

GM Graphix and we're proud to say that he has done a sterling job.'

Listing highlights in the last five years, Coennie mentions a Blue Rating for two audits in a row from Woolworths' auditing firm, IBL Africa, as well as other positive customer audits; and winning gold and silver awards in the GAPP awards.

Adds Henri: 'Last year, we researched and developed a three-layer five-sided peel-and-reveal label using existing machinery. We've also made a point of keeping up with technology, to ensure that all labels are printed to the highest quality standards.'

Besides these achievements, Henri and Coennie are especially proud that GM Graphix has reached an 87% vaccination rate among employees, without making it mandatory. In addition, Covid protocols have been of such a high standard that none of the staff members who tested positive transmitted the virus to fellow workers.

Asked how the pandemic has affected GM Graphix, Henri notes a significant increase in orders for complementary medicine labels (for instance, vitamins and minerals), a slight drop in orders for beauty/personal care product labels, while orders

for FMCG labels seemed to remain unchanged. 'We can only attribute this to consumers seeing a need to strengthen their immune systems, while people working from home spend less on beauty products,' reckons Henri. 'Obviously the pandemic has been one of the toughest challenges we have ever had to face,' he continues. 'We also can't overlook the destruction caused by the looting in July that saw some of our suppliers having to close their businesses. All in all, we are just grateful that most of our customers and suppliers have survived and continue to support us.'

In conclusion, Henri reports the biggest challenges currently facing GM Graphix are rising prices and shortages of raw materials. One of the main contributors, he explains, is the global shortage of shipping containers. 'So far, we've managed to secure material to cover us during this unpredictable time, but it's unsettling to have to manage factors outside our control. I would rather spend our manpower on production,' he remarks. 'However, this situation is currently faced by our whole industry, and is one in which we'll undoubtedly find opportunities, and ultimately overcome,' he confidently predicts.

Graphica now in local hands

A significant development for Graphica, reports MD, Simon Grose, is that the company's Swiss partners have been bought out, and ownership now rests in private, South African hands.

Among business highlights during the last five years, Simon lists the outsourcing of the company's warehousing and logistics functions, and migrating to web-based accounting and inventory management.

So far as product technology breakthroughs are concerned, at the forefront Simon cites recovered

ocean plastic waste-based textiles and rock and rust textured papers.

In the face of smaller but more frequent buying patterns Graphica's market sector has contracted over the last year or so. 'However, through embracing better and cheaper technology, as well as developing fresh supply partnerships, we have delivered our best results in the last decade,' Simon relates.

Heidelberg always a step ahead

Among changes at Heidelberg Southern Africa in 2019, Marc Lotter took over as MD, as Ryan Miles left the local operation to take the reins as MD at Heidelberg UK and to head up the group's Western Europe Cluster. Related local appointments saw Warren Jones appointed as sales director and Lisa Cherry as finance director.

Another change occurred in 2021, when Joe Eichhorn retired as service manager for Heidelberg Southern Africa, after 50 years with the Heidelberg group in various service roles across the globe, to be succeeded by Selwyn Gorman.

'Our motto "Always a step ahead" rings true for Heidelberg on many levels,' declares Marc. 'In recent years, our group has continually delivered innovations and new technologies for the commercial printing, packaging and label sectors, resulting in improved print shop performance and ever-greater efficiency,' he declares.

'We've also continued to focus on the quality of our service and parts offering. We've responded to customers' requirements for more flexibility and added value in their service contracts, allowing more accurate



management of maintenance costs. Similarly, we've continued to invest in factory-trained field service staff to ensure customers benefit from Heidelberg's expertise, which translates into minimum downtime



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and maximum equipment availability,' Marc adds.

Another focus is on consumables to meet demand for reliable, high-quality, high-performance products.

'Our supply chain has continued to be strengthened by partnering with strong players. As a result we've ensured that local printers continually benefit from high availability of consumables and parts. We further diversified and expanded our consumables portfolio by partnering with Asahi Photoproducts to distribute flexographic photopolymer plates and with Adheso-Graphics to distribute Rogers R/bak cushion mounting materials,' Marc continues.

'These moves further supported growth in our consumables business, particularly over the last two years, which have proved economically challenging as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.'

Among notable new products, Marc lists the Speedmaster 2020 generation of sheetfed presses, which includes the Speedmaster CX104 – a versatile press packed with new and improved technology to drive profitability – and the continued evolution of Prinect Workflow for driving the smart print shop.

Other recent introductions have been digital platforms and services (such as eShop, Heidelberg Assistant, Heidelberg Cloud), and packaging finishing options (die-cutting, embossing, folding and gluing) through Heidelberg's partnership with MK Masterwork.

A notable market shift has been to more diversified print offerings. As packaging printing has remained fairly resilient through recent economic challenges, many commercial printers have moved to include packaging in their portfolios. Marc maintains that Heidelberg is well positioned as a reliable partner in this regard, offering strong packaging and label printing technologies supported by excellent service, consumables and an efficient supply chain.

Travel restrictions and health and safety concerns as a result of the pandemic have also added to challenges for South African printers. To a certain degree, this has been addressed by introducing customer-focused online events such as Heidelberg's Innovation Week 2021, which provided an opportunity to learn about new products and technologies and interact remotely with Heidelberg experts on various topics

'We still find that meeting directly with customers is the most desirable form of communication, but it's not always possible in the current climate. To help address this, we've built an intelligent customer database that enables us to communicate through targeted campaigns with information on new products, new technologies, special offers and events,' he concludes.

Innovia Films: great changes



At Innovia Films, much has happened in the last five years.

'In 2017, CCL Industries completed its acquisition of Innovia, maintaining our branding,' explains communications manager Patricia Potts. 'This was soon followed by the purchase of an American BOPP manufacturer that extended our footprint into Mexico. At this time new branding was introduced across the whole films business.'

During 2020, CCL acquired another BOPP manufacturing site, this time in Poland, also rebranded Innovia Films. 'These investments increased our manufacturing capability to six sites (Australia, Belgium, Germany, Mexico, Poland and the UK) and our employee count more than 1 400. Today our technology includes bubble, stenter and cast capabilities,' adds Patricia.

CCL's commitment to Innovia's technology development has meant additional investments to bring all sites up to state-of-the-art level, including multilayer die capability, new slitting machines and a new boiler house in the UK, and new 10m stenter lines in Mexico and Poland.

'Acquisitions and investments have resulted in a much broader product range for the packaging and labelling sectors. We have launched Propafilm Strata high-barrier films and are on the verge of extending this further,' continues Patricia.

Innovia has also introduced Encore, highly-functional, sustainable films for packaging and labels. Manufactured from renewable, non-food-based raw materials, they help reduce reliance on fossil-based virgin raw materials, and suit all markets currently using BOPP films.

Earlier this year, Innovia launched a new film in its Propafilm range of transparent speciality packaging films, offering improved thermal resistance and shrinkage properties compared to conventional polypropylene films. It's designed to substitute traditional outer web films in laminates for applications such as pouches and lidding for food products.

'Before the year end, we will be introducing other new products for IML and shrink sleeve applications,' she reveals.

For Innovia, the Covid-19 pandemic had a dual impact. On one hand, the realisation that flexible packaging offered excellent product protection saw many items regaining previously-removed packaging, leading to increased demand. On the other hand, a decline in the 'food-on-the-go' market caused a decrease in demand for certain grades during Q4 of 2020.