

PACKAGING

The Future is Flexible

By MOLLY V. STRZELECKI

Versatility and flexibility combine with new technology for better labeling equipment

A bottle sits on a shelf, hoping to be picked up by a thirsty consumer. The one that gets grabbed the most isn't just the one with a tasty liquid inside; it's also the one with an eye-catching label wrapped around it. This end product is seemingly what will grab dollars and market share for beverage companies, but in reality, the race starts before that label even meets the bottle.

Labeling equipment manufacturers are meeting the demands for better production lines for beverage companies. To keep up with the fast-paced and ever-changing needs of beverage production, labeling equipment manufacturers constantly have to be on their toes with the latest machinery that will keep production running at the best capacity.

Serving up servos

These days, the latest and greatest in labeling equipment is tapping into the best technology available.

"Everybody seems to be looking for more streamlined lines," says Dan Michaelis, vice president of sales for Ontario-based Multi-Tech Systems International. "We feel that newer technology is going to be more electrical than ever before. New servos are coming out, and the newer electronics are going to be incorporated into the labeling equipment." Michaelis explains that two years haven't made a big difference in the mechanics of a machine, but electronics from two years ago are old news, and completely different than electronics today.

"Photo eyes from two years ago are completely outdated now," he says. "The electronics [for labeling equipment] are growing so much, and we are constantly looking at how to better tie-in with the rest of the equipment [on the line]. Servos that couldn't keep up before are now phenomenal."

With new control logics and servo-controls for equipment, says George Albrecht, vice president of sales for Axon Styrotech, Raleigh, N.C., "you get much more positive cutting application of the machinery and tying into the rest of the production line. There is communication throughout the entire line, with other pieces of machinery and equipment."

Flexibility counts

Flexibility is a word often bandied about when it comes to beverage production in general, and with labeling equipment, in particular, the word crops up as an important factor in a good piece of machinery. It is nearly as important as the ever-important V-word: versatility.

"In the past year, it seems that flexibility has been the most important thing," says Tom Kauffman, vice president of sales for P.E. USA – Labelers, Cincinnati. "With new developments in marketing labeled products, customers have to be forward thinking in regard to flexibility, label material type, speed, and more, when selecting a labeling system."

For a machine to be considered versatile, it must be set up for fast and easy changeovers. Additionally, a machine's versatility speaks to whether or not changeovers require tools, Michaelis says.

Modular machines are having a big impact on beverage production for just this reason. The equipment is not only more versatile in meeting the line's production needs, but on average, is much smaller than other equipment, making it easier to handle.

"A small footprint is a necessity to fit into plants," explains Nadia Vizza, marketing manager for Pinellas Park, Fla.-based Polypack. "Configuration changes are happening more often and it is important to build a system that offers easy changeovers."

"Flexible and modular labelers allow for the production of a variety of containers on the same labeler," notes Olivier Huss, marketing development manager of labeling for Duluth, Ga.-based Nordson. "One modular machine can handle magazine-fed, roll-fed, cold-glue or pressure-sensitive labels, allowing manufacturers to switch products at low conversion cost. This is particularly appealing to contract packers.

"If the company wants to change the look of its product, it doesn't have to invest in a completely new machine," Huss continues. "It just buys a module that allows them to produce the kind of label they need, whether it's partial labels, shrink wrap, etc. They can do it with the same machine."

Friederike Arndt, of KHS in Bonn, Germany, notes that the company's latest introduction, a modular piece of equipment called the Innoket SE, has been "deliberately kept simple," giving ease and versatility. It features a table construction and central labeling carousel matched to the system requirements specific to the line. The labeling carousel can be flexibly equipped with a wide variety of labeling stations, Arndt notes, "whether cold-melt, hot-melt, adhesive-pressure, or roll-fed labeling stations — they are all doable. The Innoket SE embodies a labeling concept with modular design, which has the advantage that all modules can be easily changed if new labeling requirements should arise within the organization."

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