

NEW POUCHING MACHINE THRIVES AT ASSOCIATED LABELS AND PACKAGING

Associated Labels and Packaging, a Canadian flexible packaging and printing company, recently purchased a servo-driven stand-up pouch machine to meet growing demand for smaller runs.

By Grant Gerke

Most consumers and industry professionals want to see a post-COVID 19 world emerge as soon as possible, and there's hope on the horizon with recent vaccine breakthroughs. However, a big question going forward will be what flexible packaging trends stick in a post-COVID world? Safety will make the cut, and recycled flexible packaging mandates are here to stay.

David Lutemberger, global packaging director at Mintel, recently provided a presentation on post-COVID consumer trends in October, and he reiterated that health and well-being features would remain strong for consumers going forward.

That's good news for many flexible packaging and converting companies, as stand-up pouches offer consumers peace-of-mind with safe and durable film structures. Associated Labels and Packaging, based in Coquitlam, B.C., Canada, has experienced great demand for its services during COVID-19, but it has been growing since its flexible packaging division started in 2009.

The company is a full-range packaging and printing company that serves a variety of consumer packaged goods (CPGs) customers, and demand for short-run packaging is increasing.

"Since 2009, we've experienced tremendous organic growth with our flexographic printing business and we

have a digital division that provides printed film for our flexible packaging operations," says Kyle Vleeming, flexible division manager at Associated Labels and Packaging.

Associated Labels' customers require a range of flexible pouches for convenience stores, retail outlets, grocery stores and box stores throughout North America. For its printing business, the company purchased an HP Indigo 20000 digital press three years ago to meet short-run demands from smaller, but growing customers.

In 2020, Associated Labels purchased a Hudson Sharp Ares 400-SUP pouch machine, which is part of the Converting Machinery Company (PCMC) group based in Green Bay. The machine comes equipped with independent servo controls for each sealing head, has independent dwell control and a guillotine knife for variable distance double cuts.

"Our HP digital press produces small pouches, and it's not always easy to run on short-run orders on our large pouching machine," says Vleeming. "The 400 series pouch machine provides a smaller footprint and, most importantly, doesn't use as much film with set up."

This scenario is a familiar one in the industry, as a 2019 PMMI Snack Foods study revealed that "the CPG's main priority is for packers to run different

CASE STUDY: POUCH MAKING



With the Ares 400 SUP pouch machine at Associated Labels and Packaging, one operator selects the recipe and does all the packing duties for the line. Image courtesy of Associated Labels

types of primary and secondary packages, and easier changeovers are needed to maintain production rates while dealing with greater number of products (shape and size)."

This rings true for Associated Labels. "It's not unusual to have 10 different stock-keeping units (SKU) and all are short runs," says Vleeming.

SUSTAINABLE POUCH CAPABILITY

Besides short-run needs, Associated Labels wanted a flexible pouch machine to meet sustainable film packaging mandates that CPGs are gearing up for by 2025 and 2030.

Plus, companies see the writing on the wall. The snack foods study also revealed, "a lack of packaging

sustainability was not yet an obstacle to purchase for consumers, but brand owners and retailers are pushing to improve their image. When sustainability becomes vital, packaging equipment and materials will need to be able to respond."

"Hudson-Sharp has been leading the way on polybag machines for years and has been leading the way on recyclable polyethylene (PE) pouches," says Vleeming. "And that was part of the reason for Associated Labels going in this direction."

The machine offers 30 in. (914 mm) maximum web width with an 18 in. (610 mm) maximum roll diameter, along with recipe storage via touchscreen control interface. Package types include stand-up pouches with a zipper, a three-side seal and three-side seal with zipper. The machine can accommodate many types of material, such as laminated films, recycle-ready PE, paper and biofilm.

Associated Labels also added the extended length stack index conveyor for its machine, which helps the company achieve a one-operator approach for this line. "For the 400 series machine, we have just one operator per shift, and the operator selects the recipe and does all the packing duties," says Vleeming. "With the servo capability, we can avoid a separate operator for adjusting and have this operator pack boxes."

For short-run jobs, the company can produce up to 25,000 to 30,000 pouches in a regular, seven-hour shift or just deliver 10,000 in one day.

Associated Labels didn't select the Accelerate Live field service app, which enables a machine inspection via an audio/video connection between the machine and Hudson Sharp technicians. However, the Canadian company does use the remote connection feature that allows technicians to connect to the machine to view any downtime issues.

The company is extremely happy with the machine, and even more so with the virtual commissioning and attention to detail during the pandemic.

"We commissioned the machine in May, and because of the pandemic we weren't able to do a traditional factory acceptance testing (FAT)," says Vleeming. "We did it in a virtual manner, and the implementation by Hudson Sharp was great."

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