

Corrugated **TODAY**

THE BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION FOR AMERICAN

AND CANADIAN INTEGRATED AND INDEPENDENT BOX MAKERS

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INVESTMENT IN A BRIGHT FUTURE

Maxco Supply of Parlier in the central valley area of California installed a seven-color Martin DRO NT HBL rotary diecutter with a Bobst Registron register control unit. While a press of this size and printing capability is somewhat unique, perhaps what truly sets Maxco apart from the crowd is what the corrugator plant added to the press and how it has begun using it.

Each of the print stations is equipped to run conventional water-based flexo inks, as well as the latest generation of UV inks. Each printing station has JB's IR (Infrared-Final Flexo Dryers) drying and UV (ColorCure UV Interstation Curing System) curing capability integrated within the same vacuum transfer units. Whereas, immediately after the first down is a Final Flexo Dryer, followed by a single bank, air-cooled interstation UV curing system (Air Cooled Flexo Curing System) curing unit. And, as they say on television, 'But wait... there's more!' After all of the printing and before the diecutter this Martin is equipped with a Double Bank UV Flexo Curing System. In total, Maxco's press has seven UV curing and IR drying stations; according to JB Machinery, its most complete and versatile installation to date. So the question becomes 'why' and 'what are they doing with that kind of horsepower?'

This configuration is the realized dream of owner Max Flaming and plant General Manager Joe Sepe. Sepe explains, "For several years now we've been going into areas that others have not, trying new things and new ideas. We compete by continually getting better. There haven't been too many years that we haven't improved our business and, in doing so, provided a superior end result to our customers."



GENERAL MANAGER JOE SEPE POINTS OUT THE FFDX.IR DRYING/COLORCURE UV CURING SYSTEM ON THE COMPANY'S NEW MARTIN HBL TO OWNER MAX FLAMING.

PHOTOS: NICK GRIFFIN

Over the course of two days, both Sepe and Max Flaming opened up their operation for Corrugated Today and answered the mystery of why so many colors, dryers and curing systems on a single press. Condensed portions of the conversation follow.

■ **Joe, you're in the heart of California, one of the most competitive markets in the world. What sets Maxco apart?**

■ **JS:** Being an independent company, we realized in 1992 that we had to stay ahead of the integrated companies as well as other independents and that's when we bought our first four-color graphics machine. Soon afterwards we bought a six-color. We installed a corrugator in 2002 to put us in complete control of the substrates, and earlier this year we upped our game with the (Martin) HBL. In each case, our goal was to bring better and better boxes to the customer, to give them something that will help protect and help sell their product better.

■ **Examples?**

■ **JS:** When we started making our own sheets our motivation was two-fold, strength and printability. We started the company running 69-26-26-69 dual arch and did that for a couple years. Then we decided to try BC doublewall and then EB doublewall. It gave a better substrate to print on and created a stronger box. Now we're experimenting with microflute multi-wall sheets. Some of the things we're working on are NEE for our bliss wraps,



and EBE + EBE for our laminated bliss ends.

■ **Why did you opt to configure the press this way, with the Registron and all the UV and IR components?**

■ **JS:** As I mentioned earlier, we're trying new things and are proud of being on the cutting edge. While I'm sure that there are others experimenting with the benefits of UV inks, I doubt that there's anyone else doing it the way we are. We're able to do six color printing on a seven-color press. With a full UV curing unit after the



COLORCURE UV INTERSTATION CURING SYSTEM IN LOWERED POSITION



IR FINAL FLEXO DRYER IN LOWERED POSITION

first down we can UV flood coat sheets with a white base, bringing a mottled white sheet up to the spec of a much more expensive high holdout sheet. Then each successive down is capable of printing UV inks and instantly curing the ink before the sheet proceeds to the next station. This is happening at speeds currently approaching 10,000 per hour.

■ **Joe, in your estimation, what are the advantages of UV and why is it worth the trouble?**

■ **JS:** First, that's where you, like so many others, may be misinformed. UV isn't more trouble. In day-to-day operation it's actually much less trouble than conventional flexo because you're not dealing with the multiple wash-ups and contending with evaporation. Our goal is to have four-color process in the machine at all times and still give us two downs for spot print. A lot of our customers want their logos printed in a certain color. Second, the real attraction of UV inks is the 'pop.' What you can do with four-color UV would take a six-color standard flexo process to achieve anything close. Add a UV varnish over top of UV inks and you have a look that competes with the finest litho label or pre-print any day of the week. I like to think that even as others move into UV,



JOE SEPE

our UV will look better because it was my theory to combine IR drying with UV curing. IR smoothes out the ink for a look that's superior to UV by itself. JB's ColorCure made this possible.

■ **Why the Martin press? There are others on the market.**

■ **JS:** Well, in reality only two in this class, as far as I'm concerned. It came down to a few simple things for me. On the competitive machine, to hang a plate the cylinder drops down about 18 inches. On the Martin, just one inch. When something moves 18 times farther, it will probably be higher maintenance. The Martin also has more room inside, making it easier on the operators. And one of the major advantages of the Martin was the Bobst Registron. This may be the only Martin HBL in the world with Registron. In corrugated it's usually just on the Masterflex. Registron's viewing and continuous control of register capabilities made us as close to being a pre-print machine as you can get. And lastly, the machine is easy to operate. Our crew was inexperienced and they were able to learn quickly and are doing a great job on the machine.

■ **If your goal is to improve every year, where do you think you will be a year from now?**

■ **JS:** I have a couple of ideas up my sleeve. I can't mention specifics, but we will be implementing further projects as we complete our analyses . . .

Next we proceeded to Max Flaming's office.

■ **Max, we've been talking with Joe about doing new things to stay ahead of your competition. Who is that, and as someone with sales as well as management responsibilities, how do you view your operation?**

■ **MF:** I started out as a college student in the fruit box business gluing labels on the ends of wooden crates. I was being paid something like a half-cent a label so if I could do 20,000 a shift, I would make \$100. That was good money for a college student. Tree fruit and grapes are the majority of the valley's business, although we also make a lot of products for strawberries, blueberries and blackberries. We're competitive when we make a better looking and stronger box than our competitors for the same or lower cost.

Many of them are using pre-print and litho labels so our direct print will automatically have a cost advantage. As we meet or exceed their level of graphics we really begin to shine."

■ **Tell us about your customers. How would you describe their businesses and how does Maxco have to respond to it?**

■ **MF:** Our busiest production time is second and third quarter. Tree fruit and grapes start in May and end sometime in October. Strawberries are a commodity that produces 12 months of the year. Clementines start in October and run through May. Our industry has changed significantly over the last 15 years. Back then we produced three basic boxes — $5\frac{3}{4}$ $6\frac{1}{2}$ and $7\frac{1}{8}$. All tree fruit boxes were on a 35 x 42 inch pallet. Grapes were on a 42 x 53 inch pallet. Retailers wanted a universal pallet so both commodities moved to the 40 x 48 pallet, requiring footprint changes for both tree fruit and grape boxes. In addition to basic footprint changes, retailers started asking for print designs and additional footprint changes. Today a packer could have as many as 20 different prints with four different depths. With potentially 80 different boxes, the packer can't place orders long in advance so a just-in-time mentality has become more the norm in the industry.



THE 7 COLOR MARTIN HBL AT MAXCO PACKAGING.

■ **How has the new Martin press impacted business?**

■ **MF:** We don't know what the HBL Martin with UV and IR can accomplish. The full impact will take some time. Our first attempts with UV ink are promising, but the jury is still out. If we're able to produce a UV print combined with an IR print at a competitive price, the packers and retailers would be the benefactors. We do know the HBL Martin has replaced pre-print in our operation.

■ **We noticed that you also appear to be in the machine business?**

■ **MF:** When I started the company, we had income only in the second and third quarters of the year. With that kind of seasonality it was difficult to maintain a quality staff. We started

Maxco

manufacturing case erectors for ourselves and started selling equipment nationally. One of the benefits of owning your own equipment company is that we can design a new container and then build case erectors to assemble that container. We provide case erectors for the strawberry industry. This year we designed stackers that integrate with our erectors that will eliminate a significant amount of labor. Another benefit of the machinery division is that when we see opportunities within our own organization, we can design and build our own solution.

■ What does the future hold for Maxco?

■ **MF:** It's very bright. I don't see a decline of fruit being grown in the San Joaquin Valley or the coast. People enjoy the summer fruit and the strawberries that grow on the coast. The clementine industry

will produce over 200 million containers in the near future. Anytime you pilot a program it usually takes several years before that project is completed. We might be a little aggressive sometimes, but we have many growers that will work with us. They come to us with an issue seeking a solution and our job is to provide that solution. For example, bottom sag for grapes is an issue for corrugated containers and somehow we need to resolve that problem. Another example — corrugated grape containers were not allowed for export due to USDA protocols. With the help of the University of California at Davis, we were able to develop a solution that allowed us to produce corrugated grape boxes eligible for export. Forty percent of the grapes packed in California are still packed in Styrofoam. If we are able to provide a corrugated container that can



stay in storage for 60 days with minimal bottom sag, we think we can capture a significant portion of that Styrofoam business. We currently enjoy a significant portion of the market for tree fruit and grape containers, and we are growing in the strawberry and clementine industry.



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

