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In 1998, Formika was the first company in Poland to begin using the flexo UV printing method. Nowadays it is a leading Polish producer of lids, using the flexo printing method on packages made of aluminium, paper, polypropylene and laminates. Dariusz Balcerzyk reports.

LIDS FULL OF COLOURS

Formika's origins date back to 1978 when it was founded in Raszyn, near Warsaw, as a private enterprise by Jerzy Przywuski. Until 1991 it had manufactured various products for the motor industry; then it changed its business profile. "It was a time when Poland had begun to move more towards a market economy and new possibilities were opening up for business. We were looking for a market gap and, finally, we found it in the packaging industry," says Joanna Przywuska, the company's general director and Jerzy's daughter.

"Between 1991 and 1997 Formika was the first company in Poland to manufacture plastic packages for the food industry. It produced mainly containers for dairy products such as yogurts, cheeses etc. Those containers were made using the pressure and injection method and printed using the dry offset method. When the company became a leader on the Polish market it was sold to the Austrian company Greiner."

In 1998 the new Formika was established – this time as a printing company using the flexo method on packages made from aluminium, paper, polypropylene and laminates.

What is flexo?

The flexo UV method makes it possible to print to a much higher level than the traditional solvent flexo. Although flexographic printing was once only used for low-end applications such as crude graphics and block text on corrugated cartons, today the high-gloss, high quality look of UV flexo has made it an excellent choice for printers wishing to do premium work.

According to Catherine Paik (an author publishing in Ink World magazine, the ink industry professional monthly) the popularity of the UV flexo method can be attributed to three major characteristics: since UV flexo inks are solvent-free they exhibit superior press stability with no solvent replenishment, mid-run viscosity adjustment or constant pH monitoring necessary; UV flexo inks contain virtually 100 per cent active material, which means that even an average UV flexo ink can have high gloss and excellent chemical, abrasion and heat resistance; A UV flexo job can be checked for adhesion, chemical resistance and other properties right off the end of the press.

In addition, a properly cured job can be converted in-line or it can be rewound at the end of the press with no fear of blocking, even on non-absorbent films. These properties make flexo UV especially well suited for shorter runs, where quick make-ready and low ink maintenance are even more crucial to extracting maximum profit than on a longer run. Flexo UV inks are increasingly popular in flexible packaging and label applications.

Range of products

Printing for food, dairy, beauty, chemical and pharmaceutical industries are the company's bread and butter. Formika's market offering includes printing aluminium lids for dairy products (such as yogurts and creams); packages from laminates for cosmetics (paper + PE + aluminium) and spices; in-mould labels (IML); paper packages for the chemical industry (e.g. soap); and labels from PP for the beverage market.

Aluminium lids for dairy make up 60 per cent of the entire production, while lids for pies (which require thicker lids than used for dairy products) make up 15 per cent of the production. The company delivers lids to over 100 customers in Poland.

Sachettes for cosmetics are the latest product offered by Formika. They are made from polyester, which is a more difficult material for printing, so the company had to invest in more modern equipment. It has recently bought the Nexus graphic programme, which enables it to make tonal transitions, as well as a Gallus printer. "Gallus, a company based in Switzerland, is one of the leading worldwide manufacturers of machine systems for label printers. It is the Mercedes of printing equipment," explains Mrs Przywuska.

The company's policy is to purchase only new machines and equipment. At this moment it has two modern Propheteer flexo-hand presses which can print up to six eight colours, five cutting machines (including the special one for IML) and a rewinding machine.

Formika also owns a professional design studio. "As for designing, we fully rely on our studio. Our company does not cooperate with any external labour forces everything, from the project to the matrix, is made"

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on site. The four designers we employ have a lot of experience and outstanding specialists in flexography. The design studio is open to close cooperation with our clients to meet their requirements and needs." explains Piotr Debicki the company's sales director.

Constant growth

The company's annual sales were estimated in 2006 at more than PLN 24 million (€6.6 million), and its profits reached PLN 2.2 million (€0.60 million). Financial results for 2007 show that annual sales went up to PLN 30 million (€8.3 million), and profit grew to PLN 2.3 million (€0.63 million). According to Mr Debicki the annual sales will go up steadily for the next few years by 30 per cent. It is already preparing for this boom in the market; in the near future it will commence construction on a new production hall and a new, bigger warehouse. New machines and additional equipment will also be purchased.

Exports make up 26 per cent of the 2006 sales. Formika's products are sold mainly to eastern and central Europe and to Germany, France, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia and the UK. It is worth noting that the exports' share in annual sales has been growing by almost 10 per cent a year for the last three years.

The company employs 70 people who work in a three-shift system; however, the plan is to turn the production process into a four-shift system according to the growing sales. "Since the job rotation in Formika is very low and many people have been working here for 10 years, we enjoy having well experienced employees. Furthermore, they are really devoted to the job. I think this is an effect of our personal attitude to each employee," says Mr Debicki.

Quality and flexibility

Formika's production quality is fully in-line with the EU regulations according to ISO 9001:2001. Mrs Przywuska continues: "The quality of our packages is also proved by the fact that we deliver to the international companies, such as Hochland, Campina, Dr Oetker, Pepsi, Longley Farm and around 100 domestic companies. We have also been cooperating with the biggest cosmetic producers, such as Dr Irena Eris, Oceanic, Soraya and Coty. They are an extremely demanding group of clients in terms of the quality of packages. Our strength lies in quality, flexibility and short delivery times. We can fulfil an order and deliver ready-made products to our clients within a week. As we are a family owned company, the decision process takes two minutes, not two weeks like in multinational companies. Our print quality and constant innovative ideas enable us to be constantly one step ahead of the competition"

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