

FLEXO



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LABELS: LIVING LARGE



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LabelExpo Preview

**Paragon of
Excellence**

**General Mills &
FIRST**



Paragon Label has won some 20 FTA Excellence in Flexography awards in the past four years.

Paragon of Success

Dedication to Excellence Yields Award-Winning Work

Launching into new heights—it is a regular occurrence at Paragon Label, Petaluma, CA. It's been happening for nearly 20 years, and California vintners have taken and continue to take notice. This FTA member's humble beginnings, rapid growth and increasing recognition parallel that of the print process that has brought it where it is today: flexography. In addition, its personnel's mastery of the process and willingness to at least attempt any and all jobs has led Paragon to win some 20 awards in four years.

Paragon Label was launched in 1999 as a division of Mrs. Grossman's Paper Co., which had been in business for 20 years. Paragon specializes in high-end custom printing, while Mrs. Grossman's produces stickers for the retail industry. Both companies share an 110,000 square foot building, which houses around 70 employees for Mrs. Grossman's and 25 for Paragon. The two companies share seven flexo presses which consist of two Mark Andy 2200 7in. presses, one Mark Andy 4150 10in. press, a 10in. Mark Andy Scout, a 13in. Mark Andy 2200, a 10in. Mark Andy 2200, and a Mark Andy LP3000 13in. press. There is also a HP4500 Indigo on site; along with two Iwasaki units that are used for offline die cutting, foiling, and embossing. The last piece of important equipment is its "one of a kind" laser die cutting machine.

When Paragon started, almost one decade ago, it immediately went after the high-quality label business, since Mrs. Grossman's specialized in intricate and difficult work. Located in the heart of the California wine country, Paragon naturally targeted wineries and gourmet food companies. It was a very difficult start since the company had to battle the image of printing only "kids' stickers" and that it was entering into an industry that typically works exclusively with offset. Over the years, it has surmounted both obstacles and has added hundreds of wineries to its customer list. The company continues to focus on premium labels, which may demand higher prices because of the intense production costs.

METHODICAL APPROACH

In order for Paragon to meet the demands of discerning clients who expect nothing but the best, the company has taken labels from being a simple commodity to a fine art, placing extreme emphasis on quality, delivery, and customer service. Keeping in mind that a label could end up on a wine that is selling for more than \$100 a bottle, each job must be the epitome of perfection. Paragon's sales and production team are obsessed with quality, which means that just being good is not good enough. Quality control is paramount, there can be no blem-

ishes on any label and when a promise is made to a customer, it is committed 100 percent. This demand usually leads to slower press speeds, longer setups, and the willingness to perform constant R&D as different designs come in. Wineries love to push the limits of printing.

Paragon follows methodical and rigid procedures to ensure that its customers' labels are always of the highest quality. This requires different steps from the time a label is run all the way through subsequent re-runs. In fact, it is very rare that a re-run is a simple repeat. Usually the labels will change vintage dates, which require new plates for every run.

On most first-time runs, management encourages a press check with either the customer or its graphic designer. This eliminates any guesswork and ensures that the final label is exactly what the customer envisioned. In some cases, press operators are matching previously printed samples that were produced via offset or from another flexo printer, a challenge that usually requires an in-house press check to guarantee customer satisfaction. Once a standard is set and the label is signed off for approval, a specification card will be written that includes information on the substrate, anilox rolls, inks/varnishes, plate material types and even the stickyback used by the press operator. A customer-signed master sample, is then attached. The spec card also lists what to watch for, such as color or any special processes and materials that were used to make the job run more efficiently. This card is filed and saved and referenced every time the label prints or until the specs change.

Once the job is ready to run, stock and colors will be checked and the copy and text will again be proofread against the proof signed by the client. The die cut will also be checked for fit and any scoring of the liner. If the liner is scored too deep, it can cause label applications issues on the bottling line. Then a rub test will be performed. The rub test will be used throughout the run to make sure that the label is able to withstand packaging

and shipping, so it looks as good on the shelf as it does fresh off of the press. The finished label will then be checked by either the general manager or lead press operator, who will use a precise checklist to ensure that every quality aspect has been checked.

Apart from general print quality, wineries also are very time-sensitive when it comes to labels. In almost all cases, the wineries are working with mobile or fixed bottling lines that are constantly booked and heavily staffed. On top of that, the wine is placed in storage tanks during bottling, where there is a small and very precise window of time when the wine can be bottled. This allows for no missed days or huge damages and expenses. Running shiners (filling the bottles and labeling them afterwards) can cost thousands of dollars and the wineries are more than willing to pass that cost onto their label producers. To deal with this variable, Paragon has to be flexible with its production schedule and willing to work closely with its customers, so they get the labels they want in a timely, cost-effective manner.

Another huge area of concern to Paragon's customers is the physical characteristics of the label. Wineries love foil stamping, embossing and un-coated and specialty stocks with specific adhesives and durable liners that can stand high-speed application. This means no stock substitutions and a constant monitoring of the stocks that come in from their suppliers. Many wine labels have to withstand immersion in ice buckets, which causes



Paragon's 110,000 square ft. Petaluma, CA corporate headquarters and printing plant (shared with Mrs. Grossman's).



FTA Narrow Web Best of Show 2006: Paragon Label



a whole different set of challenges, that need to be addressed (cold water and paper are not the ideal match). Lastly, the labels need to be extremely scuff resistant, so special attention is needed to make sure that the labels will not scuff as they jiggle around in the abrasive boxes during shipping.

Many wineries are very environmentally conscious. They are seriously involved in organic and sustainable practices and are requesting that their suppliers also take steps to protect our environment. Fortunately, Paragon has been on the cutting edge of environmental responsibility from the start. All printing waste (setup and waste matrix) is recycled. Its wastewater is filtered in the facility, so that all heavy metals and pigments are removed from the water. The company's wastewater is constantly tested by independent labs and always comes back cleaner than the tap water coming into the building. Paragon also practices energy conservation, which has won awards and accolades from the local energy supplier. As an extra special environmental benefit, the firm offers a program to its customers allowing them to return waste liner to Paragon to be recycled, free of charge.

All of these extreme demands make Paragon better at what it does. This is shown by the many awards it has won and the many label orders that it has taken away from offset houses. Paragon must not only excel at traditional flexography, but also must be able to offer the best when it comes to foiling, embossing, and rotary screen printing. In many cases, the company's customers are selling their product via the label (market tests have shown that 80 percent of first time wine purchases are made because of the label) and are constantly experimenting with any technique or design that will grab the consumer's attention. The needs of the customers have pushed Paragon to constantly improve and push the limits of what flexo can do.

Paragon is very fortunate to have a unique offline laser machine that allows for extreme die cuts on the interior and exterior of a label. The laser cutter is a proprietary machine that is giving Paragon a unique niche in the wine label field. The laser process



A gold-winning label in FTA's 2008 awards competition, submitted by Paragon Label.

makes a label stand out and is quickly grabbing the attention of some of the finest wineries in the country. By cutting out an interior design on the label, it gives the wine bottle a whole new added texture and dimension. This process is slow and fairly expensive, but wineries are seeing the "shelf appeal" that the laser cut label adds, and are placing these unique labels on their higher end wines. As more and more laser cut labels get out on the shelf, Paragon is seeing a swell of interest in the process. Prestigious design firms are also catching onto the process and are starting to design labels that promise to be monumental to the industry.

AWARD-WORTHY PROCESS

Paragon is very proud that its work has been honored with numerous FTA Excellence in Flexography awards. The company's first year in the competition was 2004. Since then, it has won 20 awards, including five medals in 2006 and seven in 2008. The company won Best of Show in 2006, a significant achievement. Gary Cane, Paragon's general manager, commented, "I enter this competition for several reasons; it adds credibility to our operation, it's a valuable tool for sales, and it's a huge morale booster for the production team. I am very fortunate to have a great team of very talented pressmen."

Cane continued, "We are dedicated to Mark Andy presses and are winning major awards on machines that are not only American made, but cost about half as much as many 'fancier' presses. This proves that it's the personnel that make the difference, not just the equipment."

Approximately 20 labels are submitted for competition every year. Cane makes sure that all of the pressmen are aware of this and that they note any jobs that are unusual or challenging. Before it is time to enter the competition, Cane will get together with his team and narrow down what labels are truly the best, and then submit them to FTA.

As for the present and near future, the company plans on investing more and more into the latest technologies while keeping in mind that the best equipment can only succeed with the best personnel running it. Its purchase of a Mark Andy LP3000 reflects

PLANTS & PROCESSES

the firm's belief that combination presses are the future. Within the next two years, Paragon plans on replacing a few of its older presses with either LP3000 or XP5000 presses. It is also looking into digital prepress equipment and will continue to expand into digital printing, but the focus of Paragon will remain flexography; that is where the company excels and where it wants to be.

"All the changes that have occurred in flexographic print technology have taken Paragon to places that we simply could not have dreamed of back when we started in 1999," said Jason Grossman, president. "Since then we have seen UV and water-based ink dramatically improve. High-speed rotary screen has been added to our capabilities, which is being used for high-build varnishes and opaque whites. Dies have become more intricate and magnetic tooling is improving phenomenally. Substrates and foils are broadening and improving. The versatility of combination presses allows us to move between water-based and UV inks from station to station and also place foil and rotary screen wherever we please.

"Screen counts are getting higher, dot gain is decreasing, and we are constantly finding new tricks and techniques, which launch us to new heights on a yearly basis. For a printing process, flexo is on a change rate that rivals computer technology, while the other processes are fairly stagnant. It's thrilling to offer a printing process that is constantly changing and growing at such a quick rate."

Grossman went on to say, "Flexo is now becoming a must for anyone who wants to be in the wine label market. Many printers who once only worked with offset equipment are being forced to add flexo presses. The speeds and various other cost savings are requiring them to take this technology seriously or risk los-

ing business to us 'flexo guys.' As for Paragon, we are going to stick to flexo, since we have seen it grow so much over the past 10 years and see it getting even better. As we continually inch up on the line screen counts and become better and better at laying ink down on uncoated stock, we are simply doing what

the offset guys are doing, but we're doing it faster and cheaper and, in many cases, better. Everyone from designers to QA people at the wineries are noting that flexo has come a long way and no longer has a 'scarlet letter' attached to it."

TEAM SPIRIT

Grossman and Cane believe that what makes Paragon special is the team of talented people who make up the company. By valuing everyone's opinion and tackling tough new projects as a complete team, the company is able to produce exquisite labels. Grossman stated that he and Cane make "one awesome team, as both of us have strengths and weaknesses that truly complement each other." Cane added, "Throughout the day, we are constantly bouncing ideas off of each other and coming up with solutions for any challenge that is thrown our way."

This problem-solving spirit travels down the ladder and is followed

by all of the Paragon employees. One of the company's founding principles is not to say "no" until you have at least tried. "There are many times that we have surprised not only our customers, but everyone in our own company with our focus, dedication, ingenuity and teamwork," said Grossman. "In the past 10 years, we've realized a dream and have become one of the most, if not the most, respected and sought-after label printers in Sonoma County. We started out like the little engine that could and suddenly discovered not only that we could, but also that we would. And we did." ■



Jason and his mother, legendary sticker designer Andrea Grossman, run Paragon and Mrs. Grossman's side by side—with a little help from their canines.



Jason Grossman, Gary Cane and Jeff X at a press check.

**Awards
for
Best Flexographic Printing
in nationwide competitions**

(Wine Labels)

2005

Foil Stamping and Embossing Association
Gold, 2 ~ Silver, 1

Flexographic Trade Association (FTA)
Gold, 2 ~ Silver, 1

2006

Foil Stamping and Embossing Association
Bronze, 1

FTA – **Best of Show** (Coppola Rosso Classic)
Gold, 1 ~ Silver, 2 ~ Bronze, 1

2007

FTA
Silver, 1 ~ Bronze, 2

2008

FTA
Gold, 2 ~ Silver, 2 ~ Bronze, 3