

FLEXible CONVERTER

A NEWSLETTER DEDICATED TO THE SUCCESS OF FLEXCON CUSTOMERS

New Retail Trends Bring You Opportunities For Self Adhesive Graphics

The retail environment is always in a state of flux, constantly changing to meet the evolving needs and wants of shoppers. Today, we are witnessing a transformation, as technology helps us bridge the divide between traditional advertising approaches and social media platforms.

Brand owners are developing new experiences for shoppers. They are working closely with retailers to create a new type of interaction that will make shoppers more than passive consumers. The shoppers of tomorrow will actually interact with the very products they are seeking out. As a result, the alternative advertising market is growing exponentially, using new and innovative self-adhesive products to create branded zones and transform existing spaces into vibrant new marketing vehicles.

This new paradigm is causing a shift in terms of how advertising is generated. Brand owners have traditionally looked at their advertising and integrated marketing campaigns as

driving what shoppers saw in store. Today, they are looking from the store out: whatever drives sales in the store serves as the foundation of all other marketing campaigns. In short, if it's not working in the store, it's not going to work. Thus, it is more important than ever for brands to create an instant connection with shoppers.

FLEXcon can help you take advantage of this move toward alternative advertising. You can utilize our product expertise and our industry connections to help make the most of these emerging opportunities. We offer the broadest range of self-adhesive materials in the industry, allowing us to be your one-source supplier. Our unique topcoating and flexible manufacturing capabilities enable you, the converter, to select the specific type of product that meets your application needs.

We are able to take a product and modify it so it can be printed using whatever specific print technology you choose. Whether it's for an offset press or an Indigo® sheet press, based on the size of the order and how you want to print it, we can modify a product to support your print technology. This is the advantage that a flexible manufacturing process offers you.

For us, providing custom solutions to help you make the most of your opportunities is nothing new. We have been helping converters for more than 50 years. We believe there are many opportunities for success in these expanding and emerging markets. We look forward to helping you make the most of them.

Neil McDonough
President and CEO

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Hot Trends In Retail

A Natural Fit for Self-Adhesive Films

Today, when it comes to retail advertising, in-store advertisement is only the beginning. While in-store graphics remain a mainstay of the advertising industry, the spectrum of products and surfaces available for such promotional efforts continues to expand dramatically. At the same time, promotions are multifaceted, linking in-store campaigns to both digital and social media.

The goal is to engage the shopper both inside and outside of the store, creating not only brand loyalty, but a connection that makes the brand a part of a lifestyle. This may begin with a window graphic that brings a customer into a store, graphic advertising for floors draws a customer through the store, and a branded zone within that store where the customer finds not only the product, but interactive features that are accessible through his or her smartphone.

This year's Shopper Marketing Expo (SME) and Specialty Graphic Imaging Association (SGIA) shows explored this ever-expanding landscape of in-store promotions and how alternative media is leading the way in making the most of these opportunities. Both shows brought together an array of self-adhesive substrate suppliers, printers, converters and brand owners to explore emerging trends in this expanding market.

Converters have the ability to help consumer goods manufacturers craft a multimedia approach to change the shopping environment, as well as the customers' shopping experience. Experts also shared information about the latest trends in branded zone marketing and shopper marketing techniques.



Retailers, such as Minnesota-based Dock 86, are using their store environments to market as directly to customers as possible.

Confronting The New Realities

The retail environment is changing rapidly. Traditional media is being reexamined in favor of new methods of attracting the attention and dollars of consumers. Although advertising spending in general is expected to decline next year, the forecast for in-store marketing and other alternative advertising is growth. PQ Media, a Stamford, Connecticut-based provider of alternative media

and econometrics for media stakeholders, predicts that by 2012, one advertising dollar in every four will be spent on alternative media.

In-store advertisement, therefore, has become more important than ever. The

In-Store Marketing Institute's (ISMI) Shopper Marketing Trends reports that in-store branding has a significant influence on a brand decision, with 70 percent of consumers attracted to aisle displays, 63 percent to merchandising displays, 58 percent to department signage, and 52 percent to shelf strips.

At the same time, in today's challenging economy, consumers are less likely to be impulse buyers, and are more apt to be selective with their purchasing decisions.

Today's converters and printers are therefore working more closely than ever before with advertising agencies and brand owners to create shopper experiences.

Traditional signage, although still a part of the equation, can

no longer be counted on alone to draw in potential shoppers.

As a result, brands and retailers are seeking unique solutions, and FLEXcon can help you respond with innovative self-adhesive materials that offer differentiated



Graphic advertisements for floors, such as these, helped Dock 86 drive traffic patterns, directing shoppers to different locations within the store.



Today's multimedia approach to advertising begins in the store. All other promotional advertising campaigns are built off the connection brands create with shoppers.

features. Our unique substrates can be printed to create eye-catching special effects, or can be used alone to create displays with outstanding aesthetic appeal. Our specialists can help you secure application opportunities with the most impactful and creative film solutions in the industry. You can offer these materials to retailers, allowing them to take advantage of existing spaces, such as walls, floors, counters, and windows, and even the product itself and the display shelf surface, using self-adhesive film to change the sales environment, and, by association, the customer's shopping experience.



Window graphics are one element of an integrated promotional strategy. In this case, the Summit League created brand awareness through a carefully coordinated effort throughout Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

The SME show, which took place in Chicago on October 6 and 7, examined this move toward immersive marketing through the concept of "Paving the Path to Purchase", which comes as a response to the new economic realities that are shaping shopper trends. The in-store shopping experience is only one component of promotional efforts, which now include tie-ins with electronic and transit media.

At the same time, many retailers are segmenting their stores, creating stores-within-stores to meet customer needs. Some are creating in-store segments focused on particular products, such as a bank, coffee shop, or flower shop within a larger grocery store. These unique environments can be themed around specific promotions or events and can offer something unexpected in the retail environment: a new shopping experience that invigorates purchases and helps create long-term brand loyalty.

This branded zone approach, which uses one or more branded media to create an experience for the shopper, taps into the shopper's need to be engaged in the shopping process; creating an interaction that goes far beyond simply purchasing one particular item. Such efforts can be augmented with a social media connection. For example, QR codes, a matrix barcode readable by scanners, mobile phones, and smartphones, are becoming an increasingly popular way of linking in-store advertising with electronic media. The encoded information can



Advertising is no longer limited to the venue where an event will occur. In this case, the promotional message is tailored to the specific space, maximizing its visibility and providing an opportunity to interact with the Summit League brand in a unique manner.

include text, a link to a website, or other data, allowing shoppers to learn more about a particular product and perhaps even access coupons.

Retailers are using their store environments to market as directly to customers as possible. Local managers are demanding more leeway to craft promotional campaigns that are tailored to their particular demographics. Thus, although the days of mass advertising are far from over, such ads

are becoming increasingly specific to individual shoppers.

Other establishments, such as fast food chains and grocery stores, are also using existing surfaces, such as tabletops, to promote new food items, as well as themselves. The brand owners are working with these companies, who are acutely aware of the drive to focus on consumer need-based products. The converter's role here is to be able to offer the products and services that allow this synergy to take place.

FLEXcon can help you do this. We have developed self-adhesive materials that allow printers, converters, brand owners, and retailers to create an experience that will take shopper engagement to a new level. Our

Application Specialists have the knowledge of self-adhesive materials, the expertise in brand messaging, and the established relationships with ad agencies and installers to help make you a success. Working together, we can develop innovative brand experiences that ignite customer awareness, loyalty, and motivation to purchase.

Transforming the Industry

"Innovate or die" may be something of a cliché, but the spirit of that approach was present at

this year's SGIA Expo, held in Las Vegas from October 13 to 15. The focus was on helping printers and converters realize more business by tapping into industry trends, such as scalability, a focus on graphics and industrial applications, and the demand for specialty substrates and greener alternatives. These factors are transforming the print industry.

The show provided insights on new ways to leverage printing equipment for both narrow web and wide format digital presses to support applications from durable labels to windows, walls, floors and shelves. Specialty substrates from FLEXcon, including self-adhesive wood veneer and new holographic patterns, allow printers and converters to differentiate themselves from the competition and grow their businesses.

There was also a focus on how to take advantage of venues outside of the



Non-traditional surfaces, such as this countertop in a local tavern, provide excellent opportunities for alternative advertising efforts. By providing advertising in an unexpected location, promoters are able to catch the attention of patrons.

traditional branded environments, such as stadiums, hotels, clubs, and bars, linking branded products with particular events. The goal is to engage the consumer, not just in the retail environment, but also outside of it.

For example, during the National Basketball Association All-Star game in Dallas, Texas, this past year, the NBA showcased its brand in the lobbies and stadiums where its games were played. But the promotional efforts went far beyond basketball courts.

The league wrapped the Bank of America building with a 53,000

square-foot graphic, the largest of its kind in the world. This helped draw attention to both the All-Star game in particular, and the NBA brand in general.

Not every effort need be on such a huge scale, however. Some stadiums are offering branded suites, allowing corporations who own their own box seats the option of transforming the space into something unique. The Minnesota Vikings recently worked with CAT, a multinational manufacturer of earth moving equipment, to customize their suite. The transformed space features window graphics, table graphics, and wall graphics that reinforce the CAT brand. This means that when CAT ushers a special guest into their space, that guest will get the full brand experience.

The Changing Landscape

The new reality for many printers is that they can no longer be focused solely on one print technology. The recession has led to a consolidation in the industry. Numerous print shops across the country have closed down, leaving the remaining shops with an increasing number of customers.

However, the companies that remain have discovered an interesting byproduct of their survival: although there are fewer printers, they are being called upon to offer more options. Likewise, those printers are looking to diversify their options to help attract and retain business, sometimes moving beyond their own traditional technologies.

Today, some printers are offering multiple printing technologies under one roof, doing more with their existing capabilities while continuously seeking out niche opportunities where they can offer a differentiated solution and expand their business. In short, they are becoming more of a marketing services company, offering start-to-finish solutions, such as creative development, printing, packaging, and kitting. The key is to differentiate your company from the competition: what do you offer that no one else can provide? These unique solutions can attract new customers and lead to more business from existing clients.



Amtrak's high-speed Acela express train was the perfect, high-visibility base for an alternative advertising campaign promoting TLC's Cake Boss. Transit advertising remains an important element of multi-platform promotional efforts.

If you attended the SGIA or SME shows, we hope you had an opportunity to stop by FLEXcon's booth and say hello. If not, please give us a call and we can share ideas as to where the industry is going and how we can help you make the most of emerging and future opportunities. These shows allow us the opportunity to bring our innovations to you, and for you to share your application challenges with us.

Trends in Technology Convergence Attract New Business Opportunities

Technology convergence was an overarching theme of Labelexpo 2010, which set up shop in Chicago from September 14 to 16. The show attracted printers, brand owners, advertising agencies, and many others. It examined a range of print technologies, including conventional, UV, digital, and thermal printing.

Today, digital and conventional technologies are moving toward a time when they will complement rather than compete with each other. Many converters are now using both technologies, providing their customers with a one-stop-shopping approach for their printing needs. This helps converters to both retain existing business and attract new opportunities.

One of the things that made Labelexpo unique was its focus on live demonstrations of the pre-press and press flow processes. In this case, the same jobs were run using four different conventional and digital print technologies, including Nilpeter's HD Flexo press, HP Indigo's digital liquid toner press, Xeikon's dry toner digital press, and EFI Jetrion's UV inkjet press. Printed samples were then distributed so that participants could weigh the cost and quality benefits of various technologies.

By providing brief descriptions of each of the presses, participants were able to get a comprehensive picture of the jobs, including the press, origination, materials, finishing and MIS workflow. Applications of food, personal care and pharmaceutical labels were demonstrated during the technology workshops.

FLEXcon Website Upgrade: FLEXcon.com More Helpful Than Before

There are several significant upgrades to FLEXcon.com, designed to make it easier for you, our customers, to get the information you need.

These improvements come as a result of feedback from customers, who asked us to streamline this process so that more of their employees could have quicker access to pricing and order status. FLEXcon is pleased to be able to bring you these new features. We work continuously to update our site and to provide the features you need to help make you successful.

For example, have you ever forgotten your password to log in? No problem. Our **secure Password Reset is easier than ever**. Simply type in your e-mail address and we will send you an automated e-mail with a link to reset your password.

After logging in, go to the "My FLEXcon Info" home page. The link is located in the upper right hand corner of the site. There, you can check out the newest features under Product Information. These include:



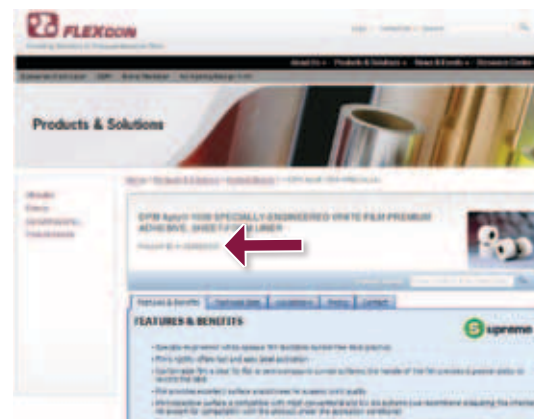
My Invoices is the newest self service tool FLEXcon offers customers.

My Invoices: Find and instantly e-mail an invoice to yourself. With a simple keystroke, find an invoice by date, invoice number or amount. It's that easy!

Product ID#s: At the request of our customers, FLEXcon has added identification

numbers for all our products. You can now find them on individual product pages, application sheets, order status, My Product History, My Special Pricing, and PDF price lists. And if you have other employees who need to register for FLEXcon.com, we made that easier too.

Our new registration process is faster than ever. To register, have an invoice number and amount, along with your 10 digit customer code. This will allow you to access everything the site has to offer. If you have ideas as to how we can make FLEXcon.com work better for you and your business, please contact your Business Team Representative.



Product ID numbers allow our users a fast and easy way to search for products.

People in the News



John Bennett, Vice President of FLEXcon's Product Identification Business Team, served as moderator of an expert panel discussion on Data

Collection at Labelexpo 2010 this past September. The panel discussed the benefits and uses of collected data, as well as the use of tools and metrics in the

data collection environment, interface systems, and the developing and maintaining of systems in the label printing industry.



Jodi Sawyer, Product Manager, Product Branding Business Team, will appear in the November issue of Digital Output as a contributor to a story about window advertising

solutions. Jodi spoke about how the industry is changing and growing, and noted that there are many solutions to window advertising opportunities for printers.

She also highlighted some of the products that FLEXcon can offer printers to help them make a mark in this segment.



Roland Castonguay, FLEXcon's New Business Development Manager, Product Branding Business Team, was featured as a contributor in a recent Digital

Output story on the state of the industry on vehicle wraps. Roland discussed the continuing expansion of this market segment as well as advances

in the skills of the wrap providers and FLEXcon's contributions to the growth of the market.

Qualify Compliant Labels Faster

Underwriters Laboratories (UL), the trusted resource across the globe for product safety certification and compliance solutions, has recently announced a new "Pre-Certification" service. The program is designed to simplify the quoting, pricing and implementation to get compliant labels into the supply chain faster.

The "Pre-Certification" process begins with a UL engineer discussing the customer's objectives and choice of materials. A focused test plan is developed to ensure the customer's

These changes will benefit you in a number of ways, including:

- Simpler quoting, pricing, and implementation of UL Projects is achieved;
- Paperwork transfer adoption will cost less: You can now easily switch to new technologies;
- Cost of compliance will be less than the cost and risks associated with counterfeit or non-compliant labels;
- Non-Subjective pricing due to a structured tool governing the quoting process;
- Reduction in ROI duration: Known fixed costs for testing and paperwork transfer adoptions will help facilitate budget planning;
- Better access to UL Engineers and the entire quote process for collaborative participants.

FLEXcon makes it easy for you

FLEXcon has long valued Underwriters Laboratories as a resource to ensure its pressure-sensitive films and adhesives are compliant with industry and consumer-safety standards. As the only UL self-certifying DAP lab in the PSA industry, FLEXcon continues investing in capital equipment and resources to maintain UL approval of its products and to better serve our customers.

FLEXcon's dedicated personnel are ready to assist you in taking advantage of these UL modifications. We can review your complete UL file and advise you on the most

cost-effective action plan to fit your needs. These may include testing needed, paperwork transfer adoptions to pursue, enhancing your UL listing, or a migration plan to better performing UL products. To speak with a Technical Service Representative and discuss your options now, please call (508) 885-8303.

To view a complete list of FLEXcon's standard (VBS) UL certified products go to www.FLEXcon.com and select FLEXcon's Products by Attribute tool found under the Products and Solutions tab. Simply select "UL Recognized" under the Agency dropdown.



In addition, you may visit Underwriters Laboratories website at www.UL.com to view FLEXcon's entries at UL and file listings of our products.

UL - PGGU2.MH10170 • UL - PGJ12.MH16635
CUL - PGJ18.MH16635 • CUL - PGGU8.MH10170

Underwriters Laboratories (UL) has set up two telephone numbers for FLEXcon customers to call to get details on the new pricing model and specific pricing for their products.

For a UL quotation contact:
 Danielle Tremblay, Tel 1-877-854-3577 x11309
 Debbie Nelson, Tel 919-549-1530
 Email: imdquote@us.ul.com



requirements and UL certification standards are met. The end result is an approved test plan, sample requirements, a testing timeline and a quote for the final certification project.

In addition, UL has revised its pricing schedule to provide a quicker return on investment for customers who wish to adopt label materials that have previously been UL certified by other label manufacturers.

Film Review

PRISMcal® Silver Water Drops offers clear advantages

FLEXcon is pleased to announce the newest addition to our holographic film portfolio, PRISMcal® Silver Water Drops. The water drop image is a new unique eye catching pattern. It's a silver embossed vinyl film with an asymmetrical water droplet, which reflects a holographic image, giving the film the illusion of dimension.

PRISMcal® Silver Water Drops is ideal for creating premium effects in advertising novelties, prime label applications, POP displays, stickers and decals, and unique interior signage. The new holographic water drop image is ideal for bold promotional and prime label brand applications.

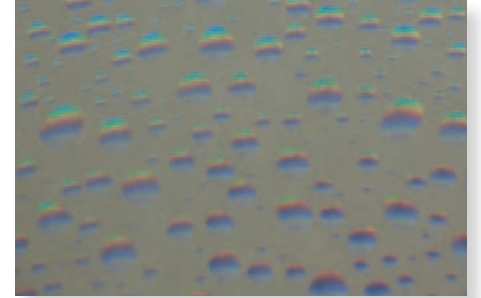
The new holographic water drop image is perfect for bold promotional and prime label brand applications. It is coated with a high-performance, aggressive permanent acrylic adhesive that provides a permanent bond to a wide range of surfaces.

PRISMcal® Silver Water Drops is available in two constructions to meet the needs of different print technologies. PRISMcal® V 240 Silver Water Drops V-344 94 PRT PFW is backed with a 94 lb. premium grade

liner with excellent layflat properties and backside printability, making it ideal for manual dispensing.

PRISMcal® V 240 Silver Water Drops TC-848 V-344 TRACrite® 150 features a TRACrite® 150 liner, ideal for roll-to-roll converting. The liner also provides a good diecutting base and allows for high-speed dispensing. The TC-848 topcoat makes this product compatible with UV, water, and solvent flexo inks. This construction is ideal for prime label applications. Custom constructions are also available for specific converting requirements and end user applications.

Please contact the Performance Products Business Team for more information.



FLEXcon Expands Thermal Transfer Pre-Slit Roll Program

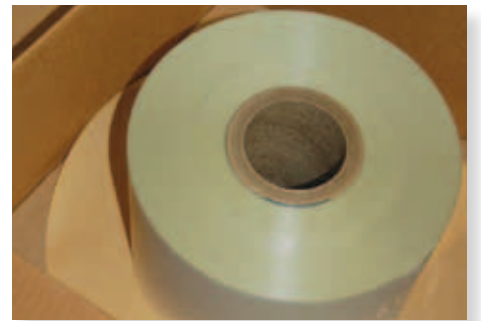
FLEXcon is now offering several new pre-slit widths and roll lengths to help you take advantage of the growing market for thermal transfer films. The pre-slit program includes COMPUcal® EXCEL™ 21440, COMPUcal® EXCEL™ 22440, COMPUcal® EXCEL™ 10442, THERMLfilm SELECT® 21940, THERMLfilm SELECT® 22940, and THERMLfilm SELECT® 10852.

In addition to the 4.5 inch and 6 inch widths already available, FLEXcon now offers 4 inch, 5 inch, 6.5 inch, 8.5 inch (Available with THERMLfilm SELECT® products only), 9 inch, and 10 inch widths as well. These widths have been selected based on input from you, our customers. The new and existing widths are designed to work in conjunction with standard thermal transfer printers and ribbon sizes. This allows for fewer change-over interruptions during printing, helping to improve efficiency and profitability. These products can also help you reduce warehouse inventory as well as waste, allowing you to reduce your overall costs. They are ideal for short-run applications.

FLEXcon's thermal transfer products are the best in the industry for high-deposition printability and high-definition barcode printing. They are also

compatible with the widest range of thermal transfer ribbons. All of these products are UL-recognized and offer proven performance for labeling in harsh environments. They provide resistance to smudging, abrasion, and a host of other environmental factors.

All products are available in 1,688 foot rolls on 3 inch cores in lots of three. We are also offering 5,000 foot rolls of THERMLfilm SELECT® 21940 (all widths) and COMPUcal® EXCEL™ 21440 in single roll releases (10" width only). Shipment lead times from FLEXcon's Spencer and Nebraska warehouses will remain same day for orders placed before 2 p.m. EST and next business day for orders placed after 2 p.m. Please contact the Product Identification Business Team for more information.



VALIDATE® Offers Security Labeling Solutions

Looking to create a security label? Then you should be looking at VALIDATE®. FLEXcon's metalized holographic film is embossed with a generic pattern for use in overt (obvious) security applications. The new pattern VALIDATE® Silver Protect Copy reads "protect*copy*authentic", and there are two new VBS "better" constructions of the product.

VALIDATE® V 240 Silver Protect Copy V-344 94 PRT PFW is backed with a 94 lb. premium grade liner that offers excellent layflat properties and backside printability. It is ideal for manual dispensing. VALIDATE® V 240 Silver Protect Copy TC-848 V-344 TRACrite® 150 is designed for roll-to-roll converting and provides a good diecutting base while also allowing for high-speed dispensing. It is coated with TC-848, the ideal topcoat for UV, water, and solvent Flexo inks.

VALIDATE® Silver Protect Copy holographic film offers a highly visible, cost-effective method to help guarantee goods are genuine brands/products, offering protection from potential liability and profit loss associated with product counterfeiting. They can also be used in conjunction with covert (hidden) or forensic security measures. These products are ideal for use with electronics, software, cellular phones, clothing, OEM parts, event tickets, or other security applications.

Custom constructions using VALIDATE® V 240 Silver Protect Copy are available for specific converting requirements and end user applications. FLEXcon can also create custom holographic image films with customer specific patterns. In this case, you can take advantage of FLEXcon's secure manufacturing procedures, which are designed to offer a higher level of security.

This product is available on a made-to-order basis. Custom constructions are available with a minimum order quantity. Please contact the Performance Products Business Team for more information.



DURapro™: the Tedlar® alternative

DuPont, the single supplier of Tedlar® films, has discontinued selling products for graphic applications. FLEXcon is no longer able to source any Tedlar®. As a result, all FLEXcon products constructed with OT 100 Clear, PT 100 Clear, and DFT 100 Clear have been discontinued.

There is, however, an alternative product available. The recommended replacement product is DURapro™ OF 100 Clear, a VBS Supreme product. It is in Quick-Ship for fast delivery, and samples are available for qualification.

DURapro™ OF 100 Clear is a 1 mil clear fluoropolymer film designed for outdoor graphic overlaminating applications. It is coated with a permanent pressure-sensitive clear acrylic adhesive, which provides optimal clarity and bonds well to printed surfaces. It is backed with a 42 lb. one-side polycoated white Kraft release liner and includes anti-graffiti characteristics, chemical

resistance, as well as UV protection for a minimum of seven years. It has a service temperature range of -40°F to 120°F, and its excellent moisture, scratching, and dirt protection make it suitable for most graphic applications.

In addition to our off-the-shelf products, custom solutions are also available. If you have any questions, please contact the Product Identification Business Team.



*Tedlar® is a Registered Trademark of E.I. du Pont.

TechTips



Engineering Labels to Lower Total Applied Cost (TAC)

By Ken Koldan
Business Development Manager, Product Identification

Despite the economic downturn, the market for self-adhesive films continues to expand. Whether it is consumer electronics, AHR (air conditioning, heating, and refrigeration), home appliance, product identification, security, or specialty labeling, the forecast for growth in the coming years is positive.

Increased demand, however, does not guarantee increased profits. Even with these positive sales predictions, every market segment is acutely aware of the challenges before them. As the public tightens its financial belt, manufacturers, brand owners, and retailers must remain vigilant as they seek to reduce total applied costs (TAC) without sacrificing the quality or performance that is expected.

What is true for these constituencies is also true for those who supply these companies with labels. Although labeling may appear to be a small cost when compared with the actual manufacturing of a product, label converters and their clients are exploring every possible avenue of cost containment.

More and more, they are turning to pressure-sensitive label manufacturers and converters in an effort to lower total applied cost while remaining in compliance with all labeling requirements. This has prompted converters and label manufacturers to re-examine not only their product offerings, but also how they can reduce the total number and size of the labels themselves.



Looking at the components of the pressure-sensitive "sandwich"

To fully understand how label options can lead to reduced costs, one first needs to understand the components of the pressure-sensitive film sandwich. The sandwich gives design engineers virtually limitless possibilities in meeting appliance development requirements.

Each component of the sandwich offers converters and OEMs either aesthetic or functional characteristics, or sometimes, both. In many cases, the wide-ranging characteristics and potential of pressure-sensitive film can be the catalyst for new product designs. This is because the sandwich is comprised of four layers (i.e., film, adhesive, topcoat, and liner) of widely varying material components.

In the case of the film, or substrate, converters and design engineers can select a product to match, say, the gloss level of an LCD display, the grain pattern of walnut, or the texture of brushed metal, as in the case of FLEXcon's BRUSHcal® products. There is a seemingly endless array of colors, gloss intensities and finishes available for the film layer to match or enhance the look of virtually any application. Yet substrate options also go beyond aesthetics. Its material composition, for example, is key to providing necessary durability characteristics to the self-adhesive film solution. Film gauges and thicknesses can play an important role here – they can range anywhere from .5 mil to 10 mil, depending on the application needs.



A self-adhesive product identification label can offer the high-end appearance and long-term durability of stainless steel, but at a fraction of the manufacturing and application costs.



The adhesive layer of the pressure-sensitive film sandwich is a functional component of the label. A viscous substance when pressure is applied, the adhesive enables the label to adhere temporarily or permanently to an application surface. The product surface, in addition to the environmental conditions the adhesive is likely to encounter, will play a large role in terms of adhesive properties it will need. These properties include tack, peel and shear, as well as other attributes, such as resistance to chemicals, UV radiation, heat, humidity and other environmental conditions. The ability of a label to stay adhered to a car battery during manufacturing and through the life of the battery is one example of where this adhesive layer is vital in the automotive industry.

FLEXcon offers a wide variety of adhesives to meet all of your bonding needs. These include V-344, an aggressive permanent acrylic adhesive that bonds well to many challenging surfaces. We also offer V-778, designed for use with TPO plastics, and V-606, an aggressive permanent acrylic adhesive designed to adhere to rough textured surfaces.



The number one job of the topcoat layer of pressure-sensitive film is to ensure proper ink adhesion to the surface of the film. Therefore, depending on the application, topcoats need to be compatible with a range of conventional, UV and water-based inks, as well as a range of conventional and digital printing methods. The right topcoat must be matched to the particular printing technology being used to create the label. For example, FLEXcon's DigiPRO® topcoat is specifically designed for digital printing with HP Indigo printers. It ensures excellent ink receptivity for sharp, vibrant image quality.



Liners serve a functional process as a base to die-cut against, as well as serve as the support material to assist in the manufacturing process. Although sometimes viewed as the "throw away portion" of the label, liners serve an important role. Liners need to withstand the printing, die-cutting, lamination and application steps inherent in the converting industry, as well as in the various electronic product testing and manufacturing processes. Furthermore, far from being thrown away, FLEXcon now offers some liners that are recyclable. In fact, FLEXcon offers a recyclable PET liner and has been working with third-party recycling companies to assist printers and brand owners in developing programs to collect and reuse these materials.

Each component has an impact on the label as a whole. For example, in the case of an exterior graphic application, you would want to select a durable film that would offer color fastness when exposed to UV light, as well as the necessary strength to withstand varying weather conditions, such as freezing cold temperatures, strong winds, and exposure to moisture. By choosing the right substrate, as well as the proper adhesive, topcoat, and liner combination, you can help ensure the success of the application.



When deciding which self-adhesive product will work for your application, understanding the end use environment is critical. Failure in making the right selection can be costly.

(Continued on next page)

Reducing Costs Through Substitutions

Choosing which elements are the right ones for a particular application involves asking the right questions. Designers are acutely aware of the range of demanding conditions that the label may face. There may be finished surfaces composed of entirely new materials, to which labels must adhere for the life of the product. Or the surface may be composed of a low-surface energy plastic or a powder-coated metal. The application may need to withstand scalding heat, acidic chemicals, UV light, or some combination of challenging conditions.

Once the demands have been assessed, an experienced label manufacturer may be able to work with the converter to offer alternatives that retain and even enhance the functional aspect of labeling, but at a reduced cost. Further, working with a supplier that has already field tested its materials and subjected them to outside testing agencies can help reduce label development timeframes, thus consolidating design-to-market schedules and ensuring a further reduction of the TAC of the product to the OEM.

Thus, design engineers can choose a self-adhesive film that can provide affordable alternatives to other identification options. For example, a product manufacturer may be using a stainless steel brand tag for a washing machine. In this case, the manufacturer may be using stainless steel because it offers a rugged representation of both the brand and the product; the presence of stainless steel implies endurance and quality. However, that same impression can be successfully imparted by using a 2 mil polyester BRUSHcal® label that gives the appearance of stainless steel. When coated with an aggressive permanent adhesive V-606 and protected by a clear overlamine, the resulting label retains the appearance and long-term durability of stainless steel, but at a fraction of the manufacturing and application costs of stainless steel.

Even within the realm of pressure-sensitive labeling, there are numerous cost-reducing options. In some cases, a label supplier may be able to suggest a thinner, but equally durable, substrate to reduce cost. For example, FLEXcon re-engineered its COMPUcal® EXCEL™ 2 mil clear overlamine and now provides a 1 mil version as well. This thin gauge film can also be used as a printable base film alternative to the standard 2.0 mil product.

A different liner can also provide cost savings. In some cases, printers can switch to a thinner gauge liner, reducing potential waste. If such substitutions can be accomplished without sacrificing any functional aspects, there are potential economies.

Reducing Costs By Reducing Time and Labor

Although one may be able to achieve some cost reduction through material choice, there are other options available, some of which can also help reduce the time and labor associated with label application.

The label provider, working closely with the OEM, can also perform an inventory of labeling needs. For example, almost every element of a larger product features a work-in-process (WIP) label at some point in the manufacturing process to help keep the final product in compliance with ISO or other quality assurance programs.

WIP labeling allows for a clear picture of the manufacturing chain, where the development and installation of every element can be traced. This is especially important in today's just-in-



Identifying which labels can be combined is the first step in streamlining the process and reducing labeling costs.

time manufacturing environment. In many cases, first level suppliers are fulfilling orders as they come in, making the need to track and account for each component even more critical. This necessity for accountability can potentially provide an opportunity for combining labels.

This is where assistance from the label manufacturer or pressure-sensitive material solution provider is best utilized. With this assistance, they can identify what labeling needs can be combined and thus help in streamlining the process and reduce labeling costs. The right combination of film, topcoat, adhesive, and liner can then be formulated to minimize the total applied cost and get the product to market as quickly as possible.

An example of this can be found in the manufacturing of stovetop appliances. In one case, a work-in-process (WIP) label was being used to track individual components during production. At the same time, a mask was being applied to prevent certain areas from being powder-coated. A diagnostic conversation with the appliance first tier supplier and the product identification solution specialist

from either the label manufacturer or pressure-sensitive material provider could result in a label that would serve both purposes.



Material choice can aid in reducing costs. One might switch to a thinner film or liner. If there is no sacrifice to functionality or aesthetics there are potential economies.

At first, this seems like a small change, but when one looks at the impact on the overall process, the true

cost savings become apparent. The cost of printing and diecutting both labels can potentially be cut in half, and those reductions would continue

throughout the rest of the manufacturing process. Instead of two or more labels being applied in the manufacturing line, only one is applied. Perhaps the manufacturer can eliminate the cost of removing the mask and the WIP label. The potential for WIP label failure during the powder-coat process is also reduced. The list of potential cost reductions is long. The economic benefit can be measured and is usually quite surprising to both the supplier and OEM.

Changing Perceptions

Traditional mindsets regarding pressure-sensitive film are changing as new technologies create new opportunities to reduce TAC. Converters who understand the financial pressures their customers are facing can offer solutions that will help them keep an eye on their bottom line. For the converter, the key lies in asking the right questions and working with an experienced pressure-sensitive film supplier to create the best possible solutions to meet the manufacturer's needs.

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