

# Progressive Packaging

By Melanie Franner

Quality is a core value at Progressive. They have standard processing conditions where every material is checked to be sure it meets customer specifications.

## Quality by Design

The North American flexible packaging industry is one constantly in flux. Consolidation, acquisition and the never-ending start-up of small, often niche-based operations mean that customers can choose from a variety of suppliers. For those customers looking for the highest degree of quality when it comes to print and service, there's one name that consistently stands out from the mix: Progressive Packaging Ltd.

Founded in 1959 by the John Reid family, Progressive Packaging remained a family-owned operation up until 1989, when it was purchased by the Jim Pattison Group. Progressive Packaging has retained the independent, entrepreneurial spirit that has helped build up a reputation for providing quality printed, laminated and converted

flexible packaging to the North American snack, pasta, confectionary, cookie/biscuit, beverage, medical, household goods, garden supplies, industrial, pet food and personal care industries.

Today, Progressive Packaging continues to emphasize two features that have earned the company a special place in the North American flexible packaging industry. This focus on quality and service, coupled with ongoing investments in some of the most state-of-the-art equipment available, will enable Progressive Packaging to maintain its commitment

to providing the highest degree of customer satisfaction possible.

"We've always concentrated on quality and service," says Vice President and General Manager, Peter Mattiuzzo, who adds

that the upgrading of technologies in all areas of manufacturing is almost a constant. "If you ask our customers for a list of quality printers, I've no doubt that our name will be among them. It's an area we feel very comfortable in and one that enables us to consistently deliver quality product time after time."

Mattiuzzo stresses that Progressive Packaging is a very customer-focused organization and it is this dedication to customer satisfaction that has helped build up its reputation within the North American flexible packaging industry. "One of our key strengths is our ongoing commitment to quality and service," he says. "This allows us to give the customers what they want to meet their needs on an ongoing basis."

From its Aurora, ON, headquarters, Progressive Packaging operates within a 100,000 square foot manufacturing facility (along with another 10,000 square feet for corporate offices). The company employs 200 people, of which 140 are plant personnel.



Peter Mattiuzzo, Vice President & General Manager.



Senior Management team: (left to right) Tom Everett, President; Dave Coutts, Technical Manager; Judith Puttock, Human Resources Manager; Michael Olejnik, Vice President Canadian Sales; Peter Mattiuzzo, Vice President and General Manager; Don Hilder, Plant Manager and Mark Coleman, Vice President U.S. Sales.

### State-of-the-art Equipment

Part and parcel of providing increased quality is capitalizing on the latest advances of technology. Progressive Packaging has recently committed to this line of thinking with the acquisition of a new, top-of-the-line 10-colour Central (or common) impression Flexographic printing press. The new multi-million dollar machine - the first of its kind in Canada - is from Fischer & Krecke GmbH & Co. It was delivered to the plant in October 2001 and was assembled and operational within 6 weeks. The state-of-the-art piece of equipment is gearless and features AC Servo technology that will enable Progressive Packaging to compete head-on with rotogravure printing. The press is equipped with a downstream unit for backside printing or cold-seal application. It also has an automatic

print fault detection system to ensure highest possible quality.

Other equipment on-site includes: a variety of printing presses that deliver everything from four-colour printing to six, eight and now 10-colour flexography; two extruder laminator/coaters; three adhesive laminators; eight slitters capable of doing very narrow widths all the way up to 60-inches; plus a variety of bag making equipment and high-speed converting equipment to produce finished roll stocks, pouches, preformed bags, tintie bags and stand-up-pouches.

"Technology is advancing every day," says Don Hilder, Plant Manager. "It's just like the computer industry. If you want to stay on top, you have to keep investing in equipment."

The new multi-million dollar printing

press is just the latest in an array of equipment that Progressive Packaging has invested in its facility in order to provide its customers with the highest degree of quality available. Two years ago, the company purchased new slitting line technology. Prior to that, it was updating print line inspection from rotating mirror system to digital video technology to cameras and computers. The company is also looking at expanding their bag and pouch making capacity.

According to Hilder, the new printing press will increase Progressive Packaging's printing capacity by 30 to 35 per cent - a fact that the company sales representatives are thrilled about. For plant personnel, the new machine holds a different mystique, namely that it's outfitted with all of the bells and whistles that will make their job easier than ever. "The fact that the machine has no gears, is outfitted with the latest monitoring equipment and utilizes lightweight sleeve technology instead of cumbersome metal cylinders and anilox rollers - all of these things have been used to provide the operator with a lot of new tools," says Hilder, who adds that there has been



Plant facility - Aurora (near Toronto), Ontario, Canada.

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"a lot of interest" from personnel interested in operating the new machine. "We believe in cross-training so eventually, everyone will be trained on it."

Part of that training will include scheduled time on the press simulator - an innovative piece of equipment (carrying an approximate \$100,000 price tag) that operates much like a flight simulator, enabling personnel to "operate a virtual press" before actually going out on the line.

A 21-year veteran of the company, Hilder attributes much of Progressive Packaging's ongoing success to its roots as a family business. "It's still operated very much like a family business," he says, citing the examples of a catered, hot dinner buffet Christmas lunch for all employees and a Christmas turkey for all employees. "Yes, we're getting bigger and bigger as a company but you can talk to any of our people and if you don't find the same high



level of enthusiasm from each of them, I'd be shocked."

Judith Puttock, Manager, Human Resources, is one of six members who make up the senior management team. Since joining the company in 1999, Puttock has worked hard at maintaining the company's respected work ethic. "One of the reasons the company has a low turnover rate (less than 2%) is because it has many excellent programs in place for the employees," says Puttock, "the most important of which is our ongoing efforts to recognize the employees for their hard work."

Some of the other innovative employee programs include: an employee relations team; employee appreciation days (one of which sees the company's management flipping burgers for the staff); employee of the year award; an employee suggestion program; regular employee meetings; and an



employee newsletter (mailed to the home address so spouses and families can stay up-to-date on corporate happenings). One of the company's more recent programs is the introduction of the "Afternoon Tea Talk", where Puttock and Mattiuzzo, get together informally with six people from the plant to talk about issues that are front and centre to these people's work. "We started this program about eight months ago and it has been very well received by everyone involved," says Puttock.

Maintaining an atmosphere of open communication among all personnel is paramount to Progressive Packaging's ongoing success and evidence of the company's ability to do so can be found in the longevity of its staff. One gentleman, for example, is currently in his 37th year with the company. "Many of our employees have been here for over 20 years," comments Puttock, who attributes this kind of tenure to the company's ongoing efforts to recognize employees and to a loyalty and dedication that stems back to the days of being a family owned company.

### Accent on Quality

This type of open communication with staff is backed by an extensive training program that places very high regard on quality assurance and R&D. Andy Valy, Manager, Quality Assurance & Development, has been with Progressive Packaging for 31 years. He currently oversees eight personnel: one Quality Assurance Manager who looks after the technicians on three rotating inspection shifts under the quality mandate



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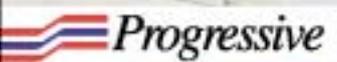
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(Far left) Print quality control – press side.  
(Left) One of several bag making machines.

AIB - one of the highest ratings granted.) The AIB follows guidelines from the Department of Food/Safety and Hygiene and is responsible for auditing food processors around the world.

In terms of R&D, Valy says that over the years, the process has taken on more of a proactive approach as opposed to a reactive one. "In the future, I see the quality being built right into the product upfront,"

comments Valy. "There's more control being put on the front-end of the operation now and it makes sense. There's no point in testing it at the end because by then, it's too late to do anything."

### Out on the Front Line

Michael Olejnik, Vice President Canadian Sales, has six other Canadian salespeople thrilled with the prospect of increasing plant capacity by as much as 35 per cent. A seven-year veteran of the company, Olejnik admits that as much as they try to not

and a Technical Manager who looks after various R&D functions, including development and trials, other specialities and development in printing processes.

Unique to Progressive Packaging is the addition of a staff member in 2001 with a Ph.D in colour chemistry. This specialist has a background in flexographic printing and acts in the capacity of a Development Specialist and is a valuable resource for the functional areas supporting the printing process.

Progressive works closely with their key suppliers (who are generally leaders in their field) to develop new products and processes. Partnering relationships with suppliers also ensures consistent quality and service from them at competitive prices.

"The emphasis on quality assurance has always been a major focus of this company," says Valy. "We have a full-service lab on-site to do all back-up testing. Everything here is tested for quality before it goes out to the customer."

The company has built up an array of specialized equipment that allows it to perform in-house testing that ranges from checking the curing time on adhesives to checking for print colour accuracy, testing oxygen permeability, and testing film thickness and weights (to name but a few). Valy estimates that the company's lab contains over \$250,000 in specialized equipment.

The company has received the highest rating possible - SUPERIOR - from the American Institute of Baking (AIB) for the last three consecutive years. (In fact, Progressive Packaging recently earned 925 out of the possible 1,000 points given by the

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Olejnik believes that quality has been such a large part of Progressive Packaging's corporate culture that it has become ingrained in the day-to-day operation of the business. "Quality has become ingrained in the people on the plant floor and in the office," he says.

According to Olejnik, another area where Progressive Packaging stands apart from its competitors is its strong use of computers and high-tech equipment to help run the business. "We

can track orders easily, know how many metres of film we used for a particular job and have a variety of tools to allow us to update customers on the history of their jobs," he adds. "For example, we can find out how long it takes, on average, to deliver an order from the time the customer requested that order."

Along this same line, which Olejnik claims is the direction that some customers are moving toward, is a new software system that will give customers access to an Internet location where they can check the

(Above) State-of-the-art 11 colour press. (Inset) Process Control monitoring.

let it affect sales, knowing that Progressive Packaging was operating at near capacity had somewhat dampened their ability to aggressively sell the company's services. Despite this "setback", the Canadian sales team managed to "dramatically" increase 2001 sales over the previous year.

"A lot of things that we had been working on for a number of years came to fruition in 2001," says Olejnik. "Plus, we were more focused on expanding our coverage within existing accounts and being more aggressive on calling on new

accounts. We put the effort in over the last two years and now, we're seeing the benefits of those efforts."

Olejnik goes on to say that this is a type of industry where quality is of the utmost importance. "The quality of what we print is what is going to be sitting on that store shelf and the consumer is going to make a decision based, in large part, on that quality," he says. "Historically, we've been one of the best quality and best service companies out there and we anticipate that we'll remain so in the future."

# Progressive Packaging

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status of their order, inventory and other job details. The company is hoping to roll out this service to those interested customers sometime in 2002.

In the United States, Mark Coleman, Vice President Sales, U.S., was also eagerly awaiting the arrival of the new 10-colour printing press. He and his team of seven sales representatives service the entire U.S.

"A lot of our customers have been coming to us asking for new graphics and new designs," explains Coleman. "This new printing press will allow us to deliver on those requests and will give us an edge over our competitors."

According to Coleman, the new press will also open up new markets for them, namely the dried fruits and lawn and garden markets. Coleman and his team have been speaking to customers about their new capabilities and have generated a lot of interest already. He anticipates that U.S. sales could experience as much as a 20 per cent increase next year as a result.

"You have to keep making that investment in technology," he says. "Technology and service - those are the two things that will open doors."

## Future Progress

At the helm of the Canadian operation is Peter Mattiuzzo, Vice President and General Manager. Together, with his senior management team, Mattiuzzo runs the day-to-day operation with little input from the Jim Pattison Group.

"The Pattison Group is a very decentralized organization," says Mattiuzzo, who adds that Pattison's philosophy is to put managers in place who can make good, long-term decisions. "Beyond our regularly scheduled quarterly meetings, the Pattison Group tends not to get involved unless we need advice or help."

This type of entrepreneurial arrangement appears to have worked well over the past few years, with Progressive Packaging posting steady financials. The fact that the company was operating at near capacity, however, is one that Mattiuzzo has been coping with for a number of years.

"In the mid-90s, the company went from a five-day-a-week operation to a seven-day-a-week operation," explains Mattiuzzo. "Since then, we've been operating close to capacity all the time and when you start hitting capacity and there's a hiccup, the customer is going to feel it. That's why we needed this new machine."



According to Mattiuzzo, Progressive Packaging still has some very good opportunities in both Canada and the U.S. but he sees the greater growth coming from the American market (mainly because of its population density). "We definitely want to increase our U.S. market share," he says, adding that although he doesn't discount opening a U.S. production facility at some point down the road, "The first step was getting the new printing equipment."

Today, with the new press in place and

Preparation of customer shipment - quality is checked at every process through the plant.

meeting expectations, Progressive Packaging has all of the necessary ingredients for continued success in both existing and new market sectors. Quality, service and technology have always been central to the company's core operating philosophy and in an age of increased competition, they've become even more so. ♦

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