

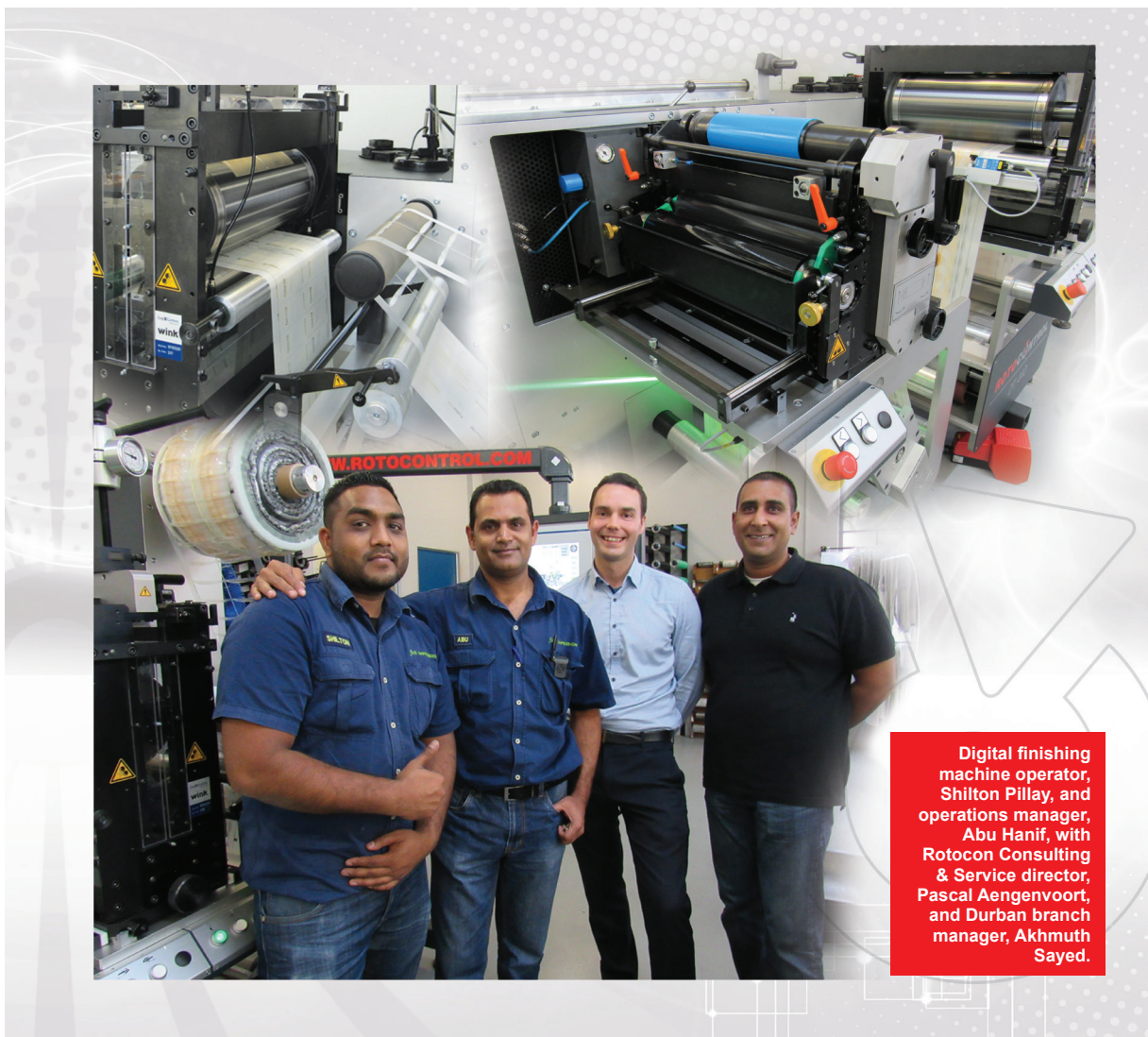
Continuing tradition of technology firsts

First Impression Labels made history in 2014 by becoming the first African converter to install a Screen Truepress Jet L350UV digital inkjet label press. Nici SOLOMON reports that the business continues this pioneering tradition with the latest round of investments: RotoControl's three-colour digital finishing machine and the country's first UV Ray ink curing system.

STEPPING into First Impression Labels (FIL)'s 3 600m² factory in Alexander Road, Pinetown (KZN), reveals a battery of gleaming printing, converting and finishing equipment, producing top-quality folding cartons, pressure-sensitive labels, shrink sleeves and wraparound labels for multinational food, home and personal care customers.

Operations director, Vaughan Cumming, reports that the Truepress Jet L350UV digital inkjet label press (supplied by Rotocon in 2014) runs 24 hours/day, five days/week, resulting in throughputs of over a million metres of labels/month, placing FIL in second place globally among Screen's largest ink users.

As Vaughan explains, it was these throughput levels,



Digital finishing machine operator, Shilton Pillay, and operations manager, Abu Hanif, with Rotocon Consulting & Service director, Pascal Aengenvoort, and Durban branch manager, Akhmuth Sayed.



FIL's production manager, Carlos Mangos, in front of the Atom UV ink curing system from Italy's UV Ray, which has been retrofitted on a 10-year-old Mark Andy 22000 H series press.

plus the fact that digital inks cost five times more than UV inks, that motivated FIL to replace an existing semi-rotary offline finishing machine (running at a top speed of 30m/min) with RotoControl's custom-built rotary model that varnishes, cold foils and die-cuts jobs at 50m/min – matching the Screen's running speed.

Critical to FIL's directors is partnering with suppliers who give them what they want, when they want it and how they want it. 'The Rotocon team has built up a good service and support track record with our Screen press and two RotoControl RSC 440mm web width slitter-rewinders,' Vaughan confirms.

'We chose this first-of-a-kind machine to remain competitive and at the top of our game in the South Africa market,' he continues. 'RotoControl has taken the best tried-and-tested components and used them to build this modular machine, consisting of two rotary print stations, a varnishing station, a rotary cold foiling station and a semi-rotary die-cutting station and edge guide system. Additionally, the servo-driven software is key to the machine's performance, ensuring it ticks all the boxes.'

Rotocon director, Pascal Aengenvoort, who facilitated the build and deal, describes it as 'a privilege' to offer FIL a full-house digital service through the supply of this finishing machine. 'As Vaughan requested, we kept its design as simple as possible and made the web path and other vital areas – which are usually concealed, resulting in maintenance and cleaning challenges – open and accessible,' he explains.

The finishing machine arrived in modular form during the first week in June and was installed within a day by Rotocon's technician, William White. After some fine-tuning, it was ready to run at the end of the second day. 'William stayed on-site for a week to train the three operators with production work and returned with RotoControl's German software technician – after the operators ran the machine independently for a week – to iron any little issues,' says production manager, Carlos Mangos.

Thanks to its modular construction, and each component having its own servo drive, the finishing machine can easily be upgraded in the future.

Pascal Aengenvoort reports that Rotocon is currently negotiating to install a rotary silkscreen module to

replace FIL's former flatbed rotary silkscreen, which was too slow, making short-run wine label jobs uncompetitive.

'Through our Kocher+Beck TecScreen agency, we can supply the equipment and consumables to produce screens in-house at competitive prices,' he says.

Retrofitting a new UV ink system

FIL faced a conundrum: its 10-year-old eight-colour Mark Andy 22000 H series press was still in great condition, but its existing UV ink system wasn't. Rotocon director, Pascal Aengenvoort, proposed UV Ray's Atom UV ink curing system as the most cost-efficient solution to this problem.

According to Pascal, main benefits of the UV Ray Atom system – the first installed in this country – are the ability to upgrade an older machine with a competitively-priced UV ink curing system to do the same job; an open system design that enables technicians to work on power packs, rather than having to return them as trade-in units; and a reduction in electricity consumption and emissions.

FIL production manager, Carlos Mangos, agrees that this compact system is easy to work with and service. 'The plug-in port on the side of each brick allows us to plug into the Ethernet and obtain an online breakdown of faults straight away. In addition, UV Ray can run diagnostics and make maintenance recommendations from Italy,' he reports.

Adds operations director, Vaughan Cumming: 'I trusted Pascal's recommendation because MPS has started using this system on its European-manufactured presses. And after nearly three months in operation, I can confirm that performance-wise it's as good as the previous UV ink curing system, and each station is fitted with an exhaust fan, preventing the whole system from going down.'

Ed's note: FIL also purchases its flexible dies, print and magazine cylinders, anilox rollers, and tooling through Rotocon Consulting & Service.



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