



The universal straight-printing press. Speedmaster CX 102.

With speeds of up to 16,500 sheets per hour, the Speedmaster CX 102 can handle almost all challenges in commercial, label, and packaging printing, and reliably processes all materials, from lightweight paper to rigid cardboard with ease.

➔ heidelberg.com/cx102

Heidelberg would like to congratulate Britepak on the acquisition of a new Speedmaster CX 102-6+L and Suprasetter A106.

Wishing Britepak many years of top productivity!



Investments herald a brighter future

Britepak has invested in the latest imaging, printing, die-cutting and folding equipment to alleviate production bottlenecks for critical pharmaceutical packaging, reports **Nici Solomon**.



Running at up to 16 500 sheets/hour for all materials from lightweight paper to cartonboard, the Heidelberg Speedmaster CX 102's high level of automation shortens make-ready times and results in lower wastage and consistently high print quality.

WHEN Britepak was established in 1976 to supply the local pharmaceutical industry with folding cartons, instruction leaflets, cut labels and general print, it was a thriving sector of the packaging industry offering untold opportunities for converters.

Four decades and many changes later, there are now only a few major players producing such packaging locally, and many multinational pharmaceutical brands import finished goods. In the face of this dwindling packaging market, converters are left competing for a slice of a smaller pie.

Britepak MD, John Latter, describes the pre-Covid-19 pharmaceutical packaging market as fairly stagnant, showing only minimal annual growth, but it has benefitted from the recent upswing in demand for antiretrovirals and other drugs that fight symptomatic conditions. As a result, he's confident that Britepak will maintain its market share and show turnover growth this year.

Securing additional contracts last year resulted in a review of production capacity and identification of bottlenecks in the printing, die-cutting and folding departments, and in October some serious capital investments were approved. On the shopping list were a Heidelberg CX 102 press, Suprasetter CtP system, and a Bobst Novacut 3.0 die-cutter.

'We were fortunate with the timing,' John notes. 'The worldwide economic slowdown has meant equipment was either available or semi-completed, and local OEM representatives were able to use South African engineers and technicians to install and commission the machines so production wasn't delayed by having to wait for the international travel ban to be lifted. We still can't believe how efficiently the projects have been completed, with equipment in full production and delivering significant efficiency improvements in under eight months.'





Britepak's Prinect Press Centre XL 2 control desk and wall screen.

Printing prowess

As John remarks, defending Britepak's share of the pharmaceutical packaging market requires continuous investment in the latest technology for top-quality printing, finishing and folding, and the use of good manufacturing practices to ensure strict controls to prevent cross-contamination. 'Unlike a standard production environment, where converters can run multiple jobs on one machine in CMYK, our dedicated pharmaceutical packaging facility requires a spread of equipment to run one job at a time and to produce spot colours on multiple machines requiring many colour changes,' he notes.

The decision to stick with Heidelberg was twofold. 'We already had a strong partnership with Heidelberg and were impressed with the versatility of Heidelberg systems that provide efficient workflow from repro to finishing,' John explains.

'The Heidelberg Speedmaster CX 102 universal straight-printing press and Prinect workflow represents an enormous leap in technology in terms of make-ready, production speed and print quality.'

Print manager, Matthew Allercott, agrees that the CX102 is in a different league, with a 60% higher

running speed than the company's other multi-colour presses, and allows for one-pass printing.

'The new six-colour press, with a seventh print station acting as an anilox coating unit, is far more flexible, allowing us to print complex jobs in one pass,' he confirms. 'For instance, a customer requires a special type of security varnish that's easily applied during the process.'

Matthew praises the Prinect Axis Control colour management system, which assists with the make-ready process of spot colours and in maintaining the colour during the run.

The drying, feeder and delivery systems and wash-up devices are also credited as important factors in quick job turnaround times.

Matthew remarks that the infrared, hot and recirculated air modules are optimally coordinated with sheet travel. Secondly, the automated, high-precision feeder and delivery systems' configuration is suited to the company's needs because operators can adopt presetting data to reduce make-ready times and achieve production speeds of 16 500 sheets/hour. Thirdly, the automatic, program-controlled wash-up devices for the inking unit, blanket and impression cylinders with sensor-based monitoring and extremely short washing times enable resource-efficient cleaning so the next job can start promptly.

Asked about any challenges during the installation process, Matthew singles out reconstructing and reinforcing the floor with steel bars and a floating concrete foundation before its arrival. 'When assessing where to position the new press to meet our workflow requirements in line with our sheeting equipment, Heidelberg's structural engineers recommended this reinforcement to ensure no structural defects in the floor. Attaining perfect alignment of the six printing stations is vital in preventing misregister and gear lash down the line,' he adds.

Although the project was professionally handled, and the installation area was isolated to keep the rest of the facility clean, Matthew describes it as quite nerve-racking and exciting to watch progress. 'Naturally, installation teams adhered to strict hygiene and protection protocols during the lockdown to ensure a sanitary and safe project environment,' he comments.

Imaging of plates on the Suprasetter A106 takes place under regulated ambient temperature conditions – avoiding quality deviations and maintaining register accuracy – to allow fast make-ready and minimum waste.





The Bobst Novacut 106 E 3.0 die-cutter is designed to save the operator's time. Its Sphere human-machine interface provides simple step-by-step guidance throughout the job-setting process, with all settings appearing on one screen for easy navigation.

Plate imaging kickstart

Also necessary was a complementary CtP investment to provide a constant flow of quality plates to the new CX102 press – fondly known as ‘the hungry beast’.

According to repro manager, Dominic Nugent, the reliability of Heidelberg's CtP technology and the Prinect workflow system over the past 14 years, in conjunction with exceptional support from Heidelberg's prepress department, made it a simple choice. ‘The Prinect system has never given us any challenges. We've been delighted with the continuity of proficiency and support with the replacement Suprasetter A106 CtP unit, which is around 40% faster in terms of plate imaging speed than our previous model,’ he enthuses.

One reason is the upgrade from a manual single cassette loader to an automated dual cassette loader that accommodates different plate formats and types. Additionally, the processor is more efficient and requires less maintenance than its predecessor, and no set imaging time translates into substantially faster processing of smaller plate sizes.

For peace of mind, the unit has been supplied with a 60-month full system service warranty, plus a further 12 years' cover on the laser when the warranty expires – provided Britepak continues with a preventive maintenance contract.

‘This agreement reflects the mutually-supportive relationship between our companies,’ says Dominic. ‘We do some R&D together and welcome Heidelberg technicians into our facility to see how the equipment operates in a production environment,’ he adds.

He also compliments the work done by the installation engineers during a trying time at the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown period. ‘We greatly appreciated their professionalism, efficiency, enthusiasm, and co-operation to personalise the machines for our needs,’ Dominic remarks.

Grant Anderson, Heidelberg Southern Africa's consumables business driver, notes that Britepak's dedicated platemaking operators were already fully conversant with Heidelberg's software and hardware. ‘This made it quite easy to meet deadline and training requirements,’ he comments.

Die-cutting in a jiffy

Britepak also maintains an excellent relationship with Bobst and local representative, Beswick Machinery, in terms of carton converting, folding and glueing, and cutting and creasing equipment that dates back to the 1970s.

‘Although we examined a more affordable brand alternative within the Beswick stable, it didn't meet our requirements for longevity, range and interchangeability of dies across all folding carton size requirements,’ reports John Latter.

Finishing manager, Brent Kench, recalls first seeing the Novacut 106 E 3.0 flat-bed die-cutter at Bobst's Competence Centre in Switzerland in November 2018, during a fact-finding mission to compare processes and equipment used by European converters of pharmaceutical cartons. ‘Ease of operation, quick job changeovers and reaching maximum speed with great efficiency, even on complicated jobs, were just a few of the standout benefits evident on this new-generation machine,’ he says.

‘Although we considered a few alternatives, we chose the Novacut 3.0 because of its high level of compatibility with Britepak's existing Bobst machines that minimise handling of the cartons between die-cutting and glueing, backed up by spare parts availability and after-sales support. Beswick Machinery and Laserpac also developed creative ways to use existing tooling, even from the much smaller SP 76E in the new Novacut, resulting in excellent cost savings and production flexibility,’ Brent reports.

According to Bruce Beswick, MD of Beswick Machinery, the Novacut 3.0 represents the latest generation of Bobst autoplatens with six feature improvements that reduce job preparation, changeover and repeat times.

One improvement is smoother sheet acceleration to reduce the number and size of nicks for better quality final products; another is automatic centring and locking of the chase and supporting plate to ensure perfect quality cutting and creasing, while the Quick-Lock die-cutting chase enables simple and accurate die placement.



A redesigned stripping station for perfect stripping of delicate or light materials at high speed is supported by fine micrometric tooling adjustment with digital position indicators. This combination facilitates precise, repeatable stripping settings, as well as easy fitting of dedicated tools for quick and accurate job repetition.

Finally, perfect stacking of all types and sizes of materials is possible thanks to the blower sheet hold-down device controlled by the Sphere human-machine interface.

The Novacut 3.0 is also equipped with Bobst Helpline Plus, a high-speed internet connection for remote troubleshooting, which features four apps to monitor and assess performance and interface this data with third-party ERP and MES systems.

The Connect Portal app provides online access to the apps from a web browser plus management of user accounts and access rights. The Mobile Portal app enables a real-time view of the machine's productivity (eg units produced, speed and OEE) from a smartphone or tablet.

The Remote Monitoring app presents detailed live and historical machine data and KPI in a visual and easy-to-understand way, and the Downtime Tracking app supplies accurate machine stoppage root-cause monitoring.

Although the Novacut 3.0's arrival in South Africa was a little delayed by Covid-19 until the beginning of May, the installation of the first such machine in the country, went like clockwork thanks to Britepak's excellent preparation and Beswick Machinery's technical expertise. The machine started production ahead of schedule, with the first job running at the top speed of 8 000 sheets/hour with full waste stripping.

Because the Novacut 3.0 was supplied with numerous pre-make-ready (PMR) accessories to reduce machine downtime for job changeovers, Britepak allocated a special room for this process

directly behind the Novacut 3.0. 'It's very convenient for the operators and PMR staff to be in each other's proximity,' notes Brett Kench.

From a training perspective, Britepak's experienced team only needed to be shown how to operate the 22-inch full-colour Sphere HMI and a few pointers on the fully-integrated Bobst Quick-Lock technology that facilitates job changeovers.

Step-by-step job set-up guides and settings now appear on one HMI screen, making it more convenient and intuitive for operators to navigate.

Inserting a dose of enhancements

Asked what's next on the horizon for Britepak, John Latter's quick reply is the imminent arrival of enhancements for the packaging insert department. The equipment on order, due to arrive in August, will meet the growing complexity and longer run work demands from a printing, finishing and folding perspective.

Folding carton manager, Mervyn Kuppan, explains that inserts are increasing in size because more information is required and brands are introducing a layman's storyboard so consumers can easily understand indications and how to use the product safely.

'Investing in this equipment is another positive step in meeting our continuous improvement objectives as well as long-term customer needs,' says Mervyn. 'It's part of our commitment to delivering good quality and service to embed these relationships and accompanying product demand for many years to come. This is clearly a successful approach because our customer base has grown with Britepak since its establishment in 1976. And many regarded as founding customers are still with Britepak.'

Youth empowerment partnership

IN November 2019, Britepak partnered with the YES4Youth programme to help uplift the country's unemployed youth (18-28) through a 12-month employment contract, enabling them to gain quality work experience and training plus an opportunity to be absorbed into the company's workforce.

MD, John Latter, explains that through securing additional work and the investments outlined above, Britepak had to ramp up its shift hours and increase its staff complement by more than 40%. 'We also committed the capital to the YES (Youth Employment Service) programme to secure the company's future succession foundations and inject it with a high level of energy and enthusiasm by retaining those candidates who have a matric certificate, display potential, capacity and the right fit for the business. This first intake has already yielded positive outcomes.'

The other major benefit for participating companies is that they can increase their current B-BBEE scorecard.

