

By Jackie Schultz
Editor

ALMOST FROM THE BEGINNING, CHIEF CONTAINER HAS BEEN MAKING A NAME FOR ITSELF IN HIGHER-END PRINTING ON CORRUGATED BOARD. WITH ITS SKILLED WORK FORCE AND ARSENAL OF PRINTING EQUIPMENT, THIS AMERICAN SHEET PLANT IS CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN FLEXO AND LITHO.

Lamar Guthrie admits that establishing a niche in the higher-end corrugated graphics market wasn't exactly his plan when he started Chief Container 15 years ago. His son, Reuben, who heads up sales, was the catalyst.

"I've always been a brown box guy," Lamar says. "Reuben was really the force behind us getting into graphics. Whenever a job was two or three colours, he would say, 'Let's go one more colour.'"

"I still want to go one more colour," Reuben says. "We've got eight now. I'd like to go to nine. It's more fun."

More fun, indeed. Chief Container in Acworth, (Georgia), belongs on the short list of pioneers in corrugated graphics. Since the mid-nineties, the sheet plant has been pushing the envelope, printing higher line screens and achieving near perfection in four-colour process, accomplishing what

many considered impossible at the time.

"We do a lot of R&D. We've tried a lot of crazy things. Some of them work, some of them don't," Reuben says. "We've had a lot of hairbrained ideas."

"Yes you have," says Production Manager Todd Crabtree. When asked for examples, Crabtree says, "Printing 130 line screen or embossing a customer's logo using the rotary die. We had to crush the corrugated to make it look like it was popping out. Not all ideas work."

This "can do" attitude is commonplace at Chief, says General Manager Charlie



From left, Charlie Alexander, Lamar Guthrie, Reuben Guthrie and Todd Crabtree.

Pioneers in Printing



Alexander, who learned about corrugated printing from graphics consultant Glen Buckner. "We're surrounded by talented people who don't need a lot of direction. They always want to try something new. When we had a two-colour machine, they wanted to print four colours."

In fact, it was Chief Container that came up with a concept for printing seven colours. United Machinery used the design to develop the Flexus.

"We encouraged them to come up with a machine that would print seven colours," Lamar says. "Most people at that time felt that such a machine might not hold registration but we proved that it could."

Today, Chief can print eight colours in one pass. The plant has two side by side seven and eight colour 66 x 113-inch Martin DRO 1628 NT rotary diecutters.

Production runs range anywhere from five to 7500, with most of the product being larger format. "Our sweet spot is the larger sheet (40 x 80 inches)," Alexander says.

The company runs one shift. Monthly capacity is about 40 million sq ft.

Getting Results

Whether it's brown box, higher-end graphics, P-O-P displays or fulfillment, Chief Container is results-oriented. For an independent manufacturer, the company has a large design department. The Creative Group has six structural designers and five graphic designers. Brian



An eighth print station was added last year giving one of the NT's hexachrome (six-colour process) capability.

Daniel is the Creative Manager.

The designers use ArtiosCAD and Adobe Acrobat Reader to draw three-dimensional files. Customers can rotate the files to any side, even upside down. They can zoom in or out, print different views and get measurements.

"This solves a lot of problems for us because we were constantly getting requests from customers saying, 'I like the rendering but I wish I could see the other side.' Or 'Can you add dimensions because we don't have any idea how big the footprint is on this display,'" Daniel says.

Chief's product mix is 50% promotional, 30% retail packaging, with the rest being brown box. Noteworthy customers include Coca-Cola, Campbell Soup Co., Heinz, Pepperidge Farm, Diageo and Hewlett-Packard (HP). These customers are high profile, often requiring higher-end graphics, even award-winning.

In September, Chief received the 2008 CorrPak Best of Show award in the printing category for a two-piece HP pallet skirt. The display also received first place in the Flexo Printing on White Liner Combined Board category.

Another entry, the Crown 750 box for Diageo, received second place in the same category. Diageo is one of the largest premium drinks businesses in the world. The Crown Royal box used to be litho printed.





"This was the first time they've tried getting out of labels," Alexander says. "They were quite satisfied."

"Diageo has very demanding print requirements and we met them quite well. They wanted litho quality with flexo print and we gave it to them," Lamar adds. "It's more than machines when you get into that type of printing. You've got to have talented people, which we have."

In many cases, Chief has been successful in convincing customers to

The HP pallet skirt won Best of Show in the 2008 TAPPI CorrPak Competition and first place in the Flexo Printing on White Liner Combined Board category. The Crown 750 box for Diageo received second place and the Heinz pallet skirt received third place in the same category.

switch from lithography to flexography when it makes sense. For example, one customer was using a three-colour litho label that required three operations — printing, laminating and diecutting. This was time-consuming and costly.

"They agreed to allow us to print their photo images directly onto corrugated," Alexander says.

Investing Accordingly

The company's investment in printing and converting machinery reflects its commitment to graphics.

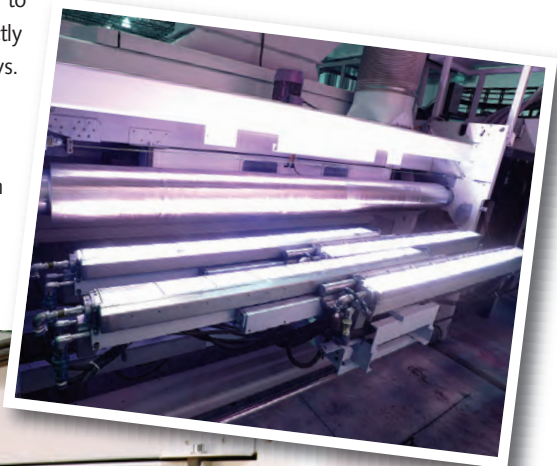
"We have a lot of fire power in that plant," Lamar says.

Most of the equipment is relatively new — within five years. In addition to the two NTs, Chief has a jumbo 54 x 78-inch Automatan litho label laminator; a two-colour Martin rotary diecutter; a Bobst flatbed diecutter; a three-colour Martin flexo folder-gluer with inline diecutting; an ink kitchen from Poteet Printing Systems; a J&L specialty gluer; a Rapidex double headed stitcher and gluer; an HP Display Maker digital press, and two Kongsberg cutting tables. Production uses HRMS computer software to track orders.

Both of the NTs have infrared dryers and an ultraviolet curing system from JB Machinery and anilox rolls from Pamarco. UV is applied to about 50% of the product run on the NTs.

"Chief boasts a seven and eight-colour flexo rotary diecutter arsenal that is both capable of multi-colour process printing, water-based or UV varnish on semi-coated and coated papers with diecutting in a single pass at maximum

The sheet plant has been pushing the envelope, printing higher line screens and achieving near perfection in four-colour process, accomplishing what many considered impossible.



rated machine speeds," says JB Machinery Vice President, Warren Bird.

JB Machinery and Chief Container have taken parallel paths in their corrugated graphics journey, helping each other along the way.

"John Bird (JB Machinery President) is an extremely knowledgeable person. He took our concept of what we wanted to do in large format printing and helped us go in the direction where we could do this on high end clay coated material," Alexander says.

In 1999, JB Machinery equipped Chief's United Flexus 66 x 113-inch six-colour rotary diecutter with five interstation flexo dryers, one final flexo dryer and an FCS three bank UV curing system in the dwell station (Chief no longer has the United machine).

The seven-colour Martin, which was installed in 2003, has six interstation flexo dryers, one final flexo dryer and an FCS double bank UV curing system in the second dwell section.

Chief's second NT, also installed in 2003, started out as a three-colour. Four additional print units were added in 2005. The eighth print station, added last year, has an interstation flexo dryer, giving the machine hexachrome (six-colour process) capability.

"Hexachrome is an interesting concept. The colours are very nice, but we really don't know if there's a place for it," Alexander says. "I don't know if we're far enough along that we could convince the Coca-Cola's of the world that we could match their colours with six-colour process."

Rapid Growth

Lamar founded Chief in 1994, four years after he sold Target Container to Pratt Industries. Alexander left Rock-Tenn to join Lamar. Combined, they have more than 75 years in the corrugated industry.

"I had no plans to start another company when I sold Target," Lamar says. "I had a three-year no compete. When that expired I started thinking about starting another boxplant."

Part of that decision was prompted by Guthrie's two sons, Reuben and Bo, who

both worked at Target and then at Pratt. "They decided they didn't like working for someone else and encouraged me to start one more boxplant," Lamar says. Bo works at Chief in sales.

Chief was originally located in Marietta, Georgia. "We started out very conservatively, renting 45,000 sqft of a 150,000-sqft building," Lamar says.

As it turns out, Lamar was too conservative. The company grew quickly and needed more space. Chief ended up taking over half of the building as well as a 65,000-sqft building across the street. "We grew quite rapidly from that point on," Lamar says. The company relocated to Acworth in 2003. There are two buildings on 46 acres. The main office and manufacturing is 260,000 sqft, and the Specialty Packaging Center, dedicated to fulfillment, is 215,000 sqft. Chief has about 125 full-time employees.

Lamar attributes the company's growth to "very dynamic sales and production people. We had the right ingredients to get it started."

He is more than humble about Chief's accomplishments and often praises Reuben, Crabtree and Alexander. "These are probably the most talented people in the corrugated box industry for displays, colours, and creative design.

"We're trying to become printers rather than box makers," he continues. "Most people in our industry say they're boxmakers or they're a boxplant, but really we're printers and we think as printers. That's what Todd, Reuben and Charlie do. They think as printers and it makes a difference."



Most people in our industry say they're boxmakers or they're a boxplant, but really we're printers and we think as printers," says Chief Container President Lamar Guthrie.

Roger Poteet of Poteet Printing Inks designed the ink kitchen to look like a press, hiding the ink drums.

Have you come to your senses yet?



Taste success

Smell the profit



Listen to the market



Stay in touch



Envision your future

IR Drying

- ▶ Maximized productivity
- ▶ Single pass efficiency
- ▶ Vibrant colors
- ▶ Reduced waste

UV Curing

- ▶ Maximized productivity
- ▶ Superior gloss
- ▶ Outstanding rub and scuff resistance
- ▶ Increased profits

ColorCure™

- ▶ UV process printing and special effects
- ▶ Reduced carbon footprint (75% less)
- ▶ Maximized productivity
- ▶ Optimized print reproduction



JB MACHINERY