OEC graphics

dedication to innovation

visual INSIGHTS

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SEAMEX® CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

OEC Graphics is excited to announce the 25th Anniversary of Seamex, our exclusive ITR sleeve. Introduced by OEC to the North American marketplace in 1991, Seamex was the first continuous photopolymer sleeve produced in-the-round. Today Seamex is the industry standard, but it took years of research and development to achieve this success.

In the late 1980's, Stork Screens America had been searching for a buyer for its Seamex process that produced seamless photopolymer plates bonded and vulcanized to lightweight nickel sleeves. Many prospective companies had an interest in this unique flexographic process, but OEC Graphics stood out. Jack Schloesser, OEC's CEO, made sure his company had consistently been at the forefront of flexographic prepress technology and lobbied for the rights. Stork respected OEC's position as a technological leader and awarded Seamex to the company.

Upon adding a 9,000 square foot addition for Seamex, manufacturing commenced. OEC was prepared to take on the commitment that Seamex was going to require, but it went far beyond what was anticipated. Schloesser shares, "When we adopted the Seamex technology, it was nowhere near ready for the marketplace. We had to train our people and develop SOP's for the process." Much was done by trial and error. Challenges in areas like film exposure and sleeve coating certainly made OEC better stewards of the ITR process.

Seamex Celebrates 25 Years continues...

...*Seamex Celebrates 25 Years* continued

By 1992, Seamex was growing, prompting OEC to add another 16,000 square foot addition to house the second manufacturing line. Schloesser was pleased with Seamex's success, but already had a vision of where it should be going. At the time, OEC was transferring the print image onto the Seamex sleeve when the film on the coated polymer was exposed to a light source. After the introduction of the yag laser, Schloesser began to search for a laser device that could directly laser the sleeve, eliminating the need for film while also accommodating OEC's seamless sleeves. He explains, "I traveled around the country calling on laser companies, but was unable to stir up any real interest in developing a laser to image photopolymer sleeves. Laser companies were more interested in the medical field. Finally, systems began to appear in Europe. At OEC, we developed the criteria that a system would have to meet to fulfill our specialized needs. We looked at all the systems that were available and found the Digilas, manufactured by Schepers in Germany and distributed exclusively in North America by NAPP Systems, Inc."

He continues "The Digilas system met our criteria. It was able to accept varying sizes of cylinders, it was able to image small or large plates with equal ease and precision and it was designed to accommodate modification as the need for upgrading arose. Most importantly, it was the only system capable of laser-imaging sleeves." For Schloesser, he knew this shift to digital would eliminate all of the issues associated with film distortion, including light scatter, emulsion shift, scratching and kinking.

Going digital did require even more from OEC's R&D team. Working with many suppliers, the right combinations of support materials and processes had to be found to produce the quality of ITR sleeves needed for the digital flexo market. By 1996, all the pieces of

Jack Schloesser inspects an original Seamex sleeve.

the puzzle came together and the new Digilas laser was installed at OEC Graphics' headquarters. Within 12 months, an additional Digilas laser was added to meet demand. These installations not only solidified OEC as the first North American company to produce ITR laser sleeves (previously referred to as computer-to-plate sleeves) and flat laser plates, but the first North American company to install flexographic laser technology, period.

The following years were a time of continued product improvement and building Seamex awareness. Seamex was marketed as seamless and continuous, perfect for wallpaper, gift wrap, food wraps, table covers and bag or pouch items. The technology was now producing a product that could rival offset and rotogravure printing. This was the beginning of the shift in thinking that flexo was no longer inferior to other printing processes.

As laser-imaging devices gained in popularity and accessibility, Schloesser and his team recognized that there was a way OEC could provide a laser-ready,

Seamex Celebrates 25 Years continues...

...*Seamex Celebrates 25 Years* continued

imagable Seamex sleeve to be distributed directly to printers who invested in their own equipment. In 2003, OEC introduced this product, called SeamexBlanks. The blank sleeve was produced based on a printer's specific print repeat, bare cylinder diameter, cushion and press pitch. It proved to be a niche product that we still manufacture for select customers today.

OEC's Seamex process continued to evolve. In 2005, Flint Group came out with a new ITR sleeve-making machine which eliminated the need for OEC to grind the photopolymer in the manufacturing process. Naturally, OEC became a beta test site for Flint's merging system. "This new technology was on the cutting edge, if not leading edge of what could be done with photopolymer and sleeves." Says Nathan Rank Corporate Plateroom and ITR manager for OEC. OEC marketed this new version of Seamex with a simple addition, calling it Seamex2. He goes on to say, "The Seamex2 process was refined and improved by OEC and our experienced team to make it what it has become today." This streamlined manufacturing resulted in finer dot control in a process sleeve. OEC was now selling the original Seamex sleeve, Seamex2 and SeamexBlanks.

> **"A quarter century of Seamex is quite an accomplishment. I'm proud of the fact that OEC leads the digital ITR industry."**
>
> *– Jack Schloesser*

With the advancements in sleeve processing and the laser's capabilities changing, front-end prepress began to make strides in print quality as well. In 2010, Flat Top Dot technology and HD Flexo were able to be incorporated into Seamex. Used in conjunction with one another, these technologies resulted in sleeves with increased color gamut through greater solid ink density and longer tonal range. These improvements

Seamex Celebrates 25 Years continues...

OVER 220 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

Jack Schloesser with Seamex Team

gave Seamex the same advantages that were being recognized in flat plates.

At this point in Seamex's lifespan, it had been tweaked from nearly every direction to achieve new levels of quality and performance. By 2011, OEC knew it was time to make a major remodel to the department, including installing a clean room for increased tolerances in quality. OEC experienced the fruits of its labor in 2015, which marked the highest production in volume for both Seamex2 and total ITR sleeve manufacture. "Listening to the needs of our customers and tailoring the capabilities of our sleeve offerings to those needs has been the catalyst for our continued and ongoing growth" adds Nathan Rank.

At age 25, Seamex is by far the industry standard with over 50,000 sleeves in the marketplace, making OEC Graphics the largest photopolymer sleeve manufacturer in North America. Seamex's reputation of being the highest quality ITR sleeve available is a direct result of the years of dedication and continuous improvement spent on this product. Schloesser reflects on the time,

Nathan Rank and Jack Schloesser adjacent to the company's current high resolution imaging device.

"A quarter century of Seamex is quite an accomplishment. I'm proud of the fact that OEC leads the digital ITR industry. Seamex has truly been able to adapt and change to match technology and our customer's need over the past 25 years." OEC Graphics promises that we will continue to pursue technology on behalf of ITR sleeves as we forge through the next 25 years of Seamex.

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