

# Technically-advanced Tropic



## On offer from Tropic

Technologically-advanced films and bags (printed/plain/laminated) for:

- Industrial applications
- Grain and prepacks
- Dairy
- Poultry
- Confectionery
- Snack food
- Tea
- Boutique
- Courier

Investment in the latest technology is helping Tropic Plastic & Packaging to sustain a competitive edge in today's volatile flexible packaging market, reports GILL LOUBSER.

**THE somewhat unassuming exterior of Tropic Plastic & Packaging – situated in Durban's industrial area of Jacobs – belies the awe-inspiring extent of the operation within. A tour of this family-owned flexible packaging business reveals an impressive number of superbly-equipped divisions – from extrusion to printing and from lamination to bag-making.**

It's obvious that this business is thriving and can be counted among the country's largest manufacturers of flexible films, supplying packaging nationally as well as exporting to other parts of Africa. And it seems as though the owners are intent on buying up buildings along the entire length of Chamberlain Road to accommodate their inexorable expansion!

The staff complement at this ISO-accredited business is around 200, underlining the significant size of this operation.

Key products are all manner of packaging films – including shrink films, snack food laminations, tea laminations, printed and/or laminated form-fill-seal material, and much more.

Tropic's MD and owner, Fazel Bhabha, is understandably proud of the company's 44-year history. 'This company was founded in 1963,' he relates, 'and has really stood the test of time.'

The company's success is ascribed to a number of factors, not least its continued private ownership in the face of continual merger and acquisition activity in the flexible packaging sector, and its stable management structure.

Also high on Tropic's list of attributes is an ethos of close personalised customer relationships, coupled with fast turnaround times.

Playing a key role here is sales director, Farouk Motala. 'We can boast a long list of blue-chip customers with whom we have enjoyed unbroken

service for many, many years,' he comments, going on to pay particular tribute to his 'outstanding sales team'.

### Sustaining a competitive advantage

The last two years have seen a huge focus on upgrading Tropic's technology and capacity; and this has had one primary purpose – to sustain a competitive advantage in today's volatile flexible packaging market.

'We've undoubtedly kept ahead in the flexible packaging sector by installing the very best machinery – the cream of the crop,' comments operations director, Mohamed Timol, who has recently returned to the company after a three-year stint in Australia. There he gained valuable technical and operational expertise that's now helping to propel Tropic into the higher end of the flexible packaging market – particularly in the development of technically-advanced films.

Just one example that Mohamed cites is development work that has allowed phenomenal downgauging of film, resulting in significant cost savings for customers.

Other technology breakthroughs include the development of new materials such as Tropithene and Tropistar, which provide added value for customers' products. Tropithene film, for instance, has a luxurious feel and finish and is particularly suitable for bread bag packaging, while Tropistar's glass-clear properties make it suitable for numerous applications.

Again the accent is on ensuring a competitive advantage in a tough market, by experimenting with different polymer blends to produce cost-effective yet technically-advanced films.



A state-of-the-art Kirion three-layer blown film line from Kiefel in Germany represents Tropic's latest investment in coextrusion technology.

### Innovation and investment

Tropic has a well-proven philosophy of innovation and investment that has enabled the company to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive market. With equipment comprising state-of-the-art monolayer and multilayer extruders, eight-colour flexographic printing presses, laminators, bag-converting and slitting machines, Tropic is able to manufacture flexible packaging to the highest global standards.

At the end of the day, such investments have one aim – to facilitate just-in-time production, allowing Tropic to live up to its promise of on-time in-full delivery.

Tropic's armoury now includes several mono-layer and coextrusion lines.



So what shape has this continuous investment taken?

Starting at the beginning of the process with extrusion equipment, Tropic's armoury now includes several mono-layer extruders and coextrusion lines. The latest investment in coextrusion has been a state-of-the-art Kirion three-layer blown film line from Kiefel in Germany.

This line is completely automated and can produce laminating and general packaging films. Just one of its many features is a heavy-duty oscillating take-off system that allows production of thin films without edge wrinkles.

This up-to-the-minute extrusion technology, combined with Tropic's expertise, creates major benefits for customers.



The Carint Cyberflex 1708 gearless press.

Printing equipment is equally awe-inspiring, with several flexographic presses offering a mix of six- and eight-colour printing. Among the latest installations is an impressive Carint eight-colour press. This Carint Cyberflex 1708 gearless press features the latest servo-drive technology, new levels of automation, and an advanced control system.



The Rexson Colorweigh ink dispensing system generates a full spectrum of reports covering all aspects of stock control, pre-job ink estimation and post-job costing, while maintaining a history of all transactions.

# Advanced Packaging Technology

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## FLEXIBLE PACKAGING

'This major investment in the latest flexographic printing technology allows for improved branding for our customers' products, helping them to improve their market shares. It has also enhanced our operating versatility and improved our productivity,' Mohamed explains.

Another important installation is a Rexson Colorweigh Compact18 ink dispensing system, installed by Hi-Tech Inks.

Hi-Tech Inks operates an in-house 'ink kitchen', staffed by a Hi-Tech technician who assists with ink mixing, process control, quality control, stock control, equipment assessment and maintenance.

Along with the Rexson, Hi-Tech has installed an integrated colour computer to ensure accurate colour matching to customers' specifications, run after run, and kitted out the ink laboratory.

All ink usage is reported on a daily basis, and stockholding of mixed ink is reduced thanks to the ability to estimate ink requirements before printing. A further option is to make up small batches of identical ink if run lengths are increased. And, in view of both Tropic's and Hi-Tech's ISO status, it's not surprising to learn that there's full traceability of all products used.

Also of value to Tropic's customers is that when any new project is initiated, the on-site repro facility, operated by Polyflex, is included from the early planning stages.

Polyflex provides a total prepress solution to Tropic and is intimately involved in the entire workflow – from new design to on-press approval.



**Proud to be Associated with Tropic Plastics**

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A new Nordmeccanica Super Simplex solventless laminator has been installed. Celebrating its commissioning with Mohamed Timol, Tropic Plastics (second from left), were Natale Ferioli (Colines), Vincenzo Cerciello (technical director, Nordmeccanica), Mark Cooper (Conequipt) and Paolo Milani (Nordmeccanica).

Moving on to lamination technology, another recent installation has been a Nordmeccanica Super Simplex solventless laminator that has allowed Tropic to enter new market segments.

### Bag making excellence

Bag making is a prime component of Tropic's promise to customers to supply a complete packaging solution; and the company's bag-making operations are now in two distinct divisions.

The first produces all types of bags, from boutique bags to side-seal bottom-seal bags, and much more. Emphasising the wide range of bags produced, Tropic operates a remarkable number of different types of bag-making machines; and considerable capex has recently gone into the purchase of more equipment from Technimac, in the form of side- and bottom-seal bagmakers.



An impressive line-up of Hudson-Sharp wicketing machines produce bread, poultry, fresh produce and hygiene bags for automatic filling.

The second bag-making division is the speciality division which contains an impressive line-up of Hudson-Sharp wicketing machines for the production of bread, poultry, fresh produce and hygiene bags for automatic filling.

Supplied by Advanced Packaging Technology, Hudson-Sharp's local representative, these machines are capable of sealing LDPE, LLDPE, HDPE and PP coextrusions and blends in various gauges, and consistently produce top-quality bags.

Thanks to the advanced features of these bagmakers, Tropic's customers enjoy an unparalleled choice of styles of poultry and bread bags – all produced at high speed.

'When it comes to the supply of wicketed bread bags, we have the largest capacity on the African continent, and we focus on innovative products for our customers,' remarks sales director, Farouk Motala.

With a commitment to quality and with an SABS/ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System to back this up, Tropic Plastic is dedicated to offering top-quality packaging to meet customers' requirements – in full and on time.

The company insists on forming solid partnerships with customers and raw material suppliers. The bottom line is competitive pricing, fast turnaround times and technical back-up when required.

In summary, Tropic Plastic & Packaging's success comes from its strong management team, highly skilled staff, and an overall commitment to customers and suppliers – plus, of course, state-of-the-art equipment.

There is no doubt that this business is on the right track, making a success of supplying packaging throughout Africa, in today's tough, fast-moving consumer goods market.

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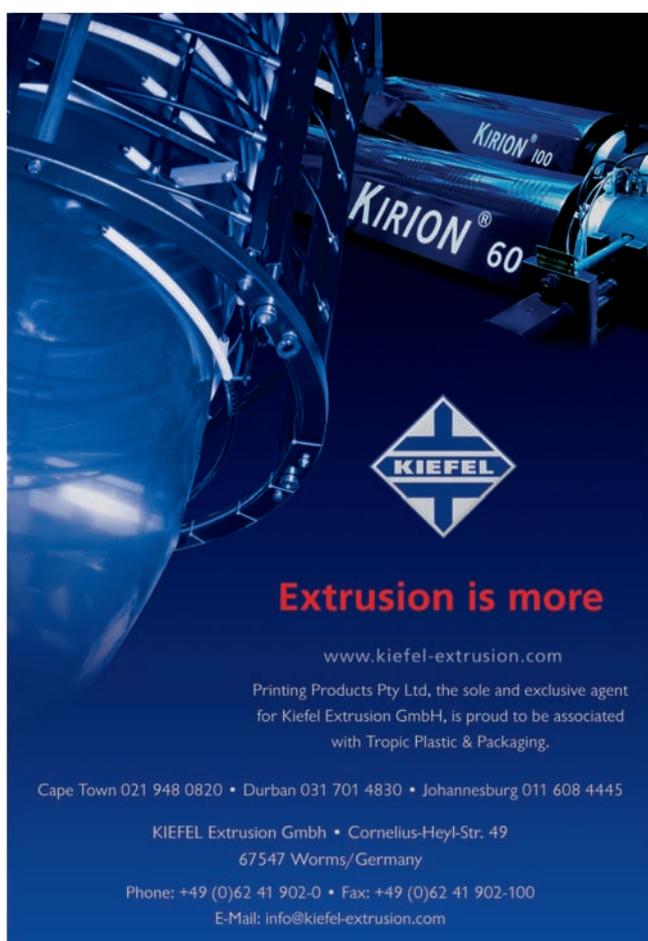
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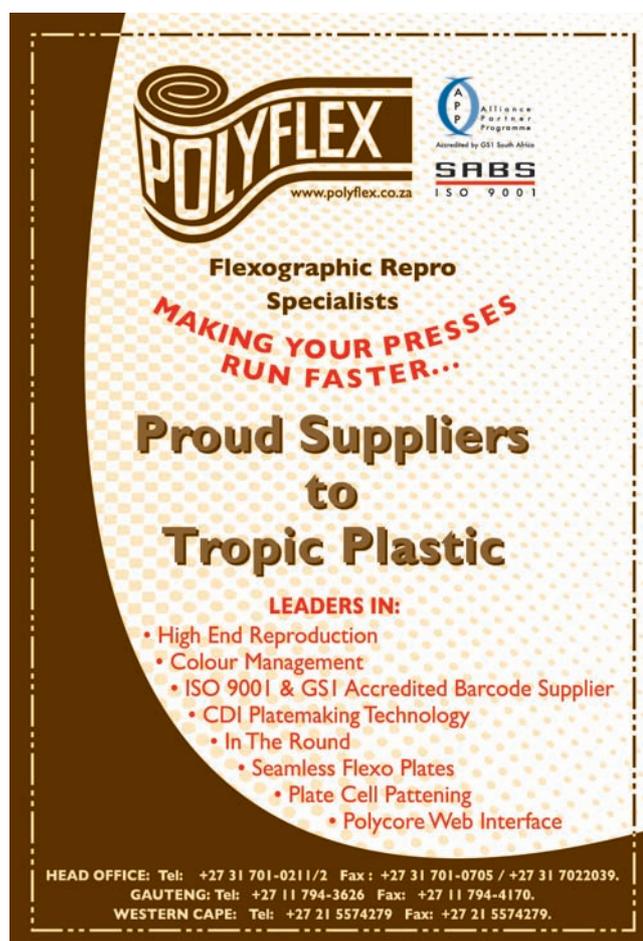
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