

Meeting fast-paced label trends

“Battle of decoration technologies” set the context for improved communication between brand owners and consumers. Understanding labels is the way forward for a successful brand.

A good label attracts consumers. A great label changes their buying habits forever. Consumers of today are more concerned with products that reflect their personality and individuality, a successful example being Coca-Cola’s “Share A Coke” campaign. Trends impact the way we perceive products – especially their packaging and specifically the labeling. In today’s landscape, label manufacturers that are flexible and offer the capacity for simple and fast changeovers can help to bring new products to the market quickly and efficiently.

Delivering a label is not just a matter of printing it. It involves a complex value chain that also spans the material to be printed and the machinery to apply it - whatever the technology employed. Zultec Group, Head quartered in Saudi Arabia, with operations spanning at 23 global locations with 3 label converting facilities provide complete labeling solutions for food and beverage manufacturers.

Making the right label choice

There are wet glue labels, wrap around labels, shrink sleeve labels, Reel Fed labels, Clear Labels, Linerless Labels, in-mould labels and the legendary self-adhesive labels. There are also different printing processes to choose. The choice of your food label largely depends on container type, your packaging requirements, the environment, substrates, volume, budget and the product itself. These are the requirements that typically drive the method choice.

The primary forms of printing labels are flexo, gravure and digital. Each of these technologies have its own significant pros and cons but flexo outweighs the remaining when it comes to flexibility, wide choices of labels printing, substrates, finishing, small and medium print runs and variety of products that it can offer for your food labels

Short-run Drives Flexo Labels

Printers and converters have to serve the customer and meet their specific requirements. One of the most prevalent trends over the past five to eight years is declining run lengths in print. This trend is caused by a vital change in customer behavior. Simply put, the end-user wants choice. For example, consumers want to see a salad dressing in several different custom flavors on shop shelves, not just one flavor.

When you think about that in terms what it means for printing labels and packaging, where you had one product in the past, there are now 23 product variations that have to be printed. This means that also the typical run length is divided by 23: instead of one million of labels, the print buyer will order 43.000 labels for each of the 23 product variations.

In addition, special marketing campaigns designed to attract consumer atten-



Reel fed labels.

tion decrease the life span of a label or a packaging. There is an increasing volume of “limited editions” of a certain product or packaging that reflects a limited time offer. This also shortens run lengths and can also affect the amount of time the printer or converter has to deliver the packaging. Another reason the demand for short-runs is rising is the ability for brand owners and manufactures to ‘print-on-demand’. Due to the massive associated costs, nobody wants to keep large inventories.

Wet-Glue vs Self Adhesive

Though wet-glue still dominates in the beverage world, a pre-eminence founded on its traditional edge in terms of quality and – for longer print runs – lower costs. However Self Adhesive labels are catching up with more options and quality printing and the question of choosing which one is better still seems a bit more of a toss-up. Self-adhesive labelling uses a reel-fed applicator which is far simpler matter to set up whereas wet glue needs to go into a magazine and requires technical expertise. Self-adhesive would seem to make sense for shorter runs, with wet-glue having a cost advantage in longer runs because material costs are substantially lower in case of wet-glue due to paper as a substrate and no additional cost for liner and adhesives.

Sleeve and roll-fed labels

Reel-fed labels are the primary choice for beverage and bottling sector. Hundreds of billions of bottles are being labeled using



Food labels.



Shrink sleeve.

this technology. The soft drink industry has identified the benefits of reel fed OPP which offers significant recycling benefits. Besides this, OPP is ideally suited for drink and dairy industries production environment because it is inert to moisture. The high tensile strength of OPP allows thinner gage material to be used giving further cost savings and contributing towards sustainability.

Statistics reveal that the market for shrink sleeve labelling is growing faster and there are several reasons for this. The larger area available for graphics on high shrinkage, full body sleeves naturally present designers with greater opportunity for creativity, as well as the inclusion of data such as volume, contents and barcode. By covering the whole bottle, including the cap, the label sleeves can also serve effectively as a seal. In the case of sensitive beverages, it can be used as a light barrier to protect the contents. As the sleeve is heat-shrunk into position, it adapts to any surface and eliminates restrictions due to container shape. It also eliminates the need for glue and solvents, therefore making recycling easier.

Designed to meet growing demand for these label formats, Zultec's state-of-the-art label converting facility offers flexibility that allows easy switching between sleeves and roll-fed label applications in a single machine. It also offers the ability to use multiple types of label material to achieve sustainability and cost savings.

Self-Adhesive Labels – Drive from sheet to reel to reel film labels

Pressure sensitive is an industry term describing a self-adhesive label. Like modern postage stamps that no longer need to be licked, pressure sensitive labels are pulled off of a release liner and permanently applied to the package. When self-

adhesive labels first appeared around 30 years ago it was in a very simple form, with things like single-colour price code labels and bar code labels. Now self-adhesive labels have advanced to the point where it is the labelling approach of choice for many top-tier brands. Experts agree that it is the most widely used label today, and for good reason. With the more sophisticated combination presses now available, albeit at a price, SA is capable of very high quality graphics and embellishments. Among its main benefits is its unsurpassed versatility, which begins with the choice of base material.

The design attributes of pressure sensitive labels are due in large measure to the virtually unlimited choice of available substrates, including films, papers, metallized papers, foils and holographic films. From this flexible foundation, brand owners can choose from a range of printing processes and techniques. Among the various techniques available, the use of metallic inks, bronzing, embossing, hot or cold foils stamping and sub-surface printing. There are also decisions to be made on coatings, which aside from its utilitarian advantages, can dramatically impact a label's look. Coatings also serve multiple purposes. Some coatings are used simply to aid in label application, others are applied for protection from scuffing, scratching and other dangers, and some others are employed to enhance aesthetics for example to give metallic or pearl look or to give a raised texture feeling to the label.

Aside from design flexibility, pressure sensitive labels offer additional, more practical benefits versus other label types. One major benefit is if you use a label, you do not have to keep inventory of glass, tubes or bottles that are directly printed. It makes your inventory control very flexible and also reduces reaction time to please your end user. Directed printed containers and tubes are often sourced from overseas, requiring high minimums and long lead times. On the back end, this limits flexibility to respond to market and regulatory demands, as now both the decoration and container costs are already incurred, and scrapping inventory means wasting all these applied costs.



Future predictions

Change is everywhere. We see it in the volatility of currencies. In climate, In globalization, and commoditization. And also in consumer demands and tastes. This change has resulted in label market "crossing the chasm" and going mainstream. Traditional processes are being transformed to meet the modern day needs. 2017 will continue to see focus on a million-dollar question – what does the brand owner want? The answer is the highest possible print quality, an increasingly large amount of variation (more SKU's), least inventory, short lead times and all at the lowest possible cost.

The key to survival will largely depend on flexibility. Hybrid systems with flexo and gravure will provide means for easy and quick adaptability to customer requirements in Narrow to medium web markets Pressure sensitive or self-adhesive labels in food and beverages will still remain the primary choice within narrow web whereas shrink sleeve market share will continue to grow in wide web formats. There will be a strong drive exploring new trends including no-label look and linerless labels. Shift to Digital will still be a debatable issue because of obstacles such as finishing processes, special additives and mid-and long-run pricing.

About Zultec

Zultec Group is Head Quartered in Saudi Arabia with offices spanning around 23 global locations. With three strategic labels converting facilities, Zultec ensures our highly skilled professionals are able to take over where others lack the necessary expertise and tackle printing projects that others may be hesitant to handle. Our portfolio includes completely automated end-to-end processing and packaging lines starting from the point your products are processed to making them packed in retail ready packs. ♦