

Info Label



Mark Dufort and
Rosemary Joralemon

Harnessing the twin powers of flexo and digital print.

By Jack Kenny

The story of Info Label is the chronicle of a company that made an accurate judgment about the future of the label markets that it serves, acted on that judgment and now is reaping the benefits of having made the right move at the right time. To use an American football term, Info Label threw a Hail Mary pass and caught it in the end zone.

The winning move for this small converting company located in Halfmoon, NY, USA, is digital printing. Three years ago, Info Label was a flexographic shop that had been successful producing high quality package decoration products using UV flexo inks in combination with screen printing, hot foil application and specialty finishing. In January 2007 the company acquired an HP Indigo WS4500 press. This year it added the newest HP Indigo press, the mighty WS6000.

The switch to digital has changed production significantly for this prime label converter. Today, half of its work is printed digitally, and they have capacity to take on more.

Info Label's president, Mark Dufort, started the company in 1994, having worked for many years in sales and management for a label converter in the same region of New

York State. It began with one flexo press in a 12,000 square foot plant in Mechanicville, NY, and relocated five years ago to the 25,000 square foot plant it occupies now in Halfmoon, a northern suburb of Albany, NY. Today, besides the two Indigos, Info Label has two Gallus presses, a 410 and a 280, both with UV combination capabilities. The company employs 25 people and operates two shifts five days a week.

Rosemary Joralemon, a long time friend of Dufort, joined the company a year ago as the director of sales and marketing. Coming from sales and sales management in the medical field, she was new to the label industry, and has found it to be fascinating. "Mark's philosophy and mine are very similar in how we do business, how we treat our customers, how we think things should be," she says. "My tenure here has been the happiest 12 months of my life, professionally."

Info Label has always concentrated on customers in the personal care, and household chemical markets. "We also do quite a few wine labels," Joralemon says, "and we have branched off into some other areas as well such as pet care, fancy food, and Nutraceuticals. We sell direct to customers, and we also work closely with brokers who bring us a whole



The HP Indigo WS6000 digital press

care and household chemical products, everybody wants to have as many flavors or scents as they can. I go to buy dish soap and there are 20 choices. I can get my dishwasher soap in tablets or bubble packs with the power ball in it, or next to it, or I can have liquid or powder. Who knew? Market segmentation is giving more visual presence on the shelf which moves market share. This is good for labels, and good for everybody. I don't see that changing anytime soon."

She does think, however, that excess packaging will diminish as the industry moves, step by step, to green. "The biggest push we've seen in the last 12 months is directly due to Wal-Mart's environmental scorecard. Everybody is pushing back on the supply chain behind them to prove that those who are supplying them are also green, so that their own score improves. We used to get calls once in a while asking if we have eco-friendly stocks, or asking what we are doing at our plant to be eco-friendly. Now we get calls about these topics on a regular basis."

cornucopia of products to produce. Info Label has a strong reputation for producing very high end labels."

The majority of Info Label's customers are small to medium sized businesses, according to Joralemon. "These are our big customers. We give them a high level of personal touch, flexibility and customer service that's second to none. For example, we'll drive labels to somebody if they're in a bind. We'll stay late and do whatever it takes to help them."

Digital label printing, with its plate-free technology and extremely low setup time, has added a dimension to the sales effort.

"With digital technology, we can target startup companies," Joralemon observes. "We can do one-offs, mock-ups and short runs with the 4500, and then move them to the 6000, which is designed to produce moderate to long runs, when their quantities increase. What we are finding more and more is that the companies we work with tend to have a very wide pyramid in terms of their brands. They might order a million labels a year, but there might be 4,000 labels in each SKU. Some of them have hundreds of SKUs with small quantities, offer holiday flavors and scents; have two-, four- and six-ounce sizes, and now they want to add a bath soap and an aftershave. So you end up with decent volumes which are composed of multiple SKUs, and in flexo that becomes problematic because formulations keep changing and there are plates involved which must be scrapped and remade. Put the job on a digital press and it's just an artwork change on the computer. That's all it is. This has become very attractive to our customers."

In digital production, Info Label assigns small to medium-sized runs to the ws4500, and medium to long runs to the WS6000. The former can run at about 100 fpm with a 17" repeat, while the latter is twice as fast with a repeat of about 36".

We don't try to push a print job to one technology or another," notes Joralemon. "We analyze every job and decide if it is better produced as a flexo job or a digital job. More and more projects are coming in looking like digital jobs, because there's little that the Indigos cannot do."

Joralemon sees SKU proliferation continuing to grow. "Everyone wants a bigger piece of a bigger pie. There's a war for shelf space, and where we live, with high end personal

Customers and potential customers ask about environmentally friendly label substrates, the eco-friendly efforts in the plant, and the possibility of using soy-based inks. This last question can generate some confusion. "We have customers who are fully utilizing our digital technology," Joralemon says. "They are being asked by their customers what they are doing to be green and they ask us if they can switch to soy inks. To switch them to soy inks I have to take them off the digital press and move them to flexo technology. Attached to the flexo machines are big tubes that vent emissions out into the air. And when I push the power button on the flexo press I'm throwing away the first 2,000 feet of material before I get it into register. In most plants, this start up waste goes into a landfill forever. If I leave the project on the digital press, there are no emissions, and the Indigos use 50 feet of substrate to register. HP Indigo digital technology is probably the greenest technology that printing has ever come up with, but some customers think they are going to feel better about putting soy inks on their labels so they can say, 'We switched to soy inks to be eco-friendly.'

"A lot of it is about 'feeling good,' rather than being conscious of what's actually happening. A lot of companies think that if they feel better about what they are doing, it doesn't matter if they're green-washing or not. Second, some



The Gallus 410 UV flexo press

people are uninformed or undereducated about sustainability issues and truths. For example, I can provide any number of eco-friendly facestocks, but the label industry's adhesives aren't all eco-friendly, so in most cases these 'green' labels end up in a landfill anyway."

"We'll ask potential customers how their labels are being produced, and we'll tell them that we can make their flexo produced labels significantly greener just by moving them to our digital press. They're often surprised. Most will hear us. We have been able to educate most customers that they should stay with or move to digital technology to meet their sustainability goals."

Besides sales and marketing, Joralemon has other jobs at Info Label. She recently upgraded the telephone system, is developing the website, and humidified the plant. She also attacked the company's waste with a goal of zero waste. The result? They're down to 1 percent waste.

"I had a real problem walking around seeing the waste matrix rolls three feet across and 12 inches high, 50 of them going onto a pallet and into a landfill forever. It was disturbing. I did some research and found International Paper Products Corp. (IPPC) in Westfield, MA, and contracted with them in May 2009 to convert our waste – now considered scrap raw material or SRM – into eco-friendly Enviro Fuelcubes. Info Label is the first company in New York State to contract with IPPC. They needed to know the composition of everything we planned to send to them, so I cataloged every aspect of our manufacturing: every oil, every ink, every paper, every film, and every adhesive, every everything. I also provided MSDS sheets with samples for IPPC to examine. We were thrilled to find that IPPC got us down to 1 percent waste. They take everything, including our empty Fritos bags from lunch, paper cups and plates and utensils as well as all of our waste matrix. The only things we can't send them are metal, liquid, vinyl, or food.

"What we pay them to haul our SRM to Massachusetts is 60 percent lower than what we paid our local garbage collector to pick it up when it was waste. And within five years IPPC estimates that they will be paying us for our SRM; it will be a profit center for us."

The company followed the waste project with a change to more efficient lighting in the production area, for which it received a \$7,000 rebate from the state of New York, and from which it has been relieved of half of its lighting electrical expense. "We donated our previous lighting fixtures to a local municipality who needed them and saved them from going to the landfill. It was a no-brainer; we got better lighting for color matching, decreased our energy consumption, saved money on our electric bills, and helped out a local town."

Info Label is entering the flexible packaging arena more and more, says Joralemon, and intends to pursue the shrink sleeve business. Its markets are both national and global. "We have made labels for some Italian wines; they wanted them produced on the WS6000, and we got the business. We send wine labels to Argentina, and we do a ton of wine in Sonoma, California. Much of our business also comes from the metro New York area."

The company has not been active in one area that makes a digital press different: variable imaging. Indeed, few label



printers have had much business in that area. "It hasn't been a need for our customers yet," she adds. "We have recently started to get inquiries about it, however. Something has happened, because in the last month we've had a call a week about it, but not much interest before that."

Regarding the UV flexo business, Joralemon says, "We love doing flexo all day long. It's profitable, and there are certain looks that you can achieve very beautifully that are either harder or impossible to do any other way. But we can do almost anything we want with the digital, too. We can usually find a creative solution."

Info Label is breaking with digital tradition when it comes to the application of white ink. "Many of our high end labels are on clear film, and they require white ink to achieve the desired level of opacity," she says. "Not every digital press technology offers white ink. For us it's a crucial element. We put on two to three times the amount of white that they recommend, due to the opacity that we need in order to make the labels look the way our customers want them to look. The more white we add, the slower the process becomes. The WS6000 was a big improvement because its white is improved, and its speed is twice that of the WS4500. For example, one job we did on the 4500 took 22 hours. We moved it to the 6000 and it took four and a half hours."

The economic downturn has not had a strong impact on Info Label. "We are so fortunate – business is very steady," Joralemon says. "We have seen business by some customers drop of by almost 40 percent, but we were able to bring in new customers. We feel that our technology, expertise and creativity make us uniquely positioned to offer whatever our customers need."

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Your Image Is Our Business

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