

ABBOTT-ACTION INSTALLS INSIDE/OUT APSTAR RDC

IN PURSUIT OF THE GROWING E-COMMERCE MARKET

BY JACKIE SCHULTZ

Abbott-Action, Inc. has been very busy in recent years, as the company absorbs sizeable investments in new technology and facility infrastructure on the production floor. Recent installations include a high-speed single pass Barberán Jetmaster digital press, an Isowa Ibis flexo folder-gluer, two high-speed C64 series Esko cutting tables equipped with automatic feeders and stackers, a multitude of material handling components and a new MIS system.

With several manufacturing, warehousing and fulfillment operations throughout Massachusetts, including a sheet feeder (NewCorr) in Northboro and a large sheet plant in Attleboro, the independent, family-owned company offers an extensive portfolio of products and services. The new equipment installed at the sheet plant is driving continued market expansion, particularly in the higher-end graphics and e-commerce markets.

CEO J. Samuel Abbott likes to draw parallels between running a business

and the game of baseball. Lately, his favorite line has been: "If you build it, they will come," from the movie *Field of Dreams*. The company that he co-owns with Glen Gardiner and Gail Conca has built an impressive organization and the customers have come, in fact many customers. Sales have continued to grow steadily in response to their strategic planning.

"That level of growth is a wonderful problem to have, but it can be difficult to manage," Abbott says. "The growth was in part due to the investments

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we made, the people on the team and the message that we're sending to the market of what we can do. But it's also the business climate that many of us in the industry are experiencing and hopefully it's a sustainable increase."

Having reached capacity last year on many of the existing machines, it was clear additional investments were needed to support future growth. The decision was made to purchase a six-color Apstar HG2 1628 from the Haire Group in Merrillville, Ind. The 66- x 110-inch rotary diecutter has two top printing units, four bottom printing units and a servo dual slotting section in addition to the diecut section, enabling it to print on both sides of a corrugated sheet and then diecut in one pass. Later this year a seventh print unit will be added as a dedicated UV coating station.

"This machine is one of the most unique machine centers in North America," Bill Pratt, Haire Group Director of New Machinery Sales, says. "The one thing that sets the

Apstar apart is the way we are using servo technology to ensure a seamless transition from top to bottom printing to maintain registration integrity. This tight registration was very important to our customers."

According to Jeff Quinn, Haire VP and General Manager, Abbott-Action is one of the first companies in the U.S. to install Apstar's inside/outside printer. The press not only offers the opportunity to flexo print higher-end graphics, it also opens the door to market expansion, especially in e-commerce, one of the fastest growing segments of the corrugated industry.

Print Excellence

Abbott-Action serves a diverse market in and around New England. Depending on the season, about 60% of the business is industrial brown box and the remainder is multi-color high-end graphics. Although the company had been producing graphics packaging and displays for

many years, the jobs were run on older technology, specifically a vintage Bobst that had been converted from a letterpress to a flexo press.

Sam Abbott says the Jetmaster digital printer provided a way to leapfrog the learning curve to high-end print technology. "Now having made that digital investment we've seen that it is growing other opportunities where the economics lead us back to flexography. We are targeting the evolution of e-commerce packaging where people are wanting color on both sides of the box. The Apstar converting line was selected to meet the demand of production efficiencies, specifically uptime and speed along with great print registration and quality."

The new diecutter has a full complement of components to ensure high-speed production of near photo quality printed and diecut sheets. A Feedmax pre-feeder from Alliance Machine Systems International, LLC and a



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stacker from AG Stacker optimize productivity. The machine has an OEM speed of 12,000 sheets per hour.

All of the anilox rolls are from Praxair and range from 250 cells per inch with a volume of 7.5 BCM to 300 cells per inch with a volume of 6 BCM. CSW Inc. in Ludlow, Mass., supplies the printing plates and cutting dies, and the inks are provided by JM Fry Printing Inks’ Canton, Mass., office.

The diecutter is equipped with the complete JB Machinery® suite of products. According to JB Machinery President Warren Bird, ColorDry™ XL3000 IR dryers are located after each print station with a Final Flexo Dryer in the first transition transfer section after the two top print units and the second transfer

section after the four bottom print units, which ensures optimized dry trapping and production speeds on all substrates, including coated.

“There are also four KleenPlate® 3.0 Auto Plate Wash & Print Defect Eliminators on the four bottom print units and a ColorCure® Cold UV Double Bank Curing System in the second transfer section after the Final Flexo Dryer to provide superior gloss

and scuff resistance at maximum throughput speeds,” Bird says.

The entire machine line is controlled by the automatic InKomand® Ink Temperature Control and Viscosity/pH monitoring system, allowing for individual print unit control for precise heating or cooling on demand. The complete line is monitored using the VisionMaster® In-Press Monitoring & Inspection system delivered through



Inks are supplied by JM Fry Printing Inks.



JB Machinery's new KomandCenter™ system provides one central dashboard for real-time operator monitoring.



The diecutter has two top printing units and five bottom printers. ColorDry™ XL3000 IR dryers are located after each print station.

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1080P HD cameras on each drying unit, along with DVR incident history date/time stamping and RFID operator remote PLC reset with Wi-Fi Smart Device reporting.

"Finally, with such a comprehensive auxiliary package the control platform is housed in the new KomandCenter™ system, which provides one central dashboard for real-time operator monitoring of each and every auxiliary simultaneously, with a dual 50-inch monitor station suspended above the machine line for supervisory monitoring at a glance from the feed or stacker positions," he says.

"The goal for us was to maximize the productivity of the machine. All of the investments with JB were

geared towards that productivity," Abbott says. "The additional benefit will be print excellence."

"Now that we have this very precise color to color registration, our flexo work will be more reflective of what the Jetmaster can do," Chuck Slingerland, Abbott-Action Vice President of Sales and Digital Operations, says. "Before we could not print high speed on Kemi. Now with the JB dryers we can run Kemi at top speed. We can run more complex graphics because we don't have to worry about wet trapping. We are holding less than a 32nd inch trap. It's almost color to color registration so now we can design jobs that other companies can't print and that's a more premium box."

Since installing the Apstar and the Jetmaster, high-graphics jobs can be migrated from one printing process to another. Many of the digitally printed jobs were previously high graphics offset printed labels laminated to corrugated. Today, virtually all of those label jobs have been converted to digital, and now with the installation of the Apstar, some of those jobs are shifting back to flexo.

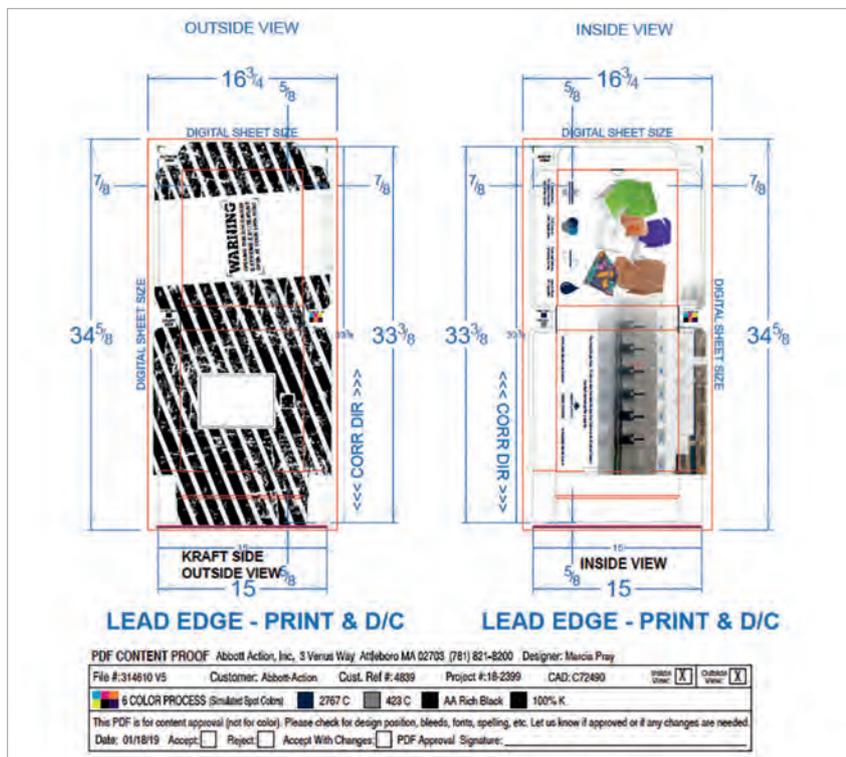
"Economics still determine print methodology, but it is interesting how much overlap there is with digital," Slingerland says. "Litho and flexo have distinct ranges for optimal return, however digital allows you to produce profitably in both of these areas."

Abbott adds, "Flexo technology certainly still has a place for us and will for quite some time. For us it's a core part of what we do every day. The Apstar was the clear choice for a couple of reasons. The quality in which they make the press in our eyes is beyond what others are doing today with a solution of top and bottom printing. We also value the relationship that we have with Haire and their service. They are committed to supporting our operation. We had a fantastic installation that went better than planned through great communication and teamwork."

Parts and service are provided by Dong Fang America (DFA), which is a joint venture between Haire Group and Dong Fang. DFA is based in Haire's Merrillville facility.

Target Marketing

Now that the newest equipment is installed and up and running, the next step is getting the word out to customers who have a need for printing on both sides of their packaging.



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An Automatån load turner is a newer investment.

“We were doing a lot of double pass work through the plant. That’s part of the comfort knowing we already had the business to place on the Apstar.” Abbott says. “We have built

a very strong company with unique capabilities, we are very excited for our future.”

Abbott-Action has identified the need to fulfill the role of a marketing manager position. “Our marketing department will support the sales staff in their efforts to promote the capabilities of the new digital press and the Apstar. We

are generating a lot of excitement surrounding the ability to print on both sides of the carton,” Slingerland says.

The company is poised for growth and has diversified into other products.

“Our facility in Canton is home to our Protective Packaging Division, where we sell foam fabrication and wood crating. Recently, we acquired French Packaging that sells protective packaging services. The addition has proven very successful and we are thrilled with our growth on this side of the business,” Abbott says, adding that the company wants to grow the business for the benefit of the employees and customers. “We are focused on creating great jobs for the team we employ and committed to being a dedicated supplier focused on meeting and exceeding our customers’ expectations.” ■