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NEWS

FlexoTechs Partners With A&V For Innovation, Growth

BY GREG KISHBAUGH

As a musician and audiophile, Mike Rogers strives for harmony, balance and clarity when listening to music or performing it live. As the Operations Manager of printing plate manufacturer FlexoTechs, Renton, Washington, he aims for the very same things.

A turntable sits atop corrugated shelving in Rogers' office, groaning beneath hundreds of albums, bracketed by speakers on either side.

Throughout the day, Rogers will lower the needle to a favorite album, reminding himself of how each individual note builds, one atop the other, to form a more cohesive whole.



The FlexoTechs team, from left: Mike Rogers, Operations Manager; Rick Wray, Plate Maker/Mounting; Andrew Elder, Production Artist; Jamie Thayer, Plate Mounter; Tatyana Barnesberger, Production Artist; Lucy He, Prepping/Shipping; Maranda Marx, Customer Service Representative/Scheduling; Dean Cariker, Plate Specialist/Plate Maker; Dina Carnes, General Manager of FlexoTechs/DieTechs. Not pictured: Jason Storey, Production Artist, Hillsboro, Oregon division.

The plates the company builds are the fulcrum of the flexo process upon which balances color, design and a product's ability to connect with consumers.

FlexoTechs began as an in-house plate supplier for independent powerhouse Alliance Packaging, located within the company's Pacific Northwest headquarters.

The origins of Alliance stretch back to 1967 when Gordon Younger,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

GP, IP Announce Additional U.S. Plant Closures

Two of the paper and packaging industry's largest global producers, Atlanta, Georgia based Georgia-Pacific (GP) and Memphis, Tennessee based International Paper, have announced additional U.S. plant closures, reflecting a broader trend of consolidation and footprint realignment seen throughout the past year.

GP has announced its plans to permanently close its corrugated plant in Mt. Olive, Illinois by December 31, 2025. The plant will continue to operate for the next 60 days followed by a safe and orderly shutdown.

Approximately 134 jobs will be impacted by this closure. GP is working to support those employees with potential opportunities within Georgia-Pacific and other Koch companies or connecting with job fairs and opportunities for employment outside the company.

GP's focus over the next two months is to continue to safely operate the plant while supporting their employees during the transition.

International Paper has also announced the closure of its packaging facilities in Compton, California and Louisville, Kentucky. The facilities will cease operations by January

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REGION	42# Kraft liner	26# Semi-Chem. Medium
U.S. Average	\$900.00-925.00	\$825.00-\$850.00

CANADIAN LINERBOARD & MEDIUM

The average prices reported are tabulated from prices PAID by various sources throughout Canada. Prices may be higher or lower in various areas of the country. The prices tabulated here are intended only for purposes of reference. They do not connote any commitment to sell any material at the indicated average. Transactions may be completed at any time at a price agreed upon by seller and purchaser. Prices are Canadian \$ and per metric ton.

REGION	42# Kraft Liner	26# Semi-Chem Medium
East	\$970.00	\$960.00
West	\$1,015.00	\$995.00

Plant Closures *(CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)*

2026. All customers will be serviced from other nearby locations.

The Compton facility closure will impact 125 employees, while the Louisville facility closure will impact 93 employees. The company will work to minimize the impact on employees by using attrition, retirements and current vacancies at other International Paper locations.

Team members at these locations will receive outplacement assistance, access to mental health support resources and severance benefits.

These closures are aimed at accelerating strategic initiatives to improve quality, reliability and service delivery.



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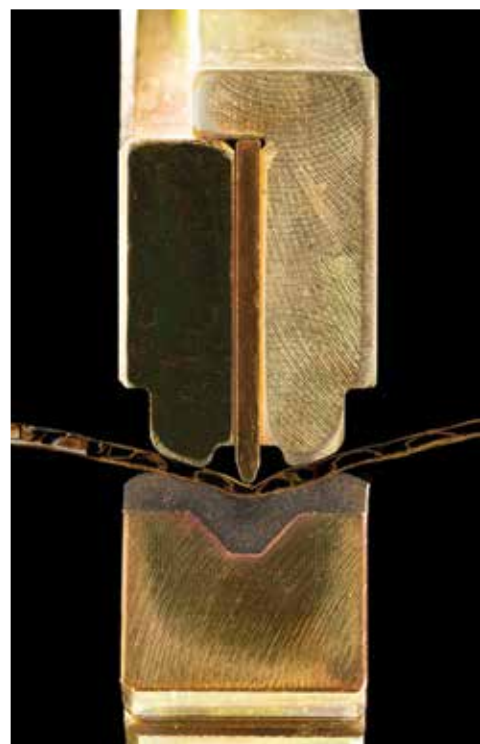


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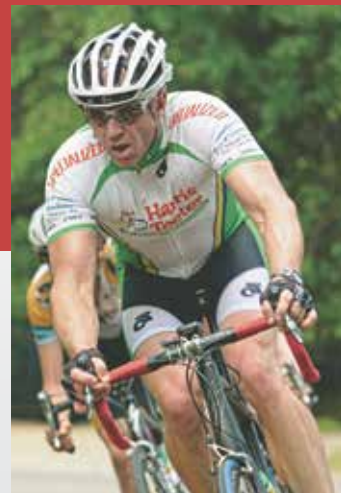
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Declining Cardboard Demand In U.S. Casts Shadow On Holiday Sales

According to a report on *Packaging Gateway*, shipments of corrugated packaging in the United States have dropped to their lowest levels in a decade, prompting speculation that the upcoming holiday season could prove weaker than expected for retailers.

Recent figures from the Fibre Box Association (FBA) show that U.S. corrugated box shipments in the third quarter of 2025 fell to their lowest third-quarter reading since 2015.

Typically, box shipments climb during the third quarter as retailers ramp up for holiday displays and stock. Yet this year several packaging firms have reported that orders during October were flat or below normal levels.

The decline in shipments is widely viewed as a demand indicator for consumer goods and retail supply-chains. Less demand for boxes may point towards muted retailer expectations or consumer spending.

Industry commentary suggests multiple headwinds are contributing to the fall in corrugated box shipments. These include weak consumer sentiment, a sluggish housing market and trade policy uncertainty.

Production data shows that containerboard output (the primary raw material for corrugated boxes) fell 3.1 percent YOY in Q3 and that capacity cuts across North

America are proceeding rapidly. Analysts note that per-capita box use is now more than 20 percent below its 1999 peak, illustrating structural demand changes in the market.

For the packaging industry, the slump in box shipments is a warning signal. Reduced orders mean lower utilization and higher pressure on margins and capacity planning. Some mills and converting plants have already announced closures or cutbacks in response to sustained weak demand.

From a retail perspective, the weakness in corrugated box volumes suggests that the forthcoming holiday shopping season may not deliver the same volume of goods movement seen in prior years. Because many seasonal displays and shipping boxes are ordered late during Q3 into October, the low volumes raise questions about the scale of inventory build-up and promotional programming.

For global packaging professionals, the current trend underscores growing emphasis on right-sizing, alternative fulfilment formats and more efficient packaging design to adapt to shifting demand. The fall-off in traditional corrugated box shipments may accelerate innovations in sustainable and flexible packaging options.

Ultimately, the marked decline in US corrugated box shipments signals caution not only within the packaging sector but across retail supply-chains.

It suggests that holiday demand may be under pressure, prompting a close watch on November and December volumes in the weeks ahead.

Say goodbye to sloppy cuts!

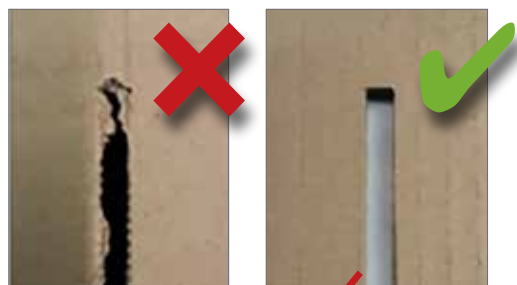
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PPC Elects Hilda S. Murray As New Board Chair

The Paperboard Packaging Council (PPC) has announced the election of Hilda S. Murray, Executive Vice President and Owner of TPC Printing & Packaging, as the new Chair of its Board of Directors.

Murray's appointment marks a continuation of strong, values-driven leadership at PPC as the organization advances its mission to promote innovation, collaboration, and sustainability across the North American paperboard packaging industry.

A respected leader and advocate for independent converters, Murray brings decades of business and industry experience to her new role. Under her leadership, TPC Printing & Packaging, a 100-year-old, family-owned folding



Hilda S. Murray

carton converter based in Chattanooga, Tennessee, has grown into a dynamic company recognized for its craftsmanship, innovation, and commitment to sustainability.

"Hilda's leadership represents the very best of our industry," said Emily Leonczyk, Executive Director and Vice President of the Paperboard Packaging Council. "Her deep understanding of both the challenges and opportunities facing converters today, combined with her passion for people and innovation, makes her the ideal person to guide PPC through this next chapter. She embodies the values of integrity, adaptability, and community that define our membership."

Throughout her career, Murray has helped TPC evolve through multiple industry transformations—from textiles to digital workflows, from mass-market to high-end luxury packaging, and, most recently, into rigid box manufacturing. Known for her forward-thinking mindset, she has championed new technologies and sustainable materials, helping TPC remain competitive and resilient amid an ever-changing marketplace.

Commenting on her new role, Murray said, "It's an incredible honor to serve as PPC's Board Chair at such a pivotal time for our industry. As converters, we share a spirit of creativity and collaboration that drives continuous improvement. My goal is to build on that energy, to unite and support our members through change, celebrate one another's success, and keep moving the industry forward together."

Under Murray's leadership, PPC will continue to strengthen its member community through education, advocacy, and workforce development initiatives, while advancing the sustainability of paperboard packaging.

Learn more about the PPC Executive Committee and Board at paperbox.org.

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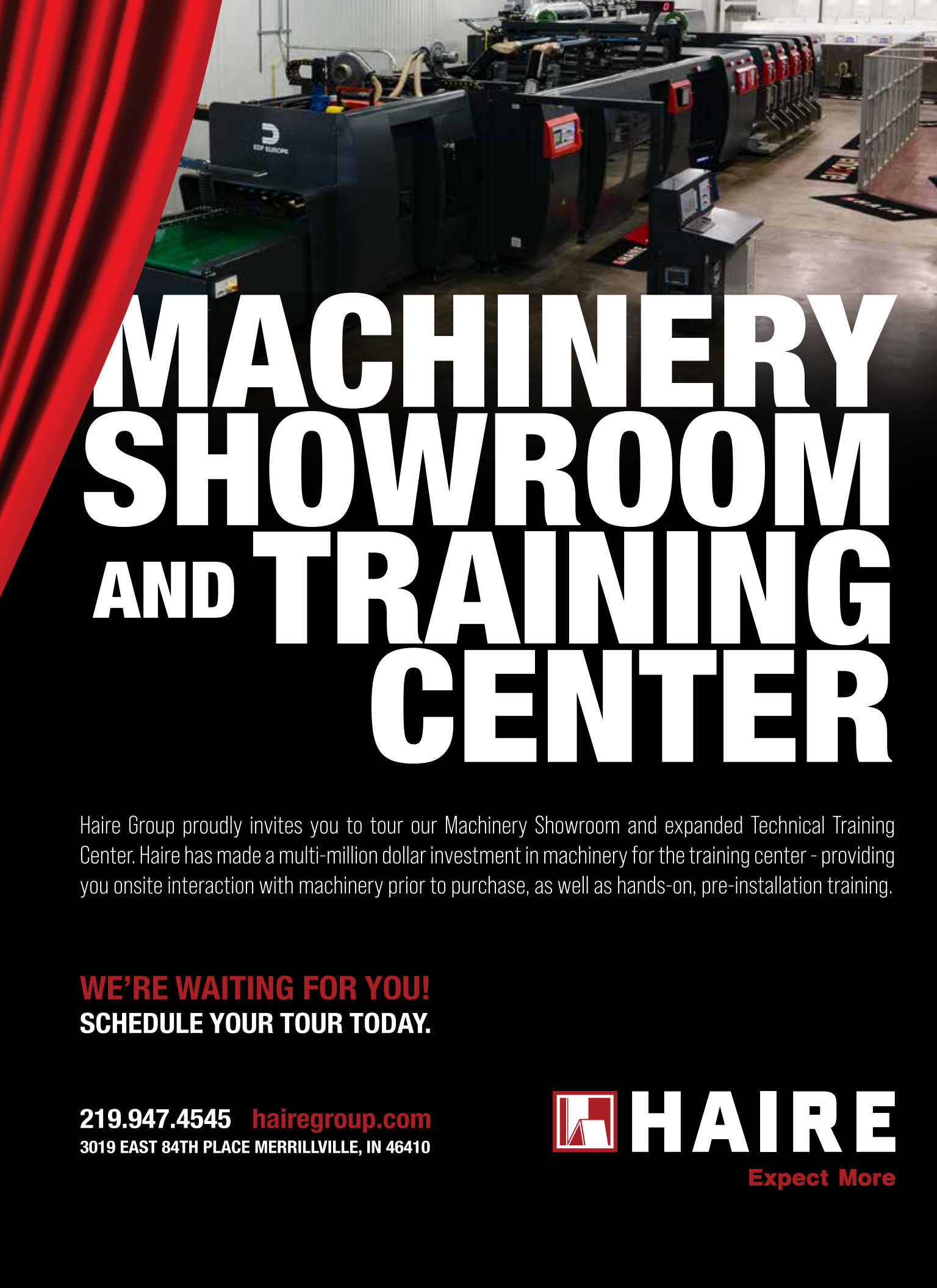
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NAM Hosts Workforce Summit In Charlotte, ICPF Shares Takeaways

The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) recently hosted its fourth annual Workforce Summit in Charlotte, North Carolina. The conference, held at the Manufacturing Institute—NAM's workforce development and education partner—explored conversations around skills-based hiring, talent investment and the growing impact of AI on the paper and packaging industry. Caitlin Salaverria, President of ICPF, attended the conference and shared her learnings and impactful takeaways of the event.

One foundational element of ICPF's Strategic Road Map is evaluating partnership opportunities with existing national programs. The Manufacturing Institute is a great place to get connected with, offering a multitude of resources and solutions to manufacturing workforce needs.

- **Change the narrative on talent investment:** Across most companies, a big challenge is developing the business case for talent investment. Know it is possible to quantify the impact of labor investment. Today, market leaders are investing across six pillars of talent excellence, tailored to address specific organizational challenges: work design, talent planning, attracting & onboarding, talent development, talent effectiveness and culture & experience. In order to get started, it is imperative to have human resources, operations and

finance all working together toward talent investment goals. ICPF's Workforce Development Report is a helpful resource as you target talent investment. Each quarter, we provide ideas and resources to help industry companies attract, retain and develop a talented workforce in today's competitive environment.



- **Reimagine frontline leadership in the age of AI:** Embedding an AI-positive culture works to get all levels of employees excited, ignited and enabled when it comes to AI. Frontline leaders are navigating the AI-enabled workplace by shaping employee experience, strengthening leadership skills and guiding teams through AI-driven change. Attendees got a sneak peek at the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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soon to be released MI and PwC 2025 Frontline Leader of the Future survey.

- **Explore community partnership models in action to address workforce challenges:** By creating internship and apprenticeship programs, sitting on workforce development boards, doing philanthropic work, and connecting with local schools of all levels, you can create career pathway partnerships.
- **FAME Program:** The Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) is an advanced manufacturing workforce education and development run by the Manufacturing Institute with locations in 17 states. FAME provides global-best workforce development through strong technical training, integration of manufacturing core competencies, intensive professional practices, and hands-on experience to build the future of the modern manufacturing industry. The Advanced Manufacturing Technician (AMT) program administered under the FAME model leverages a work/learn framework to weave technical knowledge, professional behaviors and distinct manufacturing core exercises into a focused co-op experience to build global-best, entry-level, multiskilled maintenance technicians.

The FAME model facilitates employer-led partnerships between your company and local educational institutions and establishes a channel for recruiting diverse,

high-achieving and career-oriented students. Once established, the cooperative of local employers that make up the FAME Chapter will generate a continuous pipeline of skilled technicians through the AMT program.

ICPF is aware of industry companies that are already taking advantage of this program. You can join a local chapter or start your own if there isn't one already in your area.

- **Heroes MAKE America Program:** The Manufacturing Institute's Heroes MAKE America program provides integrated certification and career-readiness training in partnership with local community colleges to prepare transitioning service members, veterans, National Guard members, reservists and military spouses for rewarding careers in manufacturing. With backgrounds that often include significant experience in advanced technology, former service members are ideal candidates for manufacturing careers and poised to be natural leaders in the manufacturing industry.

To support and promote your company's efforts, ICPF has curated an array of recruitment and retention resources available for free on the ICPF website.

The Summit reinforced the message that manufacturers must take action as they face shifting workforce expectations, economic uncertainty, and rapid advances in technology. In this environment, collaboration is not optional – it is essential.

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Mesirow Advises Color Craft On Its Sale To PaperWorks Industries Inc.

Chicago, Illinois based Mesirow advises Color Craft Graphic Arts ("Color Craft" or the "Company"), a portfolio company of First Capital Partners ("First Capital") on its sale to PaperWorks Industries Inc. ("PaperWorks").

Founded in 1929 in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, Color Craft Graphic Arts is a full-service producer of folding cartons for food, beverage and household goods markets.

Gregg Weber, President & CEO of Color Craft, who will join the PaperWorks team commented, "We are thrilled to join an organization that emulates our values and has an outstanding reputation in the industry. This is a great opportunity for the Manitowoc team to thrive within a larger folding carton network and leverage mill integration to deliver even greater value and service to our customers."

He added, "Mesirow's relationships and credibility in the sector, combined with expert guidance from start to finish, were pivotal in identifying PaperWorks as an ideal partner to support our continued growth, our customers and our employees."

Rick Weil and Melanie Yermack, Managing Directors and Co-Heads of Packaging at Mesirow Investment Banking, said, "We are honored to have advised Color Craft on a transaction that aligns with its culture and strategic vision."

Litho Press And Vivid Innovations Go Bold With GFI Ink Dispensers

In the large format corrugated package printing market, speed, color accuracy, and uptime separate the good from the great. For Litho Press, a \$30 million Indianapolis-based operation specializing in top-sheet printing for major packaging converters, those advantages come from a powerful combination of technology and partnership. They rely on GFI Innovations ink dispensers and a close collaboration with Vivid Innovations, their longtime ink and pressroom supplier.

"We've built our reputation on speed to market," said Justin Hiott, General Manager of Litho Press. "Our clients expect fast turnaround and color accuracy that's dead-on from the first pull. The GFI systems, together with Vivid's support, give us that edge every day."

Litho Press has relied on GFI dispensing technology for 20 years, long before automation became commonplace. Today, their ink lab looks more like a boutique ink manufacturing facility: three GFI automated dispensing units, plus shakers, mixers, and automatic proofers, all integrated into a digital color control workflow. The transformation has been dramatic.

"Twenty years ago, we would order a PMS color and wait two or three days for delivery, only to discover it didn't

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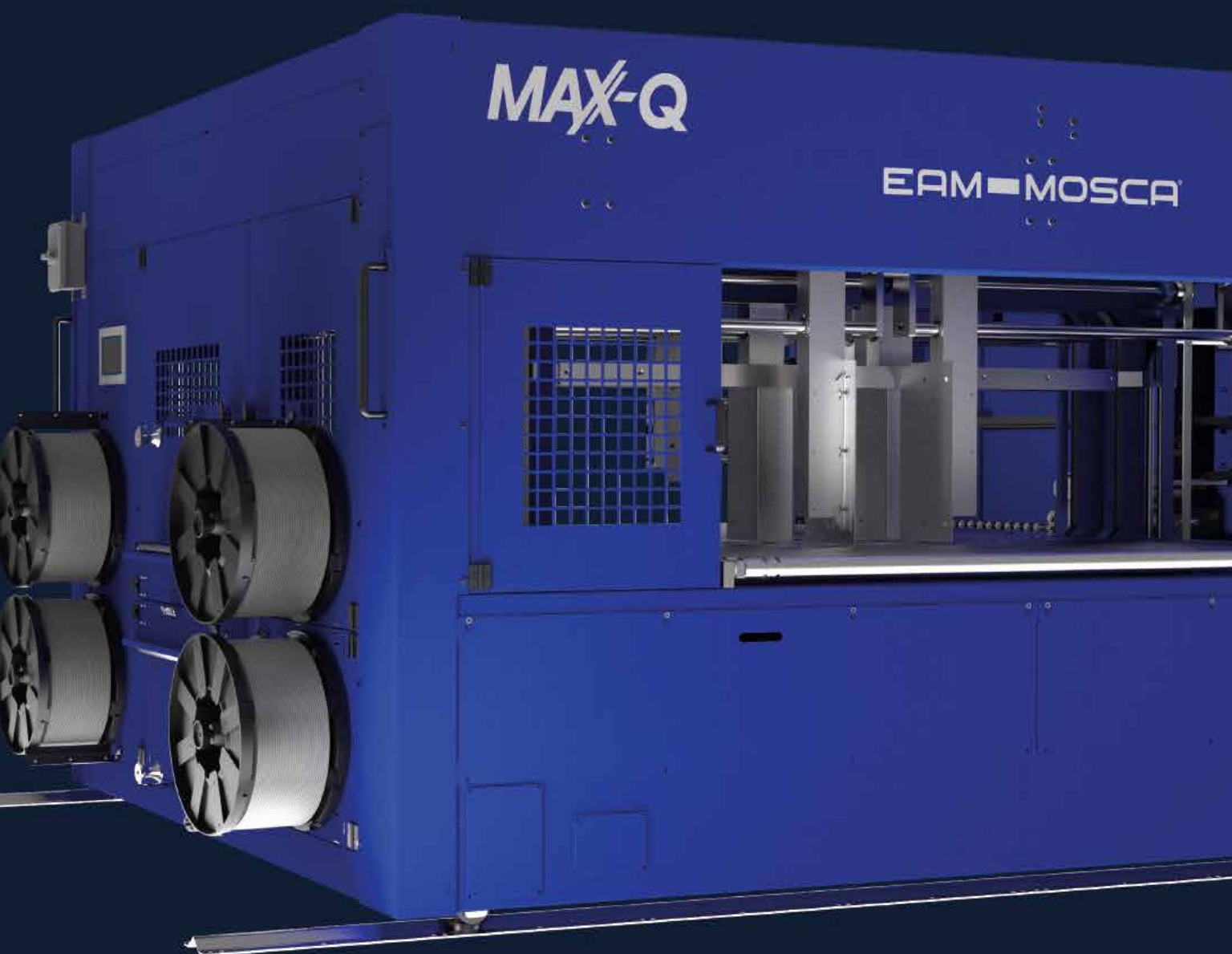
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quite match,” Hiott recalls. “Now we can match, mix, and approve that same color in a couple of hours, if not less.”

By producing every spot color in-house, Litho Press shortened turnaround times from 72 hours to just two, giving customers same-day proofs and emergency job flexibility that few competitors can match. Their ink technician can mix small batches on demand, eliminating press delays and reducing waste.

“The major advantage for us is we can run a lot tighter on the number of pounds that we’re making,” says Hiott. “Say we’re on the last 10,000 sheets and come up four pounds short on a job. Within 20 minutes, we can have the extra five or ten pounds made on press before production shuts down. That’s the difference between meeting a deadline and missing one.”

Behind those pressroom efficiencies is Ryan Higgins, founder of Muncie, Indiana-based Vivid Innovations. A supplier who built his business around GFI systems, he runs a network of GFI dispensers across sites in Indiana and Michigan. This includes three machines at Litho Press, which process more than 1,000 pounds of ink per week.

“As a small distributor, GFI technology lets me serve large, complex printers without a big production staff,” Higgins explains. “I can support accounts that run 50,000 pounds of ink annually with one person on-site, and save them hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in ink costs.”



Matt Sanford, Ink Technician at Vivid Innovations, left, and Justin Hiott, General Manager at Litho Press stand with one of the GFI ink dispensers.

Vivid Innovations provides the base inks, customized formulations, and day-to-day technical oversight that make the system sing. Each GFI AccuBlend-HV ink dispenser at Litho Press is loaded with Higgins’ proprietary database of base ink formulas, a key resource refined through thousands of live production color matches.

“Ryan is our go-to guy,” adds Hiott. “He’s not only our ink supplier, our chemical supplier and our coating supplier, he is our eyes and ears in the industry. Without the relationship with Ryan, we wouldn’t be as far as we are today.”

Over the years, Higgins and Litho Press’s ink technicians have methodically formulated, tested, and vali-

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Litho Press (CONT'D FROM PAGE 18)

dated each base color across different substrates and press conditions. This evolving data set allows the GFI COLORBOOK™ software to account for subtle pressroom variables, such as paper coatings, humidity levels, or UV versus conventional curing, to deliver highly predictable results from batch to batch.

Instead of relying on a generic PMS recipe, each stored formula has been fine-tuned to Litho Press's exact pressroom environment, often with multiple versions of the same color calibrated for different customers or press configurations. The result is faster make-readies, fewer on-press adjustments, and a library of proven colors that can be dispensed and hit target density in minutes.

"We've built a standards library that's been tweaked, tested, and proven on real jobs," Higgins says. "When Litho Press dispenses a color, it's right every time. The operator can trust what's coming out of that GFI nozzle, and that confidence saves hours of trial and waste."

Hiott credits that consistency not only for reduced downtime, but also for measurable pressroom efficiency.

"The presses are our most expensive cost centers," he explains. "Anything that keeps them running continuously is worth its weight in gold. With the GFIs, our colors are verified before they ever hit the press. There is less rework, less waiting, and fewer adjustments made on the floor. Consistency to press has become tremendous."

The ability to control color to precise L*a*b* values has also strengthened Litho Press's relationships with sophisticated brand owner customers who demand accuracy across substrates. Some color matches now have four or five formulations stored in the GFI system, each tailored to a customer's exact standard.

"One client might want their 185 Red at a slightly different hue than another," Hiott says. "With GFI, we can store each version and call it up instantly. That's a major advantage."

"Ryan's not just a supplier, he's a partner," Hiott emphasizes. "He's proactive about solving problems before they ever impact production."

The financial benefits are equally compelling. Hiott estimates at least 20 annual savings on PMS ink costs alone are the result of tighter control over ink usage, more efficient batch sizes, and reduced freight and handling expenses. Because the team can blend exactly what's needed, there is little to no excess ink sitting on the shelf or being sent for disposal.

Yet the biggest impact, Hiott emphasizes, goes beyond cost. It's about control and independence.

"We don't have to wait on outside suppliers or shuffle production because the ink isn't hasn't arrived yet," he says. "If we need 10 pounds or 100, we make it. That freedom keeps our presses running and our customers on schedule. It's enabled us to stay flexible and capable of adjusting to market changes while maintaining a competitive edge."

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a salesperson at the time for Boise Cascade, launched Seattle Packaging. When that business merged in 2001 with Sound Container, Alliance Packaging was born.

Alliance has grown and prospered by pursuing a path of strategic acquisitions throughout the years, and just as importantly, by launching companies that can support its mission and provide efficiencies.

In order to better control the quality and scheduling of its corrugated board, the company launched its own corrugator company, Sheets Unlimited. In so doing it implemented a template that it would use in launching DieTechs, to supply Alliance with dies, and lastly, FlexoTechs for plates.

It was not long before each of these in-house services began to spread out from beneath Alliance's umbrella to provide their services to outside customers, as well.

FlexoTechs was launched in 2011, and until 2014, Alliance was its sole vendor. Since then, FlexoTechs has been providing plates to outside converting facilities, with plans to increase the market share of that segment. When Rogers started with FlexoTechs in 2017 as a Graphic Designer, the breakdown for business was roughly 80 percent internal use for Alliance and 20 percent to external customers. Now, it is closer to 60 external and 40 internal.

With a goal of further increasing those numbers for outside customers, FlexoTechs required new equipment to help achieve its growth. To be a true one-source supplier,

it wanted to offer both sheet and liquid plates. "No other manufacturer in the area offered both," said Rogers.

Enter Anderson Vreeland (A&V). In 2021, Rogers and FlexoTechs/DieTechs General Manager, Dina Carnes, met with A&V company reps at the FTA meeting in Dallas, Texas, and they were able to tour a non-competitive plate shop. The company primarily produced liquid plates and had, similarly, ventured into sheet plates.

Carnes, an electrical engineer by trade, had worked with paper mills in the past before becoming involved with the converting side of the business.

When the decision was made to expand operations with new equipment, she organized the move and was able to look at every decision from an engineering standpoint, while Rogers focused on the platemaking and graphic capabilities.

The decision was made: FlexoTechs would install a new XSYS ThermoFlexX 80 flexo platemaker. Since it is headquartered within an actual corrugated plant, there were some unique hurdles that FlexoTechs faced.

"We are in a paper plant, basically surrounded by kindling," Rogers said. "When we submitted our plans to the insurance company, they returned a 38-page PDF of modifications that would need to be done before the plans could be approved."

The company had to take precautions in every aspect of the installation. All the plumbing for the solvent and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

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solvent waste was entrenched underground. Easy access shut-off valves were set up for the still, to and from.

The still is in a four-hour rated room, and the company installed enhanced ventilation for fumes to provide the very best working conditions for its employees.

"We spared no expense and we did everything by the book," Rogers said.

The company has now been producing sheet plates since the end of May last year.

"Before machine installation, we spoke with our customers extensively to let them know we would begin producing sheet plates in-house," said Rogers. "Overwhelming they preferred that we use the XSYS FTL. Often, when you begin adapting new technology there are moments of uncertainty. We didn't have that. Every customer that has been introduced to this technology has been thrilled with it."

The ThermoFlexX 80 offers a maximum plate size of 50 x 80 inches. It can automatically load and unload plates with the touch of a button. A guidance system ensures that even thick plates, up to 0.25 inches, can be seamlessly mounted on the drum, all automatically. The FlexTray mobile table, which can be adjusted in height and tilted, facilitates easy plate handling and transport.

ThermoFlexX imagers can be integrated with any workflow or RIP that can produce 1-bit TIFF file format. Closed

file formats such as LEN-files can reportedly be seamlessly converted to 1-bit TIFF.

ThermoFlexX can image all digital plates, any brand, solvent, water washable or thermal processing, and is compatible with all plate making equipment.



FlexoTechs' ThermoFlexX machine is well suited for high-volume flexo plate production. Its large size fits multiple jobs together and with intuitive solutions it can handle large, thick or partial plates easily, reducing material waste.

Productivity up to 6 square meters an hour can be achieved at the standard quality of 2540dpi. This can be doubled up to 12 square meters an hour, due to the Dual

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



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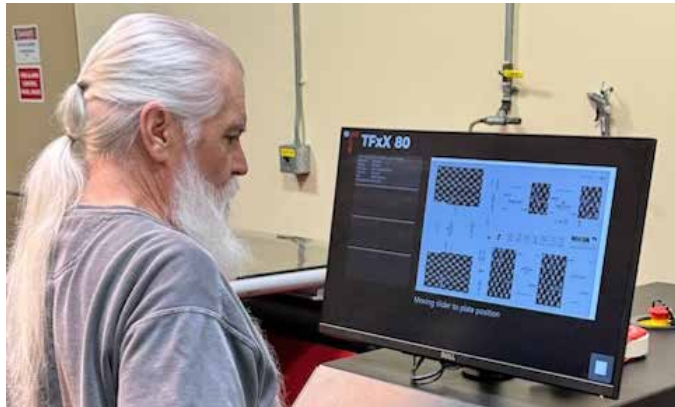
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Head Imaging concept.

The ThermoFlexX imager is controlled by a 360-degree rotating display, making the machine accessible from any side. The interface shows the job list with all parameters and a preview of the currently imaging plate.



The ThermoFlexX 80 imager offers a user interface that displays machine controls, a comprehensive job list complete with parameters, and an intuitive imaging preview.

The imaging system consists of three independent modules: motor, optics and laser. The design reportedly allows straightforward replacement of any of the modules. It is possible to perform optical fine tuning remotely.

When the original decision was made to expand FlexoTechs' business footprint to even greater degrees outside

its base at Alliance, Rogers was able to leverage much of his past experience at other converters in the area, as well as DieTechs' expansive hold on the die business of so many local converters.

"DieTechs sells dies to nearly every converter in our area, which gave us a great advantage in spreading the word about what we were doing at FlexoTechs," he said. "It was simply a matter of telling our die customers that we also make plates, as well."

Rogers stresses that equipment can only propel a company say far; it's the employees who ultimately decide the success a company enjoys. "We've built a team that provides expertise, creativity and longevity," he said. "We are all cross trained; everyone has their primary position with the company, but they have secondary positions, too."

The box business experiences enormous variance throughout the year, from low to high volume and back again. It's typical to hire workers in the summer when business booms and then lay them off when slow season begins. But what FlexoTechs has done with staffing is to provide a more secure position where no one gets laid off. Since everyone is cross trained, if people take vacation or take sick days, there is coverage.

Like many companies, COVID was a watershed moment for FlexoTechs. At one point, a visiting vendor exposed the workers to COVID and they all had to work remotely for 14 days, which they managed to do without missing a single

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

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The pandemic reinforced the notion that having a prepared workforce, ready for any contingency or emergency, was a non-negotiable necessity.

"Right now, anybody on our my team, if need be, could be out for an extended period and we would be able to operate without missing a beat," said Rogers. "It might not be easy, but we have prepared ourselves as best we can."

Part of that preparation, from Rogers' standpoint, was making certain the when the when Anderson & Vreeland showed up on site for training on the new equipment, he would be there every step of the way.

"There was no part of the operation that I could delegate," he said. "I had to know everything about the equipment. As Operations Manager, if someone had a question, I had to be able to answer them. I never wanted to be in a situation where I had to tell an employee to go ask someone else.

"As far as the rest of the team is concerned, there isn't a thing I need to worry about. This is a great group of people; they've been given the room to grow and learn and they've willingly accepted that challenge.

"Alliance is a great company, family-owned, and it's allowed us to follow by example. All of which trickles down to our customers. We are always going to do our best to communicate with them, answer any questions they have,

and meet any challenges they lay before us."

An enormous benefit for FlexoTechs is its location within Alliance Packaging. With a top-of-the-line corrugated facility at its fingertips, which can be used for training and trouble-shooting, it's an invaluable resource.

"We have a test kitchen," Rogers said. "If we are talking amongst our team about the difference between a top printer and a bottom printer or rotary diecutter and flexo folder gluer, and someone is struggling with the concept we can literally walk out to the plant and talk with a press operator."

Rogers, in addition to his stated title of Operations Manager, is also in many ways involved in sales. He is the one currently leading the charge in marketing the company and increasing its presence into the broader marketplace outside of Alliance. He and his team at FlexoTechs envisions a future that positions them as an undisputed resource for boxmakers.

"As far as capabilities go, we offer full creative services along with print consultations," he said. "We're the experts and can entrusted to set up your files for your specific press so that you do not have to worry about it."

With box plants typically not having on-site graphics designers anymore, and with a much younger, inexperienced workforce in place, FlexoTechs wants to position itself as the business partner that can fill that gap.

"One of our mottos," said Rogers, "is that, 'We design

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

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FlexoTechs (CONT'D FROM PAGE 28)

with everyone in mind.' What that means is that we are designing with the end user in mind because that is our customers' customer. We want them to have the box that they want, the print that they want. But we are also designing with the press operator in mind. The operators should be able to press a button and the plates will run flawlessly and won't need adjustments."

Since both Rogers and Carnes have backgrounds working in box plants, they understand what it is like for operators working on the plant floor. They understand first-hand the domino effect set in motion when the incorrect plates are delivered.

"We take our partnerships very seriously," Rogers said. "Companies are entrusting us, in many cases, with making the decision as to whether they should run liquid or sheet plates. We don't make that decision lightly."

It's a philosophy that is noticed and very much appreciated among FlexoTechs' many diverse customers.

"Simply put, working with FlexoTechs feels like a partnership," said Geoff Nickerson, Sales and Design Manager of Boxmaster, British Columbia, Canada. "Mike and his team provide us with great products and fantastic service. As a sheet plant, lead times and being flexible to meet an array of customer demands require top notch vendors who have the drive to help. This describes who FlexoTechs are and they've played a key role in helping us grow and evolve in a dynamic market. We can put our trust in them to meet deadlines when the situation calls for it and get us the right product for the right project. Our creative team has an excellent relationship with the FlexoTechs team, sharing ideas, providing knowledge and finding ways to continuously improve on an already high performing process. They are a valued and core supplier for us and we appreciate what they provide for our business each day, knowing we can rely on them for what comes next."

And in building relationships, none has been more important than the one between FlexoTechs and A&V.

"Before our relationship with A&V, we had a vendor for liquid resin that sent us a shipment that was leaking," said Rogers. "They sent a replacement, but that was lost and never arrived to us, which caused us to be down for a couple days."

Rogers called his A&V account manager who had been fighting for his business at the time and made him an offer: *come in this weekend and do a conversion and our business going forward is yours*. Two techs came in that weekend and a new business relationship was formed.

"We now had a vendor we could rely on," Rogers said. "I made a, truthfully, ridiculous request and they came through. What they were willing to do for us in a jam told me a lot about A&V as a company. And they have continued to demonstrate that since we've partnered with them."

FlexoTechs will be exhibiting in booth #TC15 at this year's NW Hort Expo in Wenatchee, Washington, from December 8-10. For more information, visit flexotech.com.



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New Metsä Board Study Compares Barrier Board To PET Plastics

Norwalk, Connecticut based Metsä Board has recently conducted a comparative life cycle assessment comparing the carbon footprint of berry trays made from three different materials: MetsäBoard Prime FBB EB, PET and recycled R-PET. The study included both biogenic carbon sequestration and biogenic carbon emissions, and it was verified by two independent reviewers from RISE and SimaPro UK. The cradle-to-grave study covered multiple end-of-life scenarios, such as regional recycling and full incineration.



Under the U.S. end-of-life scenario, the carbon footprint of a berry tray made of MetsäBoard Prime FBB EB was shown to be negative for the studied life cycle – meaning that more carbon, expressed as CO₂ equivalents, was bound in the paperboard's fibres than was released during the processes of the first life cycle. The carbon footprint of the PET tray was 0.065 kg CO₂e, and for the R-PET tray 0.033 kg CO₂e. When the end-of-life scenario was 100 percent incineration, the carbon footprint of a berry tray made of MetsäBoard Prime FBB EB was 87 percent lower than that of a tray made of R-PET.

"When comparing end-of-life impacts, both PET plastic and paperboard contain carbon, which forms carbon dioxide during incineration. The key difference is that paperboard's emissions are balanced by the carbon dioxide absorbed from the atmosphere during tree growth, while fossil-based plastics add new carbon to the atmosphere," says Lari Oksala, Sustainability Manager at Metsä Board. "The recycling rate of paperboard packaging is higher than that of plastic packaging in the USA, and recycling delays carbon release from the packaging material."

"The highest total carbon footprint benefit is achieved when the packaging fulfills its primary function to protect the product inside. The packaging material must always be tested and selected according to the intended application," says Marjo Halonen, VP Marketing, Communications and Sustainability at Metsä Board. "Our lightweight, fresh fibre paperboards are produced mainly with fossil-free energy, which further reduces the climate impact. Metsä Board is advancing towards its ambition of phasing out the use of fossil energy in its mills by 2030."

Additional information about the study, including sources, can be found at metsagroup.com.



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NAM CEO Timmons Responds To New U.S. Trade Deals

The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) has weighed in following the administration's announcement of new trade agreements with partners in Latin America, Switzerland and Asia—additions to the deals already in place with the United Kingdom and the European Union. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer outlined the developments during an appearance on CNBC's "Squawk Box," calling the agreements a turning point in ongoing discussions about tariff reductions.

Greer noted the president intends to remove tariffs on products that are not manufactured domestically or cannot be produced in the United States due to climate or resource constraints. "We have a critical mass," Greer said. "Now that we have these deals in hand, it is time to take off some of these tariffs on products we don't make here." He emphasized that any tariff adjustments would be considered "product-by-product," balancing the need to avoid undermining domestic production while ensuring access to goods that are essential but not available in the U.S.

He added that the timing aligns with the administration's earlier commitment to ease tariffs on hard-to-source items, noting that the new agreements provide an expanded and reliable network of trading partners. "This is good timing," Greer said. "It coincides with the president's commitment in September to remove tariffs on items we can't grow or produce in the U.S."

NAM President and CEO Jay Timmons called the agreements a "major win" for U.S. manufacturers—particularly for food and beverage companies that rely on imported ingredients such as coffee, bananas and cocoa. "Today's announcement will empower companies in the food and beverage supply chain to bring certain critical ingredients and inputs to the United States in order to enable and expand production at home," Timmons said.

Timmons stressed how manufacturers depend on a range of imported machinery, materials and components that simply cannot be sourced domestically. "Americans run on coffee—and America's manufacturers run on indispensable materials, machinery and equipment," he said.

Timmons also pointed to the NAM's U.S. Manufacturing Investment Accelerator Program, a proposal the association has discussed with the administration. The program outlines a framework for reducing or removing tariffs on essential manufacturing inputs—like critical minerals and industrial machinery—to strengthen domestic production and encourage long-term investment.

"The president's tax, regulatory and energy dominance agendas are designed to stimulate manufacturing investment and job creation here in America," Timmons said. "Empowering manufacturers to bring needed inputs, equipment and machinery to America's shores would supercharge that investment and bring new prosperity and opportunity to communities from coast to coast."

“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

— Peter Drucker



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The AI Skepticism That Won't Age Out

BY TROY HARRISON

Here's something nobody saw coming: The generation most skeptical of AI isn't the one that doesn't understand it. It's the one that understands it best.

Every new technology faces resistance. The internet? A fad. Smartphones? Unnecessary. Social media? A waste of time. But tech skepticism has always followed the same pattern—older workers resisted, younger workers embraced, and eventually the skeptics retired and adoption became universal. Not this time.

The Tech Skepticism Script Has Flipped.

Traditional technology skepticism was driven by unfamiliarity. Baby Boomers didn't grow up with computers. Gen X had to learn the internet as adults. They resisted because the technology was foreign. As digital natives entered the workforce, resistance faded.

AI flips this script entirely.



Sixty-two percent of Gen Z express skepticism toward artificial intelligence—higher than any other generation. Sixteen percent explicitly don't want AI on their phones, compared to only 9 percent of older users. Forty-nine percent believe AI will harm their critical thinking skills.

This isn't ignorance. It's educated wariness. Gen Z grew up watching social media algorithms manipulate behavior, mine personal data, and damage mental health. They understand how "engagement optimization" created filter bubbles and monetized attention at the expense of well-being. They've seen technology companies prioritize profit over users – and they figure (correctly) that it will keep happening.

When it comes to AI, Gen Z isn't asking "how does this work?" They're asking "who does this benefit, and at what cost?" And they can spot AI-generated content instantly. Years of exposure to algorithmic manipulation have given them sophisticated internal detectors.

The Impact For B2B Sellers

You already know that generational dynamics in B2B selling have gotten complex. Older salespeople struggle to connect with younger buyers who communicate differently and research differently. Younger salespeople face

CONTINUED ON PAGE 38

Multicell Packaging Inc.

Lawrenceville, GA

Announces they have acquired the operating assets of

Cell Pak

Bridgeport, CT

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Acted as financial advisor to the sellers

PREVIOUS M & A TRANSACTIONS WITH REPRESENTATION BY KLINGER NADLER LLP:

- Empire State Container, Inc. in an asset sale to Buckeye Corrugated, Inc.
- Impress Packaging, Inc. in an asset sale to Pratt Industries, Inc.
- Jamestown Container Company in an asset acquisition from H P Neun, Inc.
- Central Florida Box Inc. in an asset sale to KapStone Paper and Packaging Corporation
- Associated Packaging in an asset sale to KapStone Paper and Packaging Corporation
- Multicell Packaging, Inc. in an asset purchase from John J. Monaco Products Company
- Michiana Corrugated, Inc. in a stock sale to Akers Packaging Service Group
- American Corrugated Products, Inc. in an asset sale to Welch Packaging Group
- State Container, Inc. in an asset sale to Paige Packaging, Inc.
- Island Container Corp. in an asset purchase from Squire Corrugated, Inc.
- Abbott Action Packaging in a sale of its protective packaging division to Unified2 Global Packaging Group
- Packaging Logic, Inc. in an asset sale to Akers Packaging Service Group
- Gulf Packaging, Inc. in a stock sale to SupplyOne, Inc.
- Independent II LLC in an asset sale to Hood Container Corporation



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Quest7, Inc. is focused on being a leading manufacturer and distributor of critical parts and materials required in the corrugated box industry. Our commitment of "Bringing the Best to You," reflects the level of quality and customer response in what we do every day.

AI Skepticism (CONT'D FROM PAGE 36)

challenges selling to executives who expect traditional relationship-building. AI adds another layer of complexity to this already-delicate situation.

Consider this common scenario: Your sales team deploys AI-powered email outreach, chatbots for qualification, or AI-generated proposals. The goal is efficiency—reach more prospects, respond faster, scale the process. But when that AI touches a Gen Z buyer, it triggers immediate skepticism.



An AI-written email isn't just impersonal—it's a signal that you chose efficiency over authenticity. An AI chatbot isn't helpful—it's a barrier between the buyer and real human expertise. An AI-generated proposal tells the buyer you couldn't be bothered to understand their situation.

Here's the mismatch: Millennial and Gen X sales leaders view AI pragmatically as a productivity tool (which it can and should be, used correctly). They don't realize their AI-enhanced outreach is actively repelling their youngest prospects. They see time savings. Gen Z buyers see corporate shortcuts that signal low prioritization of genuine relationships.

Authenticity Is Everything – You Can't Fake It

When buyers doubt the authenticity of your communication, they doubt the authenticity of your company.

This hits B2B particularly hard because business relationships depend on trust. B2B buying decisions involve long-term commitments, significant investment, and organizational risk. Buyers need confidence that you'll deliver, support, and stand behind your product over time.

AI-generated content undermines that confidence. When a prospect receives an AI-written email, the subtext reads: "This company would rather automate than understand our needs." When an AI chatbot handles initial qualification, the message becomes: "Our time is more valuable than yours." When an AI system generates proposals, buyers wonder: "If they're using AI for this, where else are they cutting corners?" And guess what? These messages are correct interpretations.

Gen Z interprets AI deployment as a values statement. They've watched tech companies claim to prioritize user experience while optimizing for ad revenue. They've seen platforms promise connection while fostering division. If

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40



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WPR Services was established in 2016. What originally started as a technical services company expanded its product offerings to include a machine center learning platform POWtalk™. Our analysis of video, audio, machine metrics, employee ergonomics, and person to person conversation provides a way to identify safety and process inefficiencies.

AI Skepticism (CONT'D FROM PAGE 38)

your technology serves your interests at the customer's expense, trust evaporates.

AI Skepticism Will Age In, Not Out

Here's the critical difference: Internet skepticism aged out. AI skepticism will age in.

Gen Z is entering the workforce now. Within a decade, they'll hold senior leadership roles. Their sophisticated understanding of AI's capabilities and limitations will shape how organizations approach artificial intelligence.

The choices you make today about AI deployment will determine whether future decision-makers view your organization as trustworthy or opportunistic. Companies that use AI thoughtfully, transparently, and in service of genuine customer value will differentiate themselves. Those that deploy AI primarily for internal efficiency will be shut out as skeptical buyers gain purchasing authority.

What You Should Do

Don't abandon AI. Use it, but use it well. The technology offers legitimate value for data analysis, research, ideation, and productivity. But deployment must be strategic and behind the curtain.

Distinguish between internal AI use and customer-facing AI deployment. Using AI to analyze customer data and identify patterns? That's smart. Using AI to generate customer communications? That's dangerous. The former enhances human decision-making. The latter replaces human connection.

When AI does touch customer interactions, be transparent. Don't try to make AI-generated content indistinguishable from human communication. Acknowledge the tool's role while demonstrating human oversight. Let prospects know that AI helped research their industry, but a human shaped the insights specifically for their situation. Remember – AI is your intern, not your manager, salesperson, or decision maker. As an intern, it's great – it has a high IQ, it has 20 degrees, and it has no street smarts whatsoever. Your job is to give it the street smarts.

Gen Z's skepticism reflects a permanent shift in how buyers evaluate vendor authenticity. Companies that double down on genuine human relationships, transparent processes, and customer-first values will thrive. Those that view AI primarily as a cost-cutting tool will become irrelevant to the generation they're trying to reach.

The question isn't whether to use AI. It's whether you use it in ways that build trust or destroy it. Gen Z's skepticism provides the answer—and it's not going away.

Troy Harrison is the Sales Navigator and the author of "Sell Like You Mean It" and "The Pocket Sales Manager." He helps companies navigate the Elements of Sales on their journey to success. He offers a free 45-minute Sales Strategy Review. To schedule, call 913-645-3603 or e-mail Troy@Troy-Harrison.com.



FLEXO

MARKET NEWS

L9 Group Names Label Award Winners

BY GREG KISHBAUGH

The L9 Group of international label associations announced the results of the 2025 L9 World Label Awards (WLA) competition which was judged by an international panel of judges selected from each of the participating associations. The judging took place in Barcelona, Spain, the day before the Labelexpo Europe exhibition opened.

The L9 is an alliance of global associations formed to jointly formulate policies and to collect strategic information of global interest to the worldwide label industries.

In 2025 entries were received from the following associations: FI-NAT (Europe), JFLP (Japan), TLMI (USA), LMAI (India), FPLMA (Australia), SALMA (New Zealand), and CPF (China). In total 84 entries were received resulting in 27 Winners and 13 HM awards being given.

THE RESULTS

Class 1: Flexo Line

Winner SALMA: MCC Auckland for Musashi Range



This label shows a solid and even black coverage with reversing out of very fine text. The company name in red is varnished, and a silver print is used to highlight other features.

Class 2: Flexo Line & Screen

Winner TLMI: Fortis Solutions Group for Prime Strawberry Banana SS

A distinctive sleeve for the product, created by collaboration between customer / pre-press and print teams. The background features a smooth transition from 100 percent to 1 percent dot. The product name in solid black is gloss varnished with a soft touch matte coating on the rest. Finally enhanced with a scratch 'n sniff patch.

H/M SALMA: MCC Albany for Terra Sancta Olive Oil

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APR Relaunches Recycling Demand Champions Program

The Association of Plastic Recyclers (APR) has relaunched the APR Recycling Demand Champions Program, supported by The Re-



cycling Partnership. The program recognizes companies committed to the long-term use of North American post-consumer recycled (PCR) plastic.

Virgin plastic prices are dropping and imported plastic is on the rise. Therefore, it's critical to recognize companies that are supporting the North American recycling system by creating demand, said the association. Recycling is a circular system that only works if there is a steady supply of materials being collected and processed. Plus, there needs to be reliable demand from companies committed to buying the recycled materials. Stable demand for North American PCR is a critical step toward scaling plastic recycling, building and maintaining a circular economy, as well as reducing plastic waste.

All Demand Champion companies utilize PCR, and the program recognizes consistent demand for North American PCR. This is necessary to scale recycling. APR evaluates companies on eight criteria based on the following actions:

Commit to PCR Use – Integrate PCR into manufactured products or facility purchases,

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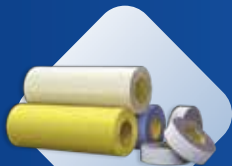
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This job was converted to flexo from an offset job, and had to match the previous work. It features halftone work with sharp fine text reproduction. The cold foiling and detailed label shape further enhance the label.

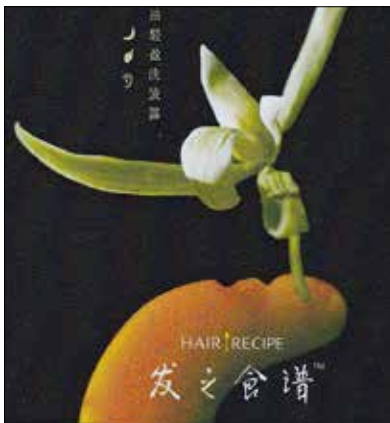
Class 3: Flexo Color Process

Winner CPF: Company Cymmetrik (Jiangsu) for P&G HR - Hair Recipe (Moonlight Flower) Shampoo

An two-sided label printed in three layers on transparent film. After printing the process color back image, a middle layer of two hits of white made a base for the front image.

H/M SALMA: Kiwi Labels for Hellers Danish Eye Bacon

Printed CMYK flexo with reversed out white text tested the skills of the plate mounting and the operators. The reversed out text is sharp and clean.



Class 4 Flexo Wines and Spirits

Joint Winner CPF: Haoneng Industries Corp Ltd for West Lake Green Rain Beer

A label using a micro-optical structure array on the film. Through the Moire effect, a 3D image is created to the naked eye with apparent parallax when viewed from different angles.

Joint Winner LMAI: Any Graphics for Grand Whisky

A nicely printed label, with even background color. The use of accurate embossing and cold foiling gives the label a luxury look.

PGSF 2025 Fall Educational Grant Program Opens

The Print and Graphics Scholarship Foundation (PGSF) opened a second grant program for the 2025-26 academic year. This program closes on December 8th.

In addition to travel funds, the Fall 2025 Grant Program has an equipment application. The 2024-25 PGSF Grant Program awarded more than \$76,000 for equipment purchases that included small presses, die-cutting tools, and color measurement instruments.

Winter Is Coming

The Winter/Spring 2026 PGSF Educational Use Grant Program will open January 1, 2026, and close April 17, 2026. Applications for equipment, student travel and continuing education will be available for instructors.

All grant applications are reviewed by members of the PGSF Board of Directors to determine which grants are awarded funds.

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People & Places

Flexcon

Nick Tucci has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of Flexcon. Tucci brings more than 25 years of experience in the pressure sensitive label and roll-to-roll manufacturing industries. Plus, he has previously led major business units at Avery Dennison and served as CFO and Advisory Board member for 44 Maple Group, Flexcon's parent company.



Nick Tucci

As part of this transition, Aimee Peacock, CEO, Nick Lupoli, COO, and Matt Gardner, CFO, have departed from Flexcon.

Wausau

Amber Goodin has been named Customer Solutions Manager for Wausau Coated Products.

In her new position, Goodin will strategically lead and enhance the overall customer journey by implementing customer-centric strategies



Amber Goodin

that increase satisfaction, build brand loyalty, and drive business growth.

Flint Group Confirms GIO Compliance For Flexo FCM Inks

Flint Group has confirmed that its European-manufactured flexographic UV-curable printing ink series for food contact materials (FCM) meets all compositional requirements of the 21st Ordinance amending the Consumer Goods Ordinance (known as German Printing Ink Ordinance – GIO).

The confirmation applies to its flexographic UV and LED-curable inks and coatings that are designed for printing on the non-food contact side of food contact materials, labels & packaging applications. This covers Flexocure ANCORA and EkoCure ANCORA ranges, but also its latest innovation: Flexocure LEAP.



The majority of products were already compliant; however, a range of relevant product formulations have been verified and, where necessary, updated to ensure compliance with provisions introduced under the GIO.



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X-Rite to Acquire Select Assets of Rutherford Graphic Products

X-Rite Incorporated has signed a definitive Assets Purchase Agreement to acquire certain software and firmware assets of Rutherford Graphic Products (RGP), a U.S.-based provider of closed-loop press automation solutions for packaging converters. For years, RGP has partnered with X-Rite; this acquisition formalizes the partnership and positions X-Rite to deliver a fully integrated, best-of-suite press automation offering.

PGSF Accepting Scholarship Applications

The Print and Graphics Scholarship Foundation (PGSF) is accepting scholarship applications for the 2026–2027 academic year. PGSF provides scholarships to individuals interested in an education and a career in the graphic communications industry. Full-time students are welcome to apply as well as those seeking part-time education to enhance their current position within the print and graphics industry.

The 2026–2027 scholarship application period runs from November 1, 2025, to May 1, 2026.

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 Ted Vilardi (1933-2013) - Founder

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INDUSTRY CALENDAR

DECEMBER 9-10
 Folding Carton Boot Camp
 PPC World Headquarters
 Springfield, Massachusetts

DECEMBER 12-14
 ICPF Holiday Weekend
 Washington D.C.

JANUARY 17-19, 2026
 TAPPI-PIMA Student Summit
 Sheraton Birmingham Hotel
 Birmingham, Alabama

FEBRUARY 26-28, 2026
 AICC Ski Meeting 2026
 Big Sky Resort
 Big Sky, Montana

FEBRUARY 26, 2026
 Converters Expo South
 Charlotte Convention Center
 Charlotte, North Carolina

MARCH 25-27, 2026
 PPC 2026 Spring Outlook & Strategies Conference
 Louisville, Kentucky

APRIL 13-15, 2026
 AICC 2026 Spring Meeting
 The Omni La Costa Resort
 Carlsbad, California

APRIL 15-17, 2026
 FBA Annual Meeting
 The Lodge at Torrey Pines
 La Jolla, California

APRIL 26-29, 2026
 TAPPICon
 Columbus, Ohio

SEPTEMBER 28-30, 2026
 AICC/TAPPI 2026 Corrugated Week
 Fort Worth Convention Center
 Fort Worth, Texas

APRIL 5-7, 2027
 AICC 2027 Spring Meeting
 Trump National Doral Resort
 Doral, Florida

SEPTEMBER 13-15, 2027
 AICC 2027 Annual Meeting
 The Westin Copley Place Hotel
 Boston, Massachusetts

OCTOBER 8-12, 2028
 SuperCorrExpo 2028
 Orange County Convention Center
 Orlando, Florida

Finlogic Installs Second Domino N610i Digital Label Press

Gruppo Finlogic, an Italian manufacturer of labels and supplier of identification and tracking systems, has invested in its second Domino N610i digital label press.

Gruppo Finlogic, founded in 2003, owns seven label production plants in Italy and Spain, as well as several companies in the coding and identification systems sector.

Finlogic installed the first Domino N610i digital label press in 2019, supported by Domino's Italian distributor NTG Digital. Finlogic utilizes the presses to produce a wide range of labels for various industries, including food and wine, as well as pharmaceutical applications.

GAA Adds Cabstone Inks As Preferred Partner

Graphic Arts Alliance (GAA) has welcomed Cabstone Inks as its newest preferred partner.

For more than two decades, Cabstone Inks has been a manufacturer and supplier of flexographic, offset, and specialty inks serving the commercial, packaging, and label printing industries. Through this partnership, GAA members will gain preferred access to Cabstone's product lines, technical expertise, and tailored service solutions.



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Max Print Area*	2080 X 5250	2080 X 5450	2480 X 5250	2480 X 5450

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FFG 2355	92 X 216

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