

TRANSITIONING FROM BROWN BOXES TO MULTI-COLOR FLEXO



THIS SESSION included presentations from a brand owner customer, two converters and a plate maker who, starting with the original idea at the converter's customer to change how a product was printed, walked through the steps of delivering a high quality package or display at lower costs than the normal litho laminated corrugated process, as well as the personal stories from each speaker elaborating on their own journeys. Once upon a time a small group of people started printing flexo on corrugated box now it has many multi color flexo printing machines installed and more and more every year.

THE CASE

3M use corrugated as shipping container, shipper display and display tray. The existing product print with Litho Laminate



(print 4 color process and 2 spot colors) and would like to change to flexo direct printing on corrugated.

Michael John, design operations print quality manager at 3M Co then try to find a print partner who could



take on the project and then hold meetings where that printer offered ideas on how to achieve its goals. Together, they reduced the number of spot colors, and identified challenges that included traps, fold rollovers and even tempering expectations.

Before start with direct printing multicolor we must answer the followings:

- What is the average amount of color per job



- What is the desired substrate
- What is the desired lpi
- Does your company already have the right printing machine?
- What are the variables: Paper, anilox roll, ink and varnish, dryer, prepress, plate, etc
- Develop standardization
- Control and measure quality before and during production by using tools to measure color, registration, dot gain, diecut, etc

Ed Nusslein, general manager at McLean Packaging Corp, told the story of pushing corrugated print's quality from the view of a converter well on its way to running high-end direct print flexo.

THE FUTURE OF DIRECT PRINT

With the advance in print, ink and plate technology the future of direct printing onto corrugated is bright. The speeds, LPI, and minimum traps

that are now being realized in direct on corrugated allow the industry to be competitive within the litho and digital markets.

- E-commerce is rapidly developing market in which multi-color printing is sought after on the outside and inside liners.
- There is equipment available that can print and diecut in one pass
- The unboxing experience and the impact of social media
- Are corrugated companies marketing to the generations of today?

Nusslein stressed any printer looking to make the same transition to collaborate with experts and understand not only what is needed (substrate, lpi and the



average number of colors per job as examples) but also that there is business committed to supporting the investments to make that transition.

A PREPRESS PERSPECTIVE

Jake Kraus, account executive at Printron, gave a prepress provider perspective to the session's topic. Kraus explained how his company manages the much more complex prepress and plate making processes that come with multi-color, high-end corrugated.

He began by talking about why most people fail in achieving goals like New Year's resolutions: they have unreal expectations, goals that are too vague, a lack of planning and the wrong mindset, positing a corrugated printer could find itself unable to achieve goals for the same reasons. He then discussed three key elements to succeeding in the transition:

- **Communication:** Communication directly impacts the ability to successfully print high-quality graphics on direct print corrugated. Having a print champion is important to form partnerships with key suppliers. And commitment from top management,

supervisors, press crews and supplier partners is vital.

- **Preproduction meetings:** In preproduction meetings, define the expectations of the brand owner, prepress providers and print providers. Establish procedures like the workflow and chain of command ("Who is responsible for changes?" Kraus asked).
 - Determine color standards,
 - The condition of the press,
 - The specific ink's properties and
 - The specific substrate's characteristics
- **Process control:** Everything needs to be consistent the same plate every time, the same ink set and the same level of dot gain (check what is the min dot gain). What traps you can handle? What traps will your customer accept?

A COLORFUL DISRUPTION

David Diroll Jr., general manager, Jamil Packaging told the story from the perspective of a converter newer to the transition, explaining what it recognized as opportunities,

what it sees happening now, and where the future may take it. "No matter what, we say 'yes!'" Diroll explained, a mentality that helped lead Jamil Packaging to, in 2006, purchase a new corrugated press. With new machinery and increased capabilities aligning with brand owner demands, Diroll's company evolved from 1 and 2 color boxes to 2 color boxes, and then to increasingly complicated and multi colored boxes.

He explained that engaging in a culture of professionalism with your associates and your supply partners is key, as well as educating your customers as to what your new or improved capabilities are. Key questions to ask include: "Can our equipment do what the customer is asking?" "What tools do we need? What plates, inks and processes need to be involved?" and "Who is involved? Staff, plate maker, ink supplier, corrugated supplier."

- Create a go to market strategy with the right customers that will have the patience to go on the journey with you one step at a time.
- Assemble the right supply partners that have

demonstrated world class performance in their fields

- Network with the right peers within your industry/ associations to learn from and set up collaboration conversations.
- Collaboration between your ink, die and corrugated suppliers is of the utmost importance
- Get with you die suppliers and set up fingerprint schedules to understand your capabilities (anilox volume, registration, line type etc
- Educate your sales group and customers on what can be done with the tools you have
- Include your die and ink suppliers in sales calls when needed
- Include your suppliers during the pre-press process

Print Day

Emboldened by the printer's confidence as well as his own, John returned to the stage to finish his brand owner story. After overcoming some small color obstacles on press, the final print run went well, appeasing even those who were apprehensive about the project.