

Embellishment and enhancement requirements are very much sector specific, according to ABG



Pretty as a picture

From hot and cold foiling, to embossing/debossing, in many instances, it is the finish to labels and packaging that makes all the difference.

Whether you're a manufacturer of roll-fed labels or sheet-fed boxes, when it comes to giving your customers what they want, more often than not it is in the finishing and converting of your output where there is money to be made.

From busy supermarket shelves and aisles, to online retail and creating an impact when the product arrives at the consumer's door, for brands of all sizes, the need to have high-quality and impactful labels and packaging is strong.

'It is well documented that adding any tactile or textured look and feel to print adds an emotional connection,' says Paul Franklin, director at Printbyte, a provider of digital finishing systems to the UK market. 'The importance of touch when communicating with consumers can convey brand values in a much more lasting and deeper way than ordinary print or online mediums. Touching paper and packaging has a significant influence on people's perception of brands and messages, and it can ensure the emotions delivered by materials match consumer's expectations.'

As Matt Burton, global sales director at A B Graphic (ABG), notes, 'Embellishment and enhancement requirements are very much sector specific. The wine and beverage market requires more hot/cold foiling and tactile screen embellishments to achieve shelf stand-out and be more appealing to consumers. In other markets such as food, flexo spot varnishing and lamination is mostly used. We also continue to see our flatbed screen, and Big Foot foil stamping and embossing modules grow in popularity.'

Virgilio Micale, sales director at Cartes, adds, 'The market is segmented into microtrends that follow specific country styling and traditions. However, it is well known that the main goal is to compete in an aesthetic environment that guarantees an attractive visual impact to the end consumer.'

Dario De Meo, export sales director at Smag, says his company's converter customers are, 'very demanding on quality', with many active in luxury markets, such as wines, cosmetics, and also security labels. Labels produced on Smag equipment for added-value purposes use



Jet D-Screen from Cartes is a digital screen printing unit for creating high build effects and metal doming, including the possibility to foil high build varnish and print Braille effects

mostly screen printing for tactile and sensorial effects, he notes, with hot foiling and embossing processes for 'ennobling', and a combination of these for special effects such as soft touch or silk foil.

'This particular attention to the highest quality, very specific in Champagne and perfume labels for example, is the focus point of such converters and brand owners. Differentiation is a key aspect of which quality makes the difference with the mass consumption products.'

A general trend across all sectors is to increase embellishment of the product in order to maximise shelf appeal and reflect brand value

Tony Martin, technical sales manager for the south of the UK at Pulse Roll Label Products, comments, 'In the world of digital label and package printing, converters are increasing looking for innovative ways to enhance and embellish their high-quality print. From foils and embossing effects, to tactile finishes and high gloss or matte, we are witnessing a huge upturn in the combination and use of different techniques and products to help brands create maximum impact and stand out on the shelf.'

'The level of sophistication available for embellishments today means that the digital printer can produce outstanding results, differentiating brands and creating truly premium packaged and labelled products.'

Building on this, Simon Smith and Adam James, managing director and operations director respectively at UK converter CS Labels, note foiling, embossing, tactile screen and variable data as being in high demand. 'The most requested print option is foil blocking currently as it

seems to be the most cost-effective way to accentuate certain elements with metallic and clear foils,' says Mr Smith.

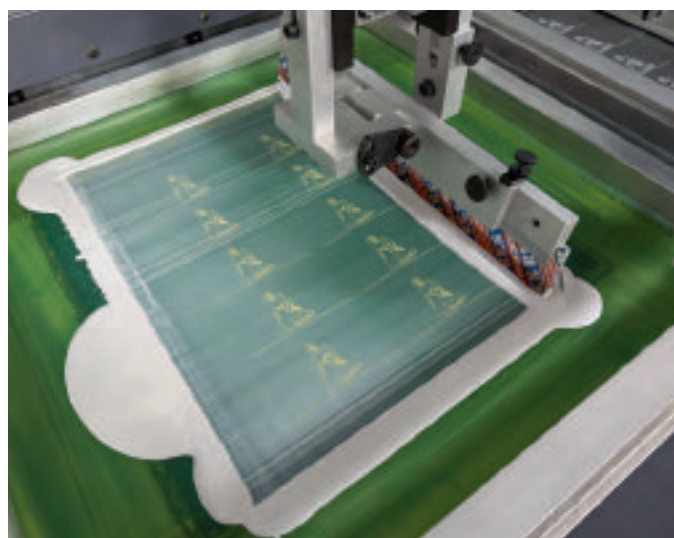
Impact

Mr Smith goes on, 'Embellishments are almost exclusively associated with premium products. They are more common to us in the spirit market, although we do embellish for other markets regularly too, such as beauty, homeopathic, car care, vape, etc. Brands want to promote quality by using high-quality labelling and packaging.'

Mr Micale says, 'Embellishment is a word that a few years back was almost unknown for many of the players in the label industry. New trends and market differentiation willing have forced constant changes focused on product diversification to achieve a high appearance value that even goes beyond the product quality. Therefore, all the products have been constantly aiming to look good, regardless of price or market rating.'

Mr Burton reiterates the drive to stand out on the shelf as well as the trend towards personalisation. 'The drive to web-to-print, digital printing and finishing solutions, enable our customers to offer an elevated standout label in an often-crowded market. Digital embellishment solutions such as DigiJet, also allow digital labels to offer that extra level of embellishment for increased personalisation. With the developments in the digital print market, we see the personalisation option continuing to trend in 2021 and being of interest to many smaller businesses.'

According to Mr Smith, 'For most SMEs and start-ups where the product is new or unknown, they seem to be looking for the greatest contrasting effect to bring added value to justify product costs. It's also a way for all brands, new and existing, to protect their products from counterfeiting. By explaining that their labelling incorporates foil with tactile varnishes for example, it can differentiate between their genuine product, and a replica. Aesthetics are also always important. Shelf appeal is one of the biggest considerations. Processes that will draw attention



Labels produced on Smag equipment for added-value purposes use mostly screen printing for tactile and sensory effects

are usually at the top of the list, however the cost considerations are just as important. Finding a solution that understands what the customer's priority is allows us to propose something that fits perfectly.'

Technology

To deliver on such market demands and customer requests, suppliers and converters alike are investing in the latest technology.

Smag has been developing a range of options to meet its customers' needs, from added-value printing, to the final converting and finishing processes. All these are now available under one product umbrella, Icon, offered as a modular platform that allows processes to be mixed and matched. Converters can also upgrade their Icon line, depending on how their business evolves, adding new process modules such as hot foil and silk foil, or RFID/NFC insertion and encoding.

Cartes develops technologies to 'guarantee the quality' of the final products and maximise production performance, notes Mr Micale. These are targeted at markets where high-end labels are specified. Several configurations can be combined, with units for digital and conventional flatbed screen printing, hot stamping and embossing, flexo coating and printing, flatbed and semi-rotary die-cutting, as well as laser converting. A recent innovation has seen the introduction of Jet D-Screen (JDS), a digital screen printing unit for creating high build effects and metal doming, including the possibility to foil high build varnish and print Braille effects. This works by depositing a thicker layer of ink, claimed as

'previously impossible to achieve with inkjet technologies'.

'Our machines can be configured with all the gadgets to highlight the products with top-end added-value applications,' continues Mr Micale. 'Also, our special gadgets can be added to create multiple effects, such as 'Labels on Labels', cut-off windows, metallic doming, invisible laser cutting, in-mould label processing, and more.'

Brands want to promote quality by using high-quality labelling and packaging

CS labels relies on GM lines for all of its embellishments and finishing. Mr James draws attention to a bespoke screen unit for high build and tactile effects. 'A GM hot foil press with 20-ton head allows for two foils to be applied at the same time,' he adds.

For foiling applications, ABG's Big Foot features 50 tons of pressure, with the capability to run multiple foil feeding along and across the web to create 'stunning effects and finishes'. The addition of the foil save feature makes this a cost-effective process, states Mr Burton.

AI Pulse, many of its UV coatings and varnishes are used for overprinting digital inks, with, 'developments in digital finishing equipment and embellishment technologies meaning that first-class effects can be achieved,' says Mr Martin. 'Our PureScreen high build



Pulse's PureFX rough textured matte varnish is popular for finishing over digital inks

gloss varnish is used by digital printers for creating embossing text, particularly popular in the wines and spirits sector. Hot foil stamping is often incorporated to add a touch of luxury. PureFinish UV flexo FB matte and gloss varnishes for digital printing provide an ideal solution for printers seeking excellent chemical and heat resistance properties, as well as a foil blockable finish. With our PureFinish gloss varnish, impressive cast and cure effects can also be achieved as part of the finishing process for decorative appeal in addition to overt product security.

'Tactile coatings remain popular too for increasing sensory engagement with the consumer. Our PureFX rough textured matte varnish is not just suitable for conventional UV flexo printing but is popular for finishing over digital inks as well. We continue to see interest from brand owners in coatings that provide a 'touch and feel' because they add an extra dimension to the pack.'

Next level

Inkjet-based embellishment technologies continue to make inroads, such as the Kurz DM-Jetliner (*see page 42 for more*) and EcoLeaf from Actega Metal Print.

MGI's systems, offered into the UK market with the assistance of Printbyte, include the inkjet-based JETvarnish 3D single-pass digital embellishment press, and the complementary iFoil, featuring a 100% digital inline embossing and hot foil stamping process.

EcoLeaf is offered through ABG as a foiling option said to 'dramatically'

reduce carbon dioxide emissions. 'We see this as a key component of our sustainable labelling offering in 2021,' says Mr Burton. DigiJet is another part of ABG's offer, and is a modular inkjet embellishment unit integrated into its Digicon finishing lines. DigiJet can be fully integrated with DigiLase to create a fully digital finishing option. DigiJet can even apply digital foil on shrink film, foil on flexible packaging, variable data foil/cast cure, and authenticated embellishment in the form of holograms.

CS is currently in talks with manufactures of digital embellishment for its next investment, although it is, 'still very early days,' says Mr James. 'We have looked at the next generation presses but it is unlikely to move forward in 2021. We will be promoting new foiling styles soon though.'

Smag's next-generation technology will increasingly focus on 'smart' technologies, such as NFC and RFID technologies. These might be used for anti-theft, logistic and/or marketing purposes, and, 'represent today one of the most advanced ways to meet the new converting process needs from such markets,' comments Mr De Meo.

Pulse will likewise continue to respond to market trends through new product development. 'Brand owners are constantly looking for ways to enhance and differentiate their products on the shelf via their packaging and labels,' concludes Mr Martin. 'Digital printers are using high quality coatings and varnishes to help them achieve this.' •