

Shrink sleeves tailored to fit aseptic boxes

Converter Fort Dearborn pushes the labeling paradigm to a new container type by thinking "around the box."

By Contributing Editor Lauren R. Hartman

Shrink-sleeve labeling is certainly giving pressure-sensitive labels a run for their money. The new form-fitting container decoration method is appearing on everything from upside-down cheese-sauce jars to hourglass-shaped diet supplement

bottles. But on the other hand, Wheeling, IL-based Fresh Island Beverage Co. may have taken the shrink sleeve where no such label has gone



before—wrapped around rectangular aseptic cartons.

With help from package printer Fort Dearborn (Niles, IL), Fresh Island launched its new retail line of nine non-alcoholic drink mixers in 64-oz SIG Combibloc

blank, aseptic paperboard cartons. Foodservice versions of the product packaging were previously only spot-labeled in the center with a large p-s label.

But when researching retail trends, Fresh Island owner Jimmy Chinn discovered

so many shrink-sleeve labels on packages that he chose that direction, even over direct printing of the cartons.

Good looks, brand identity

Armed with a bevy of tropical-themed ideas, Chinn wanted to create a "great-looking

label" that would catch the eye but also be affordable. Chinn says his firm liked the sleeve-label concept because of the vibrant colors and engaging graphics film sleeves can provide

To assist Fresh Island in developing label graphics and achieve a retail look, Fort Dearborn enlisted the help of Ingraphx Studio to

help create a brand identity and turn the strategy into design results for all nine stock keeping units. Ingraphx presented roughly half a dozen graphic designs from which to choose. "All we had to do was place a UPC [code] into the design and create a finalized version,"

says Fort Dearborn account manager Larry Olliges.

Operating with a computer-to-plate (CTP) workflow, Southern Graphic Systems provided complete prepress services, converted the design files to CTP and produced the printing plates, working with electronic native files from Ingraphx for the sleeve-label graphics. Fort Dearborn sends its customers "grid labels" prior to finalizing a job, so the customer can test-shrink the label. The



shrink-distortion curve can be measured and calculated for input into the final artwork. Once the distortion rate is established, it is incorporated into the CTP file.



Press proofs for the labels were produced using a Kodak proofing system from Kodak Polychrome Graphics. After proofs were made and approved, the photopolymer-based flexographic-printing plates were created. Olliges says it

was then that the full-body shrink sleeves began to take shape.

With expertise in virtually all label types and print technologies, Fort Dearborn produces prime, decorative labels for key consumer product marketers. Printing of the Fresh Island sleeve labels began in June 2004, at the converter's 60,000-sq-ft facility in Elk Grove Village, IL, which supplies national food, beverage and consumer-goods makers with shrink labels printed in up to 10 colors and converted primarily from rollstock.

Billboard effect

The Elk Grove plant reverse-flexo-prints rolls of the labels in nine colors. The raw substrate (50-micron polyvinyl chloride shrink-sleeve film supplied by Klöckner-Pentaplast) measures about 17 in. wide. The glossy film was chosen for proper shrink characteristics and eye appeal—important objectives for Fresh Island, Olliges says. "The beauty of shrink film is that it conforms to the package and provides a really great billboard effect."

The plant uses 22-in. Mark Andy Comco ProGlide 10-color presses and "strictly" water-based flexo inks from Environmental Inks and Coatings. A protective varnish applied to the backside allows the labels to resist scratching and scuffing as they're applied to the cartons. The inks include four process colors, a special white, a special green, a special purple, a flavor-designator color and a line black.



"The flavor-designator inks were designed to match PMS colors," Olliges explains. "The rest are basically process colors. There is a very deep purple and a special green, so we had to come up with some special match inks in addition to process inks. Generally with flexo work, you don't mix line colors with tone colors," he says. "That way, you can better control the vignettes and product shots. We had to break out some line colors and use tone for what it is."

On-press color checks

Olliges goes on to say that his firm kept the plate and copy changes down to only one per drink-mixer flavor, reducing Fresh Island's labeling costs. The 10-color Comco presses are equipped for backside printing, coating, splicing, tunnel ink

drying and automatic registration. An X-Rite spectrophotometer color control at press-side keeps colors consistent with the standards set. Samples are visually



compared against each other and then a reading is taken using the spectrophotometer to ensure that the press is operating effectively. Adjustments to the press are made manually as needed.

The web of labels is then taken off-press to be slit and rewound into individual

label rolls on equipment from HCI Converting Equipment Co., Ltd., and seamed

for hand application.

Fort Dearborn is considered a leading combination printer, able to gang up to 50

labels on one press sheet measuring up to 51 in., Olliges says. The Fresh Island labels were printed in tandem, or "back to back," meaning that the press was stopped between flavors, instead of running the labels side-by-side, to better maintain color consistency.

Plate changes minimized

To tandem-print the labels, press operators stop the press to change the flavor designator color, but do not change the printing plate itself. Olliges says, "Printing these labels in tandem is easier to do with so many flavor colors. Each label has eight common colors plus a special flavor designator color. We stop the press between flavors and make one color change and one plate change. The line black is the only plate changed.

"Other than that, we used the other eight plates across all flavors. Plate changes can be very expensive, so we worked with Fresh Island and Ingraphx to keep costs as low as possible. The design is the same from one label stockkeeping unit to the other—ink backgrounds and elements."

Sales of the mixers are growing and Chinn says he's very pleased with the packaging. "[Fort Dearborn] did a wonderful job. We're so impressed with the printing. They know what they're doing, and it wasn't the easiest job to do," he says.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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SOUTHERN GRAPHIC SYSTEMS, 502/637-5443, www.alcoa.com/sgs

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