

Shrink to grow

Plastics converter finds a nice market niche with shrinksleeve technology

No shrinking violet by any stretch or measure, **Safety Seal Plastics Inc.** was formed in 1989 by president and owner Grant MacLean with the simple objective of servicing clients in pharmaceutical and food industries with what at that time was a mainly niche packaging application of PVC (polyvinyl chloride) tamper-evident bands. Since then, the Hamilton, Ont.-based company has grown in leaps and bounds, ultimately positioning itself as one of the leading Canadian-based shrinksleeve label manufacturers.

Employing 30 highly motivated workers at the company's busy, 12,800-square-foot production facility, the privately-owned Safety Seal today processes around 50,000 pounds of labelmaking materials per month—translating into annual revenues of approximately \$6 million.

"We are a plastics converter with special expertise in the printing of shrink material made from PVC, PET (polyethylene terephthalate) and OPS (oriented polystyrene), with our two flexographic printing presses providing us with up to eight-color printing capabilities," MacLean told *Canadian Converting* on a recent visit to the Hamilton site.

According to MacLean, the company's major breakthrough came about nearly five years ago with the purchase of an eight-color **Chromas LX** flexo printing press from Boucherville, Que.-based manufacturer **Technologies Chromas Canada Inc.**, followed by installation of complementary production equipment such as a slitter, a seamer, and an inspector.

"We began printing the multicolored shrinksleeves in January of 2002," recounts MacLean. "Since then, we have found that the market for sleeves has increased steadily, as customers have discovered the many advantages and marketing values of shrinksleeve labeling.

"Techniques like reverse printing, for example, help ensure no scuffing or scratching on the graphics," he explains, "and these sleeves can also be used as an effective tamper-evidence feature."

MacLean's first main production challenge entailed figuring out the best way to blend decorative packaging design with fold locations to best match the equipment capabilities, without distorting the high-impact graphics. While installing a **Chromas LX** press gave the company a nice head start, it still needed to obtain a reliable supply of the highly specialized film constructions required to produce full-body sleeves for effective packaging of contoured and other odd-shaped items.

"There are only a few places in North America that can provide the special heat-sensitive film we need," says Safety Seal print department supervisor Richard Brunelle, noting that such high-cost films are typically shipped in layers of protective bubblewrap to protect them from accidental contact with heat.

After a diligent review of all the potential suppliers, Safety Seal ultimately settled on films distributed by

Brown Summit, N.C.-based **Bonset America Corporation**, and **Klößner Pentaplast of Canada Inc.** of Oshawa, Ont.

Klaus Gerwe, vice-president of operations for Klößner's Canadian operations, says Safety Seal was highly impressed with his company's **Pentaprint OT Series** PETG films—high-quality, rigid polyester products featuring transverse-direction orientation (TDO) that makes them well-suited for creating full-body sleeves, shrinksleeves, tamper-evident bands, multipacks and wine-cap linings.

"We supply them with 50-micron film that is custom-slit to their exact specifications," explains Gerwe.

"This is what we call nonplasticized film, which means it is safe for food contact.

"Moreover, the Pentaprint films are easy to recycle, and they should help clients cut down costs significantly from printing directly onto a container,"

according to Gerwe.

Gerwe says that Klößner Pentaplast prides itself on engineering films that enable easier processing, as well as backing it up with direct, hands-on technical support with on-site visits.

HAPPY CLIENT

"The heat-sensitive film we use shrinks both horizontally and vertically," extols MacLean, "with the main difference being the amount of vertical shrink that occurs.

"The films we tend to use the most for our clients are PVC, which has a vertical shrink rate of six per cent; the PET, with three-percent shrink; and the OPS, which is supposed to have a shrink rate of zero," he elaborates.

"Naturally, the lower the vertical shrink rate, the more expensive the film is. But not all customers want or need to have a zero vertical shrink rate on their products."

Maclean says the fact that the film can form to most shapes of containers and bottles facilitates application of 360-degree graphics display, which is what the customers want these days.

Brunelle points out that the **Chromas LX** printing press used by Safety Seal easily accommodates heat-sensitive shrink films at throughput rates of up to 400 feet per minute.

Incorporating a broad range of variable-speed drives and other feed devices from industrial automation technologies supplier **Schneider Electric**, Chromas-made narrow-web printing presses enjoy widespread



Safety Seal Plastics Inc. owner and president Grant MacLean stands behind some of the many of the U.S. and Canadian products using his company's packaging, featuring tamper-evident bands and highly decorative shrinksleeves.

acclaim in the folding carton, flexible packaging, and tag-and-label segments.

"We like the Chromas press; it consistently gives us high-quality labels, while keeping our maintenance costs and downtime to a minimum," states Brunelle.

After the film comes off the Chromas press, it goes through a brand new, **Hi-Speed** model seamer recently purchased from the Miami, Fla.-based manufacturer **Karlville Development Group**.

Noted for their excellent substrate control, all Karville seamers incorporate the company's innovative, direct-injection system that is claimed to be the most precise and consistent method for applying solvents.

BUILT FOR SPEED

With operating speeds of up to 300 meters per minute, the **Hi-Speed** series seamers employ an adjustable forming section that facilitates fast changeover rewind and unwind of the air shafts.

Once the seaming is done, Safety Seal uses a Karlville **Micro 1000** rewinding/inspecting system to ensure zero defects.

"Thanks to suppliers like Klößner Pentaplast and Karlville, our customers are very pleased with the appearance of the sleeves, as well as the affordable prices we can offer them," asserts MacLean.

"Being affordable, along with providing a high-quality product in a short turnaround, is really what we do best," he says, adding that Safety Seal is very price-competitive with the vast majority of bigger, U.S.-based converters.

"We are happy to let others go chasing after the big client," he shrugs. "We have focused our attention on the small and medium-sized customers for whom outstanding service, quality printing, and a competitive price are all important factors."

This marketing approach has paid off in spades for Safety Seal, which has seen its client base expand in recent years with such prized accounts as **Ocean Spray, Associated Brands, E.D. Smith & Sons, Patheon, McCormick Canada, Bausch & Lomb, Cadbury Schweppes, Ciba Vision, Renee's Gourmet Foods, Lounsbury Foods, Novopharm, Pfizer Canada, Stoney Creek Dairy, Trophy Foods, Unico** and **Wrigley**, to name a few.

"Even in the face of the rapidly changing converting industry, Safety Seal has always had one objective in mind—servicing the client," MacLean sums up.

"Thank goodness, that's one of the many things this company is able to do very well, and one of the main reasons for us being so successful." □



Safety Seal's recently-purchased Hi-Speed seamer from Karlville Development Group features an adjustable forming section.



PETG film from Klößner Pentaplast unwinds after a print job concludes on a Chromas LX eight-color flexo press.

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