

ROTARY

Foil and Embossing Supplement 2008

Label Impressions – **An Innovator of a ‘Greener’ Color**

By Kym Conis



From waste reduction and carbon neutralization to the simple act of recycling, few can deny that a breath of fresh air is sweeping across Corporate America ... and its color is unmistakably, irresistibly 'green'. No industry or company is exempt from environmental responsibility and sustainability, albeit overwhelming and, at times, confusing. And the challenge of going green, particularly in the Golden State of California where environmental laws and regulations are the most stringent in the nation, is no easy task. For Label Impressions, Inc., a label printer located in Orange, Calif., the journey has been one of awareness, education, and action – one small, but significant, step at a time.

Although green is a primary focus, the company's efforts as an educator, leader, and innovator in the label industry transcend its implementation of green initiatives. Continual evaluation of future trends, technologies, and lean business practices has strategically positioned the label printer to 'attack what will be' rather than 'react to the now' – an aggressive business model that has served the company well throughout its steady growth. From bold beginnings in top-quality foil stamping and high-definition flexography to the relentless pursuit of cold foil technology and eco-friendly printing, Label Impressions is on the cutting-edge of 'clean, lean, and green'.

“My father had a lot of integrity” – Jeff Salisbury

Ted Salisbury founded Label Impressions, Inc. after deciding to leave his employer of nearly 25 years (Cal Tape) to start a label venture with unlimited vision. “It became obvious to my father that the owners of Cal Tape had little interest in growing the business beyond its present volume,” explained

Jeff Salisbury, Ted's son and the owner and president of Label Impressions. With experience (as a shop foreman and press operator) and financial backing in place, Ted Salisbury opened the doors to Label Impressions in 1988 with a 3-color Allied Flexo Master, a camera to make his own film, and a 'hand-operated' rewind system (by the name of Ted). “My father had an incredible amount of integrity and refused to call on accounts from his past employer,” said Salisbury. “He started literally from scratch in a 1,000 square foot shop.”

As luck, or fate, would have it, Salisbury met a label broker with a clientele specializing in high-end health and beauty products. At the time, few label printers were foil stamping and Salisbury immediately identified a growing demand for the process. With some past experience in foil with his former employer, Salisbury purchased a Franklin foil stamping press and never looked back. Supplying companies such as Redken, Giorgio, Bijan, Caesars World (Las Vegas), and many others, the hot stamp business was growing faster than flexography. Foil manufacturers such as Maple Roll Leaf, Crown Roll Leaf, and API Foilmark all supplied Label Impressions with quality product and excellent service – key to the company's growth.

With a degree in production and operations management, Jeff Salisbury joined the Label Impressions team directly out of college. Spending the first seven years in the trenches, Salisbury did everything from pre-press and platemaking to running a press and making sales calls – often in the same day! With little experience in sales, no marketing budget,

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and no company brochure, Salisbury did what he, and the company, knew best – he sold foil. “I had a little baggie filled with gorgeous foil stamped labels, work that no one else could do.” And that’s all it took.

The company’s foil stamping capabilities, along with its business in the high-end cosmetics market, continued to grow, as did its offerings in high-quality printing. Today, from its 20,000-square-foot facility, Label Impressions offers water-based and UV flexo up to eight colors, screenprinting, eco-friendly printing, color matching, hot foil stamping (on- and off-line), embossing (photopolymer and steel-to-steel, rotary and flat), and cold foiling. Whether traditional or custom-shaped, tamper-evident, pin-fed and perforated, multi-part, or static cling, Label Impressions not only knows labels but, more significantly, can make them green.



“Attack what will be” rather than “react to the now” – Jeff Salisbury

For Label Impressions, reading the market, searching beyond current trends, and exploring new technologies has been paramount to supplying its customers with top-of-the-line product in such industries as health and beauty, nutraceuticals, cleaning products, industrial, food and beverage, and medical. Over the past 10 years, shifts from paper substrates to films challenged the company to find, and often customize, the right inks, coatings, and finishes. Early on, corona treatment on-press further enhanced the company’s ability to print on film, and custom-designed presses afforded it the ability to produce foil stamped images of the utmost intricacy. “Yes, we do much of our foil stamping in-line, but we continue to offer off-line foil stamping because that’s where we started and we’re very good at it,” stated Salisbury. “Off-line, we can achieve levels of extreme detail that no one else can through our expertise and custom-modified equipment.”

The cold foil process is a great example of a newer technology that caught Label Impressions’ attention years back. “I remember seeing cold foil at Labelexpo eight or so years ago. I came back to the plant excited about it,” recalled Salisbury. “But after meeting with vendors and doing some R&D, we decided the technology just wasn’t where it needed to be... yet.” Today, cold foiling is utilized on a significant portion of Label Impressions’ work. “About three years ago, we brought

in Rick Ybarra as our vice president of operations. His expertise in the cold foil process helped us to get up and running successfully,” said Salisbury. From registration and flexibility to lower overall cost, the cold foil process has its advantages.

However, Salisbury was quick to point out that applications for both the cold foil and hot foil stamping processes still exist. “Sometimes it just makes sense to use hot foil,” said Salisbury. “We can obtain extremely small type, as small as 2pt, in both positive and reverse print on the same label. We can do this on a clear substrate and it comes out beautifully, with crisp edges and no fill-in. Try achieving that with cold foil!”

Embracing new technologies is only half of the equation at Label Impressions; employing the right quality control (QC) processes to ensure the consistency, durability, and quality of those technologies is equally important. Striving for zero defects in its processes, the company operates under the philosophy that it’s much less costly to conduct thorough quality control before a job goes out than to reprint a job due to a customer rejection.



“Our rejection rate is less than .004 percent, and we have a stated goal this year to cut that in half,” stated Salisbury. With a full set of standard operating procedures and testing protocols, every job is put on the company’s Crockmeter and subjected to 50 rubs, per ASTM standards, as well as an alcohol and water rub test.

But perhaps the most important aspect of Label Impressions’ QC program is its built-in philosophy, permeating every aspect of company operations. “Our plant/equipment layout, for example, encourages constant communication between pressmen and finishers,” Salisbury explained. “We believe that testing and checking for quality is important but that it has to start with a quality mindset and constant, open communication throughout the plant.”

“Through education, we strive to empower our customers to make an eco-difference” – Jeff Morrow

As the first label printer in the U.S. to be both certified by the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) and carbon-neutral, Label Impressions has undertaken a huge commitment and responsibility to its customers, to its employees, and to the preservation and sustainability of the earth. When the company decided to ‘green up’ a couple of years ago, the certification process, the terminology, and the endeavor as a whole were overwhelming, to say the least. “We realized that to ‘green up’ our processes would be costly and possibly put us at risk financially,” recalled Jeff Morrow, vice president of sales and sustainability at Label Impressions. “This is still a cost-competitive business. Customers want and need a low cost.”

With this in mind, the company’s first step was to locate greener materials and bring those to its clients. Label Impressions is located in California, so it already operated with little to no volatile organic compounds, thanks to state regulations. Next, the company brought in eco-friendly materials such as tree-free papers, bio-plastics, and plant-based materials instead of petroleum-based. In doing this, Label Impressions was able to generate a profit, which in turn, allowed it to begin greening its processes. “Our first step was to reduce our carbon footprint and to offset our remaining

footprint,” explained Morrow. “We do this with a non-profit partner, Carbonfund.org. Our offset contributions help fund alternative energy projects and re-forestation here in the U.S.”

From the energy emitted by its presses and office equipment to the commuting miles its employees drive on their way to work, Label Impressions is carbon-neutral.

The company also helps its customers to ‘green up’ and carbon-offset their own products. “We can produce labels, tags, and packets carbon-neutral by assessing a run’s carbon footprint. Once assessed, our customer can make the corresponding offset contribution, and a ‘carbon-fund partner’ disclaimer can be placed on the label,” said Morrow. “This is important. They can build a story around this as well as choose the destination of their carbon-offset contribution, i.e. water conservation, solar energy, etc., based on their own eco-philosophy.” This benefits the customers, the conservation programs, and ultimately the earth – a ‘greener’ partnership between Label Impressions and its customers.



FSC certification on a product is a very big deal. “To give you an idea of how important this certification has become, people are actually stealing the FSC logo from the internet and putting it on their product,” stated Morrow. “We try to educate our customers that certifications can be bogus.” He further explained that verification is easy, quick, and can be checked by going to the FSC’s web site (www.fsc.org) and inputting the name or certification number on the product.

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The company has even gone as far as to develop its own trademarked, tree-free material that carries a carbon footprint that is a fraction of virgin and recycled paper. In the patent process, Label Impressions plans to continue in its partnership with Natural Source Printing of Orange, Calif. to develop more eco-friendly materials.

Initially, clients tend to be overwhelmed by the company's green initiatives, and to the whole concept of green in general. "But if we can give them the basic information, some knowledge about the terminology, then all of a sudden they are empowered to start to make an eco-difference," stated Morrow. "No need to be afraid; we can talk to them in layman's terms and get them started." After a little education, many of Label Impressions' clients embrace the process, intrigued by how they can get started on the path to green.

Label Impressions is ahead of many of its competitors and even suppliers just beginning the certification process. While the rest of the industry is catching up, Label Impressions is evaluating its next step and gearing up to attack. And as for those competitors who have chosen not to join the green movement, Morrow commented, "Competitors often chuckle at us. Going green requires a paradigm shift – one that most haven't been able to make. We often scoff at what we don't understand."

"It's not about what you do; it's about how you think" – Jeff Salisbury

Salisbury first started to think green a little over two years ago when his daughter, Shayna, was born. Complications were experienced at her birth and Shayna was in the neonatal intensive care unit for a week. "I had a lot of time to think and do some soul searching," said Salisbury, recalling that it happened to be Earth Week. When Shayna was readmitted to the hospital months later for major surgery, Salisbury decided to do something more rewarding, more fulfilling with his life. "After Shayna's recovery, I realized that I should stick with the label business (no pun intended) and do my part to make this a cleaner, greener planet for my daughter and her generation,"

stated Salisbury. In addition to volunteering at the hospital, Salisbury's focus has been on bringing greener materials and processes to his customers, vendors, and employees.

Label Impressions' 34 full-time employees have embraced the company's green initiatives, adopting green practices both in the workplace and at home. "It's not about what you do; it's about how you think," Salisbury explained. "If I can start a paradigm shift, they will go home and get their families excited." At work, the company has started to experiment with an eco-garden that will utilize compost from its own generated waste, both from materials such as compostable adhesives and label material to waste generated from the lunchroom. Additionally, the company has formed an 'eco-posse' whose job is to round up wasteful practices throughout the organization. "The entire team is involved, from production to pre-press to management. It's fun, important, and hopefully, makes them feel valued," said Salisbury.

From its efforts in green to becoming a more efficient operation, Label Impressions considers itself a training organization. "We're in this for the long haul and training is key to our long-term success," said Salisbury. Conducting training sessions every week, the company shuts down for a day every few months for company-wide lean manufacturing training. "This is expensive, but we believe that it pays off in employee loyalty and productivity. Even in lean times, we continue our training program," continued Salisbury. "The cool thing is that our green initiatives go hand-in-hand with our lean training: clean, lean, and green. It fits like a glove!"

While Label Impressions does not profess to be the greenest operation in the industry, it is the greenest resource in the U.S., with the largest offering of green materials and green information. Salisbury concluded, "We didn't get into this for a return on profit; it's a long-term commitment and it fits our business model." With still a long way to grow, Label Impressions' role as a green leader, educator, and innovator remains steadfast – truly a breath of fresh air. ■



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