



The purchase of a brand new Hewlett-Packard Indigo ws4500 press has allowed the Vancouver firm Associated Labels to form a digital printing division, with the ability to offer its clients the option of shorter runs of high-quality labels and packaging with very fast turnaround times.



PRESS FOR SUCCESS

West Coast label manufacturer prints a new chapter in its long-running success story with two new press installations

It takes plenty of nerve to buck the prevailing downcast trends and moods in the trough of a really nasty recession, but for a company that emerged from a fairly risky investment back in 1981—smack in the midst of one of the worst post-World War II economic downturns on record—defying adversity is all part and parcel of keeping your eyes on that ball while everyone else ducks for cover.

In fact, boldly venturing into enterprising endeavors deemed too risky by others has been paying off in spades for the Vancouver-based **Associated Labels**, according to company owner and president Rusty Ashworth, who got into the labeling business 28 years ago by acquiring a tiny local offset printing plant—at the time staffed by three full-time employees—operating under the **Associ-**

ated Printers banner.

After spending the first couple of years producing fish-can labels for the West Coast canneries industry, Ashworth decided the company needed a more progressive focus and market orientation to propel it to the next level.

“Although it was keeping us busy, there was too much price competition and no growth, so it was decided after two years that we needed to go in a new direction,” Ashworth recalls.

“So we changed our focus toward the pressure-sensitive label printing market and purchased our first Mark Andy press—a three-color unit—while changing the company name to Associated Labels.”

CHAIN REACTION

That change in strategic direction helped set off a long series of subsequent expansions, upgrades and marketplace successes that helped the company evolve into a highly diversified packaging converter and manufacturer—today employing 120 people at a state-of-the-art, 50,000-square-foot, full-service facility split up into four distinct but complementary product divisions: Labels, Flexible Packaging, Packaging Equipment, and Digital Printing.

“We do pride ourselves on our capabilities,” says Ashworth, pointing out how existing and prospective customers can find tailor-made packaging and labeling solutions and services for their needs under one roof.

Offering a wide selection of substrate and finishing options—including paper, vinyl, foil, fluorescent labels, flexible packaging, temperature-sensitive material, UV (ultraviolet) laminating or coating, unique die-cut shapes, cut-and-stack, environmentally-friendly and food-safe grades, etc.—the one-stop-shop plant currently runs a 24/7 schedule with print runs reaching into millions.

Naturally, for a company widely acknowledged to be one of the leading label manufacturers in western Canada and northwestern U.S.—boasting many high-profile customers in the food-and-beverage, pharmaceutical, nutraceutical and household cleaning products industries—maintaining its marketplace position requires periodic technological and equipment upgrades, which Associated Labels has re-



Rusty Ashworth,
President,
Associated Labels

cently executed with considerable aplomb.

On the flexographic and rotogravure side of its printing business, Associated Labels makes extensive use of the high-performance presses manufactured by **Mark Andy Inc.**, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of narrow- and mid-web printing equipment and UV curing systems.

Following recent installation of a state-of-the-art, 26-inch **ProGlide FLX** printing press in January of 2009—manufactured by Mark Andy’s **Comco** division—the Associated Labels plant now houses a total of 10 Mark Andy presses, reveals Ashworth, enabling it to cover an ever-growing range of printing and converting requirements for its customers.

Says Ashworth: “We purposely created a flexible packaging division within our company so that we could handle the specialized requirements of specialty packaging and films, and thanks to the high print quality we’re able to obtain from our new Comco press, we are able to deliver even more innovative decorating and packaging solutions that fit our customers’ products perfectly.”

Equipped with three gravure and eight flexo stations, as well as an inline laminating station, the **ProGlide FLX** enables the plant to make full use of its extensive in-house prepress and plate processing capabilities to produce a wide product range, including stand-up pouches, tea and coffee bags, inline bar wrappers—both clear and metallized—decorated shrink film, and various other flexible packaging formats that have already made a big impression on many of the company’s clients, according to Ashworth.

“One of the features we like about the ProGlide FLX is that as we grow and evolve, so too can the machine,” Ashworth points out.

“There are many optional expansions we can utilize, like the inter-station rotary screen, hot-foil stamping, re-



The recently-purchased 26-inch Comco ProGlide FLX press joins a growing fleet of Mark Andy equipment at Associated Labels.

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PRESS FOR SUCCESS

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verse printing, specialty curing and drying systems, various converting and finishing systems for different board types, and multiple web applications like coupon insertion and expanded content.”

According to Mark Andy, the *ProGlide FLX* system is designed specifically to enable label converters to expand into other markets by incorporating an exclusive ‘S-wrap’ web path design to maintain soft-tension web transport, whereby a dual-tension unwinding motion and adjustable infeed pacing enables the press to work on a wider variety of substrates, with consistently high print quality.

Featuring a loadcell tension feedback system for high-quality lamination, as well as individually-controlled and adjustable hot-air drying units and a UV curing option—the *ProGlide’s* shuttle-deck print station boasts an ergonomic design that facilitates quick product changeovers

for optimal productivity, according to Mark Andy.

Also this past January, Associates Labels entered the digital age in grand style with concurrent installation of the *Indigo ws4500* digital label printer—manufactured by **Hewlett-Packard (HP) Development Company, L.P.**—essentially kickstarting its digital printing business.

Designed specifically for short-run production of high-quality labels with fast turnaround—defined by HP as print runs of under 50,000 labels or under 6,500 feet—the *Indigo ws4500* digital press provides virtually limitless substrate compatibility and exceptional print quality with up to seven-color capability, including spot colors, and white and fluorescent hues.



The Happy Planet’s Energy+ Shots product is packaged in a slender, square-sided bottle featuring a high-quality, full-bodied, silver-finish shrinkwrap film printed by the Comco ProGlide FLX flexible press.

“We can now provide instant proofs and prototypes identical to a client’s final product,” beams Ashworth, “while also producing on-time turnarounds of runs as large as 50,000 or as small as a single label.”

Ashworth adds that because the digital system press does not require films, printing and chemicals, there is a lot of waste and set-up time eliminated from the printing process—resulting in considerable savings that Associated Labels can pass on to clients.

“Since it enables us to offer cost-effective small- and medium-quantity runs,” he reasons, “we realize that it can help our clients manage their inventory costs better via more effective supply chain management, and helping our customers succeed is a big part of all we have ever strived to do.”

Along with the production and converting of packaging products and materials, the company has built up extensive expertise in manufacturing custom-designed, specialty packaging equipment.

MORE MACHINES

“Our delving into the manufacture of packaging equipment actually began over 20 years ago in 1988 with the introduction of our pressure-sensitive label applicators,” says Ashworth.

“Thanks to its success, and the growing label manufacturing industry, we created a whole new packaging equipment division that would not only supply machinery for our clients, but also offer them technical consultation and a whole range of engineering and other services.

“Over the years we have also expanded into the robotics and industrial automation sectors,” Ashworth points out, “requiring us to add even more technical specialists and mechanical engineers to our staff.”

With such a solid four-pillar business foundation in place, it is hardly surprising to find the refreshingly optimistic Ashworth looking at the glass as half-full even in light of the current economic downturn that has many of his competitors tightening their belts in a big way.

“By the time this recession ends, and even while it is still on, we feel we have already positioned ourselves well enough-ahead of the competition,” Ashworth sums up, “to show our clients that we will never have to sacrifice quality to be able to supply them with affordable, premium-quality packaging products and services.”

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