

A Cut Above: How Paragon Printing & Packaging Streamlined High-Volume Label Production with HEIDELBERG's Polar N 137 and DC12 Plus

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- High-speed conversion from XL 106 press to finished labels using Polar N 137 and DC12 Plus
- Output increased from 1 million to 3–4 million labels per day
- Expansion into regional export markets
- Strong partnership and expert support from HEIDELBERG Southern Africa
- Improved ROI, reduced waste, and faster turnaround times



Paragon's Justice Chikomwe and CEO Mark Strathern alongside the Polar DC12 Plus

A Legacy Rooted in Local Excellence

In Zimbabwe's dynamic print and packaging sector, few names carry the legacy and ambition of Paragon Printing & Packaging. With roots dating back to 1927, the company has evolved from transactional stationery into a powerhouse of commercial print and high-quality packaging. Today, Paragon is a key supplier to the country's leading FMCG manufacturers and breweries — and a champion of local production.

"We've always believed in local solutions," says Mark Strathern, CEO of Paragon. "Why should people have to import printed packaging materials from as far away as India and China when we can manufacture them to the same standards in-country at competitive prices?"

The Bottleneck That Sparked Transformation

Yet even the most forward-thinking businesses encounter operational ceilings. For Paragon, the bottleneck was beer label finishing. While the XL 106 press could produce more than 14,000 sheets to floor per hour, these sheets needed to be converted into square cut or shaped labels — a process that was creating significant delays in the cutting department. Manually fed ram punch machines capped output at one million labels per day — far below market demand. With regional export opportunities emerging, the company needed a solution that could meet the demand on the body and neck beer label production.

A Strategic Partnership with HEIDELBERG

Building on nearly a decade of partnership, HEIDELBERG Southern Africa worked closely with Paragon to identify the right solution. The workflow now begins with the reams quickly prepared on the Polar RA-4 Jogger, followed by the Polar N 137 AT Plus where the reams are cut into logs with industry-leading accuracy and speed. Equipped with block programming, process visualization, Autotrim, and a back gauge speed of 300 mm/sec, the N 137 ensures reams are processed in mere minutes. These logs are then **automatically** fed into the Autocut 25+, where two logs are processed simultaneously — doubling the production capability.

HEIDELBERG's expertise ensured the Polar DC12 Plus was precisely tailored to Paragon's workflow and growth ambitions. Installed on 27 July 2024, the system includes the High-Speed Cutter POLAR N 137 AT, Automated LTS Loading table, Automated Cutter POLAR Autocut 25+, Inline Die-Cutter DC12 Plus, Single-Station Bander BD12 Plus, Lift LW 1200-4, and Jogger RA-4.

"To be honest, the first time I saw it I thought there's no need for something that advanced in our country," Strathern admits. "How wrong I was..."

Immediate Impact and Measurable Gains

The impact was immediate. Thanks to the Polar N 137 converting reams into logs and the Autocut 25 cutting two logs at once, label output more than tripled, exceeding three million per day. Turnaround times accelerated, quality remained consistent, waste dropped dramatically, and pallets of unfinished labels no longer crowded the factory floor.

"We're definitely more efficient," Strathern adds. "The combination of the N 137 and DC12 Plus has transformed our workflow. We've even redesigned our label packaging to match the new output volumes..."

Expert Support and Seamless Integration

Behind the scenes, HEIDELBERG's service team played a pivotal role. From advising on system positioning to hands-on training, the support was thorough and responsive. "Yes, we had teething problems," Strathern says. "But HEIDELBERG was quick to troubleshoot..."

Technology That Reflects a Vision for Growth

Steven Wiggill, Product Manager for HEIDELBERG Southern Africa, sees the installation as a milestone for the region. **"The synergy between the N 137, the Autocut 25 and the inline die-cutter is what allows Paragon to process the high volume of labels off the XL 106 quickly and efficiently — it's highly automated, versatile, and Industry 4.0-ready..."** For Wiggill, the message to the broader industry is clear: **"Without investment in the full production chain, there is no growth."**

Confidence in the Future of Polar

The success at Paragon also reflects HEIDELBERG's continued commitment to the region — and to the future of Polar. Following HEIDELBERG's acquisition of Polar Mohr, concerns about the brand's longevity

have been replaced with confidence. “The market understands that Polar is now backed by the global leader in print, this ensures Polar Mohr’s future and further cements the long-standing close, mutually beneficial relationship between HEIDELBERG and Polar Mohr from which our customers can only benefit,” Wiggill says.

A Partnership That Powers Possibility

As Paragon expands into regional exports and continues to push the boundaries of local manufacturing, the Polar DC12 Plus stands as more than just a machine — it’s a catalyst for transformation.

“We wouldn’t hesitate to recommend HEIDELBERG Southern Africa and the DC12 Plus to anyone looking to revolutionize their label finishing business...”

Paragon’s success is a testament to what’s possible when visionary leadership meets cutting-edge technology — and a clear signal to the region’s print and packaging sector that with HEIDELBERG as a strategic partner, smart investment can drive scalable, sustainable growth.

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