

# Print perfection at Tropic

Tropic Plastic & Packaging has invested in a new-generation Comexi FPlus flexo press, the first of its kind in South Africa, reports KAREN STRETCH.



**AFTER much anticipation, Tropic Plastic & Packaging has taken ownership of an impressive Comexi FPlus ten-colour flexo press – a first for the South African flexible packaging industry (PPM Feb11, p41).**

To mark the momentous occasion, representatives from Comexi Group and its local agent, Advanced Packaging Technology, gathered at Tropic's factory in Durban's industrial suburb of Jacobs, for an official unveiling ceremony and handover. Present at the special event was Aleix Mas, Comexi's MEA and India area manager: 'For Comexi Group, South Africa is a strategic market,' he comments. 'We're very happy to have lived up to Tropic's expectations and we believe that today is a turning point regarding the future relationship between Comexi and Tropic.'

Already operating eight flexo presses, Tropic's decision to choose the ten-colour high-speed press was based on Comexi's superior technology as well as the local service and support received from Gary Kieswetter at Advanced Packaging Technology.

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Now fully operational, the FPlus thoroughbred press has greatly impressed Mohamed Timol, Tropic's operations director, as has the 'can-do' approach of the Comexi technicians, on-site to commission the press and undertake comprehensive operator training.

'The Comexi technicians have already exceeded expectations by pushing print speeds on the FPlus up to 500m/min, with startling print results,' confirms Mohamed.

Supervising the installation was Josep Camargo, Comexi's application engineer, who's equally enamoured by Tropic's exacting standards and efficiencies. 'The professional approach of Tropic's staff has made training easy. The press operators are trained printers and they understand the flexographic process,' remarks Josep. 'Progress has been swift as they are quick learners, have a broad knowledge of plastics and inks, and can print correctly. We've installed 25 new FPlus presses worldwide and Tropic rates as one of the best manufacturing sites in the world,' he adds.

The new-generation Comexi FPlus is said to be among the first gearless presses in South Africa, and is designed specifically to achieve top accuracy print at speeds up to 500m/min, on maximum widths of 1 270mm and print repeats up to 1 100mm.

Positioned in Tropic's freshly-built Customer Experience Centre, the Comexi FPlus adds a new dynamic to the operation. With built-in auto adjustment, set-up is quick and efficient, with very little film waste.

Web-based diagnostics and in-line web-cam allow for swift fine-tuning by Comexi in Spain.

With the capability to produce top-quality films and bags – manufacturing its own coextruded Tropistar Plus high-gloss film – Tropic is now perfectly poised to produce unsurpassed printing with exceptional output.

And the news doesn't stop there. The Comexi FPlus will soon have a room-mate – a Reifenhauer Kiefel three-layer coextruder – and both will showcase Tropic's production proficiencies.

Meanwhile, there's an abundance of opportunities for Tropic to pursue. 'We're already exporting and achieving some notable contracts with Tropistar Plus and our other new-generation films,' confirms Fazel Bhabha, Tropic's MD. 'Our business strategy is on track and these latest investments give us a competitive edge to continue as a leading South African flexible packaging company.'

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## Fima's expansion plans on track

**FOLLOWING the recent announcement of its expansion plans, Fima has confirmed an order with the Andritz Group for an 8,7m biaxially oriented polypropylene (BOPP) line and an 8,7m biaxially oriented polyethylene terephthalate (BOPET) line, with capacities of 31 000 and 25 000 tons/annum respectively – to be installed at its Chamdor (Gauteng) plant.**

With two lines producing approximately 11 500 tons of BOPP film, Fima currently serves only 30% of South African demand. The balance is met by imports.

'We're enthused that Fima's new line will become a reality sooner than originally expected. Our ultimate goal is to be able to meet the demands of the South African market, as well as to export to other parts of the African continent,' comments Patrick Munyembate, Fima CEO. 'Through assistance from South Africa's major banks, we're in a position to gain the financial backing to pursue this project,' he adds.

The Andritz Group, a global market leader for customised plants, systems and services, has supplied turnkey projects and machinery to paper and packaging groups such as Sappi and Mondi.

Says Patrick: 'We selected Andritz Group as this company demonstrated the quickest turnaround time and committed to us exclusively for South Africa. The new BOPP line is expected to be completed in June 2013, and the BOPET line is scheduled for completion in 2015.'

Comments Caesar Molebatsi, part of Fima's major shareholder grouping, 'We're pleased to be involved in adding value to the South African economy and grateful for support from our local area mayors, who have offered us extra land and electricity. Through this initiative, we'll contribute to job creation in South Africa and expanding the country's manufacturing base. We look forward to the local market's support to reduce reliance on imports.'

Fima is the only producer of BOPP products in South Africa and has exclusive rights to sell the products of its global partner, Treofan, in South Africa and southern Africa. In line with Fima's business growth strategy, the company aims to export film to the greater part of Africa and largely the West African market based on its expanded capacity.