

WISCONSIN PACKAGING'S STRATEGY BEGAN MORE THAN TWO YEARS AGO WITH ITS EXTENSIVE SEARCH FOR A NEW DIECUTTER. THE SHEET PLANT CHOSE A FIVE-COLOR MARTIN DRO.

The leadership at Wisconsin Packaging Corp. is planning for growth and it shows in every decision they make. President Fred Negus and General Manager Dan West are focused on doubling the output of their medium-sized sheet plant in Fort Atkinson, Wis., about 50 miles west of Milwaukee.

Their strategic plan stretches the gamut from employee training, to the careful design of plant layout and functionality, to eliciting a teamwork approach with their key suppliers. "We think that our trading area is bigger than the typical sheet plant. We're doing more sophisticated work and our capabilities include two rotary diecutters, two (soon to be three) flexo folder-gluer, and two specialty folder-gluer. This, along with a strong supporting staff gives us an edge," says Negus.

According to West, "We're doing 18.5 million sq ft in one shift. With the employees we have cross-trained to run more than one machine, we truly believe that we can easily get our output to 30 to 35 million by changing the layout of our banding line and adding more high speed machinery. Our cross-training will also allow us to start up additional shifts, if needed, with fully qualified operators ready to go."

Pivotal Investments

The path toward more aggressive growth began more than two years ago when the company went shopping for its latest diecutter. "We looked at what was out there and quickly narrowed the list down," explains Negus. "Our criteria were quick setup times, an operator-

FRED NEGUS AND DAN WEST INSPECT A JOB OFF THE DRO.



SETTING THE STAGE FOR GROWTH

THE 66- X 127-INCH MARTIN DRO 1632 NT WAS PURCHASED WITH FIVE COLORS, BUT TRACK WAS LAID SO ONE OR TWO MORE COLORS COULD BE ADDED. THE LAYOUT ALSO LEAVES ROOM FOR THE ADDITION OF A BUNDLE BREAKER AND LOAD FORMER.



friendly/maintenance-friendly machine and, most of all, registration. That was number one for us. We looked at what (the new diecutter) can do that our competitors can't do."

Their search resulted in selecting the Martin DRO 1632 NT. The machine was purchased with five colors, but track was laid so one or even two more colors could be easily added later. The layout also leaves room for the addition of a bundle breaker and load former in the future. "At 66 by 127 inches, the Martin gives us a big format so we can easily see utilizing the

efficiencies of a breaker," says West.

Negus further explains their logic stating, "After going through testing with many of the different machines out there, we felt the Martin kept the best register by far — high speed as well as low speed. We also knew that working with Martin would be a long-term relationship because this machine will be around for a long time."

"We learned early in the process that the ability to print world class graphics involved the cooperation and support of each of our key suppliers," adds West. "We also learned that the ability to print well at

the machine's maximum output speed involved dryers. From looking around we learned that there are really only two different dryer systems out there. When we saw that some of the 5- 6- 7- up to 10-color machines use JB dryers to achieve maximum performance, we were really convinced."

Run speed was also a big factor with the dryers, according to West. "If you look at the different substrates we run like Kemi Lite, you really can't run effectively without dryers and that's where the industry is going. We wanted to get into that market, so that also drove our decision to invest in not only the Martin, but in the dryers as well. Even with just mottled whites, dryers are going to improve productivity...run speeds increased by 40 to 50%. While we were out investigating this purchase we saw it with our own eyes. Now we run four colors on mottled white at wide open speeds and we do it all the time. We're able to do that even on Kemi Lite. We can run that job today, in tight register, at 10,000 an hour."

Also in discussing the advantages of his dryers Negus said, "From an energy standpoint we liked the fact that we could turn off-and-on various widths or areas across the machine that we didn't need and not just in the center, but other locations on the box. Also, for downtime, if something happens to one of the lamps you can easily take one from, say an outer, or less used section and move it to where it's needed within minutes and be back up and running quickly."

Supplier relationships and the support that comes from them is a key factor for Wisconsin Packaging. On the day of our interview a four-color process self-promotion piece was being run on the Martin DRO. As a demonstration of its printing capabilities the quality of this job was given a high priority. Providing onsite technical support for the run were



DRYER LAMPS CAN EASILY BE MOVED FROM ONE SECTION TO ANOTHER.



THE NEW DIECUTTER HAS DRYERS FROM JB MACHINERY.

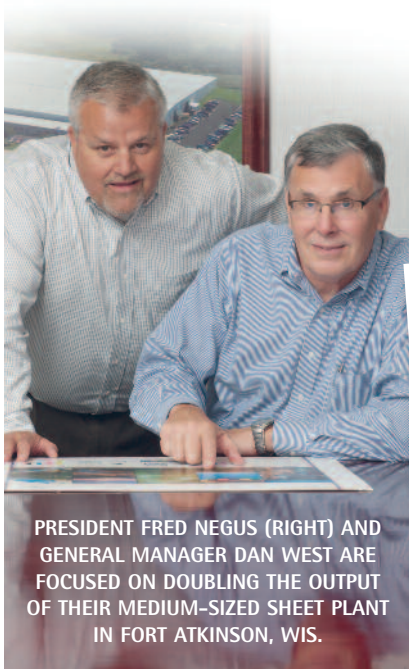
Wisconsin Packaging

personnel from Martin, JB Machinery and the sheet plant's ink supplier, Color Resolutions. West and Negus both indicated, however, that this is not unusual. "We've chosen our suppliers knowing that they're going to be with us, to support us and help us move forward and get better," according to Negus. "You can't be complacent in today's marketplace and expect to get anywhere," adding, "As far as support goes it also doesn't hurt that JB dryers are made here in Wisconsin."

People and Processes

From a production standpoint, the Wisconsin Packaging managers describe the company in terms of people as well as process. "We've taken Lean Manufacturing

"YOU CAN'T BE COMPLACENT IN TODAY'S MARKETPLACE AND EXPECT TO GET ANYWHERE," SAYS PRESIDENT FRED NEGUS.



PRESIDENT FRED NEGUS (RIGHT) AND GENERAL MANAGER DAN WEST ARE FOCUSED ON DOUBLING THE OUTPUT OF THEIR MEDIUM-SIZED SHEET PLANT IN FORT ATKINSON, WIS.

to a new level," states West. "We started videotaping our setups, sitting down and looking at what we're doing and what we can do to improve. We bring the crew in and start off very openly, telling everyone that we can stop the video at any time if anyone has any questions or ideas that they think can help the process.

"Operators are empowered to decide when to pull a job with a problem. We added a utility person to manage the flow of inks and tooling so the pressmen aren't running off to find the right ink. That keeps them focused on maximizing efficiency and quality coming off the press." As an example West says, "Over the last two years we've taken setup times for a 4-color process job on the Martin to nearly half of what it was when we first started working with the machine. We believe that we're well under industry averages and we can do it consistently, day in, day out. A lot of it has to do with the machine, but more of it is about our employees.

"Cross-training enables employees to go between machines with equal proficiency," he continues. "We have a five-man crew to run two flexos. They rotate in and out for breaks and that lets us keep running continuously. When we do the math, we find we're picking up a month of production at the end of the year even with just running one shift, five days a week. Because we never shut down we're



TOUCH SCREEN CONTROLS FOR THE MARTIN DRO AND JB DRYERS.



picking up that much production and eliminating overtime. We've learned that when you reduce setup times even by just cutting out one, two or three minutes, there's thousands and thousands of additional dollars a year that can be made. This was part of our purchase decisions for equipment."

Negus puts it into perspective, "This business doesn't have enough of a margin to really support overtime so we've found better ways to work, including cross-training and continuous run, so we can avoid it."

At the time of our visit Wisconsin Packaging had the normal complement of single purpose machines in a 135,000 sq ft plant. But there was a problem identified by West.

"Our take-off conveyors go down to the end of the building where they make a 90 degree turn to get to the strappers, and then onto the fork lift trucks." So West proposed to Negus that the bottleneck caused by this turn be eliminated. With a new 10,000 sq ft extension to the building the conveyor lines will now run straight, enabling the fork lift drivers to keep up with the plant's high speed machines. This new addition was completed in November.

Wisconsin Packaging is planning for growth and is bringing every asset into play to make sure that, as a stronger market develops, they'll be ready to take maximum advantage of it.