

First Cartes embellishment line installed in Mexico

The landmark installation at Etiquetas y Formas vindicates Cartes' focus on the market and reflects rising quality demands from local brand owners. James Quirk reports

Mexican label converter Etiquetas y Formas has installed the country's first GT360 converting and embellishment line from Italian manufacturer Cartes.

The Guadalajara-based converter has added the system, which it describes as the 'top machine in its field', to its production arsenal to add high-end embellishment to labels for tequila and other premium products.

For Cartes' global sales director, Virgilio Micale, the installation (which was followed swiftly by a second at the Juarez site of Codiflex) represents immediate vindication of the company's recent investment in a sales and service office in Guadalajara, which it announced at Labelexpo Mexico in April this year. Furthermore, it reflects the increasing quality demands of a local market that has seen strong growth in recent years.

Opportunity

Etiquetas y Formas was founded in Guadalajara in 2001 by siblings Martha, Roberto and René García. The trio had no background in printing or the label industry, but 'spotted an opportunity in the market', recalls Martha García, who took charge of sales for the fledgling company. They installed a 3-color Mark Andy press and began producing labels for small local businesses for products such as snacks and soap. Roberto García handled production, and René focused on administration and sales.

'At the beginning, the learning curve was very tough,' recalls Martha García. 'It was a real challenge. We studied hard and received a lot of great support from our suppliers, including Mark Andy, Avery Dennison and UPM Raflatac.'

The business grew quickly and added a 6-color Nilpeter flexo press the following year. The additional capacity, greater number of colors, and ability to use different material options allowed Etiquetas y Formas to expand its product range and move into larger markets such as pharmaceuticals, personal care and tequila.

The pivot to Nilpeter presses continued with the addition of 8- and 9-color flexo machines in subsequent years, which can run water-based flexo or UV flexo inks as required by the job. 'The plan originally was to continue with Mark Andy machines,' says Martha García. 'But we saw Nilpeter presses running at a Labelexpo Americas and were very impressed.'

The presses from the Danish manufacturer also allow Etiquetas y Formas to produce folding cartons for pharmaceutical and cosmetics applications. 'It's a small part of the business,' says Martha García. 'Labels are the main focus. But shrink sleeves could also be a possibility in the future, as the Nilpeter presses can handle the filmic materials.'

As its name suggests, the company also produces continuous forms, although the market has declined, and this is only a small part of the business today.

Its labels serve a wide variety of markets. Food and beverage is Etiquetas y Formas' largest end-use sector, followed by the pharmaceutical sector. The company also sells to the cosmetics, veterinary, wine and spirits, cleaning products and clothing sectors, as well as to chemical and biological laboratories. Production is all consumed domestically, although some clients export to the US, Canada, Europe and elsewhere.



Martha García with the new Cartes GT360 at Etiquetas y Formas

“After looking at many different options, we felt the Cartes GT360 was the top machine in its field”



The tequila market is a key focus for Etiquetas y Formas

Cartes to expand into new facility

Cartes will open a new production facility in Mantova, Italy, after Labelexpo Europe in September, which will add 2,000 sqm of machine-building space to its operation.

The site, located near Cartes' headquarters and other facilities in the local area, will be dedicated to producing the company's flagship converting and embellishment line, the GT360 platform.

The additional space will take the company's total production footprint to 12,000 sqm, all located in Italy.



The Cartes GT360 embellishment line

“The tequila market is where we are seeing the strongest growth and the most opportunity”

Quality

The decision to install the Cartes GT360 came after the company studied numerous different options at various Labelexpo shows. ‘What stood out was its innovation and the quality of the labels it produces,’ says Martha García. ‘After looking at many different options on the market, we felt it was the top machine in its field.’ It arrived the day after Labelexpo Mexico, which took place in Guadalajara in April.

The GT360 converting and embellishment line installed at Etiquetas y Formas features an unwinder module with Vetaphone corona treatment, a 3-color simultaneous hot foil stamping unit, semi-rotary flexo printing and varnishing, flat-bed screen printing, semi-rotary die-cutting incorporating Air Gap System (AGS) and Image Distortion System (IDS), dry embossing and flat-bed die-cutting, and a rewinding module with longitudinal slitting and unwinding separation.

‘It will allow us to produce labels with more advanced finishes,’ she continues. ‘The tequila market is where we are seeing the strongest growth and the most opportunity, so looking for high-level embellishment was a key factor in the decision. It can also bring added value to products such as premium olive oils and shampoos, for example.’

There is a burgeoning wine market in Mexico, which began in the north of the country, with many vineyards selling to the US, and has since spread elsewhere. ‘We do produce some wine labels,’ says Martha García. ‘It’s not as strong for us as tequila, but it’s a growing market and one where there will be opportunities for us, particularly with the new Cartes machine.’

Cartes’ new sales and service office in Guadalajara, which provides technical support and spare parts, was a further advantage. ‘It’s so important to have that local support. They have been hugely helpful,’ says Renée García, her uncle’s namesake, but part of the second generation of the family working at the company.

As elsewhere, the label market in Mexico dipped following a boom period during Covid. But growth and optimism have returned. ‘Challenges happen. We have seen recessions in the past, good times and bad times. But you never give up, you keep going,’ says Martha García.

The company employs 45 staff at its 1,200 sqm factory. It trains its employees in-house. ‘It can be a challenge to recruit the younger generation,’ says Martha García. ‘But we are lucky to count on a workforce with people who have been with us for many years. We have a very family-oriented atmosphere in the company, which has helped us to grow.’

Etiquetas y Formas remains a family business. The three founding siblings are still directors and in charge. From the second generation, Renée, Roberto’s daughter, works in quality control, and Martha’s daughter Andrea is part of the sales team.

Renée García is in her 20s and qualified as an industrial engineer.

Her passion for the label industry is clear. ‘It’s a noble and beautiful industry,’ she says. ‘It is gratifying work. It’s really cool to put the design and vision of a product into reality.’

The company is unfazed by increasing consolidation in the market. ‘We are loyal to our clients and our clients are loyal to us,’ says Martha García. ‘Some of our small clients from the early days have grown alongside us over the years and are still our customers.’

‘The quality of our service and our quick delivery times are what our clients value,’ says Renée García. ‘This differentiates us from our competition.’

Potential

Cartes sees such potential in the Mexican market that it opened a sales and service office in Guadalajara, an epicenter of the local label printing industry, in April. The installation at Etiquetas y Formas, Cartes’ first embellishment system in the country, took place at the same time, just after Labelexpo Mexico that same month. A second embellishment system was recently installed at the Juarez site of Codiflex (the converter also has factories in Monterrey, Chihuahua and the US). Before these installations, the Cartes’ sales into the country had been limited to laser die-cutting machines. Sales of these have also continued, with two more installed in northern Mexico since Labelexpo Mexico, at converters selling labels into the US market.

‘We are targeting the Mexican market with a lot of dynamism,’ says global sales director Virgilio Micalé. ‘It’s a big focus for us, with the new office, technical service staff and spare parts.’

Micalé continues: ‘We see big potential in the Mexican market, particularly in applications such as tequila, which require high-end embellishment. The local wine industry, much of which is based in the north of the country and targets the US market, is also forecast to grow significantly over the next five years.’

‘There are a couple more embellishment installations which should be completed before the end of the year. We are just confirming the specifications of the machines. And I expect five or six more machines to be installed over the next 18 months.’

The fact that Cartes, which produces some of the most technologically advanced converting and embellishment systems available, is selling these machines in Mexico and investing in an office in the country reflects the growth and increasing quality demands in the local market.

This was evident at Labelexpo Mexico 2025 in Guadalajara, where many converting equipment manufacturers told L&L that high-end embellishment was increasingly sought after by local brand owners, particularly in applications such as tequila and other spirits. A B Graphic’s recent success in the country is further evidence of the trend. Since appointing Renew Solutions as its agent in Mexico three years ago, it has sold more than 25 machines, with around half of these being its flagship Digicon Series 3 advanced converting systems.



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