tolerance of +/- .001 of an inch in movement; if not, it is rejected.



*In June 2021, Smyth will install its third Nilpeter FA-Line in three years*



Says Fisher: 'They've made some serious investments here in the US, which made the decision to choose them as a partner easier, as well in that they are going to be able to deliver on what they have promised. We appreciate their move for redundancy in manufacturing globally, their quality objectives, and their overall philosophy on how they are building their machines. And the stability in their business is reassuring.'

### Overcoming workforce challenges

Simplified operator usability is a feature of the FA-Line that has helped Smyth overcome what might be the biggest challenge in the label converting industry: finding skilled press operators. The pressure to find human resources has only intensified in recent years, little sign of potential improvement.

In today's manufacturing environment, a modern user interface and automation are key to luring and keeping younger talent in the narrow web printed packaging sector. Lenny DeGirolmo, president and managing director of Nilpeter USA, says: 'When our R&D and engineering teams designed the FA-Line, they knew we needed to come up with something that is easy to run. This is why the FA has very friendly interface icons that allow for monitoring a lot of the functionality of the machine. The simplicity in user operation allows our customers to put people on presses that have never run one before.'

Stark agrees: 'The interface of the FA-press combined with the auto-functionality has certainly helped relieve some of the challenge in finding operators, and in our experience with this new equipment, the younger workforce likes what they see, and want the opportunity to learn the new technology.'

The FA-Line saves all data for a given job, so an operator can easily recall parameters to re-run the next order. Anilox and print cylinders are automatically set to near kiss impression, when the user enters the print cylinder size. And while other press options in the market also deliver quick-change, Smyth has found the changeover with the Nilpeter FA to be less mechanical and command far less tooling to get up and running quickly and consistently.

'Our other presses require experience to problem solving as things come up,' Stark continues. 'We have two operators running our new Nilpeter presses that have never been operators before. In a short amount of time, they are becoming efficient and effective.'

'Running the machine is almost intuitive,' says Fisher. 'There are fewer buttons and minimal settings that need operator direction, which eliminates the human variable that we have all been dealing with.'

With the initial installation, Nilpeter's technician trained four Smyth operators equipped with headsets on the same shift for a week. By the second week, they split the operators into shifts, moving into a special schedule for an eight-week period to allow the production manager to spend time with each operator on every shift, serving as an internal support hub.

Stark says: 'Our training strategy built everyone's confidence. All four operators felt they were on the same team, sharing the same knowledge and any other opportunities to learn.'

### Service

With its global headquarters in Denmark and manufacturing locations in the US and India, Nilpeter has established a 24-7 service system to support all of its customers around the world. Service process are set up so that customers in any region can call a hotline and reach someone at any time of day.

Lenny DeGirolmo, president and managing director at Nilpeter USA, explains: 'With anything, support is everything after the fact. We went side by side with the Smyth team on the whole journey.'

Smyth ran into some trouble with the integrated die station and were grateful for Nilpeter's responsiveness and steadfast support.



Jim Stark (foreground), general manager, and Steve Kostichka (background), production manager at Smyth-Mimneapolis

**“Running the machine is almost intuitive. There are fewer buttons and minimal settings that need operator direction, which eliminates the human variable”**

Explains Stark: 'With Nilpeter, if we have any adversity at all, they will do what they can to help us. They are focused on understanding our business and know how important our uptime is to servicing customers. With Nilpeter, it's about us, and this is a differentiator in the marketplace that is real.'

Smyth's maintenance team loves the partnership it has developed with Nilpeter's technical group. The technicians take pride in getting a press up again after it's gone down, and with this new relationship, Smyth's maintenance team has been able to keep presses up and running better than ever before.

Fisher says: 'The machines are performing exactly how they predicted they would, and in some cases even better. I have always been a fan of Nilpeter technology. Their equipment is well-made and well-constructed; it's high-performance.'

'But what impresses me the most with Nilpeter is their service and commitment. There has been a tremendous amount of trust, respect and sharing to make each other successful. Nilpeter made the promise to be our partner, and spent the time to learn about our needs – not just current state, but where we want to go.'



How have US converters been affected by the pandemic? Find out on page 65

# When your label demands the ultimate in water resistance



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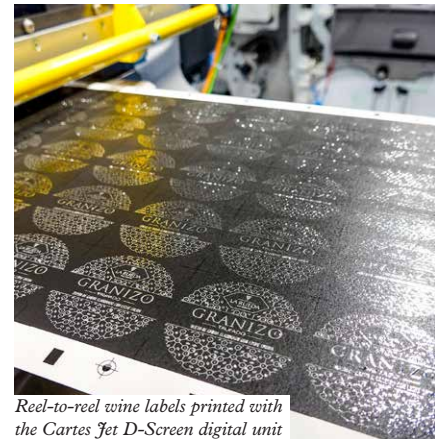


# Cartes launches digital embellishment module

The Italian manufacturer's Jet D-Screen multi-pass inkjet embellishment module is inspired by screen printing. Lorenzo Villa reports



From left to right, Carlo Stefano Lodi, Enrica Lodi and Mario Lodi



Reel-to-reel wine labels printed with the Cartes Jet D-Screen digital unit

In the production of labels, embellishment is an almost indispensable ingredient. This is particularly true in the alcoholic beverage and luxury goods segments, where labels have always been embellished with selective varnish and metal foils. With the increased importance of packaging as 'media' for engaging with and influencing consumers, brands are now commissioning increasingly rich rigid and flexible packaging. Metal foil and special effects are also being used more and more for food, confectionery, cosmetics and personal care packaging, where small runs represent both a production challenge and a business opportunity to be exploited.

At the same time, converters are looking closely into digital technologies as a value option for printing, embellishment and converting labels more efficiently, reliably and profitably.

For over fifty years this has been the territory of Cartes, a renowned label finishing equipment manufacturer and a pioneer in laser converting for labels, founded by Mario Lodi in 1970. The company, still owned and managed by the Lodi family, boasts over 4,000 narrow web lines installed in 99 countries worldwide.

In 2019, Cartes started researching digital embellishment and developing a new system which was launched in December 2020: Jet D-Screen.

## Digital project with analog foundations

'In October 2019, after returning from Labelexpo Europe, we paused to discuss the advances of in- and off-line digital finishing

**"We worked day and night to optimize varnish density, jet frequencies, print heads temperature and setting up an automatic cleaning system to prevent gelation and nozzle clogging"**

technology,' recalls Mario Lodi, CEO of Cartes. 'What we were seeing fascinated us, but we sensed its limitations, starting with the prohibitive costs to access the technology. So, we decided to develop our own solution.'

The Cartes R&D team, led by Carlo Stefano Lodi, began to explore inkjet technologies compatible with the required application, talking with the leading printhead manufacturers and specialized integrators. The geographic proximity to the ceramic district of Fiorano Modenese proved to be decisive.

'In the ceramics industry, it is necessary to lay down high thicknesses of glaze to reproduce the grain of the wood and the surface of the stone,' explains Carlo Stefano Lodi. 'Similarly, optical and tactile effects of sufficient thickness to reproduce the effects of embossing and Braille are required for label embellishment.'

Cartes engineers conducted initial tests with an integrator specializing in digital ceramic decoration, using printheads designed to lay down high-viscosity fluids. They had the opportunity to purchase a turnkey solution – including inkjet heads, electronics, software, and ink supply – to quickly introduce the product. Although attractive, such a package proved

incompatible with Cartes' manufacturing philosophy.

'We demand to govern our research and development and to be in control of what we bring to market,' continues Carlo Stefano Lodi. 'That's the only way we can be sure to overcome any gaps, meet the needs of today's customers and prepare the technology for their future demands.'

Therefore, Cartes focused on developing proprietary electronics and began testing ink pumping, feeding, and recirculation systems. On the software front, Cartes also drew on its team of specialists. The company then entered into a partnership with an internationally renowned inkjet printhead manufacturer.

'This has been an exciting adventure. While we've always been writing software for our machines, we had never dealt with waveforms and print presets for fully digital output,' says Matteo Marastoni, Jet D-Screen project manager at Cartes.

The next challenge concerned formulating a varnish suitable for the application, capable of guaranteeing full compatibility with inkjet printheads, high adhesion and resistance as well as the high thicknesses required for print embellishment. Using a laboratory machine designed and built in-house, Cartes tested

numerous pre-formulated varnishes and finally developed a custom formulation in collaboration with one of the world's leading inkjet ink manufacturers.

'We worked day and night to optimize varnish density, jet frequencies, print heads temperature and setting up an automatic cleaning system to prevent gelation and nozzle clogging,' says Carlo Stefano Lodi.

The printing carriage, which holds the staggered inkjet heads and the UV LED pinning lamps, is designed to move and print width-wise across the substrate.

Making one or more passes (in bidirectional mode), it progressively increases the thickness of the laid down varnish. After going into drying process this can be also embellished with a metallic doming effect.

Using high-laydown printheads capable of producing drop sizes between 25 and 150 pl, Jet D-Screen makes it possible to achieve a varnish thickness of up to 230 µm in one pass, which can be increased to 650 µm in four passes. The final result and the number of passes required to achieve it can vary depending on the substrate's absorbency rate. High levels of coverage are possible even on untreated non-coated papers.

The first three Jet D-Screen beta units started field-testing in July 2020, in collaboration with two leading Italian label converters. At the end of 2020, after certifying the machines' performance and reliability on long runs and fragmented jobs, Cartes concluded the beta program and started a cycle of closed-door demos for label converters and online printers, some of whom are already accustomed to digital embellishment.

Jet D-Screen is designed with full modularity and scalability as a goal. Therefore, it is possible to insert multiple digital modules on the same production line, before and after any analog printing and converting units. By deactivating the line's analog printing units, the Jet D-Screen can also be used solely to embellish prints produced on other presses, whether traditional or digital.

'Most prospects for new lines are interested in Jet D-Screen as the last unit, immediately before the foiling,' points out Ivan Spina, sales manager at Cartes. 'This configuration gives them operational flexibility and ensures flawless die-cutting results, even with very high- thickness varnish.'

Among the various options, Cartes also offers the Jet D-Screen as a standalone finishing system. In that configuration, the digital unit is combined with an unwinder, drying and foiling modules, and a rewinder.

### Ready for Industry 4.0

In the packaging industry, the label sector was the first to embrace digital printing and implement hybrid presses. Along with the huge variety of processes used in creating flexo photopolymers, offset plates, and screens, almost every advanced label converter has at least partially digitized its workflows.

To this end, Cartes has equipped the Jet D-Screen with proprietary PDF-compatible application software and an intuitive user interface. Using the touch panel installed on the machine, the operator can load substrate presets and PDF files containing the varnish layout. Each color can be matched with a different thickness of varnish, and Jet D-Screen can simultaneously manage up to three varnish thicknesses within the same job.

The system can also interpret gradient fills, from white to black, to achieve smoother, more controllable varnish gradients. The software automatically associates black with the maximum thickness and white to the lowest thickness.

Accurate registration between print and embellishment is guaranteed by the MHPS (Multi Head Positioning System) technology, which automatically corrects substrate advancement variations using data collected by a photocell. The operator can quickly adapt the embellishment layout using the touch panel to



Jet D-Screen installed on a Cartes GT360 line

**“Most prospects for new lines are interested in Jet D-Screen as the last unit, immediately before the foiling”**

handle the print's dimensional variations.

Software included with the Jet D-Screen allows creating hot folders that the pre-press department can use to optimize job queues. Cartes has also preloaded the software with a database of standard substrates presets (which the user can customize) to reduce set-up times.

The unit is designed to integrate into third party software ecosystems – such as those of Esko, EFI, HP and Xeikon – but can also operate as a stand-alone machine. Furthermore, Jet D-Screen can exchange production data in XML format with any MIS software and is compatible with Industry 4.0 guidelines.

To lower Jet D-Screen's running costs and encourage its intensive use, Cartes defined an aggressive consumables price policy: customers receive increasing discounts as they exceed agreed consumption thresholds.

'The price of our inkjet varnish is comparable to that of screen-printing consumables,' says Spina, 'with the added benefits of zero waste, predictable consumption to the gram, and not having to make screens.'

Jet D-Screen's software includes an estimation tool, which allows accurately forecasting of the embellishment cost. Depending on each job's settings, it also shows the time required for processing.

Tests carried out by Cartes have shown complete compatibility of Jet D-Screen with the most common kinds and brands of foil on the market.

As proof of the system's robustness, Cartes does not require Jet D-Screen customers to subscribe to a service contract and offers a one-year warranty on the printheads. Routine maintenance is limited to periodic replacement of filters and membranes.

'We are accustomed to providing solid durable technology and when designing the Jet D-Screen, we eliminated everything superfluous, enabled remote assistance and defined a straightforward maintenance routine that customers can perform themselves,' concludes Enrica Lodi, marketing manager at Cartes.



Lorenzo Villa is co-founder and CEO of Density Media, which publishes the printing magazine Italia Publishers, among other titles. [www.densitymedia.com](http://www.densitymedia.com)

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# All roads lead to labels

*UK-based commercial printer Print-Leeds has opened a self-adhesive label division after investment in a Screen press, ABG finishing equipment and Cerm MIS. Piotr Wnuk reports*

**T**he pandemic presented the global population with a series of challenges. We have been asked to stay safe, adjust our lifestyles, isolate and convert face-to-face relationships with our family and friends into virtual meetings to mitigate potential health risks.

Many of us have started new hobbies and taken on new projects. However, Rod Fisher, managing director of Print-Leeds, went a step further – setting himself a year-long challenge of putting together the finance and the team to take a new self-adhesive label division to market.

'Adding self-adhesive labels to our offering is the obvious progression for the company,' says Fisher. 'It's been a real lockdown challenge for me, organizing the finance and recruiting the team, and when Covid-19 hit, I didn't think I'd be able to achieve it. I thought my plans would be delayed. Given our impressive infrastructure, experience and expertise, we are ideally placed to make good in-roads into the self-adhesive label market.'

The new division represents further evolution for Print-Leeds – which started as a repro house before moving into printing in 2001 and label production in 2013 – and the perfect accompaniment to its offering. The company is renowned for its wet-glue labels, which it supplies to the food and beverage industries, and has operated a digital printing division since 2009.

In 2017, the company invested in a new GBP 2.5 million Heidelberg XL106 7-color press with coater, to run alongside its existing Heidelberg 7-color UV litho press. This was part of a planned GBP 5 million investment to double the company's production capacity, streamline production, provide greater flexibility and bring in-house the all-important contingency option to produce wet-glue labels, composite tube wraps, litho box laminates and UV litho work.

Currently, Print-Leeds is the sole supplier of labels to brewing giant Marston's, which recently merged with Carlsberg UK. The company also prints labels for other household beverage brands such as Fentimans, cider producer Aston Manor and The Black Sheep Brewery. It is one of the largest printers of wet-glue labels in the UK, producing more than 200 million per year. However, Fisher says: 'Self-adhesive labels can be applied much quicker and on a wider variety of products. It was important to invest in the technology to serve this growing need. Many clients were asking if we could also print self-adhesive labels digitally for shorter run productions.'

## **Pioneering investments**

After looking at many digital label presses and a variety of finishing equipment, the company invested in a Screen LS 350 SAI inkjet press, offering an almost limitless combination of options to fully customize labels of all shapes and sizes using a full spectrum of colors. The Print-Leeds' Screen LS 350 SAI digital press specification includes a 333mm print width and seven colors, including opaque white. Operating speeds are up to 60m/min.

'We have a long-standing relationship with Screen. We trust the staff we deal with, and that's worth a lot,' explains Fisher. 'The SAI S 7-color has delivered with the same top-quality service we expected. Since it was installed just before Christmas, we've done numerous quality trials for different customers. Everybody is happy with the vibrancy of the colors.'

'On top of that, the SAI S 7-color can achieve a much wider



*Rod Fisher, managing director of Print-Leeds, in front of the newly installed Screen press*

**“Self-adhesive labels can be applied much quicker and on a wider variety of products. It was important to invest in the technology to serve this growing need”**

range of Pantone colors thanks to its very wide color gamut. Many beer labels have special colors, so we will be able to meet the growing demand of craft brewers and big brewers alike. The set-up times are so much quicker. When we print wet-glue labels, we have 500 to 1,000 sheets of waste. That makes sense for a long run, but not for the shorter ones. With the SAI S 7-color, we are looking at a waste of only 15 meters. The machine is already opening up new avenues for us in other sectors such as cosmetics and the car industry.'

The new press was quickly followed by investment in an A B Graphic Digicon 3 finishing machine, tailored to the company's requirements to allow embellishment of labels with tactile varnishes and other special effects. The Print-Leeds' bespoke Digicon 3 includes a flatbed screen printing module to add value with relief varnishes or vibrant screen inks, a delamination and relamination module for double-sided labels, two flexo modules, and an autoslit module to keep time-consuming make-ready times to a minimum.

'The investment in Digicon Series 3 is an important factor in making that happen, allowing us to create a clear and competitive advantage from the outset,' says Fisher.

Mark Hyde, ABG's sales manager, elaborates on their shared vision: 'We are delighted to supply Print-Leeds with the Digicon Series 3. As a new customer, hopefully, this will be the first of many items of ABG finishing equipment. We fully share their drive and commitment to always delight the customer, and we look forward to following their progress in the future.'

The investment in the new label division also included innovative internal systems. In 2021 Print-Leeds bought a Cerm MIS system, which has introduced several operational improvements, starting from initial inquiry through pre-press to

printing, delivery and invoicing.

'Over the years, I have made a point of investing in new equipment, so we are the most technically advanced printer,' reveals Fisher. 'This technology means we can print the best quality products for our clients. I don't believe in the cheapest being the best – it's the same with whatever you buy. Our clients stay with us because we print a high-quality product and provide superb customer service.'

Fisher's words are backed up by his investment history. The company's Screen LS350 SAI is the first in the UK, as was its Heidelberg 74 UV press a few years ago.

**Expanding team**

The company has made several appointments during the Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen its team, as label production has ramped up since the first lockdown announcement in March 2020.

'On the labels side, we've been lucky to get more work and employ some highly skilled people from the industry,' remarks Fisher. 'We've been open and producing the whole way through. At the beginning of the March lockdown, we furloughed a third of the staff, but everyone returned to work over the summer. We have been operating using the government's health and safety guidelines with strict social distancing. We moved four years ago to a 30,000 sq ft factory which has meant we've plenty of space to keep our staff safe.'

The new division has created five new roles – two new salespeople, one new IT and estimating position, and two technical staff deployed to operate the equipment. Chris Whitehead and Jerry Dugdale have joined the existing sales team as sales executives. Sam Nightingale-Smith has joined IT and Estimating and spearheaded the transition to the Cerm management information system.

Print-Leeds is a company with a conscience. It nurtures its staff and prides itself in creating attractive opportunities for a new generation of talent.

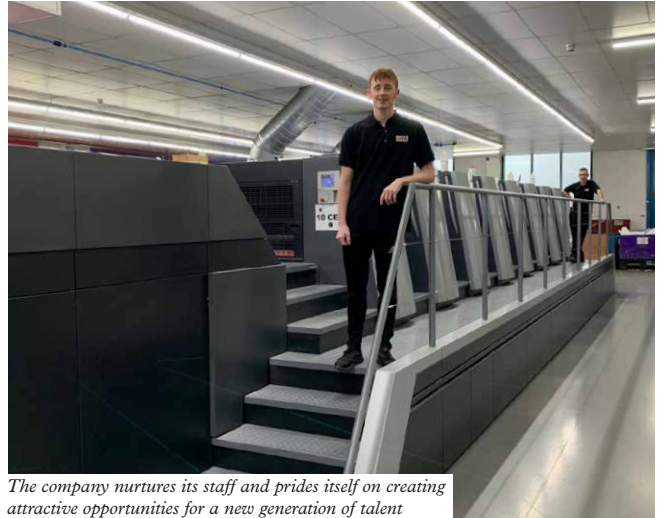
'We have a policy where we try to bring a lot of young people in. I give talks to Leeds Beckett University students, trying to give them advice on how to join the printing world, how exciting it can be,' says Fisher. 'Most of them do not think of printing as an exciting career path. We've been able to take on another apprentice – it's great to bring young people into the business straight from school. Our new apprentice Jake is a real asset – he loves machinery and engineering, and with us, he can work on the latest Heidelberg machines and learn the technology.'

**Ambitious plans**

'Covid has brought with it all sorts of challenges. Parts of the business have steadied while others are still trying to get back on their feet,' answers Fisher, when asked about the company's future. 'As well as printing labels for the food and beverage industries, we also produce print for retail, travel companies, events and exhibitions, which have not recovered yet.'

With its 30 employees, Print-Leeds has a turnover of GBP 4 million. Despite the pandemic's impact, Rod Fisher plans to double the company's size within two years.

'We expect the economy to bounce back after the pandemic, and we've made all the investments to be ready for it. I already have an ambitious plan for this year. We are going to diversify again. Everybody knows us as a beverage label printer, so we are trying to print in other sectors. I enjoy business, and I enjoy the cut and thrust. We have a lot of energy within the company to continue developing.'



The company nurtures its staff and prides itself on creating attractive opportunities for a new generation of talent


**“We expect the economy to bounce back after the pandemic, and we’ve made all the investments to be ready for it”**



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# Digital finishing helps drive Springfield's success

*Despite the pandemic, UK-based Springfield Solutions has attracted new business thanks to investment in ABG digital finishing equipment. Piotr Wnuk reports*

Last year Springfield Solutions marked a significant milestone: its 45th anniversary. 2020 was also a roller coaster for most businesses in the UK, adjusting to remote working and applying social distancing and safety rules for those operating machinery on production lines.

**“Since the installation of the DigiJet module, we have attracted new customers and gained significant interest from the beer, wine, and spirit markets”**

‘The pandemic has been an extremely challenging time for everyone at Springfield,’ says Matt Dass, managing director. ‘However, the fact we are 100 percent digital company has meant we have been able to react quickly, be agile, and continue operating throughout coronavirus. None of this would have been possible without our fantastic staff, who have worked tirelessly to ensure we can continue to service our customers.’

Matt’s father, Albert Dass, established the business in 1975. He served his apprenticeship as a printer in the metal box and printing industry before moving to City Engraving in Hull as a printer and proofer. However, after 15 years as an employee, the pull of entrepreneurship was too great, and he founded a trade platemaking and proofing service on Springfield Way, Anlaby, UK.

In 2016, after three years of substantial growth, the company invested GBP 1.3 million to expand its digital print division into a neighboring building. Springfield increased print capacity by 30 percent by installing a Screen Truepress Jet L350UV with Jet Converter and an A B Graphic Digicon Series 3 finishing unit with buffer, retrofitted to an off-line Screen Truepress in the new factory.

The company’s name might still recall its first headquarters, but everything else has changed over the years. Today, Hull-based Springfield Solutions is one of the leading one-stop-shops in the UK, offering global brand management, digital print, and media services.

The company currently operates four digital presses and five finishing lines. Its team of 90 supplies a wide range of end-user markets such as household, chemical, cleaning products, paints, coatings and aerosols, to name just a few, with 60 percent of its production destined for the domestic market.

## Year of growth

During the last year, Springfield’s digital team produced 187 million digital labels, equivalent to 29 million meters of printed material; its brand management department created 19,118 digital artworks supplied to 45 different countries.

After installing its latest piece of machinery in 2020, a DigiJet module powered by JetFx technology from A B Graphic, Springfield launched a digital label embellishments service enabling



*Labels produced by Springfield Solutions with the new digital embellishment unit*

personalized digital foiling, tactile finishes, digital spot varnishes as well as embossing and debossing effects.

Purchased at Labelexpo Europe in September 2019, the installation was delayed due to Covid-19 restrictions but has since been successfully integrated with Springfield’s existing Digicon Series 3 finishing press.

‘Although the unit’s installation was delayed, the team at ABG couldn’t have been more helpful,’ adds Matt Dass. ‘Engineers attended the site on the weekend, not to affect production, followed all secure Covid-19 policies, and had the machine back up and running for the Monday production slot. We are delighted to have the JetFx DigiJet module finally installed. And having it retrofitted over a weekend to allow for social distancing was easily the best installation ever.’

According to Matt Dass, the module enables Springfield to create varnish and foil effects, tactile finishes and other embellishments. ‘Being perfect for short runs, our digital package offers no tooling costs, variable data, personalization, and dramatically reduced lead times. It’s a perfect fit that will open many doors to all our

customers,' he says.

As a digital embellishment module, DigiJet offers an on-line or off-line fully digital system allowing for multiple processes in one pass, including spot varnishing, cold foiling and tactile screen. Springfield benefits from equipment features including two inkjet heads with UV pinning and UV curing.

'Springfield decided to go into the embellishment side of labels to offer our customer something epic, something unique, something personal,' notes Steve Nix, print operations manager at Springfield Solutions. 'These digital finishing effects can be applied to any product, whether it is a drink bottle, a beer bottle, a wine label or a cleaning product. This is one of the world's first units offering a digital foiling solution and a digital spot varnish. Its potential is really great.'

'Springfield has been a valued ABG customer for many years, and we look forward to seeing the results of their investment in the future,' said Matt Burton, sales director at A B Graphic, based in Bridlington, just a few miles away from Springfield Solutions. 'The DigiJet module powered by JetFx technology shows that ABG has the ability and expertise to provide a finishing technology that works seamlessly with all technologies within the digital label print environment while adapting to meet the requirements of all consumer label markets.'

Matt Dass says that since the installation of the DigiJet module back in the summer of 2020, the company has attracted new customers and gained significant interest from the beer, wine and spirit markets. With no additional tooling costs, the converter could reduce lead times of premium packaging to up to five days from sending approved artwork.

'The ability to add foils and spot varnishing to enhance our brand owner's look and feel of their packaging is very appealing to them and their market. Historically, this has always meant expensive set-up costs, minimum order quantities and long lead times. The ability to do this digitally takes away these barriers and allows brands to run special offers, campaigns, personalization, serialization, and change their packaging designs much more cost-effectively,' says Dass.

**Year of giving**

2020 was also a year of giving. When Scottish company Macphie temporarily converted its production facilities to produce hand sanitizers for crucial organizations and frontline staff, Springfield was tasked with creating the labels. The challenge with this particular set of labels was urgency, as Macphie needed them



ABG installed the DigiJet module powered by JetFx over a weekend to comply with all Covid-19 distancing rules



Digital embellishment module fitted into ABG Digicon Series 3 modular system

**“The fact we are 100 percent digital has meant we have been able to react quickly, be agile, and continue operating throughout coronavirus”**

quickly. After the first batch of 25,000 free labels, the company requested a further order of 300,000. The order was placed in the morning, and the labels were delivered the following morning.

'It brings us great pleasure and joy to know our innovative and digital print facilities provide organizations like Macphie the opportunity to get the products it desires quickly and efficiently, with the correct labels,' comments Matt Dass.

Last Christmas, the company donated 850 personalized hand sanitizers to local NHS staff in the Queen's Centre, Castle Hill Hospital.

'Every year, we send a Christmas gift to our customers thanking them for their custom and support,' notes Dass. 'Last

year, we decided to do something slightly different and show our appreciation to a special group of people. We have donated personalized hand sanitizers to local NHS staff who received bottles with their names in an elegant silver foil.

'Once again, another year of growth for Springfield. But we don't plan on stopping here, and we want to continue working with forward-thinking brands and organizations to provide innovative packaging solutions.'



To learn more about Springfield, go to [www.springfieldsolutions.co.uk](http://www.springfieldsolutions.co.uk). For more detail about ABG's DigiJet module powered by JetFx technology, visit [www.abgint.com](http://www.abgint.com)

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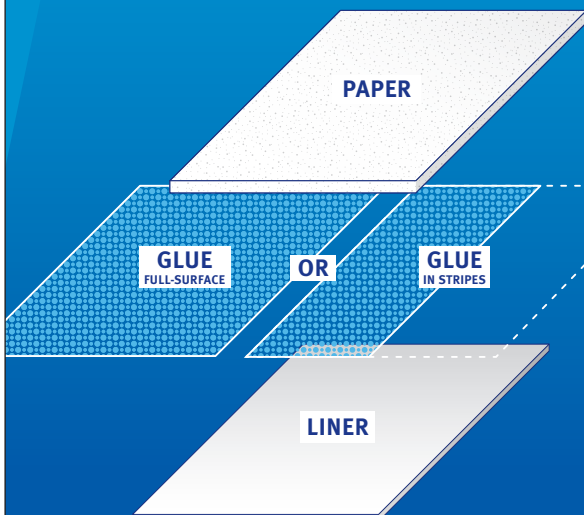


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ACM's factory houses presses from Omet and Bobst

# LED transition boosts growth at ACM

ACM Plastics has moved to 100 percent UV LED curing for its narrow and mid-web flexible packaging operation. James Quirk reports

**M**assimo Raffaele took a bold leap when he founded ACM Plastics without any experience in the packaging market. Within a short time, he had achieved a high level of success and earned the respect of his customers, suppliers and competitors alike with a pioneering vision that quickly positioned his business at the top of a demanding industry.

Raffaele took his first steps in printing as a truck driver transporting and delivering packaging materials to clients throughout the Milan area. During this time, he saw an opportunity to fill a gap in the market for customers seeking high-quality flexible packaging in smaller quantities and with faster delivery times than typically offered by existing industry suppliers.

Along with business partner Antonio La Franceschina, Raffaele founded ACM Plastics in 2005 in Crema, just outside Milan, first offering laminating and reel-cutting services.

As a former racing car driver, Raffaele was certainly used to making bold moves, and over the next few years developed ideas for a pioneering concept – to become one of Europe's first flexible film converters to offer all-UV LED curing in a narrow to mid-web format. Furthermore, he planned for the company to specialize in the food and pharma markets, where many brand owners had been reluctant up to that point to commission UV cured flexible packaging due to concerns over potential ink migration.

The two partners' ingenuity, persistence and close collaboration with cutting-edge suppliers not only made the concept a reality, but also helped to establish UV LED printing as a growing production standard in flexible packaging and labels.

In 2008, Raffaele and La Franceschina invested in their first press, a 7-color Omet VariFlex 530 with conventional (mercury) UV curing, and became one of the first flexible packaging printers in Europe to investigate the potential of extended gamut printing.

This technology, which ACM calls Heptachrome, significantly extends the available color gamut by adding three more colors – orange, green and violet – to the standard CMYK palette, allowing Pantone color shades to be matched without the use of dedicated print stations. Avoiding the need to change inks from job to job greatly speeds the job makeready process – a 'pit-stop' approach that certainly appealed to Raffaele's racing driver instincts.

## Inside lane to UV LED

By 2014 Raffaele and La Franceschina were seeking ways to eliminate some of the speed bottlenecks with traditional UV printing. This included excessive heat build-up from the mercury UV lamps, which required the press to run slower and the printed rolls to cool down in a storage locker before lamination.



Massimo Raffaele, co-founder of Italy-based ACM Plastics, was formerly a racecar driver

**“Following months of collaboration and refinement, ACM staked its claim as one of the first printers to install an LED printing system in the narrow web flexo market”**

The decision was made to move from traditional UV to full 'food safe' UV LED curing, working closely with Baldwin Technology company AMS Spectral UV, which retrofitted the press UV stations with its XP Series LED UV technology.

Flint Group was chosen as the ink supplier partner, using the company's EkoCure Ancora Dual Cure inks which can be used with both UV LED and mercury UV curing systems to the same exacting standards – which simplifies the process in the press room when transitioning between mercury and LED lamps. The Ancora inks were supplied in a low migration formulation ideal for applications in food and pharmaceutical labels and flexible packaging. The inks are available in flexo shades, metallics and coatings as well as gloss and matte varnishes.

'The first thing that customers noticed is that each color "shined" more than before,' Raffaele recalls. 'This can be translated into more visibility for each final package.' ACM is printing at 70/80 lines per cm and seeing increased color saturation with smooth gradient transitions to zero.

Following months of collaboration and refinement, ACM staked its claim as one of the first printers to install an LED printing system in the narrow web flexo market. Along with AMS Spectral, Omet and Flint, the company had proved that UV LED could dramatically



improve the printing process and make narrow web food-grade cured packaging a reality. 'With UV LED, we can ensure rapid and uniform drying, so we are able to reduce each production cycle timing and quickly satisfy all customers' requests,' says Raffaele.

La Franceschina adds that along with the benefits noted above, the LED lamps have a constant yield throughout the duration of the curing process. 'This guarantees homogeneity of performance over the entire range of the printable material, improving ink anchoring and eliminating delamination problems.'

The switch to UV LED speeded up drying times on film, making the entire printing process more efficient and flexible while guaranteeing rub and fade resistance and what Raffaele describes as 'enduring brightness'.

UV LED curing eliminated the primer step and any heat to the press, so ACM was able to print on a wider variety of substrates at faster speeds without worrying about film shrinkage or wait times.

'What we are calling HD LED printing is now ACM Plastics' standard,' says La Franceschina. 'We guarantee realistic images and a high degree of detail and color stability in the whole printing run.'

Using Flint's low-migration inks and the high-energy, cool-running UV LED curing technology, ACM was able to increase production speeds to 180m/min on its Omet press, significantly reducing production and delivery times compared to the company's traditional mercury UV lamps.

Delivery times dropped from four days to next day, since mercury UV curing had required 48 hours for the printed substrate rolls to cool before the lamination process. ACM can also efficiently manage runs as small as 50kg, ensuring just-in-time supply and eliminating the need for its customers to warehouse stock.

In addition to its speed and quality differentiation, switching to UV LED printing has ushered in significant environmental benefits which amplified the company's sustainability message.

UV LED curing has reduced ACM's energy costs and, in lock step, its carbon footprint by an average of 50 percent versus using mercury lamps on all its presses. AMS Spectral's liquid-cooled LED technology has also eliminated mercury and ozone in the press room, along with blower noise, preventing risks to workers' health. Additionally, it increases production up-time as lamps, which have a longer lifespan, require no warming or cooling before and after operation.

Along with 100 percent recyclable packaging and fully recyclable PET films, ACM offers a more sustainable flexible package thanks to the use of solventless adhesives.

There are other sustainability benefits. Because minimal heat is transferred to the web, the use of UV LED allows the production of thinner high-barrier films, which can facilitate the move to lighter, easier-to-handle packaging, drastically reducing overall waste and emission levels. ACM also provides its customers complete traceability, from raw materials to the end product.

Raffaele and La Franceschina check in regularly with ACM's machine operators to gauge the ongoing success of their investments, since they are on the front lines. They say they have received nothing but praise for the 'reliability and precision' of the combination of AMS Spectral UV's UV LED technology and Flint Group inks on its Omet presses.

In 2017, ACM bought a second all-LED press, an 8-color Omet VariFlex 860, to fulfill booming demand for 'food-safe' packaging

## **"In addition to its speed and quality differentiation, switching to UV LED printing has ushered in significant environmental benefits"**

and in 2018 it added a Bobst M6 670 with LED that extended its range to nine colors.

Today ACM has transitioned completely to UV LED printing, with no remaining traditional UV lamps, and leads the world among AMS Spectral UV's packaging customers for the number of LED lamp units in operation in a single facility, with 27 in production and 17 more set for installation.

### **Film range**

'We know that to be noticed, and be chosen, is one of the most important challenges facing small and big brands,' says La Franceschina. 'We respond to packaging requirements with tailor-made solutions, identifying the right laminations to better preserve the product.'

ACM's packaging options range from film, stand-up and stick packaging for coffee, tea and solubles, to bar wrap and pillow bag for confectionery and chocolate, and side-seal and gusseted pouches for snacks. Its pharmaceutical packaging materials meet stringent legal requirements and can include anti-tampering features.

For cosmetics brand customers ACM is able to provide vivid, bright colors including gold and silver and special features like windows. Its packs are resistant to water, alcohol and other aggressive agents while preserving the cosmetics inside.

'ACM's flexible packaging is customized to the exacting needs of product formulations, distribution methods, packaging and filling lines in terms of printing, formats, finishes and features,' explains La Franceschina. 'This includes anti-fog windows, easy open and resealable zip closures and UV barrier to ensure freshness and enhance brands and products' properties to suit consumer lifestyles.'

In 2020, the San Marino, Italy-based SIT Group acquired a 70 percent stake in ACM, providing a significant investment boost. Raffaele and La Franceschina continue to lead the team and serve their growing customer base, which currently encompasses 500 brands.

Recently ACM signaled the next phase of growth by investing in more UV LED printing capacity from Omet and AMS Spectral UV, comprising two new machines, an 8-color and a 9-color Omet VariFlex 670 scheduled for installation this year.

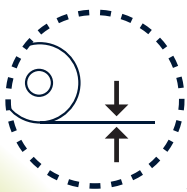


'We are ready to face the challenge of the transition from rigid to flexible packaging,' concludes La Franceschina. 'Bright colors, eco-sustainable solutions, smaller portions, guaranteed dosage, waste reduction. There is only one packaging method to respond to each of these needs: the flexible one.'



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# Sticking around

*A label's functional effectiveness is largely due to the formulation of its adhesive, writes Tom Kerchiss, MD of RK Print Coat Instruments*



Tom Kerchiss, CEO of RK Print Coat Instruments

**L**abel and packaging converters and their customers – as well as the many others that have a say or are involved in product output – have to take into consideration many factors before making a final commercial and process commitment.

Decision-making is a joined-up affair. Economic, environmental, feasibility and marketing related objectives – such as brand/product image and presentation and what is expected of the label or packaging – are discussed. Material properties and process fundamentals including durability, conformability, flexibility, chosen method of printing and – if relevant – die-cutting or the addition of tamper evident/anti-counterfeiting devices, etc, must be allowed for.

It doesn't stop there. The need for clarity, gloss, chemical resistance and moisture resistance may influence substrate and consumable (inks, adhesive) selection. Overriding everything, perhaps other than cost, of course, is what do we want from the label or the package? If it is a label for a shampoo container, will it be taken in and out of the shower? If so, is the surface that the label is to adhere to flat or curved? Is the product container going to be squeezable? If the answer is yes, the label, and most importantly its adhesive, is going to be subjected to a great deal of flexing and deformation. There is a lot to think about when it comes to designing and producing a label or a package – and that includes choosing the adhesive.

## Effectiveness

Let's consider the cosmetic or personal care label. Cosmetic labels must stick fast to the container, irrespective of whether it comes into contact with water, plasticizers, alcohol or even the greasy or oily substances contained within the package. Much of a

**“A visually creative, heat resistant label for a scented candle will be judged to be a complete failure if the label fails to stay firmly in place”**

label's effectiveness is due to its adhesive. After all a visually creative, heat resistant label for a scented candle will be judged to be a complete failure if the label fails to stay firmly in place.

If our cosmetic or personal care product is going to be used in or near an area subject to high humidity, such as the shower or bathroom, then the label might need an adhesive with high shear resistance so that there is less risk of tearing or cracking when the bottle or container is squeezed. For soft squeeze containers with a textured look and velvety feel, or which have been embossed or debossed, an aggressive and permanent adhesive might be judged necessary to obtain optimum adhesion.

The production of pressure-sensitive adhesives for labels and tapes is primarily a coating and laminating process. The objective sounds simple: deposit a uniform amount of adhesive onto a web. However, it is subject to many variables. Adhesives are available in a variety of formulations, each subject to specific viscosities and levels of solids. Different applications require various thicknesses and coating weights. The coating of adhesives for pressure-sensitive is usually accomplished either by direct or transfer coating. In the case of the former, the adhesive is coated directly onto the facestock or a backing material. With the transfer method the adhesive coating is first coated onto a release coated liner and transferred to the face/backing liner lamination.

PS-adhesive items may be coated via the pre-metered method – that is the thickness of the adhesive is pre-determined prior to applying it to a web. Post-metering is another option. In post-metering the amount of the adhesive is determined after it has been deposited on the web. The choice of coating method and coating applicator depends on the viscosity of the adhesive, its solids content, the characteristics of the substrate being coated and the coat weight parameters.

Pre-metered methods of coating include reverse roll coating and gravure. The latter can provide a smooth coating profile and as such may be regarded as being effective

for coating pressure-sensitive adhesives on clear film stocks. Gravure and reverse roll coating are among the coating technologies that can be supplied with RK Print Coat Instruments' VCML-Lab/pilot coater.

Post-metering methods of coating include meter bar. This method of coating is often used to coat solution or emulsion-based pressure-sensitive adhesives. Because of the risk of ridging, this wire-wound rod coating method is limited to low viscosity formulations that offer good flow characteristics. The meter bar method of coating is also an option with the VCML-Lab/pilot coater.

As the range of substrates and product requirements expand to meet the complex needs of today, so too does the range of adhesives and sealants, many of which can be applied in the converting and product development environments using pilot/production coating and laminating systems.

Adhesives punch above their weight. Despite the fact that adhesives are generally only used in discrete low volume amounts, many packaged food items, labels, tapes and industrial products and commercial goods simply wouldn't be able to function effectively without some form of adhesive input.

Synthetic adhesives only made their debut in the 1940s, so in many respects the development of modern adhesives is recent and very much on-going. One of the first beneficiaries of adhesive system advancement was the corrugated sector, when mineral-based sodium silicate glue was replaced with resin-modified starches. Synthetic polymers formed the cornerstone of modern adhesive development, invariably with many of those using thermo-plastic or cross-linking polymers.

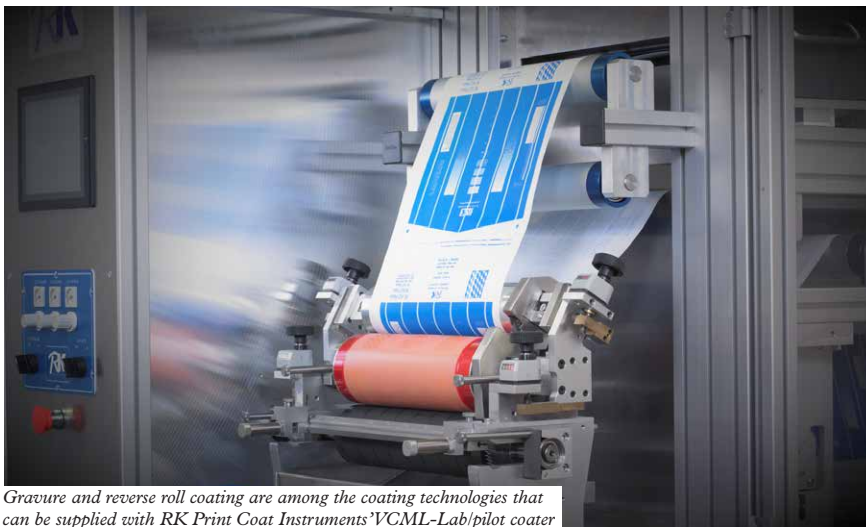
Laminate films provide flexible packaging solutions for many product sectors, including frozen foods and for many luxury items. The strength and flexibility, excellent printability and presentation and customizable nature of laminate structures makes for an attractive proposition.

In addition to holding the various plies together for the lifetime of the laminate, adhesives – along with the completed structure itself – may be engineered to



RK Print Coat Instruments' VCML-Lab/pilot coater

**“Hot melt adhesives are highly versatile and can be optimized for many different applications”**



Gravure and reverse roll coating are among the coating technologies that can be supplied with RK Print Coat Instruments' VCML-Lab/pilot coater

meet specific performance requirements. These requirements may include gas permeability and optical clarity, heat resistance, moisture and light resistance, conductivity and perhaps thermo forming capability or even flameproofing – all of which must be taken into consideration.

The laminate adhesive must be resistant to the effects of tunneling – a localized separation or delamination of the substrate that sometimes arises as a result of using substrates with differing degrees of extensibility. Also, if the adhesive is not applied correctly or the coat weight is too light or too heavy, the process of laminating will fail as it will bubble, blister or again it

might delaminate from the base material.

**Versatile**

Hot melt adhesives are highly versatile and can be optimized for many different applications including carton and case closing, chocolate/confectionary wraparound boxes, as well as for fruit and vegetable case/tray making and for labeling.

Many converters will be most familiar with the pressure-sensitive and hot melt adhesives. The former belong to a class of drying adhesives whereby most of the drying takes place before the surfaces or adherends are married together. It is pressure that optimizes contact bonding.

Pressure-sensitives are based on soft polymers or elastomers. They stay tacky for long periods, which is why they are ideal for many labeling products and for tape either from the roll or produced in die-cut shapes.

With hot melts the bond is formed by solidification of molten adhesive and then by loss of heat. They are based on resins, waxes and thermoplastics that melt in the temperature range of between 100 to 250 degrees centigrade. In recent times formulas have become increasingly complex, resulting in hot melts that provide instant adhesion on almost any substrate. Hot melt is favored for many reasons: no large drying ovens are needed, there is no use of solvents and consequently no emission control equipment is needed. Hot melts must flow, wet substrates thoroughly, then cool rapidly. The final bond strength is attained when the temperature falls to ambient levels.

Viscosity must be low at the application temperature, but not so low that excessive spreading and penetration occurs, otherwise blocking could be problematic.

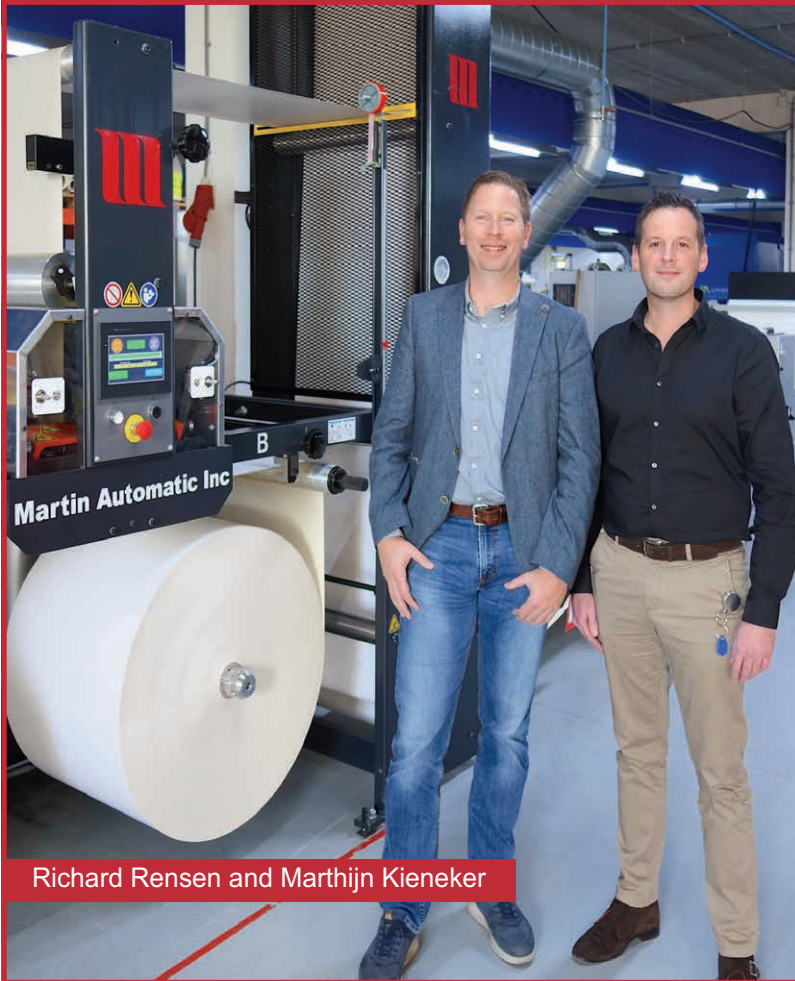
Hot melt coating can be accomplished on systems including the VCM pilot/production coater and the VCML-Lab/pilot coater via extrusion coating or gravure coating. When it comes to extrusion, the hot melt coating head is comprised of the extrusion head, heater hose and heated tank with pump. Adjustments can be made to the temperature of the system and the pump speed in order that coat weights down to as low as 10gsm can be obtained. Adhesives with a viscosity of below 500 centipoises and with temperatures of up to 150 deg C can be coated on the VCM or VCML-Lab/pilot coater with gravure cylinders using a reverse angle doctor blade setting.

While to the uninitiated coating and laminating may at first glance seem straightforward, that is far from the case. Trialing and developing adhesive and other material solutions takes up time, especially when using a production coating machine. One reason is for this is that a production machine lacks the flexibility and does not allow the degree of experimentation that a pilot, print/coat and laminating system – such as the VCML-Lab/pilot coater – allows for. In addition to being able to print, coat and wet or dry bond laminate on a wide range of flexible substrates, the system also enables users to undertake small-scale production. Hot air, infrared and UV curing is available while print and coating options include screen, slot die, reverse roll, gravure, gravure offset, flexography, etc, are selectable.



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# Mounting adoption

*Increasing adoption of JM Heaford's FTS moulder by converters in Latin America is indicative of wider technological trends. James Quirk reports*

In 2014, this magazine reported on the installation of UK-based manufacturer JM Heaford's FTS plate moulder by two leading label converters in Argentina. They represented two of the first three installations of the system in Latin America, which had been launched the year before and was selling strongly in Europe and the US.

'The FTS allows us to achieve plate-mounting with precision,' Carlos Totxo, pre-press technician at Buenos Aires-based converter Achernar, said at the time. 'It also allows the plates to be positioned correctly with respect to the cylinders, which means that the pre-registration system can be used correctly and that the amount of material wasted is reduced.'

'The amount of short-run work we produce means that the time lost during set-up accumulates over the course of a month. This technology has provided us with an effective tool to minimize this lost time and, fundamentally, to reduce our material waste.'

JM Heaford had long had a strong presence in the region, selling plate-mounting equipment in Latin America since its inception in 1983 and, at the time of the article, estimating that more than 10 percent of its 5,000-plus global installations had taken place at companies in that part of the world. It was testament to the quality of the manufacturer's equipment, and to the experience of its Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin American sales manager, Nick Vindel.

But these early FTS installations were still regarded as something of a coup. The FTS was more expensive than alternative plate-mounting systems, and Latin America was on the whole a price-sensitive market. Top tier converters might be keen, but deeper market penetration would be a challenge.

But greater recognition of the potential return on investment in high quality equipment, coupled with a desire for increased automation, has seen the FTS adopted by both smaller converters and multinational printing groups alike. Argentine converters have continued to invest in the system, while JM Heaford has also sold it to companies in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Puerto Rico. Perhaps most impressively, it has installed ten machines in Brazil – traditionally a difficult market for European narrow web equipment due to punitive import taxes and cheaper local alternatives – in the last three years.

## Integral

'Converters in Brazil are looking at higher quality equipment,' confirms Nick Vindel. 'Our moulder is more expensive, and when you add import duties it can increase the cost by a further 60 percent. So the purchasing decision takes on a different aspect, particularly on a product which people didn't used to see as important. But business owners are beginning to realize that automated mounting equipment is worth the investment. You can have the best printing technology in the world, but if the mounting is not working properly, then it's a problem.'

'The initial cost might be high, but return on investment is fast. If you don't mount properly, what comes out of the press is not of commercial value. Remounting is also very expensive when you factor in press downtime, start-up waste and the knock on effect to production schedules. Increasingly plate mounting is seen as a critical part of the pre-press process as companies focus on job changeover times and the need to get it right first time, every time.'



*Ecuador-based Expoplast has installed the wider 900mm version of the FTS*

**“If you don't mount properly, what comes out of the press is not of commercial value. Increasingly it is seen as an integral part of the pre-press process”**



*The FTS plate moulder from JM Heaford*

Among the adopters in Brazil is Flexo Print, whose five facilities in Brazil and site in Paraguay all use the FTS plate mounter, as well as Albea, Grafimax, Index Label and Soft Color.

The FTS is also installed in Nilpeter's demo center in São Paulo and used for mounting plates during customer trials. 'We have used several different plate mounters in the past, from both European and Brazilian suppliers, and none is as easy to operate as the FTS,' reports Rubens Wilmers, managing director of Nilpeter Brazil. 'Our customers are very interested in the technology. We can demonstrate how fast and easy it is to mount a set of plates, as well as the mounting accuracy in terms of pre-register and register when running a job on our press.

'As you don't touch the cameras, you don't move them out of position. This is one of the industry's biggest problems – to move the cameras in a standard plate mounter, you have to move them manually to the position required. With the FTS, you can slide the camera without touching it, avoiding potential misalignment and the problems that result from that. The FTS is easy to operate and mounts the plates extremely quickly and accurately.'

As Vindel points out: 'When the major press manufacturers are endorsing your product, there's a reason for it.' As well as Nilpeter, in its Brazil and Denmark operations, both Gallus and MPS run FTS plate mounters at their demo centers. Edale and A B Graphic have also installed the systems in the past. 'We get a lot of indirect sales through the press manufacturers,' says Vindel.

The FTS mounter features a user-friendly design and laser guides to help position and mount the plate quickly and accurately. It uses high-magnification cameras situated below a cushioned table to line up the register marks through a viewing slot on the table. Once the plate is positioned on the table and alignment verified, the action of sliding the table back and forth takes over the mounting process, this reduces the risk of plate damage, eliminates RSI from manual rolling and prevents human error.

'The increase in extended gamut printing in narrow web has also had an impact: it necessitates better registration, and therefore higher quality plate-mounting.'

JM Heaford's success in Latin America has been replicated globally – the company claims it is the best-selling mounter in the world. It has been adopted by many of the major converting groups, including All4Labels, CCL, Coveris, Multi-Color Corporation and Sato Group. Two leading label converters have installed more than 25 FTS plate mounters each across different sites worldwide.

### Wider systems

Further reflective of another key industry trend, JM Heaford launched a wider 900mm version of its FTS mounter five years ago, moving it into the mid-web market. 'There is lots of overlap between the traditional narrow web converters and wider web printers. The lines are blurring – wider web converters are moving into narrow web; narrow web converters are looking to go wider,' says Vindel. 'In mid web, you are mounting two plates rather than one. So you need motorized cameras which automatically go to the mounting position. This allows you to put all coordinates into the mounter, so repeat jobs can easily be recalled. The mounter's database can save more than 100,000 jobs, so the quicker set up can save a lot of time. To speed up the job set-up process even further and eliminate operator error, jobs can be entered via a barcode scanner using Heaford's integrated software.

'This wider system gave us the platform to supply customers using machines from press manufacturers operating in this market such as Comexi, Uteco and Windmüller & Hölscher. The mid web market is increasingly moving towards shorter print runs. This means more job changeovers and therefore more plate mounts.'

Last year, the company went a step further, launching a 1,500mm width version to cover most wide web presses. The development 'was very much customer-led', reports Vindel.

**"There is lots of overlap between the traditional narrow web converters and wider web printers. The lines are blurring – wider web converters are moving into narrow web; narrow web converters are looking to go wider"**



*José Noel Gomez, owner and founder of Chemisolutions*

### JM Heaford appoints agent in Colombia

The latest addition to JM Heaford's network of agents in Latin America is Chemisolutions, headquartered in Bogota, Colombia.

Nick Vindel, Latin American sales manager at JM Heaford, said: 'Colombia is a large and diverse market, spread over a considerable territory. It calls for an agent with a great track record of technical competence and a strong sales network across all the major centers. We feel that Chemisolutions is the right company to boost market penetration while continuing to service the needs of existing customers and drive sales forward in this important market.'

Chemisolutions was established in 2010. It represents many leading brands in the flexo market, including Uteco, Harper, IST, Vetaphone and DuPont.

'JM Heaford is not simply the global leader in mounting and proofing solutions, but more specifically to this region, the Heaford brand has maintained its reputation here in Colombia as a byword for quality and consistency over decades,' commented Jose Noel Gomez, owner and founder of Chemisolutions. 'The company is a valued provider of innovative and competitive solutions to the Colombian flexographic sector, which itself is widely recognized for high quality, both at a regional level and beyond, counting among its members many printers who have achieved considerable success on the world stage.'

'Jose has been active in the market for more than 28 years and is well known and respected by all, not only among the converters who already have Heaford equipment, but also in the flexible packaging and label markets where we aim to grow our sales,' added Vindel.



Go to [www.jmheaford.co.uk](http://www.jmheaford.co.uk) for more information

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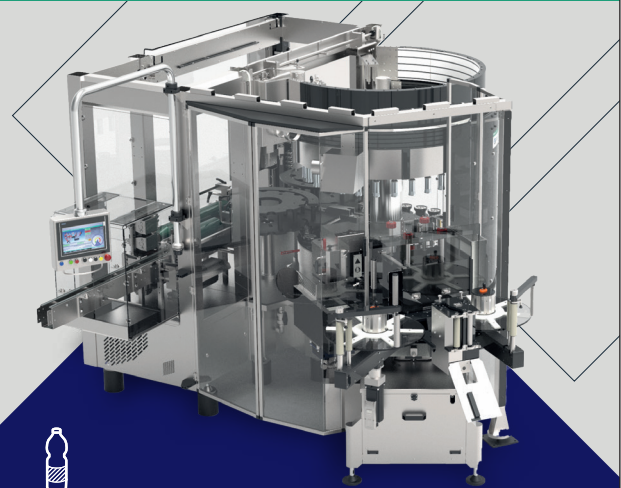
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# First Mark Andy Digital One in Bangladesh

Shore to Shore Uniglory installs digital press to cater to fashion and FMCG industries. Aakriti Agarwal reports



L-R: Dr Lloyd Fernando, director, Shore to Shore Uniglory Bangladesh; Gourav Roy, managing director, FIG; Tom Cavalco, executive VP International Business, Mark Andy; Beaumo Fernando, chairman, Shore to Shore; M Suresh, technical sales manager, FIG

**F**lexo Image Graphics (FIG), representative for Mark Andy presses in the Indian sub-continent, has installed Bangladesh's first Mark Andy Digital One label press at Shore to Shore Uniglory Packaging Industries.

On the investment, Dr Lloyd Fernando, director at Shore to Shore Uniglory Bangladesh, says: 'In the age of digital disruption, we have evolved our sustainable product and services with cloud-based responsive manufacturing systems. It is more productive, efficient, agile and better at meeting customer needs. The Mark Andy Digital One press with 1200 DPI electrophostatic print engine, in-line converting and finishing enabled us to develop an end-to-end curated creative rapid prototyping. The speed of product customization enables us to service e-commerce platforms.

'Further, the Mark Andy Digital One offers printing on a wide range of substrates, enabling us to diversify our product offering to apparel, footwear and FMCG industries. The press enables us to add value to a variety of products including variable data graphic tags and swing tickets, roll-fed labels and wrap bands, fabric friendly stickers, packaging and innovative Eco RFID products at high-speed and cost-efficiently.'

Gourav Roy, managing director at FIG, says: 'I am happy that the company is delighted with the investment. We met the chairman of Shore to Shore in Sri Lanka in 2019 and finalized the press. Shore to Shore Uniglory is a new offshoot of a well-established global firm, so the company wanted to offer something different and unique to its customers. Since

**"Many flexible packaging companies in Bangladesh are evaluating whether to diversify into label printing"**

the installation of the press, they have been doing certain things that they were not producing earlier.'

The installation was planned for 2020 but FIG and Mark Andy could not install the press last year due to the ongoing pandemic. 'The press reached Bangladesh in 2020, just as the lockdown was announced, so our team had to head back to India and machine could not be installed last year,' says Roy. 'As soon as the travel restrictions lifted, a trained technician from our office flew to Bangladesh and completed the installation. Mark Andy's UK team supported us with the installation via video conferencing. To further assist the customer, we sourced substrates, varnishes and other materials locally in India and sent them as a start-up kit along with the standard start-up kit that is sent with the press.'

## Market trends in Bangladesh

The market is now opening up and companies have returned to business as normal. 'The label industry in Bangladesh, in my opinion, is doing well and involves huge quantities of export in the garment industry,' says Roy. 'Having said that,

## Shore to Shore Uniglory Bangladesh

The company has plants in 13 countries including India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Shore to Shore offers apparel labeling, branding, package printing, embellishments, RFID labels, textile transfer products and more to fashion retailers and apparel manufacturers globally.

Shore to Shore, which has operated in Chittagong, Bangladesh, since 2005, expanded its production facility in November 2020 with a new production unit and an offshoot of the parent company, under the name Shore to Shore Uniglory. Dr Fernando explains: 'The recent set-up at the state-of-the-art Vertical Accessories Park is a pioneering initiative offering unparalleled solutions to the RMG (retail marketing group) export industry of Bangladesh.'

the size of the label industry itself is small compared to the Indian market. Nevertheless, the country is at the cusp of growth with many flexible packaging companies seriously evaluating whether to diversify into label printing.'

Of the growing fashion retail industry in Bangladesh, Dr Fernando says: 'The fashion industry has shifted to a new reality. In the last year, global brands and vendors have partnered with us for strategic initiatives in the local market. We are able to print effectively on recycled and sustainable materials.

'As consumers become more engaged with sustainability issues, the key in the industry will be circularity, material selection and minimum order quantity. The latest installation is in line with this development, and enables cost competitiveness, sustainability, speed, digitization and customization at Shore to Shore Uniglory.'



For more from the Indian sub-continent, visit [www.labelsandlabeling.com/regions/south-asia](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/regions/south-asia)

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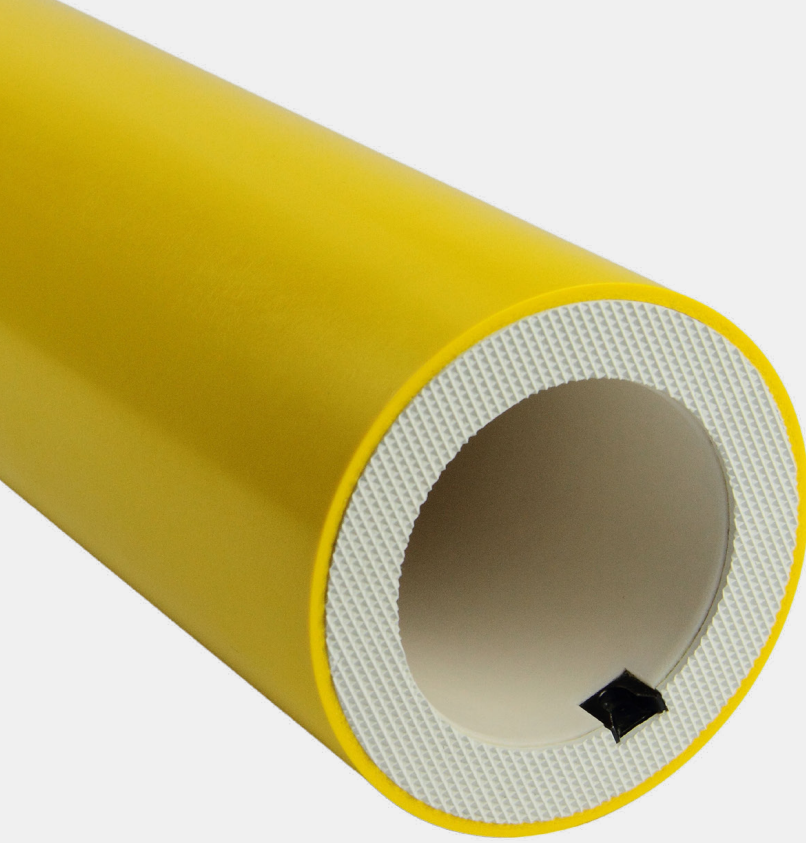
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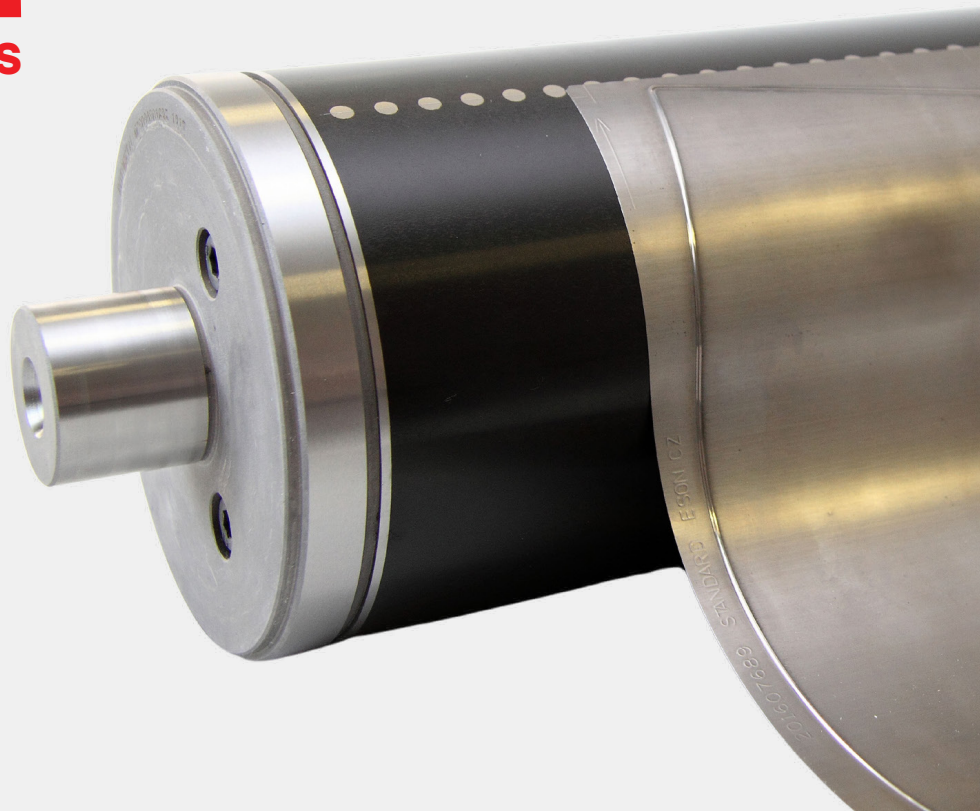
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# HP appoints Indigo distributor for UAE

*The peace treaty between Israel and UAE has prompted HP to appoint Dynagraph as its UAE distributor for Indigo products. Akanksha Meena reports*

**H**P Industrial Printing has appointed Dynagraph as its distributor for its Indigo and PageWide presses in the Middle East. In a conversation with Adir Ariel, regional business manager for Indigo in HP CEMA (Central Europe, Middle East, Africa), and Ronnie Louw, product manager of HP Indigo at Dynagraph, they explain the advantages of the new deal for customers in the region.

Dynagraph, a printing equipment supplier for more than 70 years, was already distributing HP latex and 3D printers in the region.

'Dynagraph has been with HP for latex and 3D printing for sign and graphics,' Louw says. 'Because of our track record of serving the print industry for 70 years, we like to think that it was an inevitable conclusion for Indigo to sign up with Dynagraph. We have the market exposure and relationships which is very important in the Middle East.'

Under the new agreement, Dynagraph will offer the complete Indigo portfolio as well as service, training and installations.

Ariel explains: 'The most important thing for us was finding the right partner in UAE who will help us to open the door for our future customers and to deliver our message and innovation for both HP Indigo and our PageWide presses. We are not just selling our products, consumables and service but also our know-how. Together with Dynagraph, we have a very impressive know-how accumulation throughout the years.'

'Customers are moving from offset and flexo to digital. They know what they want but don't know how – and how is the most important part. We are partners and not just suppliers. That is why HP is so successful around the world.'

Ariel says that when he visited UAE in a personal capacity, he was touched by the vibrancy of the people and the economy.

'I always wanted to be able to work with them,' he says. It's an opportunity for us and the market because now the market has the larger choice. It will bring the possibility to adopt newer technology and offer new products to end-users. That's the nice things about it, the market is open to both sides and it's a good thing that people



*Adir Ariel, regional business manager for Indigo in HP MEA*

**“It’s an opportunity for us and the market because now the market has the larger choice. It will bring the possibility to adopt newer technology and offer new products to end-users”**



*Dynagraph's new facility in Dubai*

can come together and work together.'

He is positive that HP, being a leader in digital printing in most parts of the world, will soon be a leader in the region too.

Louw explains that apart from equipment training and consulting, the company will share knowledge of trends, technology and applications with its customers. The supplier will also offer courses and seminars for customers who want to take it a step further and look at ROI.

Dynagraph recently invested in a new 5,500sqm facility in Dubai. Currently, it has two offices in Dubai, and will consolidate everything in its new headquarters. The new facility will showcase several HP products including latex and 3D. The key featuring products will be the HP Indigo range.

Dynagraph will also provide training and testing in the new facility. Print service providers can come to the facility and test the machine and train on it.

### Digital printing growth

The label and packaging industry around the world was among the least affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

'Covid shook up the entire print industry like every other industry. We saw a reduction but not in that segment. The label and packaging segment is growing, both globally and in the area I am responsible for,' Ariel says.

He adds that HP Indigo labels and packaging customers showed double-digit growth. 'We also saw increasing demand for digital printing,' he adds. 'The number of label print jobs as well as commercial jobs is growing while the length is shrinking. As print volume drops, digital becomes more economical than flexo and offset.'

Louw explains that although the Middle East, specifically UAE, has not typically been the first to adopt new technology, the pandemic has been a driving force behind increasing demand for digital printing.

'The drive is coming not just from the print converter but also brand owners. They want to print and deliver, and it makes it much easier from the financial perspective as well.'

Agreeing with Louw, Ariel says that customers now demand faster turnaround time and less inventory. He sees a greater call for on-demand printing.

He adds that there is a rise in craft labels in the food, cosmetics and beverage industry. 'Packaging becomes a part of the product and gives it shelf appeal. It is a part of the product experience.'

Other trends that Ariel highlights are sustainability and brand protection.

'Online shopping is increasing and with that the issue of counterfeiting is also increasing. This costs tens of millions of dollars to the world economy. Brands and PSPs are looking to prove their authenticity.' Personalization is another up-and-coming trend.

Louw adds that automation is one of the biggest technology trends. 'Businesses are moving away from dependency on labor. The Middle East tends to depend on foreign labor. And now with Covid and visa restrictions, businesses want to move away from dependency on labor. Automation is the key not just in print but in the entire supply chain – order taking, planning, printing, quality control, delivery and predictive maintenance.'

### Diversification

According to Louw, customers in the region didn't diversify into new market segments. Instead, they are looking at current markets from a new perspective.

'For example, in pharmaceuticals, they now can add Covid security details on packaging and print RFID tags. So, digital brings another facet to the existing industry. They are looking at current products and finding ways to diversify within them.'



Ronnie Louw, product manager of HP Indigo at Dynagraph

**“The Middle East tends to depend on foreign labor. And now with Covid and visa restrictions, businesses want to move away from dependency on labor. Automation is the key not just in print but in the entire supply chain”**

Diversifying in new market segments such as labels and packaging is an opportunity for commercial print businesses.

'But how to compete with guys who are already doing that? You print and deliver fast. There is also the benefit of offering additional colors. With automation, you can move away from dependency on specialized color mixing and maintaining stocks. You can print with Indigo's orange violet and green colors and add embellishments,' Louw explains. 'With digital printing, converters can print high quality with less floor space and fewer employees.'

Louw mentions that commercial, newspaper and cut sheet printers have the option to diversify into labels and digital printing. But there are only a handful of digital printing options available in the region.

'The quality available in digital printing in the region was not comparative to flexo and offset. Indigo's tech is based on offset technology. You can print one or thousands of labels on it and then move it to offset and get the same quality,' he says.

Concluding the conversation, Ariel addresses potential customers in the region and says, 'We will together contribute to the prosperity and success of the region. We will be a part of it and at the same time we will also get the benefit of having this reach. I think we are going to do great things together.'



For more from Akanksha Meena on the Middle Eastern label market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena)



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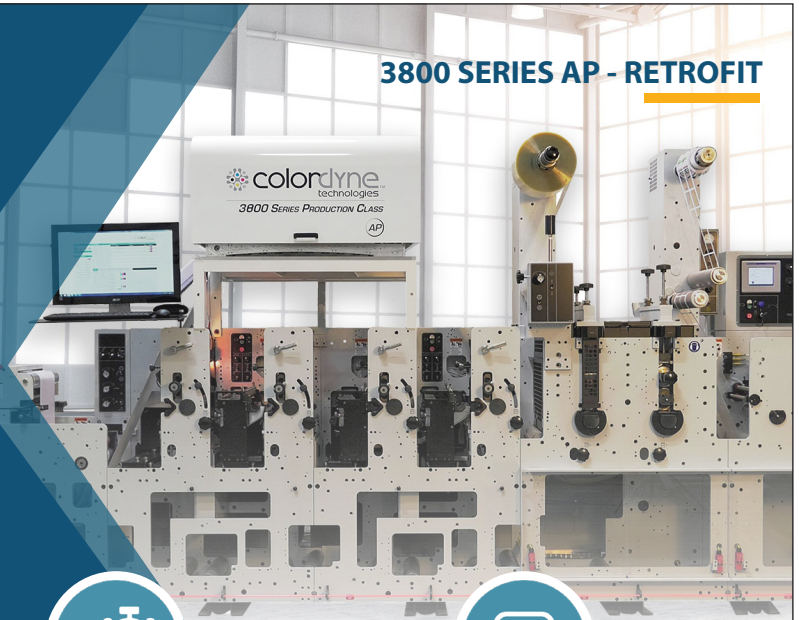
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# Sigma Middle East Labels expands production

With its new investments, Sigma plans to increase production by 25 percent, save costs and enter new markets. Akanksha Meena reports



The Sigma Middle East Labels team

The label industry in the Middle East was only partially affected by the pandemic. While some converters reported losses, others found growth opportunities. One such label converter, Ajman, UAE-based Sigma Middle East Labels Industries, grew by 30 percent in 2020 and has recently expanded its production capacity by 25 percent and invested in new premises.

Jagannath Wagle, MD of Sigma Middle East Labels Industries, started the company in 2010 with just two employees while working full time at his day job. The company began as a liner business and with the help of his brothers and a small bank loan, Wagle purchased a second-hand Mark Andy 830 3-color flexo press and moved into self-adhesive label production.

As his business grew, Wagle quit his other role in 2011 to focus completely on his start-up. 'I was completely independent and free to do whatever I wanted to do,' he says. But soon after, Wagle's press operator met with an accident and Wagle had to run the machine and handle the business on his own for a number of months.

'It was very tough,' he recalls. 'I had a lot of business at the time and had to manage every aspect of it myself, including production, sales, delivery and purchasing.'

Within the next year, he managed to add more employees and a slitting machine to his production line and started printing small 2-3 color labels. That is when he realized the potential in the printing industry.

In 2013, Wagle felt the need for another

flexo press. 'I was searching for an affordable machine and bought it from Multitec in India. It was my first 8-color machine, which was a boost to my business. With support from a financial institution and paying a high rate of interest, I somehow entered the product label market. That's when my journey began to transform.'

#### Rapid investment

Wagle saw a sudden growth spurt in his business and within two years he purchased a Gidue MX 370 – his first European machine. Continuing the streak of new investments, he invested in another Gidue in 2017. By that time, Sigma's staff had grown to 30 employees.

'We even have in-house label designers. A label company doesn't need many designers, but we have four of them. We are providing complete concept design to final product printing to our customers. I am proud to say that we have an excellent design team.'

However, Wagle says that the rapid investment program took its toll and he faced financial troubles. 'I faced difficulties, but I had good relations and a good reputation in the industry. My suppliers helped me during my bad phase as we developed good faith. From 2019 onwards, we have been doing very well and achieving our targets with consistent growth.'

'We also won "Best in Class Print Awards 2019" by Prime 2019 Awards for Africa and the Middle East.'

To keep up with increasing demand, the converter has invested heavily in its

**"I am changing 20-22 jobs a day in flexo. The quantities are in the range of 10,000-20,000. There are few high-volume jobs left. That's why I invested in the Bobst M5 press"**

production lines. In January 2021, Wagle purchased a Bobst M5 430mm full servo press, a Konica Minolta Accurio Label 230 digital press and a Brotech CDF330 slitter rewinder with one color flexo printing, lamination and cold foil, and semi-rotary and full rotary die-cutting.

He also invested in a Chinese machine for liners to service his old customer who supported Sigma during its initial days.

Another recent addition has been a Grafotronic SR3 die-cutting machine with a turret rewinding system.

The company also moved into a new premises. From a humble 1,100 square feet in the beginning, the establishment now stands strong at 12,000 square feet. It supplies its products to Oman, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Africa and Pakistan.

With the new investment and expansion, Wagle expects the business to grow: 'My three machines are running for 24 hours. I feel that I can increase my turnover by 25 percent more.'

#### Short-run demand

Wagle says the Middle Eastern label market is evolving rapidly and moving towards short runs. 'There are not many long-run jobs in the region. Even big brands want short runs.'

Explaining the reason behind it, he says that the local market is small. If a new customer enters the market, the job gets divided among the print suppliers in the region.

'Apart from the high-end customers such as MNC brands, the volumes are shrinking



Bobst M5 430mm full servo press



Brotech CDF330 slitter rewinder

## “My team has grown with me and now they are like my family”

in the market. That’s the reason why I bought a Konica Minolta digital press. Even my high-volume customers sometimes ask for short runs and I cannot refuse them. Earlier, I had to shell out the plate-making charges from my pocket. The customer is not going to pay for the plates for short runs. At the time, those short-run jobs were a loss for me. Now I can shift those jobs to my digital press and earn something.’

Sigma also invested in Asahi Water Washable AWP2530 system and is the first to do so in the region. Asahi AWP will give the converter and its customers the advantage of processing a plate in 40 minutes and encourage others in the industry to adopt environment friendly practices by removing chemicals from the process.

In addition, Sigma bought Esko Automated Pre-press and CDI Spark 2530 for digital flexo platemaking.

Wagle explains that one of the bottlenecks in platemaking was plate-processing time due to the use of solvents. He realized that with in-house platemaking capability, it could be automated, faster and of higher quality.

With the new Esko platemaking machine, Wagle intends to save on platemaking costs as well. ‘I am changing 20-22 jobs a day in flexo. The quantities are in the range of 10,000-20,000. There are few high-volume jobs left. That’s why I invested in the Bobst M5 press. It is a fully automatic machine. Once you put in the plate cylinder, it registers automatically, and you don’t waste time in that. Material wastage is also very much less.’

Sigma plans to target shrink sleeve and BOPP film market with the new M5 machine. The company also invested in Esko workflow software for high accuracy.

Commenting on his new investments,

he says that his technical team is happy with the new machines. In addition, the automation features in the new machines have eliminated the chances of manual errors that used to occur earlier.

Wagle thinks that digital is the upcoming technology but is not immediately suitable for the MENA region. ‘First reason is the cost,’ he says. ‘The production cost in digital is less but the investment is huge. Not to mention, the maintenance cost is also very high. That’s why I did not go for inkjet. I was planning to do it for my short runs but considering the costs, I did not think it was smart to invest in an expensive machine. Recovering the cost of investment would have been difficult.’

Sigma is closely monitoring digital developments and is considering it for its next investment in the coming years.

### FMCG – a growing label market

Wagle says that the cosmetics and food industry are always good market segments for a label converter.

‘The packaging industry, in general, has grown in 2020. The best example I can give you is hand sanitizer. Millions of sanitizer labels were being printed in the Middle East. We supply to leading brands in FMCG, personal and home care. Some big brands in the Middle East get 100 percent of their labels from Sigma. We are very strong in food and cosmetics.’

Speaking about the state of the label market in the region, Wagle says that the overall market is doing well but it varies from company to company. ‘There are companies that are going bankrupt. It depends on how you manage your business. It’s profits and not sales that determine the company’s growth. We are now concentrating on productivity with the new Bobst M5. So, that the customer doesn’t have to look at another supplier for their label requirements.’

Wagle prides himself on how far Sigma has come and says that despite being a small company, he is competing with big converters in the region. ‘When you develop such good relations and faith with your customers and give them good support, service and prices, they will not look for another option and that is the key to success. Our team is very strong. I am proud to say I developed my team from the ground up.

‘My team has grown with me and now they are like my family. I take care of them and they take care of Sigma.’



For more from Akanksha Meena on the Middle East market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/akanksha-meena)

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# Jingangliu deepens digital transformation

Looking for an entry-level digital press for industrial labels, Chinese converter Jingangliu Paper invested in a Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230 and a laser die-cutter. Yolanda Wang reports

**E**stablished in 2013, Foshan Jingangliu Paper is mainly engaged in the printing and production of multi-color folding cartons, self-adhesive labels and user guides or product specification sheets. Around 60 percent of its labels are used by household appliances and 40 percent in the home care sector. Today the company owns a factory with a working area of 5,000sqm and more than 30 employees. In 2020, annual output hit 120m RMB (18.5m USD).

Jingangliu Paper purchased a full range of digital printing equipment from Konica Minolta in September 2020, which included an AccurioLabel 230 digital label press, a MK360R laser cutting machine, an AccurioPress C3070 sheet-fed color printer and an AccurioPress 6120 mono printer.

As a relatively small company, what were the key considerations for Jingangliu Paper in transforming itself from a conventional print shop into a digital printer, with both digital label press and post-press machinery?

## Digital transformation

In recent years, digitization has become one of the hot topics in China's label industry, particularly due to stricter environment protection policies and the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, which has accelerated the digital transformation of the whole label industry.

But Jingangliu Paper's investment in a digital label press was not merely following these trends.

General manager Jin Waisheng explains: 'For a company of our size, the investment in a digital press is a serious decision that requires caution. We must make sure those capabilities fit current market demands, existing customers' requirements and order structures, but also the overall capital investment and what time and cost efficiencies we can expect.'

'Take household appliance labels for example. Brands are increasingly turning to multiple SKUs and short-run orders following the growth of personalization or customization demands from the younger generation of consumers. As for the suppliers of electrical equipment, the faster replacement and upgrading of products compels them to control more precisely and lower their inventories, or preferably try



Jin Waisheng, general manager of Jingangliu

**“With this digital press and finishing unit, we can fulfill an order completely within one working day”**

to realize zero inventory.

'As for label converters, the numbers of orders or individual SKUs just keeps on increasing, yet the overall quantity continues to fall, resulting in a high cost for a conventional label press. Under such circumstance, we have to pay close attention to the digital label press.'

From first casting an eye on a digital press in 2017 to the final investment in 2020, Jingangliu Paper spent more than three years making its final decision.

'It was mainly because our major label products – such as labels for external air-conditioner units – have special requirements for resistance to UV light and moisture. So we spent a lot of time testing the printing performance of the digital presses on the market under these different conditions.'

The cost performance of the machinery is another key factor to consider. 'Considering our present order structure, a high-end digital press will need a lot of investment, which comes with high risks for Jingangliu Paper. What we actually needed was a cost-effective entry-level digital press.'

Now Jingangliu Paper can adjust production with AccurioLabel 230 according to the quantity and lead-time of its purchase orders, while using the MK360R digital die-cutting machine for post-press finishing.

'With this digital press and finishing

unit, we can fulfill an order completely within one working day, which significantly shortens our lead-time and helps us get closer to our customers. Digital production also simplified our personnel structure; now we have saved eight employees and lowered our labor cost to a large degree,' notes Jin Waisheng.

The first step in its digital transformation was for Jingangliu Paper to purchase the AccurioLabel 230 digital label press. But hardware is only half the story. 'The digitization of any company will consist of two parts: hardware and software,' says Jin Waisheng. 'The core of our company's future development lies in using digitization more widely: to simplify personnel structures, optimize our company's management; then to strengthen the efficiency and reduce cost of the whole company in all its aspects.'

After the rough experience of 2020, Jingangliu Paper has full confidence in 2021. 'Complying with the trends towards personalization and new market demands, we believe our digital transformation will allow us to go forward in the label market. We hope to double the value of our output in the coming new year.'

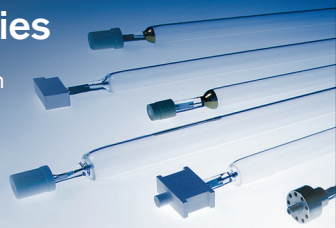


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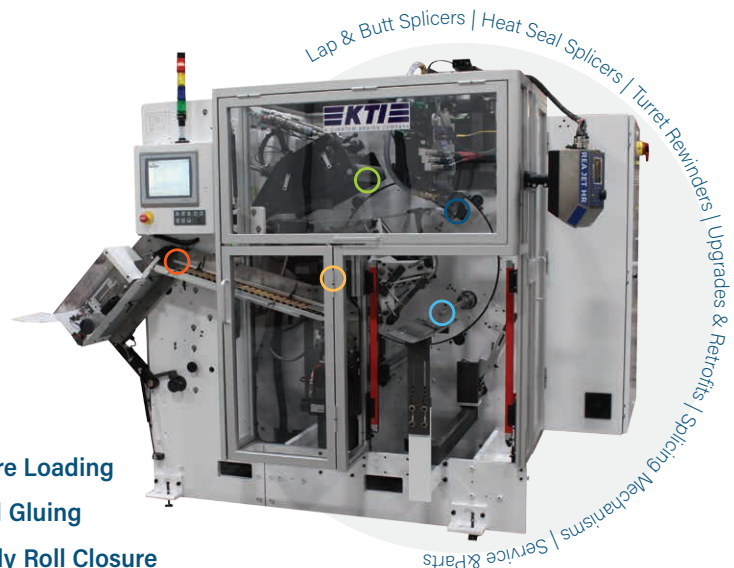
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# Fuya focuses on diversification

*Xiamen Fuya's focus on diversification has led it to invest in machinery from Weigang, HP Indigo and Kurz. Yolanda Wang reports*

**F**ounded in 1999, Xiamen Fuya is a self-adhesive label converter equipped with a wide range of printing processes including letterpress, offset, flexo and digital. Recently the company introduced an ERP management system to help achieve steady growth through a strategy of diversification. Xiamen Fuya is located in the Special Economic Zone of the coastal city of Xiamen in Fujian Province. Ms Ye Liling, founder and general manager of Xiamen Fuya, started out in the business forms printing industry in 1994. In 1999, she started working with her husband Fu Guohua to establish Xiamen Fuya with a focus on self-adhesive label printing.

'At the beginning of our business, there were less than ten employees including me and my husband,' recalls Ye Liling. Pushing through the initial difficulties, the wife and husband team were able to take advantage of the rapid growth of the whole label and packaging industry as China went through an industrial transformation. The company has now achieved ISO9001:2015 quality management certification, ISO14001:2015 environmental management certification and UL certification.

The workshop built in 2001 and located at Guankou Town, Jimei District, Xiamen, was renovated in 2016. It has in-house platemaking and separate areas for conventional and digital printing, along with a post-press processing workshop. The company has a production area of 4,000sqm and more than 70 employees and in 2020 total annual output reached 40 million Yuan (6m USD).

'From the beginning, Xiamen Fuya has adhered to its original aspiration of focusing on self-adhesive printing,' says Ye Liling. 'I love the self-adhesive industry, and I am full of interest in new materials, technology and equipment. Each time I go to a professional trade show, I want to invest in new equipment and new materials!'

## Diversified development

Fu Guohua, general manager of Xiamen Fuya, says that diversification is a key strategic focus for the company, and its entire approach to specifying equipment, product development and management structure is designed with this end in mind. Xiamen Fuya's printing equipment includes a Qiangrun full rotary press, Jenki 8+1 full rotary press, Zonten 4-7 color intermittent offset rotary press, Konica Minolta 1060 single-sheet digital printing press, as well as Ribon and Vorey die-cutter, AVT and Luster inspection systems and Rhyguan post-press processing equipment. At the end of December 2019, Xiamen Fuya invested in an HP Indigo 6900 digital press, and in March 2020 installed a Weigang 10-color unit-type flexo press. More recently, it invested in a Kurz digital hot stamping machine – a first in the Chinese market. 'Our production equipment covers a variety of technologies including letterpress, offset, flexo and digital, which allows us to fulfil more than 90 percent of label printing orders on the market,' says Fu Guohua.

Labels produced by Xiamen Fuya are used in the toiletries and cosmetics, pharma, health care, food and electronics industries, with household chemicals accounting for more than half of the business. 'Xiamen Fuya has won wide recognition from the market by virtue of high-quality products and professional service,' says Fu Guohua. 'Now we have a steady group of loyal customers.'

Looking to manage production, quality control and personnel more efficiently, Xiamen Fuya has invested in an ERP workflow management system from YLYprint, which has not only improved business management and operational efficiency, but also reduced operating costs. Full-time personnel are dedicated to quality control using an in-house developed QC system which starts with intensive



*Fu Guohua, general manager of Fuya*

**"Each time I go to a trade show, I want to invest in new equipment and new materials"**

personnel assessment and training followed by an incentive system which rewards defect-free production. The effect of this is to make each individual responsible for quality control.

'We are guided by the need to optimize production capacity, reduce wastage of labor and materials and improve overall competitiveness, so as to provide the best quality products and services for our customers,' says Fu Guohua.

The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 saw Fuya receiving a lot of label orders for hand sanitizers and disinfectants, and the company's total business volume increased by 30-40 percent.

'We understand that these increases are temporary,' says Fu Guohua. 'With the launch of the new coronavirus vaccines, the global pandemic will be gradually brought under control, and the label demands driven by Covid-19 will also gradually decrease. Label converters need to keep a sense of rational judgment and exploring how market and customers' needs are shifting so as to achieve a steady growth.'

Increasing raw material prices and pressures for environmental protection have led the couple to consider the company's future development. On the one hand, the driver is always to optimize the company's production capacity, making best use of its blend of print technologies. The Weigang press is mainly used for mass production orders; the HP Indigo 6900 is mainly for short-run, personalized, variable data labels; the Kurz digital hot stamping machine provides more possibilities for personalized decoration.

On the other hand, the goal is to continuously optimize the overall business model and exploit new business opportunities. At present, Xiamen Fuya is mainly focused on business within Fujian Province and some export label orders via agents. In 2014, Xiamen Fuya opened its flagship store on the Alibaba website, allowing it to accept small-run orders directly from online customers.

The future will be to attract more new customers by leveraging the new digital and in-line flexo press assets. 'In the future, we will also consider moving into in-mold labels and flexible packaging,' says Fu Guohua.



*For more from Yolanda Wang on the Chinese market, go to [www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/yolanda-wang](http://www.labelsandlabeling.com/contributors/yolanda-wang)*

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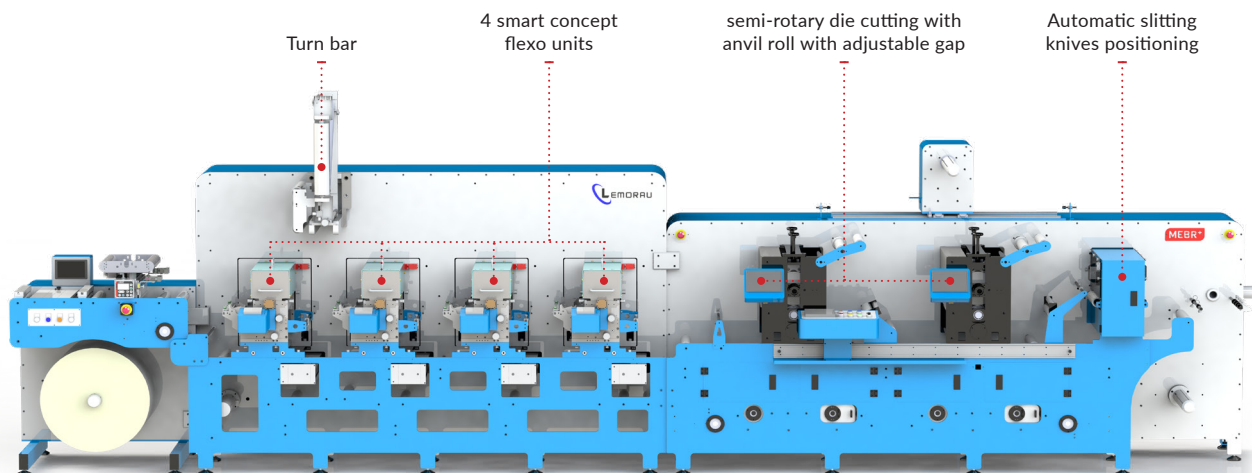
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# Inventory control

*In an extract from the Label Academy book 'Management information systems and workflow automation', Mike Fairley looks at how to manage your inventory of stock and finished products*

**M**ost label and packaging converters carry a fair degree of stock from paper and film reels, to sheet materials, inks and varnishes, cutting, embossing and foiling dies, spare parts, hot and cold foils, cartons, tapes and staples, and other packaging materials, as well as holding stocks of finished products or even pre-printed stock products.

All these stocks of production items or finished goods need to be managed as efficiently as possible, and this is undertaken in an MIS inventory management or stock control system – a set of hardware and software-based tools that automate the process of tracking inventory. Inventory management and stock control may also be closely integrated with purchasing. The kinds of inventory tracked with an inventory control system can include almost any type of quantifiable goods that are likely to be used in a label or package printing plant.

Controlling and managing both stocked raw materials awaiting production and finished goods inventory awaiting shipping, as well as warehouse tracking, is a key part of any management information system – ideally tracking product inventory in real time by scanning a barcode on the item to be recorded and tracked. The aim should be to know what materials or goods are to hand, what items are on order, and what items are needed.

When integrated with purchasing and order entry, stored materials may be automatically allocated to a particular job. As incoming goods are received, an easy-to-use search list identifies them against purchase orders. Each incoming pallet, roll, plate, tool or customer stock can then be tracked into and out of storage by a serial number or barcode, with the quantity received auto-allocated to each job or storage position.

With such sophisticated systems it becomes feasible to agree and store both minimum and maximum stock holdings, avoid unnecessary inventory purchase and

production bottlenecks, with the system providing replenishment reporting and even automated inventory management. Inventory control can therefore range from relatively simple to quite complex systems. However, they will most commonly incorporate the same basic key areas of inventory and stock control management.

These three key areas of inventory and stock control that need to be integrated within an MIS will need to cover raw materials stock holding, warehouse management and tracking, and finished goods inventory.

## Raw materials stock control

A good raw materials stock control system will enable the user to pre-allocate roll material or sheet stock to jobs, show current stock balances and values, together with providing an extensive audit and location trail – job allocation, issue time/date, movement, receipt – of all transactions from the final end job back to its original supplier source, whatever press or process it has been through. Ideally, it will also show traceability of all other jobs produced from the same batch of material.

The stock control system should integrate seamlessly with the order processing, production scheduling and management, quality control and job costing modules. Each action within each of these modules will automatically update related stock levels, keeping stock figures accurate and up to date without the need for manual data entry.

Processing an order for production automatically 'allocates' the material required in stock control, while raising a purchase order notifies stock that the material is 'on order', and recording the materials used through job costing or remote data capture removes it from stock.

Most of the MIS systems for labels have a roll tracking facility where rolls are barcoded and through job costing get scanned against a job. This enables full traceability of the rolls used on that job. Some MIS

**“The stock control system should integrate seamlessly with the order processing, production scheduling and management, quality control and job costing modules”**

are integrated with a number of material suppliers for electronic ordering with a PO sent electronically. The shipment details then get sent back to the MIS electronically, with the manufacturer's EPSMA barcode number of the roll and the exact width and length and, depending on the MIS supplier, information about the adhesive, caliper, coatings, and suggested stock substitutions. A scanner can then be used to take roll inventory by scanning all of the roll barcodes, and even allocate specific rolls to certain jobs.

Codes, including barcodes, can undoubtedly make the whole process of inventory control and stocktaking much easier, but it can still be time consuming. Checking stock more frequently – a rolling stock-take – avoids a massive annual exercise, but demands constant attention throughout the year.

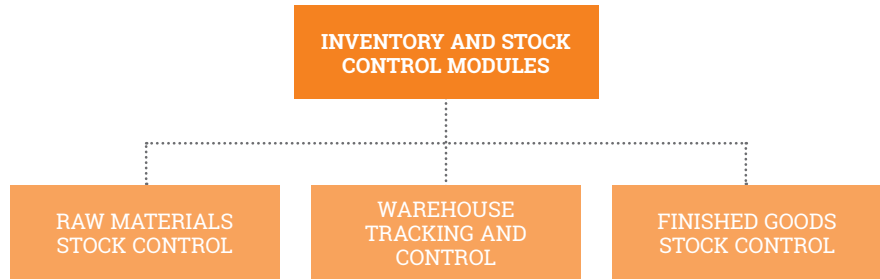
For more sophisticated inventory control, RFID tagging using hand-held wireless barcode readers can offer an efficient way to maintain a continuous check on inventory in real-time. Whatever the system, the aim should be to ensure 100 percent traceability of all materials.

For label and packaging converters working with environmental management control or environment audit systems, then their MIS inventory control may also need to add and provide for materials 'certification' details (such as FSC



*Inventory control should be a key element in a streamlined MIS workflow*

**“The aim should be to know what materials or goods are to hand, what items are on order, and what items are needed”**



*Inventory and stock control modules integrated within MIS*

certification) to be entered and displayed as required.

Depending on the warehouse and materials storage process being used, its size, location and management, the MIS may need to incorporate a stock search and viewing facility that will easily identify stock in a particular location. This may in turn mean that a definable storage structure that allocates stock to aisles, rows, levels, etc, has to be established if not already in operation.

On first-in-first-out storage principles the system will show current stock balances and values with an audit trail of all transactions. There should also be full batch traceability from an end product back to its source via whatever machines it was produced on. It should also show the history of all other jobs produced from that same original batch.

A reporting facility will enable ready stock management and should be able to facilitate periodic or annual stock taking, as well as ensuring that stock is not overlooked, that the right balance of stock is in the right place at the right time, that jobs are not held up, and that money is not tied up with surplus or old outdated stock. It should also be closely integrated with estimating, purchasing, costing, production control, quality control and waste management and ideally be based upon the requirements of ISO9000.

Achieving ISO or BSI quality standards is undoubtedly one way of showing customers and regulators that you take quality control seriously. Quality control can therefore be a vital aspect of stock control – especially as it may the quality of the finished product.

Efficient stock control should incorporate stock tracking and batch tracking. This means being able to trace a particular item backwards or forwards from source to finished product, and identifying the other items in the batch. With built in reconciliations for physical inventory adjustments, purchase orders, material receipts, damage roll tracking, spoilage tracking, and shipment cost recording, converters can be confident that the appropriate costs are being recorded and more importantly, billed.

Goods should be checked systematically

for quality so faults can be identified and the affected batch or product weeded out. This will allow the converter to raise any problems with the supplier and demonstrate the quality of the products produced. Some systems are also able to enable the addition of 'product certification' details to materials, such as FSC certification for environmental audit trail and analysis.

Remember that any inventory control system – whether manual or a sophisticated fully computerized system – is only going to be as good as the original and ongoing data that is entered into it.

#### **Storage of dies and cylinders**

The creation and maintaining of a tooling library of cutting, embossing and foiling dies, cylinders and specialized tooling is an important element of stock management and control. The manufacture and use of tooling at the finishing end of a roll-label press often involves engineered products that can be heavier, harder to handle, bulkier and potentially more likely to be damaged or cause damage than in many other label productions applications. Quite simply, moving and handling precision engineered tools during manufacturing or in warehouse, production or storage areas requires specific expertise and training. Solid rotary cutting, embossing or foiling tools, as well as cylinders and anvils, can be quite heavy and a challenge to lift and move in or out of the storage area and handled safely without risk to the tool or the handler. Flatbed, rotary or flexible cutting dies have very sharp edges. Handlers can sustain cuts and the cutting edges can be damaged during handling and preparation for storage. Unpacking of incoming cutting dies and other tooling – and re-packing for storage or shipping – again has the potential to cause damage to the tool or operator during handling. Poor tooling maintenance and storage conditions can lead to deterioration in tools over time.

Such considerations mean that the systems that are used to move and handle tooling as it enters from the supplier, is stored prior to production, moves from incoming goods storage, passes through, and departs the press room, and then back

to a storage area for cleaning, packing for storage, and then storing for easy and quick location can be critical to a company's productivity.

It is not just a case of putting tooling into storage after use. They need to be cleaned, treated (oiled) prior to storage, inspected, protected with chemically treated wrapping, or placed back into the manufacturers shipping boxes for safe storage when possible.

Good storage, transportation and handling systems for all tooling used in label converting operations can significantly reduce costs, increase productivity and create a safer, more ergonomic production environment. Key factors that therefore need to be considered and addressed in the handling and storage of tooling in the label production plant are: checking that there is no transportation or handling damage, either from or to the manufacturer or within the storage facility; the elimination as far as possible of any form of tool damage; making use of optimum handling and storage procedures; the recording of the exact storage position of every item of tooling; the provision of easy access to each individual tool in storage; the elimination or minimizing of any heavy or awkward lifting operations; obtaining a significant decrease in the chance of accidents.

As can be seen, the storage, handling and identification of tooling from incoming tools, during storage, for easy production location in store, after production storage, and then possibly returned to the supplier for repair or sharpening, can be a key to employee safety, productivity and profitability. A raw materials MIS system that can successfully and accurately provide for all these stages – depending on the volume of tooling, the range and variety of tools used, the availability and size of storage area – needs to be carefully discussed with the MIS supplier.

If label and packaging printing plants use external manufacturers for the supply of printing plates, then the same kinds of issues of handling, checking, cleaning, packing and storage of tooling are also going to occur. Again, discussion with the MIS supplier to create a suitable system for the plant needs to be undertaken.

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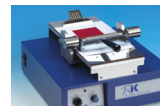
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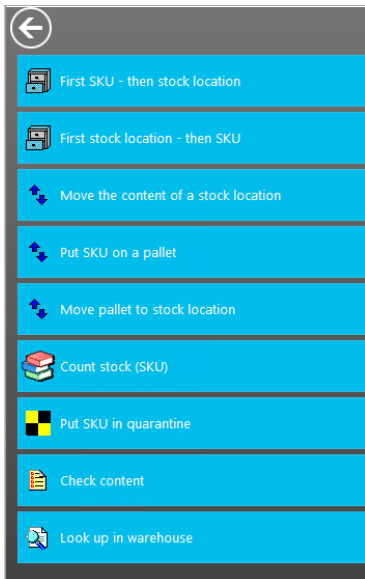


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## “An inventory control system is only going to be as good as the original and ongoing data that is entered into it”

### Warehouse control and traceability

Relying on a paper trail and the manual entry of data to manage a label or package printing warehouse is not a very satisfactory means of achieving worker productivity and inventory accuracy. Once received as a computer print-out or even a hand-written order, pre-production stock or perhaps finished goods that need to be packed and shipped, will be picked from the warehouse, with a paper trail tracking every step of the process. The information is then manually entered into the system and filed. Should a discrepancy appear in a customer's order or invoice, pinpointing the problem requires cross referencing the data in both the system and in filing cabinets.

On the other hand, a good mobile warehouse WiFi scanner with a menu-controlled tracking system within an MIS workflow will automate the flow of information and coordinate key activities in the warehouse in order to maximize efficiency and undoubtedly help to streamline a label or package printing business, enabling the warehouse to be configured into easily identifiable areas and for the rapid tracking and movement of incoming stock, stored stock, finished stock and any work-in-progress.

It should also show goods that have been delivered, but have not yet been allocated

a final location, as well as knowing the location of all existing inventory, being able to direct workers to the right storage location, minimize the order picking process, and reduce any impact from products out-of-stock. Get all of these working well and errors will be eliminated and productivity will be improved.

Depending on the MIS warehouse or inventory system or software, it may only be suitable for a single site or be suitable for handling multiple sites. Sites can be configured for tracking and traceability in a variety of ways, from very simple areas, white paper or reel stock warehouse, machine room, dispatch, etc, to very detailed layouts, warehouse, area, bay, rack, shelf, etc.

To make it easy for warehousing systems to record and track reels, pallets, sheets, inks, etc, it may be viable to install shop floor data capture stations or use mobile hand-held scanners. Barcoded reel, pallet or box labels can be generated within such systems, enabling users to locate stock items very quickly by a range of different search criteria, including stock codes, job number, department or section, picking note.

Installing a full-scale warehouse management system can be a costly investment, yet its value is usually quickly recognized. After a warehouse management system has been up and running for only a few months, users tend to say that they cannot envisage how their business worked without it. From achieving real-time visibility into inventory and orders, to decreasing the time it takes to invoice and receive customer payments, a warehouse management information system and package extends mobility to warehouse workers and prepares the business for further expansion.

### Finished goods and stock products control

Finished goods and stock products inventory includes barcoded core labels and printed packaging called-off by customers as well as things that are bought to be resold like ribbons and printers.

There should also be a means of setting expiry times on stock. Increasingly, MIS suppliers are also being asked to incorporate interfaces to transport suppliers, enabling the sending of electronic instructions to DHL, UPS, etc, in order to manage transport and shipping.

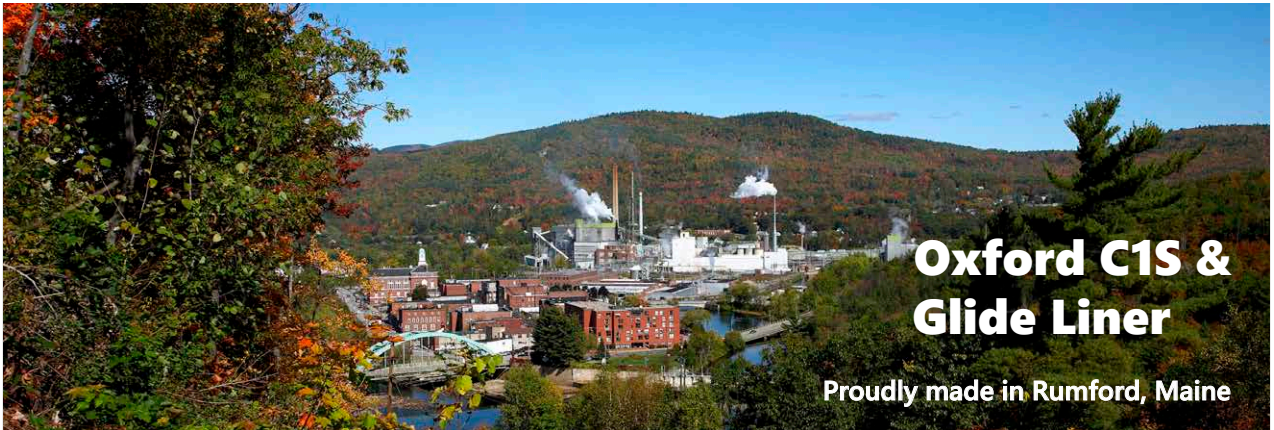
The primary function of finished goods and stock products control is to manage all printed stock and consignment stock held either on behalf of customers or for direct re-sale – including managing inventory cost. This all needs to be closely integrated with work instructions, delivery notes and invoicing, provides a fast and seamless stock movement and management system that greatly reduces the opportunity for human error.

All the features of raw materials stock control will also apply to finished good control; first-in-first-out full audit trail; batch control and barcode traceability; a sort-filter-find engine and full integration with report and document generation.

Finished Stock call-offs can be received and entered either manually or through EDI and e-commerce web-to-print orders to generate picking notes.



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## Illustrated Self-Adhesive Labels

A technical introduction to self-adhesive label technology, materials specification and end use applications

Edited by Andy Thomas-Emans

A Labels & Labeling Publication  
Tarsus Exhibitions & Publishing Ltd, London

## ILLUSTRATED SELF-ADHESIVE LABELS

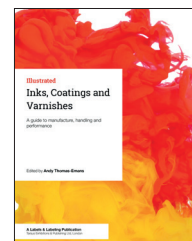
**Self-adhesive Labels** offers a comprehensive introduction to self-adhesive / pressure-sensitive label technology, the individual components, materials and specific applications. Also covered are performance requirements and sustainability.

This brand new Label Academy guide is a must-have resource for label converters, brand owners, designers and the wider label supply chain.

The chapters in this book will specifically look at:

- + Introduction to the self-adhesive label market
- + Silicone release liner technology
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- + Identification and characteristics of PS label materials
- + Test methods for pressure-sensitive labels

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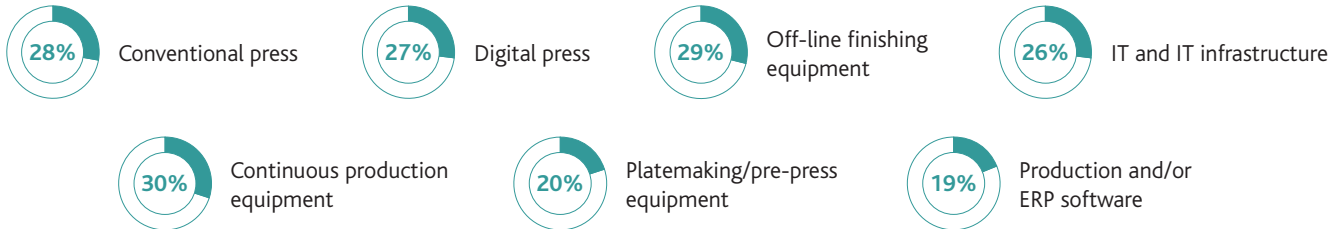
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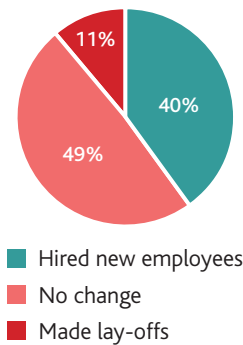
# Label trends

## How has Covid affected US label converters?

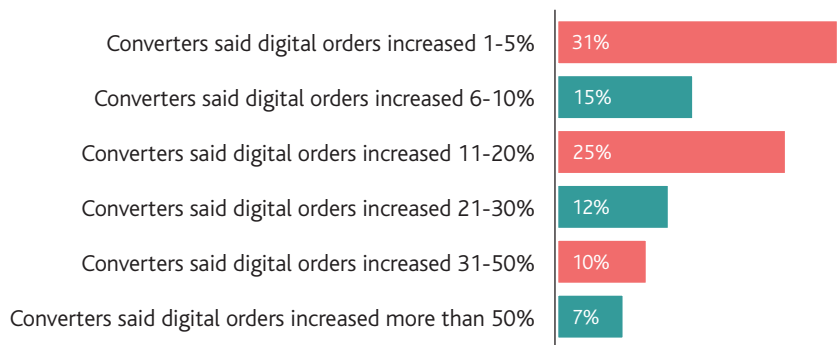
### TLMI converter members' purchasing plans in 2021



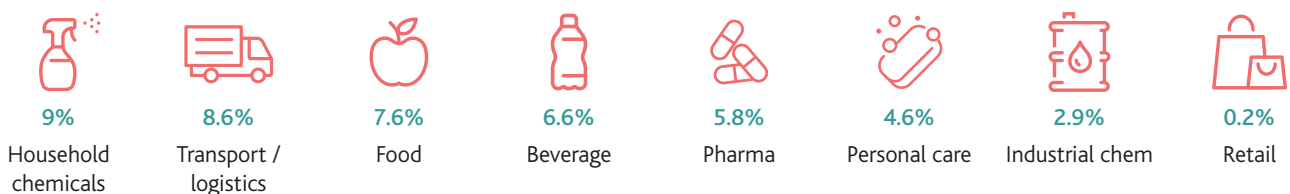
### Covid's impact on converters' employees



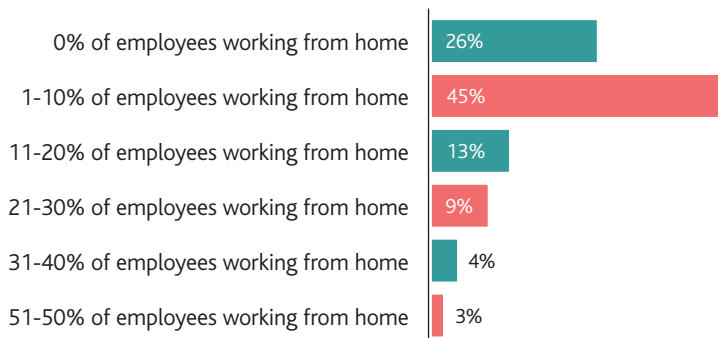
### Covid's impact on digital orders



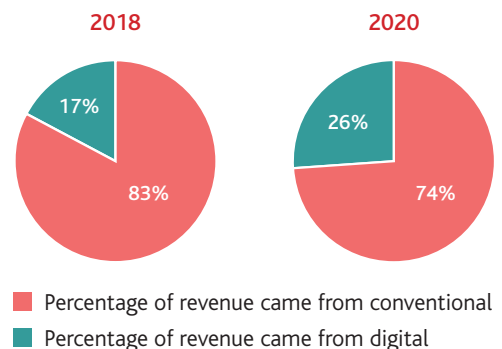
### Converter's growth per end-use segment in Q1-Q3 2020 (compared to Q1-Q3 2019)



### Covid's impact on work environment

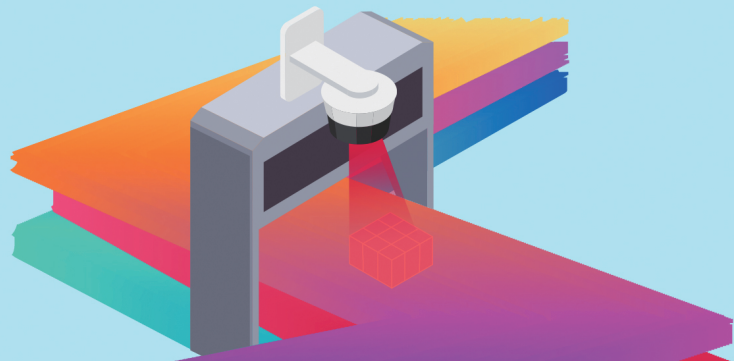


### Covid's impact on converters' employees



Source: TLMI Market Watch Volume Three – Winter 2021, compiled by LPC

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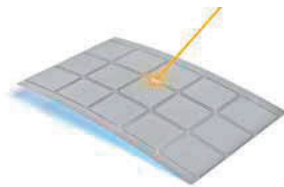
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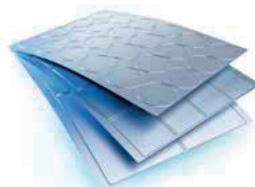
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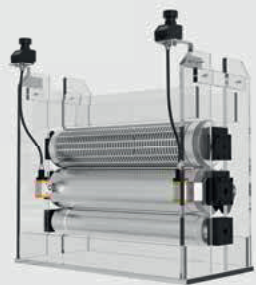


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