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Sleeved milk hits home run

Since 1998, Shamrock Farms has added value to its dairy drinks with striking, shrink-sleeve labels from Osio Intl., whose imported gravure-printed products offer superior reproduction at a competitive cost.

Anne Marie Mohan, Senior Editor



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It was just 12 days before opening day at Phoenix's Bank One Ballpark with its new major league baseball team, the Arizona Diamondbacks, when local dairy Shamrock Farms, on tenterhooks, entrusted a disk containing artwork for a flashy new bottle label to supplier Osio Intl. (www.osiopack.com). Shamrock was aiming for a big splash on opening day with its new Dulce de Leche milk drink in an on-the-go package format featuring a photograph of Luis Gonzalez, the Diamondbacks' all-star left fielder, to commemorate its sponsorship of the team. A restaging of its popular single-serve milk drinks in gabletop cartons, the new 12-oz resealable, high-density polyethylene bottle would be introduced on that day, Shamrock hoped, decorated in a dazzling, shrink-sleeve label printed with a stunning, silver-metallic ink.

Eleven days later, the glossy, premium-printed labels arrived at Shamrock's Phoenix facility, ready for application to the new bottles, which debuted with the Diamondbacks the next day. The bottles were a big hit, scoring a home run for both Shamrock and its new label supplier, Osio.

For most converters, meeting a 12-day turnaround on a new gravure-printed label design for a first-time customer would be a fairly amazing feat. But what's even more remarkable about this story is that not only did Osio deliver the labels in less than two weeks without a hiccup, but it also did so while dealing with a gravure printer located halfway around the world. Sourced from South Korea, the striking polyvinyl chloride labels ushered in a new

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strategy for Shamrock Farms that transformed its dairy drinks from commodities to high-margin, value-added beverages.



An operator seams rolls of labels. According to Osio's Whipple, its South Korean suppliers operate in state-of-the-art plants and place a very high value on customer service.

Since Osio so dexterously met Shamrock's first curve ball five years ago, Shamrock has become one the converter's largest shrink-sleeve customers. Based on the success of its striking new design, as well as on positive feedback to an HDPE-bottled, single-serve chocolate milk introduced to the retail market in Arizona, the dairy expanded its on-the-go milk offerings to include regular and flavored milks, a Low Fat Café Mocha milk and coffee drink, specialty milks such as eggnog, and regular and flavored creams, in proprietary bottles from Consolidated Container Co. (www.cccllc.com) with 10-color shrink-sleeve labels from Osio.

"The new line was a great success with both the retailers and the consumers," recalls Wendy Patterson, director of product development for Shamrock. "The graphics popped off the shelf, and the milk was off and running in the beverage category in Arizona. The plastic bottles are so much more convenient, and consumers feel that the milk is colder and more appealing. The silver-metallic graphics enhance that feeling of ice-cold milk, which results in even more repeat sales and impulse purchases."

Shamrock's beverage and cream lines currently comprise 28 stockkeeping units—11 12-oz, two 16-oz, two 20-oz and 12 32-oz varieties—with new products and sizes continuously being developed. Local design firm Catapult Strategic Design (www.catapultu.com) creates label graphics for the beverage and cream products that "catch the eye of a consumer as they scan the dairy or impulse beverage section, while they effectively communicate the products' attributes and benefits, and relay.

Shamrock's brand image and messages," explains Patterson. According to Rick Whipple, vp of sales and marketing for Osio, Catapult has worked closely with Osio to maximize Shamrock's label designs to take advantage of the high-quality reproduction capabilities of gravure printing.

Agree Shamrock and Osio, the most challenging and unique designs produced for the dairy's drinks over the last five years were three labels bearing the likeness of Arizona Diamondback outfielder Luis Gonzales. Relates Whipple, "Printing the human figure on a shrink label that will distort presents many challenges. Fortunately we've got the software and expertise so that we can pre-distort the images so that when they shrink, they look exactly the way they should. Color control is also critical on this type of label. If you print facial tones, and they turn out too red or too green, the consumer is going to know."

Patterson adds, "His likeness was of extremely high picture quality, so he was easily identified. This feature certainly enhanced our sales and marketing efforts during the launch of these three new products."

When Shamrock began working with Osio, Patterson admits that of concern

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According to Osio's Whipple, its South Korean suppliers operate in state-of-the-art plants and place a very high value on customer service.

dealing with us, it's just like dealing with any other U.S. company," Whipple says. "The only thing that comes from overseas is the product, and we take care of all of the logistics."

were the leadtimes that might be required to accommodate the label supplier's use of overseas converters. Whipple confirms that this issue, as well as preconceived notions about the condition of Asian operations, can cause apprehension in potential customers. However, he points out, Osio's responsiveness and high-quality products soon allay their fears.

"We let our customers know that we are a domestic company, and in

Osio provides prepress services, including the creation of proofs and prototypes, from its Anaheim facility, where it has a dedicated graphics department. A "fairly intricate review process," according to Whipple, along with the resolution of any potential printability issues upfront ensures that the customers' artwork is ready for printing overseas.



In South Korea, Osio has established strong relationships with six converters, each with its own specialty, to produce a range of film products, including shrink sleeves, roll-fed labels and pouches and cold-seal products, among others. Its shrink-sleeve supplier, **Kyung Won Chemical** (www.kwc-korea.com), is also the majority shareholder in a joint business between KWC and Osio, a film manufacturing firm called **Wedus Chemical** (www.weduschemical.co.kr) that creates the PVC film for Osio's labels.

According to Whipple, the advantages of South Korean-made gravure-printed products are many. "The first one is that there is a huge gravure printing industry

in Korea. There are 300 gravure printers just in the suburbs of Seoul," he says. "There is a huge skilled labor force to draw from, and they've got services to support that industry, so there is a very competitive situation with prepress film and gravure cylinders."

As opposed to the typical five-week turnaround time required for gravure cylinder engraving in the U.S., Whipple says that Osio can have its cylinders made in as little as two days, at approximately one-third the cost. "So," he says, "we start off with about a four-and-a-half-week head start." And, while Osio's standard delivery policy is seven to eight weeks on a new item from art approval to delivery, with one week less on repeat items, it has devised many ways to reduce that time frame to alleviate its customers' concerns.

Among them, having partial shipments of completed product flown from South Korea, stocking warehouses of inventory near its customers' plants and others. Relates Patterson, "Osio has been extremely responsive in meeting our needs and, when needed, has jumped through hoops to meet our aggressive timelines. We work closely with Osio to manage our inventory to avoid issues with either too many or too few labels."

For Shamrock, the fact that its gravure-printed labels are imported is far less important than the impact these labels have had on their business. "Full-body shrink sleeves provide a brand like Shamrock Farms a lot of graphic real estate on which to communicate our product and brand positions," says Patterson. "The quality of the gravure printing provides us even more latitude with our graphics, in that small print is extremely legible, photo-real images can be used, and the number and types of colors that can be used is amazing. We have utilized metallic colors, and they really pop off the shelf in the brightly illuminated dairy case.

"Once we had converted our on-the-go milk business to the new bottles with high-resolution graphics, we saw a real increase in our business," she continues. "From there we saw an opportunity for growth by investing in ESL [Extended Shelf Life] technology so we could expand our sales geography. The ESL technology came with higher costs, so we went looking for a label supplier that could offer us the best price for the high-quality sleeves we had had success with. Osio fit the bill in both aspects, and we have been a satisfied customers ever since."

More information is available:

Osio Intl., 714/808-9562. www.osiopack.com Circle No. 210.

Catapult Strategic Design, 602/381-0304. www.catapultu.com Circle No. 211.

Consolidated Container Co. 678/742-4600. www.cccllc.com

Kyung Won Chemical Co., Ltd., 82-31-945-7900. www.kwc-korea.com

Wedus Chemical Co., Ltd., 82-31-769-8511. www.weduschemical.co.kr

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