

Tropic's arena

Durban-based Tropic Plastic goes hi-tech with its new Arena eight-colour flexo press and a new Rexson ink dispensing system, reports DERYK CHAMPKINS.

FOUNDED over four decades ago and successfully growing all the time — that's the story of Durban-based Tropic Plastic & Packaging which has recently invested in a new eight-colour Arena flexo press from OFEM and taken the decision to link on-press ink requirements to the Rexson dispensing system.

Initially sited close to Durban's port to facilitate, in those early days, the importation of basic raw materials, this business has thrived in the 'magic province' of KwaZulu-Natal,

and today counts as one of the largest manufacturers of flexible films in the country, supplying packaging on a national basis as well as exporting into other parts of Africa.

Tropic has a philosophy of innovation and investment in technology; and these values have enabled the company to expand continually in an increasingly competitive national market. With its equipment comprising state-of-the-art monolayer and multilayer extruders, flexographic printing presses from single colour up to

eight colours, bag converting and high-speed slitting machines, Tropic has consistently manufactured to the highest global standards. Its impressive product list includes mono and coextruded films, wicketed bags, as well as flat and contour-shaped bags.

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 the highest quality packaging and service to meet customers' requirements — in full and on time.

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



Tropic's Arena FD5 has pride of place on the company's pristine factory floor.

Maintaining a leadership position

To maintain a leadership position in this highly competitive market, the latest addition to Tropic's well-equipped print room is an OFEM Arena eight-colour gearless press supplied by Mactec.

This press incorporates the patented OFEM Flexo Door System (FDS) which allows replacement of printing sleeves — either plate supporting or anilox — directly on the machine, thanks to a practical door system integrated in the mandrels' supports. As sleeves are extremely light and easy to handle, only one operator is needed and, apart from many other benefits — such as reliability, reduced maintenance, safety and ease of alignment — also results in fast changeover times. The gearless system means no gears to handle and store, quicker machine set-up and easier print register at start-up. An added advantage is accurate

printing of repeats thanks to electronic compensation.

The press is complete with a centralised supervisory system using Windows-based software which is both expandable and updateable. Last, but by no means least, this press is capable of speeds in excess of 300m/min.

At the same time as installing this new press, Tropic's management team, forward thinking as they are, decided to outsource ink management to Hi-Tech Inks, a company that enjoys a leadership position in the supply of flexo and gravure inks to South Africa's packaging industry. Hi-Tech has installed the latest generation Rexson solvent-based ink dispenser at Tropic Plastic where it's being used to dispense Hi-Tech's specially formulated inks.

Rexson has been installing dispensers in South Africa since 1999 and the company's longstanding relationship with Hi-Tech Inks made the Rexson

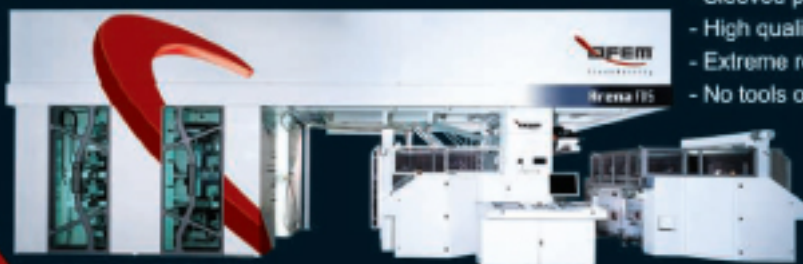
Colorweigh Compact18 a natural choice. This dispenser system comprises a supply system of 18 ingredients — single pigment finished inks and solvent for viscosity adjustment. These are stored in 200-litre drums and the whole system is PC controlled allowing for accurate dispensing of ink in batch sizes up to 25kg.

And what advantages does this give Tropic Plastic and its customers?

The powerful, yet user-friendly Rexson Impress software can generate a full spectrum of reports covering all aspects of stock control, pre-job ink estimation, post-job costing as well as statistical analysis, while maintaining a history of all transactions. This is a great benefit in ISO audit trail functionality.

It also made sense to integrate the latest Data Colour spectrophotometer (colour matching system) to the Rexson to ensure accurate colour matching to

Ofem, Positive Technology.



Arena FDS®-GL 808

- FDS® - Flexo Door System - printing units
- Printing rollers driven by Servo motors
- Precise repeat lengths set up
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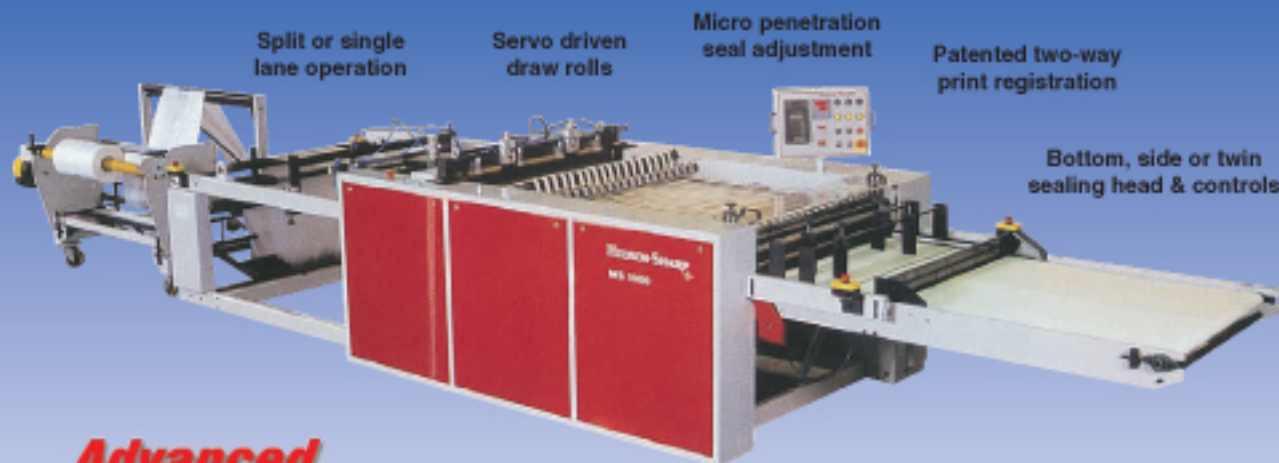
Tropic's new ink room boasts its Rexson Colorweigh Compact18.

customers' specifications, run after run. Another advantage of the system is the reduced stockholding of mixed ink due to the ability to accurately estimate ink requirements before printing and the option to make up small batches of identical ink, should the run lengths be increased.

Tropic Plastic & Packaging's success, according to MD, Fazel Bhabha, comes from a strong management team, skilled staff, a commitment to customers and suppliers — plus, of course, state-of-the-art equipment. It makes sense, too, to have one centralised production unit and, there is no doubt, this is a business on the right track making a success of supplying packaging throughout Africa to customers in today's tough, fast-moving consumer goods market. ■

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