

Ercus Packaging produces largest single-site digital labels job, spurring even larger jobs and rapid growth

At a glance

Industry sector: Labels & Packaging

Business name: Ercus Packaging

Headquarters: Mexico City, Mexico

Web site: www.grupoercus.com

Challenges:

- Increase operational and technical versatility to offer customers end-to-end solutions.
- Boost digital printing capacity to fuel fast business growth.
- Expand short/medium-run printing capabilities to align with the 80 percent of Mexican businesses that are small and medium B2C & B2B companies.
- Produce world's largest single-site job in the history of digital printing: Coca Cola's Share a Coke campaign in Mexico.

Solution:

- Three HP Indigo WS6600 Digital Presses with Inline Priming (ILP) Units for flexible packaging, primarily on synthetic substrates.
- HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press, to enable printing on larger formats up to 73x110cm, and fast delivery of large jobs.
- HP SmartStream Production Center for variable data printing, enabling highly complex, personalized printing jobs.

Results:

- Forty-five percent business growth in 2014, all due to HP Indigo digital printing.
- Digital printing now accounts for about 95 percent of business, up from 75 or 80 percent two years ago.
- Ercus Packaging printed 650 million labels, incorporating variable data with perfect color matching of the Coca Cola red, on three HP Indigo WS6600 Presses in less than five months.
- Ercus Packaging pre-sold the full capacity of its first HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press within weeks of installation. A second press will be installed in mid-2015.

If you've ever wondered what it would take to produce the largest digitally printed labels job at a single site, the person to ask is Fernando Gómez. As operations manager of Ercus Packaging, the first North American digital print provider for the 'Share a Coke' personalized marketing campaign, Gómez is an expert on the details.

Ercus Packaging is a subsidiary of Eshuis NL, the Netherlands-based company that headed the first Share a Coke campaign in which the most common first names in different countries across Europe were digitally printed on around 900 million Coca Cola bottle labels.

"We saw the quality controls and coordination behind the campaign in Europe, in which there were multiple conventional and digital printing companies and, with Peter Overbeek,

the CEO of Eshuis NL, we took that same knowledge into Mexico. Although we didn't have multiple languages, and we had 'only' 700 million labels, there are far fewer digital installations in Mexico able to do this job, so we had to make sure we could deliver the whole campaign from just one site."

HP Indigo proves the right fit

For the Share a Coke campaign, flexo printing of the static content and digital printing of the variable data names are done at different locations. After digital printing, the labels are shipped to the conventional printer for varnishing and slitting. The European campaign had been printed entirely on HP Indigo digital presses, and HP had created a special pre-mixed ink to match Coca Cola's unique red, so there was no doubt that HP Indigo technology would also be used for the North American version.

Gómez says that HP Indigo digital printing technology stands apart in its ability to meet the demands of such a complex and quality-centric job. "We do not know any other digital technology that can print so well on synthetic materials. Also, the quality is unbelievable compared to other technologies. HP Indigo was the best option."

Big and bigger, with digital printing

Ultimately, a small portion of the digital printing was handled by a different company, so around 650 million personalized labels were produced at Ercus Packaging Mexico City plant. According to Gómez, this made it the world's largest single-site digital printing label job.

As impressive as that accomplishment is, it is about to be surpassed. "We are on our way to repeat the Coke campaign next year and it looks to be twice as big as the 2014 one. It has also given us great opportunities to take on even larger jobs and to go into other markets for new applications for flexible packaging," says Gómez,

Ercus Packaging is rapidly expanding its digital printing capacity and capabilities to meet demand for fast turnaround and short-, mid- and long-run runs. "Our workspace is a scene of rapid and visible evolution. This means that we are surrounded by projects, with the proliferation of projects due more to an increase of small projects. That's why we focus on the 80 percent of Mexican companies that are small to medium B2C and B2B. They can't take the risk of long runs. They want to start with shorter ones and so it's a big advantage that we can do this. We can open markets and scale up, and grow alongside with our customers."

Boosting capacity with new HP Indigo presses

In October 2014, Ercus Packaging installed an HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press and a second one is scheduled for delivery in mid-2015.

Even before the first HP Indigo 20000 Digital Press went into full production, it made a big impression. "The quality is amazing and the larger format is mind-blowing for new markets," says Gomez. "The customers are amazed at the type and size of jobs we can now deliver in a very short time. Being able to do an impression with five, six or seven colors and change the design at any time is a very high value point for our customers."

Already, the new press has helped land a new customer who will fill the entire capacity of the new press, expected to be 500,000 linear meters per month. The customer expects to require 19 different versions of their flexible packaging, so Ercus Packaging will provide an end-to-end solution, from printing, to finishing and distributing them to the customer's warehouses.

The 'full solution' approach is a hallmark of Ercus Packaging strategy. "When a customer wants us to do something we always try to find a solution for what they want. With our HP Indigo fleet, we are very versatile and we can also respond quickly."

HP Indigo digital printing is now core to Ercus Packaging business, in Mexico and beyond. "With our HP Indigo presses, and the knowhow we have with our Netherlands partners and Mexico companies, and with best practices we get from HP and Dscoop, we are able to offer the best quality in digital printing," says Gómez.

"We will have multiple HP Indigo 20000 Digital Presses working together here, and at Eshuis in the Netherlands and the US, all delivering the same quality and service, all around the world. Whatever our customers need, when and where they need it, Eshuis will be able to deliver!"

"There is now so much that can be done digitally, like pouch bags with VDP and faster response. We have customers waiting in line to do these larger format products on the HP Indigo 20000."

-- Fernando Gómez, operations manager, Ercus Packaging