

Syracuse Label makes efficiency investment

An employee-owned converter in Upstate New York has found increased efficiency with automated flexo cleaning equipment, writes Danielle Ferschevske

Syracuse Label is a 100 percent employee-owned company based in Upstate New York. With eighty associates, nine flexo presses and two digital presses to maintain, efficiency and cleanliness on the shop floor are a critical part of the converter's Lean manufacturing and quality control directives.

At each Labelexpo Americas the business brings a handful of stakeholders to review technology demonstrated on the show floor. Explains Kathy Alaimo, president of Syracuse Label, 'It's so important for people from the shop floor to be at the event because they're using the equipment every day. They know the job inside and out.'

In the wake of last year's show, Syracuse Label invested in Flexo Wash automatic washing systems. Alaimo says, 'It takes a lot of convincing our people since each of us is an owner and we don't want to spend money on something that's not going to make us more efficient.'

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L&L: What issues were you looking to overcome with the investment in automated parts, plates and anilox washing systems?

Kathy Alaimo: We were looking to reduce labor and find greater efficiencies. We actively practice Lean manufacturing so minutes and seconds mean a lot to us when working to meet our production goals. The Flexo Wash anilox cleaner has provided our shop floor leaders with greater consistency in color management since the cells are more thoroughly and deeply cleaned more often. More thorough and consistent cleaning of doctor blades and plates helps us reduce time with the set ups on the press. Overall, the systems have allowed our operators to get the presses up and running faster and with improved production quality.

L&L: Is the ROI for the machinery on track with your expectations?

KA: The automated machinery has freed up time in our press room staging area, giving the person who was tasked with cleaning plates more time for mounting plates. Even with additional press capacity added to the work load, we're still keeping up with demands. It also allows this person to support in press change overs within each cell reducing down time.

L&L: How easy are the systems to use?

KA: We cross train with everyone here. Nothing is just one person's job. We found that the Flexo Wash equipment was simple enough to train multiple people with ease. They're not too complicated. However, understanding the maintenance side took us a little longer

than expected. We needed to develop an understanding for how the machines worked and we are performing well at this stage.

L&L: How did you integrate the systems as a regular process in daily operations?

KA: For the plate cleaner we spread the duties among multiple positions. We also purchased extra blade holders for the parts machine to allow quicker set ups and more rotations for cleaning blades as time permits. The automation has provided us with more flexibility to introduce more people to the process and given us time to clean as time allows.

L&L: What types of inks are you typically using and how do processes differ when using any of the cleaning systems?

KA: We use both UV and water-based inks. It was extremely important to us when we made the investment that we be able to clean both water-based and UV inks off of our plates, and Flexo Wash was great in helping us come up with the right chemical for cleaning both. We primarily clean only UV ink parts in parts washer due to efficiency in cleaning water-based parts without the system.

When we first started, the plates were a lot cleaner which made our print much cleaner. No one ever complains when you do a nicer print job. Quality is huge for us. We delivered quality before, but these automated systems help to produce it all quicker.

L&L: Have you noticed increased longevity of printing plates now that a machine cleans them?

KA: Yes, generally since the plates are kept cleaner and there's more consistent pressure used on the plates in the cleaning system, the integrity of the plate is better maintained as opposed to manual scrubbing.

L&L: How has using the parts washer improved or maintained quality standards and the ability to reproduce jobs consistently?

KA: Zero contamination from previous inks allows for a quicker set up to run the job. If the parts have any residue from previously used colors, it definitely affects the lay down when you're setting up and producing the next jobs.

L&L: Have you realized any improvement in print quality or reduction in defects because of the automatic anilox cleaning system?

KA: There is much less damage to the anilox cylinders and cell structure which delivers more consistency with ink matching. The cleaning cycle is faster because of the 2x2 system, so the machine cleans four cylinders at a time as opposed to a single output done manually.



In August 2016 Syracuse Label plans to begin work on a new 55,000 sq ft facility, and will move into the plant in October