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Sticks to Flexo

Loyal to Mark Andy and the flexo process, Paragon Label has grown far beyond its "sticker" roots to produce high quality wine labels for upscale brands.

By Edward Boyle, Contributing Editor



► Converter Info ◀

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Jason Grossman, president of Paragon Label Co., laughingly describes his custom wine label converting operation as "a very bizarre label company." After all, how many label companies allow their employees to bring their dogs to work, give tours to more than 50,000 visitors a year, and are so literally transparent that only a glass partition separates those tours from its 110,000-sq-ft production facility?

True, most visitors actually are attracted by the allure of

Paragon's parent company, Mrs. Grossman's Paper Co., which pioneered the decorative sticker industry 30 years ago and shares the converting facility. Still, Paragon's reliance on ultraviolet flexographic printing technology to meet the demands of the quality-conscious wine industry, traditionally served by offset, does qualify the converter as an atypical label supplier.

"Printing wine labels is probably taking flexo to its all-time greatest heights,"

suggests Grossman, noting Paragon won the Best of Show Award in the Flexographic Technical Assn.'s 2006 Excellence in Flexography Awards competition. "We're competing against offset printing all the time. A lot of our competitors offer flexo and waterless offset, but from day one we stuck with flexo. It's kind of fun to watch flexo quickly eroding that offset market share and hearing some of the offset people discussing how they're going to go to flexo from now on."

Grossman explains Paragon began producing upscale wine labels on flexo presses because Mrs. Grossman's used the technology to produce its hugely popular stickers before his subsidiary was established in 1998. While he was confident at the time Paragon could match the quality of offset, convincing his potential customers was far more difficult than delivering the product itself.

"It was a *huge* obstacle," Grossman says with a laugh, "especially when you're trying to sell wine labels and all you have are sticker samples to show! All of our competitors said, 'Oh, they print stickers. They're not in the label industry.'"

Well, no one can argue they aren't in the label industry now. Paragon has grown to become one of the West Coast's premiere wine label converters.

Loyal Press Buyer

Since installing its first 7-in., ten-color Mark Andy 2200, the company has added six more Mark Andy presses: a 13-in. 2200 with eight print stations, six die-cut stations, and one sheeter/perforating station; a 13-in. LP3000 with ten print stations, three die-cutting stations, and a sheeting station; a 10-in. 2200 with ten print stations; a 10-in. 4150 with nine print stations; a 7-in. 2200 with eight print stations; and a 10-in. Scout with six print stations.

Other Paragon presses include a 10-in. HP Indigo ws4500 web-fed digital press, a 10-in. three-station Iwasaki TR-350 hot stamp/embossing press, and a 10-in., three-station Iwasaki TR-250 hot stamp/embossing press.

The company also operates two 13-in. Rotoflex rewinders; two 10-in. P.I.C. rewinders; and a 16-in. Gallus off-line sheeter. Its platemaking equipment includes an OLEC OV-33 high-definition exposure unit, a Kelleigh 270 plate processor washout system, and a Kelleigh 230 exposure unit.

Paragon Label is host to 50,000 visitors each year attracted by the decorative stickers produced by Mrs. Grossman's.



Paragon Label and Mrs. Grossman's are run by Jason Grossman, his mother and legendary sticker designer Andrea Grossman, and a few helpful canines.

To enhance the unique details of its wine labels, Paragon also operates a Lasercraft Laserweb (no longer manufactured) die-cutting system that can engrave intricate patterns

into individual labels with maximum widths of 6.5x14 in. at 8 fpm. "It can almost make a label look like lace," explains Grossman. "That's getting a lot of interest because it's a totally different look for a label."

Grossman says the company's two newest presses, the Mark Andy LP3000 UV flexo and HP ws4500 digital, have enhanced quality and delivery times on both short and long runs. The digital press, installed in October 2007, can meet the demand for high quality and short runs required by many smaller winemakers.

Paragon runs the LP3000 at 300–350 fpm. Grossman adds that with its combination UV/screen capabilities and its ability to print on films, foils, and other sometimes-difficult materials, "the LP3000's got huge capabilities" for different quality labels.

"I just love the Mark Andy," says Grossman. "It's great having seven of the same brand in here. We get better service, the parts are here in the United States, and my in-house mechanics know Mark Andys inside and out, so there's no downtime. I didn't see any reason to go to a foreign press."

Grossman admits even with that arsenal of equipment, "There is some stuff, like really tricky uncoated stock, that is still a challenge for us, but when it comes to quality, we're there. We're constantly chasing our competition—and beating



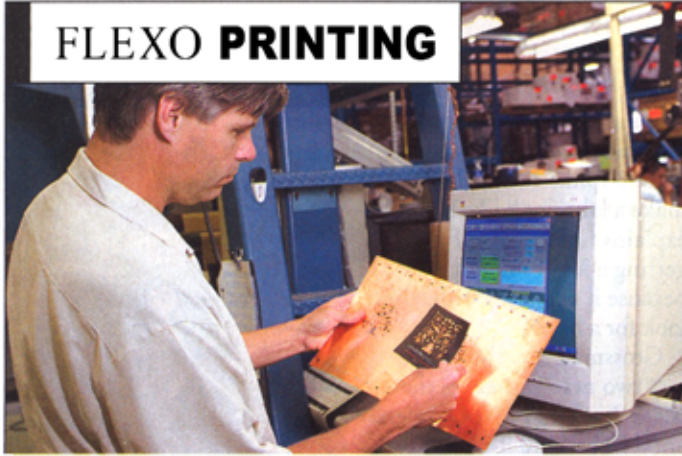
Paragon won a Bronze Medal in the Flexographic Technical Assn. 2008 Excellence in Flexography Awards competition for B.R. Cohn's Doobie Brothers North Coast Red Wine label.

Disloyal Wine Drinkers

Jason Grossman, president of Paragon Labels, says surveys show 80% of wine sales are impulse buys, "so the wine industry has a huge need for a good label." For example, customers may go into a store looking for "a Zinfandel" but have little brand loyalty. Unless they've tasted a particular vintage or got a recommendation, "it's the label that grabs their attention. Most of it basically comes down to 'Does that label appeal to you?' If it does, you're probably going to grab that bottle of wine."

"It's a proven fact the label is a huge part of the buying decision, and wine buyers are one of the most fickle group of buyers out there anyway," Grossman says. "Out of all the categories in the supermarkets, wine has the least loyal customers. It's not that price-conscious; it's not that brand loyal. They're simply looking for something new."

FLEXO PRINTING



◀ Jason Grossman at a press check for a laser-cut label produced on the Laserweb.

them. Some of our competitors who only did offset and kept slamming flexo all have flexo presses now—and I still don't have an offset press!"

Timing Is Everything

Two of Paragon's biggest selling points over its offset competitors are cost and delivery times. Grossman says, "We are faster and less expensive than offset printing, except for tooling costs, which usually are

cheaper for offset labels. When you get into embossing and foiling," he admits, "that can get really expensive in-line, but that's the only cost competition we get from offset."

Grossman says fast and reliable delivery times also have been critical to Paragon's success and its ability to capture a growing share of the wine label market. He notes many smaller wineries, which comprise a significant percentage

of the Northern California and national winemakers, don't have their own bottling lines. Consequently they have to ship their finished product to another winery or rely on a "mobile" bottler that comes to their site to bottle the wine. "Then they've got a date they can't move around," explains Grossman, "so they've got to have the labels on that date or before, or there's going to be a big consequence for the winery and for us as a printer. So service is huge."

Of course, service is irrelevant if the quality isn't there, says Grossman. And the winemakers are finding both service and quality at Paragon Label. PFFC

Contributing Editor Edward Boyle, based in Reading, PA, has covered the converting industry for more than 24 years. Contact him at EJB Communications; 610-670-4680; ejbcomm@aol.com.

▶ Supplier Info ◀

▶ **Mark Andy Inc.** |
www.markandy.com

PFFC-ASAP 305

▶ **HP Indigo** |
www.hp.com

PFFC-ASAP 306

▶ **Iwasaki** |
www.itk-iii.co.jp

PFFC-ASAP 307

▶ **Rotoflex Intl.** |
www.rotoflex.com

PFFC-ASAP 308

▶ **P.I.C. Industries** |
www.picindustries.net

PFFC-ASAP 309

▶ **Gallus** |
www.gallus.org

PFFC-ASAP 310

▶ **OLEC Corp.** |
www.olec.com

PFFC-ASAP 311

▶ **Kelleigh USA** |
www.kelleighusa.com

PFFC-ASAP 312

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