



CURTIS PRINT & PACKAGING

Customer care and environmental issues are top of their agenda says Richard Dalgleish

Adapting and updating the philosophy, strategy and focus of a business is never an easy task. It is vital to have clear goals in mind and ensure that everyone in the business understands and signs up to the new approach. About five years ago, UK based Curtis Print and Packaging, a successful family business in Wimbledon, embarked on this task under the guidance of their then new Managing Director, James Williams. As he explains, “The business, that was founded in 1938 and is now in the third generation of ownership, was successful and profitable but the world was changing

and it was felt that we needed to adapt and focus our approach to meet the significant challenges that lay ahead. We therefore embarked on lengthy discussions as to what needed to be changed, how we could change it and what impact this would have on our business, our customers and our employees.”

Some changes proved to be simpler than others — for example, changing the name of the business from F G Curtis to Curtis Print and Packaging. But deciding on the overall philosophy and approach was more difficult. Looking at the expected needs of the market and the greater focus at that time on environmental issues, they decided that the two main areas of focus should be to become a design led operation while, at the same time, ensuring that everything they did was done with the least possible environmental impact. Already well aware that cartons had excellent

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environmental credentials, they felt that it was necessary to ensure that this message was better understood and that all their processes reflected their desire to make improvements wherever possible. They therefore agreed to a new strapline under which the business would be promoted — “For packaging that doesn’t cost the earth” — which they felt encapsulated their beliefs and ideals.

At the same time they looked at all their processes and operations to see where improvements could be made to reduce environmental impact further. They refined their raw material sourcing policy to ensure that all cartonboard used came from certified sources; they reduced the number of their suppliers so that transport could be optimised; changed the inks they used to vegetable rather than oil based; exclusively used water based coatings; restricted chemical usage in plate making and assessed all their trade suppliers to ensure that they too met the strict environmental criteria under which Curtis operates.

Design

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product and asked to design packaging that best suits the need. All designs are also looked at from an environmental standpoint to ensure that the cartons they create fulfil

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their primary functions of protection and consumer attraction but at the same time utilise the minimum quantity of raw material to meet those needs. They have an in house, but separately operated, design operation called 3D Creative Packaging that works not only for Curtis but also for other customers. Customers increasingly come to them with no preconceived ideas or designs but trust Curtis to offer the best solution for a particular task. This design operation is fully equipped with state of the art digital printing and sampling equipment. With a customer base that includes names such as L’Oreal, Armani, Harper Collins and Harvey Nichols, trust in their design flair and skill is well recognised and fully utilised.

On their website, Curtis describe themselves as “big enough to cope and small enough to care” and they work continuously at ensuring that their versatility and flair is obvious to their customer base. Currently, 80 per cent of their business includes new design work — gift packaging is also an important element in this market and competition is fierce.

Conception of new packaging is not just about the graphics — though this is, of course, vital. Shapes, textures and finishes are also increasingly important elements. Opening and closing devices is another area where Curtis works hard to give their customers something a little different — ‘click closures’ are ever more utilised.



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Efficient production

Efficient production is essential — no easy matter as the variety of jobs, run lengths and the special inks and finishes they need to use on so many jobs creates challenges. Their Heidelberg 4 colour press works on a 24 hour basis with the finishing equipment

running as required. Run lengths vary greatly and it's not uncommon for a run to be as low as perhaps just a few thousand cartons.

Fast wash ups and quick order change is standard. Their workforce has, in the main, been with them for many years and their experience means that the above

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average number of production changes are understood, well planned and are carried out as part of normal day to day operation. As James Williams says, "Without such efficiency, we would not be able to meet the needs of our customers

and so we see this very much as part of every day business that also includes finishing enhancements such as foil blocking, UV varnishing and embossing."

With the requirement for foil blocking having increased significantly in recent years, the company are looking at the possibility of installing their own equipment and will also be looking this year at upgrading and replacing their printing capabilities.

A focus on design and environmental issues, allied to the versatility that a smaller company can offer, places Curtis in a good position to supply and support carton demand in the years to come. Mr Williams concludes, "We've worked very hard over the last few years to create a new dynamic for the business, placing customers and environmental awareness at the top of our agenda. This will, I feel sure, place us in a good position to tackle the challenges ahead."

