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*Product &
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Digital Times

Innovative Labeling Solutions' early entry into the digital printing marketplace has paid big dividends.

Jay Dollries, president,
Innovative Labeling Solutions

Capital Financing Strategies • Eco-friendly Inks • Business/Production Software

Innovate!

Staying on top of emerging technology has helped Innovative Labeling Solutions to expand its business.

There are businesses that wait until technology becomes fine-tuned before they change the way they operate and update their product offerings. Then there are those businesses that help drive changes in their respective industries by being innovators, by jumping on board when a technology is new. According to Jay Dollries, president and CEO of Innovative Labeling Solutions (ILS), this is the way to go. "Be an innovator," he says. "It is an ever-changing marketplace, and the ability to adapt and change definitely enhances the prospect for future success." It is with this in mind that back in 2005, ILS became an early adopter of digital printing technology for labels and flexible packaging.

It's all in the name

Innovative Labeling Solutions has been in business since 1996, starting out as a narrow-web flexographic label conversion business that operated in an industrial office park. Today, the company has grown into a full-service labeling and packaging company operating out of a 65,000-sq.-ft. facility.

Headquartered in Hamilton, Ohio, the company employs more than 40



Jay Dollries and an ILS press operator stand by one of two HP Indigo ws4500 presses in use by the company.

people, including six customer managers, a full service graphic design department, and a team of certified HP digital press operators and flexographic pressmen. The company operates nine presses, three of which are HP Indigo digital presses. It prints on paper and film and uses water-based and UV inks.

The company's operating philosophy, according to Dollries, is quite simple: to provide innovative label and packaging solutions for its customers. "A large part of our growth strategy, as is indicated by our name, has been through innovation," he says. "Ultimately what makes us distinctive is our approach to new challenges and opportunities." He adds that being stra-

tegic and forward-thinking, rather than trying to match the market, has been one of ILS's greatest assets. "We stay abreast of cutting-edge technology and have formed alliances with some of the leading suppliers in the industry," he says.

ILS works with its suppliers and its customers as strategic partners to not only deliver a high-quality product at a competitive price, but also to maximize all that technology has to offer. "Very typically, we collaborate with our customers at the initial stages of trial, all the way through production," adds Dollries.

The company continues to expand its capabilities. This summer it will add seaming for shrink sleeves, laminat-

ing for flexible packaging, and finishing (cut-and-stack, embossing, screen printing) to its arsenal. "As well, we have been named as a beta test site for the HP Indigo WS6000 digital press, which is not available to the market until 2009," says Dollries. This press reportedly will be able to handle larger runs, wider widths, and has an improved white ink system.

Digital opportunities

Digital printing has opened opportunities in practically every printing segment. For packaging and labeling, using digital printing presses as well as digital print stations on combination presses, affords package printers with myriad possibilities to meet their customers' needs.

"There is no question that digital printing has had a broad and significant impact on the entire printing industry," says Dollries. "Since our entry into the digital world in 2005, we have seen our business model shift significantly. It definitely represents a large growth opportunity for us, [by adding capabilities] for our current customers, as well as opening a door to new customers and new markets."

Helping drive this shift in ILS's business model is the introduction of HP Indigo presses to its shop floor. "[They open] ILS up to a completely new market and completely different customer," says Dollries. "As well, we can offer a whole new world of graphic innovation to brand managers and packaging designers."

Of note is how ILS uses its Indigo presses with its AB Graphic International (ABG) finishing line, along with a wide array of substrates and inks. "The Indigo, in conjunction with our ABG finishing line gives us the capability for perfect print-to-print registration of hot foil stamping, embossing, sandwich printing, and reinserted print," comments Dollries. "The abil-

ity to perfectly register with the ABG finisher along with the outstanding quality of the Indigo allows us to make multiple layer constructions that have an entirely unique look and function."

Changing the face of printing

According to Dollries, digital printing presents a tremendous growth opportunity for ILS in the consumer products category. "Digital printing has changed the face of printing," he says. "What was not possible, affordable, or even imaginable five years ago—run lengths, variable data, versioning, promotional items, regional marketing, etc.—is now readily available from ILS. One-to-one marketing, regional and seasonal promotions, and delivering the brand to the shelf are huge initiatives in the consumer market."

Despite its changing the face of printing, hurdles for digital printing remain, with the biggest one being education. "There are misconceptions about digital printing that are really based on previous-generation presses," says Dollries. For example, today's presses are more consistent from job to job, and their expanded spectrum color-matching capability, according to Dollries, is "far superior to previous models."

Additionally, Dollries says the mindset that digital is not applicable for larger national brands must be overcome. "Digital answers the call for large and small brands alike," he says. "As all consumer brands need to work harder to gain market share, the capabilities exclusive to digital, like versioning, sequential numbering, and variable data, really allow the brand to be delivered to the shelf like never before."

He also states that digital printing requires no setup and significantly reduces the waste of makeready, which addresses the increasingly prevalent requests for fast turnarounds, just-in-time deliveries, and reduction of over-

ages and wasted inventory.

Speaking of waste

As an owner of flexo, as well as digital presses, Dollries can attest that the digital printing process generates much less waste than the flexo press. "Less raw stock is required to set up the job and there really is no cleanup process between jobs, thus conserving water and eliminating the necessity of chemicals for plate and anilox roll cleanup," he says.

Inevitably these days, a package printer must address the topic of sustainability—both in the products it produces as well as its own processes. "We work very closely with our suppliers and are engaged in ongoing and open dialog about sustainability in packaging, as well as with our customers," says Dollries.

Expanding your bread and butter

Flexo printing is the core of ILS's business. It's where it got its start, and its flexographic business continues to grow. "While we have grown and expanded over the years, we have stayed true to our roots and continue to offer narrow-web flexographic printing, as well as digital," Dollries comments. ILS's ability to innovate has allowed it to expand its bread and butter business by going digital and has gotten the company noticed.

For instance, at drupa 2008, a day's worth of ILS production was showcased in real time at the HP trade-show booth. "We were one of four companies chosen worldwide for this demonstration, and actually the only one from North America," says Dollries. So, its efforts haven't gone unnoticed. "Our flexo business continues to grow, and with the use of the latest technology available from HP, we offer a full complement of package and printing solutions." ■