

Zipping up new opportunities

SINCE the beginning of the year, Johannesburg-based Zippy Labels has witnessed an increase in demand for flexible food packaging, and its ISO 9001 certification (see sidebar) has helped meet the industry's exacting standards and grow this side of the business.

Husband and wife team Kevin and Maryke Thomas are proud to act as a one-stop shop, offering a basket of products spanning shrink sleeves, packets, sachets and numerous label formats, which can be printed flexographically or digitally to meet customers' needs across the food and beverage, pharmaceutical and cosmetics, home care products and chemical sectors.

Kevin reports that the shrink sleeve market is looking promising because customers, who have traditionally only used standard self-adhesive labels, have become more educated about the correct shrink sleeve application process.

He adds that the team has always been impressed by MPS presses since before it invested in the first EF 340 multi-substrate label press in 2017, following a devastating flood at the company's Eastleigh facility and relocation to Greenhills Industrial Park (PPM March 2018).

Although there is competition with gravure printers in the flexible packaging market, narrow-web flexo offers comparable quality and short-run benefits for customers wanting to introduce new variants, without having to invest heavily in inventory.

Zippy Labels recently installed an MPS EF 410 press to increase capacity and operational flexibility to help customers better navigate the unpredictability of demand levels resulting from Covid-19. Having a second MPS press operating simultaneously with the original one also helps improve service levels when multiple customers require job deliveries on the same day.

Kevin notes that the extra 90mm width on this specialist filmic material model also broadens the offering of chip packet sizes and sleeves for decorating bigger containers.

Doubling flexo capacity

Kevin explains that Zippy Labels first started talking to ROTOCON about a second MPS press investment during Labelexpo 2019. 'Although we weren't quite ready then, we wanted to put out our feelers. In October 2020, a press became available from a food packaging converter in Switzerland through ROTOCON's turnkey project service responsible for sourcing, installing and servicing pre-owned flexographic presses. Director Patrick Aengenvoort connected us to the factory to question the production team about press performance and verify that it was in great condition.'



The eight-colour MPS EF 410 specialist filmic substrate press increases capacity plus operational flexibility, and improves service levels when multiple customers require job deliveries on the same day. Pictured next to the press are ROTOCON'S director Patrick Aengenvoort (centre) with Zippy Labels' Gavin Letcher, Maryke Thomas, Kevin Thomas and Holly Thomas.

Patrick takes up the story. 'We usually fly out a local ROTOCON technician to pack the tooling, dismantle the press and get it pre-freight ready. This wasn't possible due to strict Covid-19 travel restrictions in Switzerland in December, so we chose a local team recommended by MPS, and they did a very professional job,' he explains. 'Our team, headed by Francois de Beer, unpacked, installed and commissioned the press in February.'

Kevin adds that the installation went very smoothly. 'Because of the facility's compact nature, we had to rearrange a few things to create a dedicated space for the MPS EF 410 – it is now enclosed in a neat, drywalled room, he states. 'I was impressed by Francois' technical and printing industry expertise and helpful demeanour, and look forward to him assisting us again when the lamination unit arrives from England.'

Kevin reports that very little training was required because Brendon Diesel, who joined Zippy Labels with the arrival of the MPS EF 340 in 2017, is very experienced and responsible for training and guiding the two MPS press operators.

'Brendon has been instrumental in helping to grow the business. He's meticulous in terms of quality and likes to try new things to make the packaging exciting and help customers keep attracting consumer attention in-store.'