

Creative Wingman

SMYTH'S INNOVATION TEAM helps clients overcome obstacles, employ change strategies and find success with interactive labels, writes Danielle Jerschefske

Printed materials have long served as a crucial avenue for brand messaging. The right look and feel is paramount. Packaging must be persuasive at the first moment of truth.

Packaging and label experts have invested in R&D to print the best graphics on a variety of materials to convey brand appeal at retail. They use advanced machinery and harness vendor support to bring complex constructions like extended content, peel and reveal, and scratch & play labels and coupons to market that touch buyers' emotions, in-store and during consumption. Specialty coatings and unique embellishments incorporated in package design too, enhance brand-to-consumer interaction.

For more than 100 years US-based Smyth Companies has embraced the process of incubating wild packaging concepts that enable brand managers to meet their objectives. The converter is well placed to service large international brands like MillerCoors and Hormel, meeting all production, process and performance requirements, while at the same time, is able to bring unique and custom concepts to market with speed and ingenuity.

Craig Bakken, vice president of innovation at Smyth, leads a team of 10 charged with escorting brands through the process of ideation to implementation. Bakken says, 'We take on the strange stuff that other companies decline and we never say no.'

Bakken's team members are described as the 'cowboys' of the business, like the brazen Top Gun team of Maverick and Goose. They're given challenging missions. They have the audacity to accept them. And often enough find that the project yields further business opportunities.

TEA OF A KIND brand uses four labels to enhance shelf appeal



LABELS&LABELING

So when brands choose Smyth to integrate innovative packaging into their product lines, and harvest all that creative delivery has to offer, they won't be flying solo. Smyth will be their wingman.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

Smyth's Red Rock label application business is a key asset for project implementation. Working within the innovation group, skilled engineers and technicians develop custom, high-speed pressure sensitive label applicators for promotional labeling on pouches, boxes, bags and cartons, non-standard packaging shapes, and web printed products like newspapers and flyers.

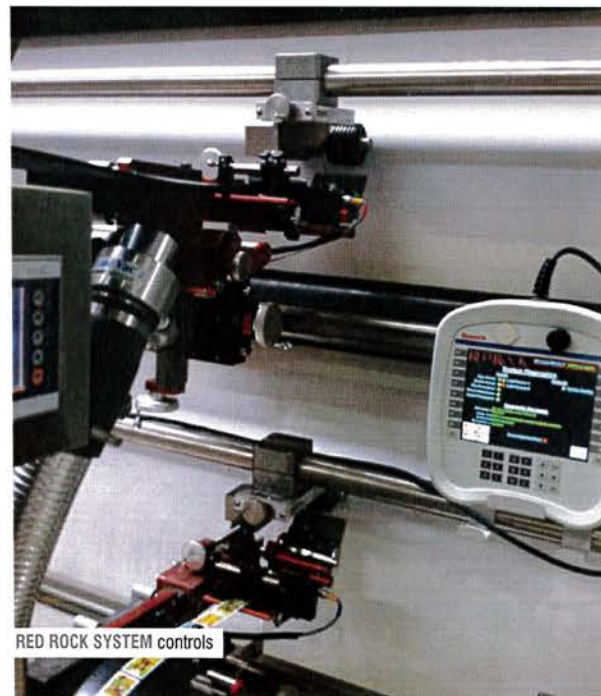
Bakken says, 'The best ideas are only as good as our ability to deliver to the product. Dozens of converters can produce most of the labels we make, and a handful can make everything we do.'

'Nobody can deliver the label to the product, at the speed and invisibility to the customer's process, as Smyth.'

Smyth recently installed a Red Rock system for Quad Graphics Plural in Sao Paulo, Brazil. With the largest commercial print capacity in the country, the Plural plant produces three million promotional booklets each month for Natura, Brazil's foremost eco-conscious cosmetics brand with 3.1 billion USD in annual revenue.

Natura values the consumer connection made possible with tangible inserts and advertisements that involve readers with whatever brand its marketing teams choose to feature. Consumers are encouraged to be more responsive. Therefore the brand owner wanted more possibilities for special interaction.

Traditional labelers used in print-publishing production are limited to front, first and last page, and back cover application. Plural needed a flexible application system to integrate more complex promotions within its client's catalogues – on any page



RED ROCK SYSTEM controls



SMYTH MILLERCOORS promotional samples



LABELS & LABELING | 75

RED ROCK label application system on Quad Graphics' Goss machine in Brazil

they wished.

The custom Smyth Red Rock machine is capable of applying as many as 12 labels in-line to any page of the booklet while being printed on a 72 inch Goss press running up to 2000 fpm.

Says Bakken, 'The system allows Natura to apply all kinds of promotional labels – in this case a label that contains actual perfume fluid for sampling – on the press. The labels can be applied on either side of the web, in virtually any location, with as many as three across.

'Typically, the speeds would dictate an offline application, which would limit the location on the printed piece and drive up the cost by adding a process. Lower total cost allows for more use of promotions and the printing of more pieces.'

The system is engineered in a master-slave configuration with three heads, each with a set of applicators. When one of the labelers runs out of labels the next one picks up, and they switch over automatically, allowing application at-speed with zero downtime. The system delivers a 100 percent hit rate and the software behind the mechanics is programed to allow movement within the 546mm application window.

Natura's booklet has a total four signatures each consisting of 18 promotional pages. Each signature can have up to three labels applied on any page, at any position. This system opens the door for significant creativity.

For ultimate position accuracy vacuum boxes hold the labels down during application. Steve Ivens, Red Rock equipment manager, explains, 'The trouble with achieving high speeds is the dance around that can occur tearing labels off or having them pre-dispense. Without dancer rolls there's zero-touch and zero-tension, meaning the labels aren't moving around. Running four signatures means a lot of labels. This project is really an understated success.'

The Red Rock business has taken Smyth into some great positioning points. It's there to support PS label production because, after all, the company is in the business of selling labels.

EMBRACING INNOVATION

'Labels can include all types of interaction, from perfumes to redeemable coupons, to gift cards, game pieces and collectables,' says Bakken. Whatever the customer can conceive, Smyth is willing to convert and apply it.

Last year Smyth opened an Innovation Room that consists of multiple stations with all the elements that make up the package decoration process – containers, materials, inks and coatings, converting methods and application technologies. A simulated bar is at the center complete with shelving, flat screens, soft lighting and tall stools.

Bakken explains, 'The room is set up to generate collaborative innovation and branding ideas. It is a place conducive to intimate creative interaction that allows us to deliver "ideation to implementation", taking customers through each step to find success.'

Gizmo is the latest packaging innovation designed for the widely popular vitamin-enhanced beverage market. The Gizmo is a pressurized nitrogen cap that releases ingredients into the water only when the consumer is ready to drink it. Recent research shows that a higher percentage of nutrients are consumed with on-demand delivery – and that vitamin-enhanced waters often lose much of the added nutrition during supply chain delivery.

Smyth produced all of the labels to launch Tea of Kind, the first brand in the world to use the revolutionary cap. It was important that the brand capture the attention of the growing number of wellness consumers. The caps are being licensed to other enhanced beverages interested in the technology, and the drink line is the best way to demonstrate the benefits.

A single bottle of Tea of a Kind calls for four labels: a shrink sleeve cap that is appealing and serves as a tamper evident seal; a pressure sensitive neck label and a hang tag with social media directions unique to the beverage shelf space. Lastly, a reverse printed pressure-sensitive main label pulls the entire package together.

'The product is pure innovation,' says Bakken. 'The see-through to the primary label design was crafted to feature the drama of the Gizmo cap rapidly discharging its contents into clear liquid.'

The client didn't necessarily know what they wanted. Smyth's capability to take such a project from the ground up while juggling all of the variables involved was vital to the launch. A lot of printers would have to contract out the various pieces.

Tim Klein, a new business development manager at Smyth, explains, 'By providing a single source for all the components and process, the customer was able to focus on implementing the technology side of the package – filling and charging the cap, filling and capping the product. We handled the decoration.'

There's lots of buzz around interactive packaging these days. QR codes, augmented reality, NFC and RFID tagging are picking up in adoption in many sectors – on packaging, in publishing, for retail replenishment and fast payments. Each offers great opportunities to connect with consumers digitally and there's no doubt that this trend will continue.

Says Klein, 'These elements are fast becoming mainstream, to the point where they will be an expected element of the package versus a "discoverable delight". Eventually, the virtual information will be deemed reliable and accessible enough to replace the extended content requirements. This could open up more of the package surface for decoration rather than content.'

While the digital world becomes more a part of our lives every day, the need to connect with consumers physically through packaging will remain and evolve. Smyth has the team and culture for guiding brands successfully through the rules of packaging engagement, no matter what happens between take-off and landing.