

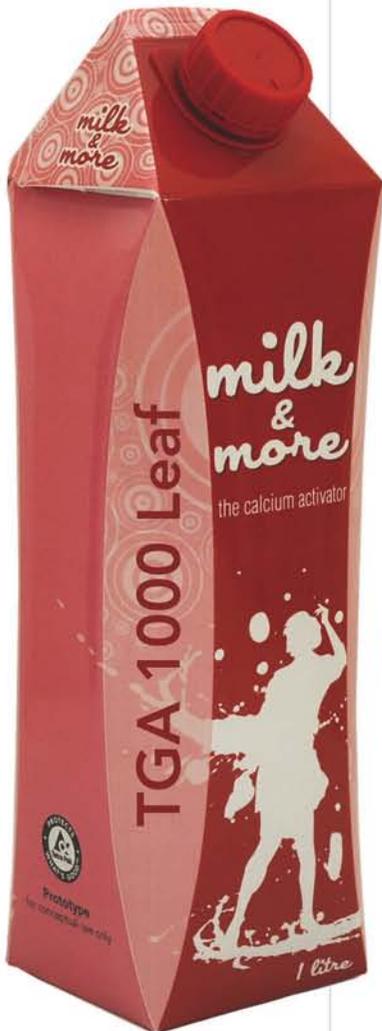
Keeping Ahead of the Curve

As beverage market segments blur, packaging machinery manufacturers provide the edge.

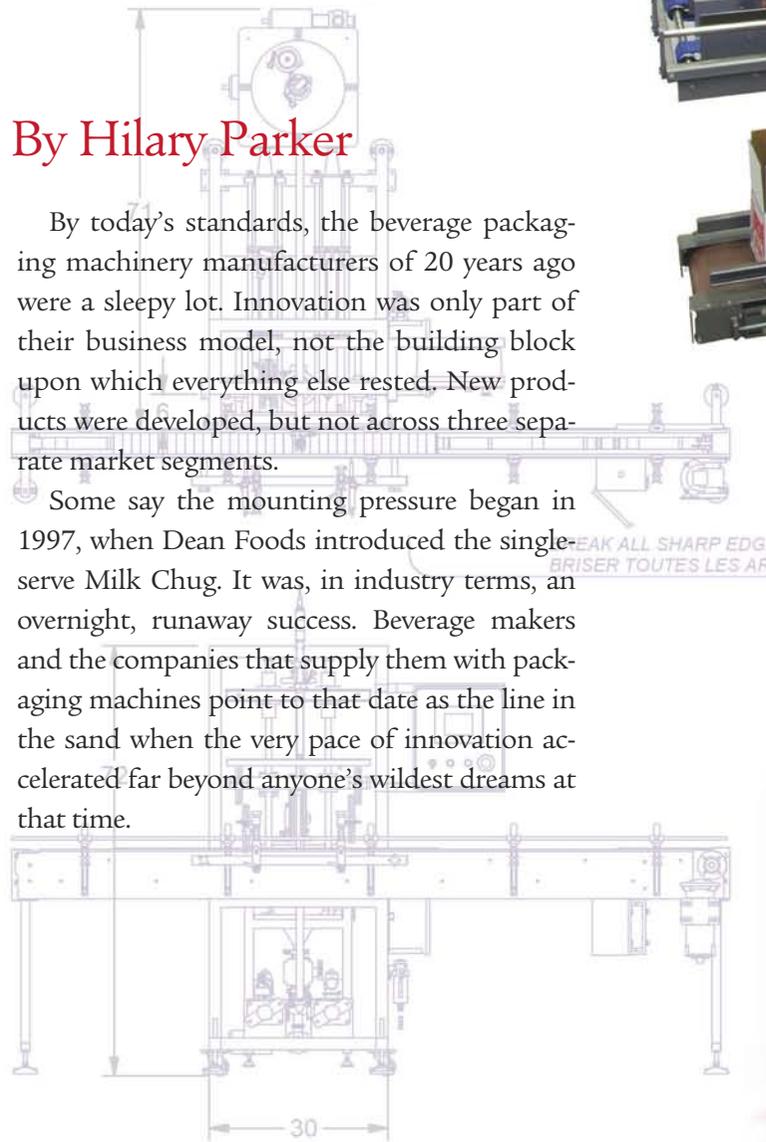
By Hilary Parker

By today's standards, the beverage packaging machinery manufacturers of 20 years ago were a sleepy lot. Innovation was only part of their business model, not the building block upon which everything else rested. New products were developed, but not across three separate market segments.

Some say the mounting pressure began in 1997, when Dean Foods introduced the single-serve Milk Chug. It was, in industry terms, an overnight, runaway success. Beverage makers and the companies that supply them with packaging machines point to that date as the line in the sand when the very pace of innovation accelerated far beyond anyone's wildest dreams at that time.



The Tetra Evero is the first aseptic carton bottle for white milk.



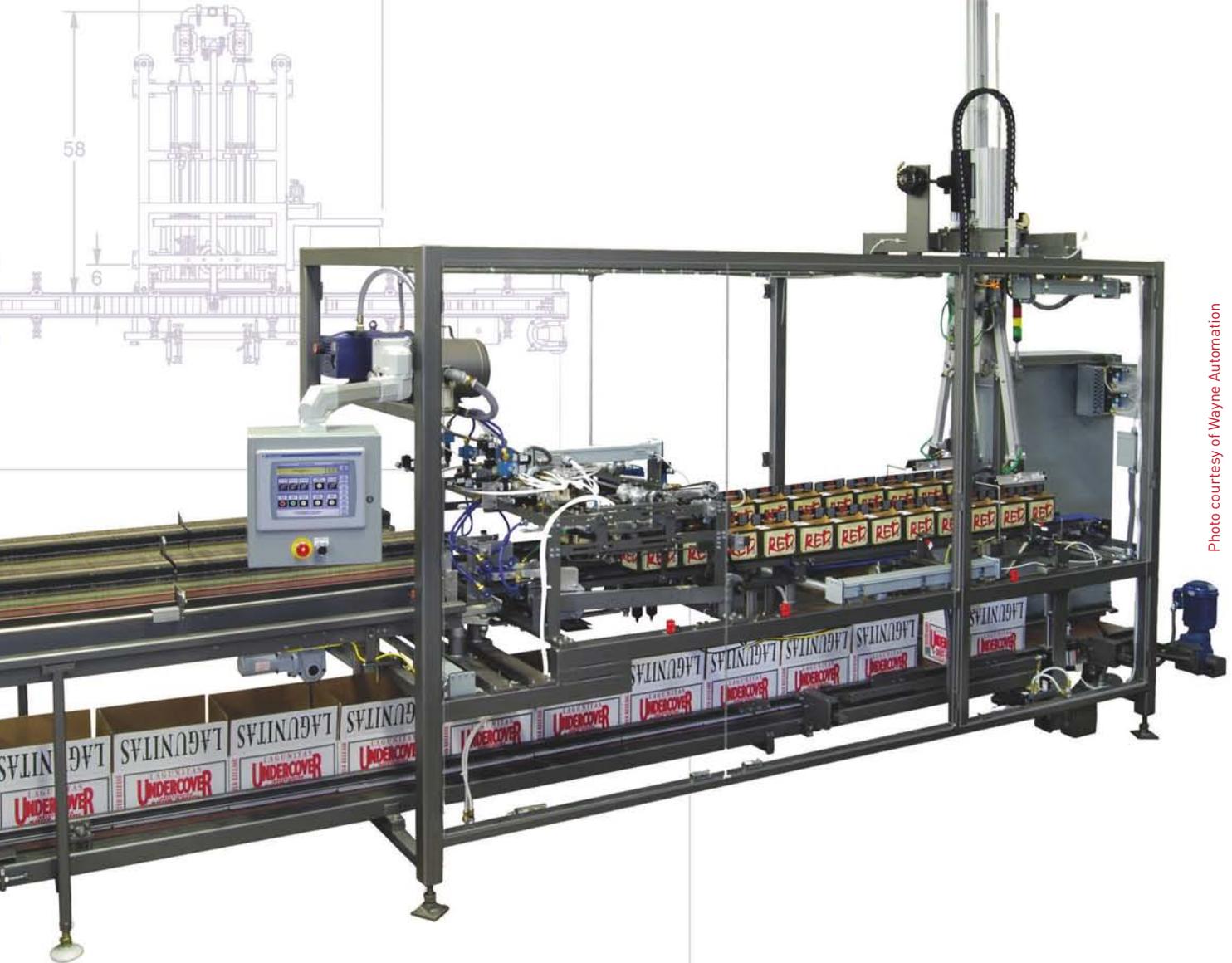
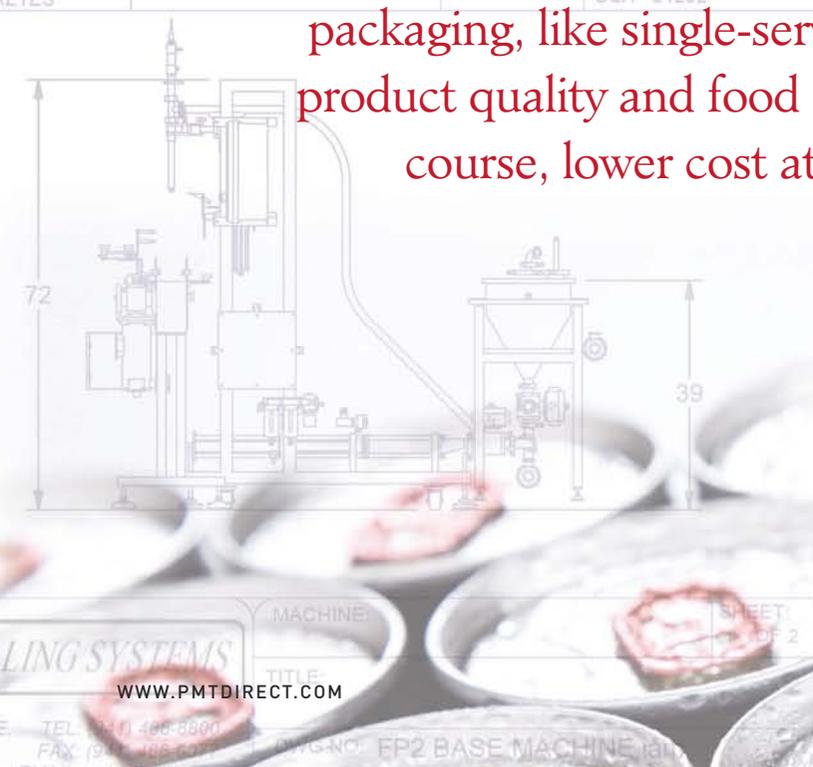


Photo courtesy of Wayne Automation

“Consumers are looking for convenience of use in packaging, like single-serve, plus high standards in product quality and food safety procedures, and, of course, lower cost at the supermarket.”

—Fred Beer
Westfalia Technologies



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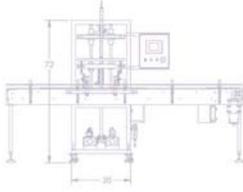


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As beverage market segments began to run together and packaging became as much a part of the product’s appeal as the product itself, beverage processors increasingly relied on packaging machinery manufacturers to bring their ideas to the table. Today, the sharp lines between beverage categories are blurred beyond recognition. Processors are very comfortable with abandoning the “either/or” approach to their work in favor of the “both/and” model. That means processing and packaging equipment manufacturers must work to stay ahead of not only their competition, but also ahead of their customers.

The reason is simple. Those customers are trying to stay ahead of consumers, and consumers want it all.

Fred Beer, president, Westfalia DEAM Systems, Westfalia Technologies Inc., York, Pa., says his company sees a continuous rise in demand for sustainable and innovative packaging, as well as a trend toward more retail-ready packaging.

“Consumers are looking for convenience of use in packaging, like single-serve, plus high standards in product quality and food safety procedures and, of course, lower cost at the supermarket,” Beer says.

Other industry leaders agree that cost remains of great concern to their customers.

“In today’s economy, one of the primary goals of our customers is cost containment,” says Harry Dudley, vice president of sales and marketing for Wayne Automation Corp., Norristown, Pa. Wayne Automation strives to provide packaging machinery that will enable customers to lower their manufacturing costs so they can pass on the savings to

the consumer, adds Dudley.

“The most significant trend Wayne Automation has experienced within the beverage industry is the movement of manufacturers to take advantage of the cost savings of buying their containers in bulk and packaging them in their own facility, thereby allowing them to form their own box shops,” Dudley says. “Previously, all of our beer, wine and liquor customers were buying their bottles in reshippers from glass container providers. A reshipper constitutes a formed case

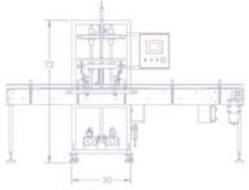


Westfalia’s Dual Drop Caser for multiple size products provides customer flexibility.

stuffed with partitions or six-pack carriers and empty bottles. These reshippers arrive at the packaging facility where the bottles are removed, filled with beverage product, labeled and repacked in the original cases.

“The problems with this practice are numerous,” he says, explaining they include higher-cost glass bottles, higher transportation costs, more factory floor space devoted to cases and a lack of flexibility to change product mix. “By bringing a case erector, partition inserter, basket carrier erector/inserter and possibly a case sealer into the bottling plant and creating an in-house box shop, most disadvantages of reshippers are alleviated.”

But cost savings aren’t any good if the packages are ugly, don’t perform well or have bad green karma, others note. ▶



GREEN BUT HIGH-QUALITY, FLEXIBLE YET AFFORDABLE

“We are seeing a great deal of activity across the entire beverage spectrum,” says Matthew Taylor, national accounts

manager, beverage, Polypack Inc., Pinellas Park, Fla. “Water, spirits, beer and soft drink producers and packers all have shown interest in the economical and visually-pleasing packaging options shrink film offers. Our shrink wrap packaging



Different configurations of Teledyne TapTone’s leak and pressure inspection systems provide coverage for the newest package shapes.

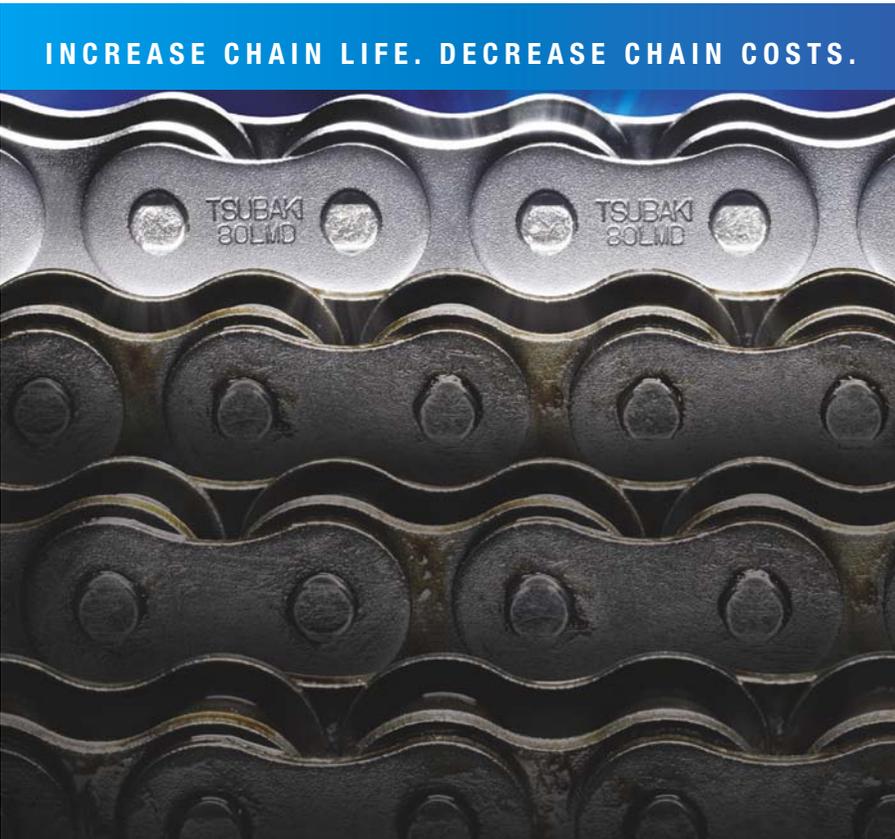
can be produced at tremendous savings over more traditional packaging methods. Having our in-house sister company, FilmSource International, allows us to offer a start-to-finish packaging solution that excites our customers and they appreciate our ability to make the transition to new methods easier.

“We find that end users are asking for two things: value and lean/green solutions. Value is achieved by giving producers the ability to save money on packaging and remain competitive in this price-sensitive market. Being ‘lean and green’ is having a package that is easily recycled should the end user choose to do so or create very little waste should they be unable to.”

But how light can packagers go?

Melissa Rossi, director of marketing for several divisions of Teledyne Technologies Inc., North Falmouth, Mass., says Teledyne sees several ongoing movements in the industry, including reducing packaging’s environmental impact and manufacturing costs by moving to lighter weight containers.

“Many manufacturers are also mov-



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ing away from metal and switching to more flexible, less expensive packaging,” Rossi notes. “These new, lightweight containers present special inspection challenges. Teledyne TapTone manufactures some of the most sensitive inspection equipment available for leak, pressure and fill level detection for plastic and metal containers.”

“The latest trend and general shift to environmentally-friendly containers—which means going from heavy, rigid containers to lightweight or flexible packaging and pouches—has an impact on stretch wrapping equipment,” says Priscille Tremblay, sales director, Wulftec International, Que., Canada. “The two main reasons driving this trend are the reduction of the packaging material, including the container itself, which directly impacts positively the bottom line and environmental consciousness. While this trend is going on, stretch wrapper manufacturers must maintain the load integrity but at the same time reduce the stress on the package to avoid deformation.

Wulftec’s FAST feeding system allows the stretch film to be delivered to the product with less tension and post-stretch without compromising the load integrity. While this technology is the answer to the environmentally-friendly container, it also reduces stretch film consumption and uses each type of stretch film to its top performance, therefore increasing load integrity.

And it can’t just be green—it has to be green and single-serve and convenient to take on the go, says Suley Muratoglu, vice president of marketing and product development, Tetra Pak, which is headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland.

“Tetra Pak cartons allow brands to offer sustainable and convenient food and beverage options, which are highly in demand nowadays,” says Muratoglu. “The market, demographics and consumer demands are changing dramatically in the United States. Single- and two-person

households now comprise 65 percent of all American households, according to the 2010 Census, and Americans are consuming more on-the-go than they did before. As consumers continue to lead busy lives away from home, both in their

professional and leisure time, smaller portions have become an important new sector of growth in the beverage industry, particularly in the dairy and juice aisle. Smaller portions also respond to the new consumers—the Millennials—and their

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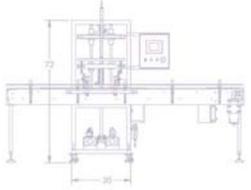


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need for diversification and willingness to try different products and flavors.”

Food manufacturers and retailers are looking into products that can respond to these right-sizing and on-the-go trends, and Tetra Pak cartons are well positioned to do so, Muratoglu adds.

“Some of the recent additions to the Tetra Pak portfolio of packages like Tetra Brik Aseptic Edge, Tetra Gemina Aseptic and Tetra Evero Aseptic respond to those, as well as offer an opportunity for brands to bring innovation to the shelf by using shelf-stable cartons that protect the food inside without the need for added preservatives,” he says.

The company continues to see a growing demand from consumers for environmentally-sound products, Muratoglu adds.

“Tetra Pak cartons offer not only packaging that is recyclable but—since Tetra Pak cartons are made mainly from paper, a renewable resource—lightweight and compact. They offer a good overall environmental footprint,” Muratoglu says. “Our cartons are already 70 percent on average paper, and the first ever use of plant-based polyethylene cap in carton packaging (launched last year) further strengthens Tetra Pak’s renewability credentials. Over time, as the company increasingly adopts plant-based plastics, it expects to be able to offer a carton range that is 100 percent renewable.”

Rossi says Teledyne also is working to accommodate the needs of a more on-the-go consumer.

“From the consumer side, there has been an evolution toward convenience packaging for people on the go,” she notes. “The packaging industry has responded with single-serve package designs that keep pace with our busy lives. These small containers require special handling and sensitive test methodologies, which TapTone package inspection equipment offers.”

For example, Rossi says, most of Tele-

dyne’s leak and pressure inspection systems now offer special low-profile configurations to handle the small, single-serve containers. The company also has introduced new inspection methods that test from the top, rather than the sides, of the container to accommodate very small containers with flexible foil and plastic seals.

“An excellent example is our new TDLC sensor that is designed for leak in-

aseptic filling is a highly sanitary process, products used in this process must meet the increased demands of the application both in terms of corrosive resistant and food safety guidelines set forth by the FDA and USDA. Festo offers products that are well-suited for these applications, as well as the process valves needed for clean-in-place (CIP) and sanitize-in-place (SIP) applications. Flexibility in end-of-line packaging applications is also



Wayne’s WCE case erector allows a company to grow and run at speeds anywhere from five to 40 cases a minute as requirements increase.

spection on single-serve, foil-sealed containers like coffee pods,” she notes.

“Factory automation systems that can both process and package extended shelf life (ESL) products on a single process line will offer the convenience and healthy choices consumers are searching for,” adds John Holmes, industry segment manager for food and beverage, End Line Packaging, Festo Corp., Hauppauge, N.Y. “Products that offer longer shelf life will allow consumers selections that remain both fresh and safe for longer periods of time. This is a key component to product selection for consumers. Although this process is not new to the industry, aseptic filling of beverages requires special considerations to the machine design and the products used in this process. Since

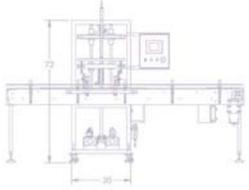
important, and Festo offers a complete range of servo-controlled actuators to meet these flexible applications.”

PREPARING TO MEET TOMORROW’S NEEDS WITH TODAY’S MACHINE

Flexibility is another commonly-mentioned must-have from the customers’ perspective.

“Customers are looking for flexibility—that is the key to their success,” says Tom Kauffmann, vice president of sales for P.E. USA Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio, a division of P.E. Labellers S.p.A., Italy. “Having flexibility allows our customers to provide superior labeling technology to meet the market demands for labeling.”

“Customers are looking for ►



more variety in terms of flavors and healthy choices,” confirms Holmes. “In addition, convenience and portability of products play a key role in their selections of beverage products. These decisions are foremost on consumers’ minds. Package design and selection have a direct impact on how portable a product is, so companies are continually redesigning their packages to meet these demands. Festo supports these efforts by providing flexible motion control solutions that can be easily re-configured for quick changeovers and reduced downtime throughout the production process.”

For example, Flexible End of Arm Tooling on robotic case packers allows consumer product companies the ability



This system from Inline was developed to direct product draw from a small customer kettle of pressed juices.

to make rapid changes to product selection and case variety, Holmes notes.

“This creates highly-customizable product portfolios that can easily be adapted to the markets they serve, there-

by giving consumers the variety of selections they are looking for,” he adds.

“Our customers continue to look for flexibility in machinery so they can package products with a wide range of containers, caps, labels, sleeves and products,” notes Aaron Black, operations manager, Accutek Packaging Equipment Co. Inc., Vista, Calif.

“We are working with customers to serve current and anticipated demands with equipment that has greater range and more flexibility,” adds Bryan Sinicrope, vice president of sales and marketing, A-B-C Packaging Machine Corp., Tarpon Springs, Fla. “For example, we offer servo-operated changeover that can be managed from the operator console.

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Most machines have modular designs to facilitate future upgrades/modifications for speed, configuration and product/packaging changes.”

And then there’s the perennial need for quality assurance.

“Product quality and safety are key trends Heat and Control continues to see in the beverage market,” notes Brian Barr, packaging systems sales manager for Heat and Control Inc., Hayward, Calif. “Our expanded range of Ishida checkweighers allows beverage producers to run a variety of packages both pre- and post-fill. We have also seen a steadily increasing demand for metal detection, using our line of CEIA metal detectors, and x-ray inspection, utilizing Ishida x-ray systems, on individual servings as well as case inspection. Our products are geared at insuring our customers’ product qual-

ity, fill accuracy and consumer safety, with Heat and Control’s global support network standing by to assist.”

KEEPING STOCK TO SAVE TIME

Because it’s more competitive than ever, customers often come to packaging machine manufacturers and ask for miracles in terms of turnaround time in order to keep up with or stay ahead of their competition.

“The biggest thing I am seeing this year is build time—most customers are getting overrun with requirements, projects and deadlines,” notes Troy Couron, corporate sales manager, Accutek. “Budget is still a concern as with every customer, but with the growing demands of the beverage business, most need a fully-integrated solution quickly and most want

to deal with one company vs. several for their solution.”

Some of this desired speedy delivery also means making it easy to train on and operate, he adds.

“They also look for quality construction [that’s also] low-maintenance, along with intuitive controls, so they can minimize their maintenance and technician staff and operate the line without extensive and expensive staff training,” says Couron.

Of course, the beverage industry is rife with consolidation, just like other processing sectors. Recently, Graphic Packaging Holding Co., Marietta, Ga., acquired A&R Carton’s beer and beverage packaging business. This move, which expanded Graphic Packaging’s position in the European beverage packaging market, complements the company’s recently-

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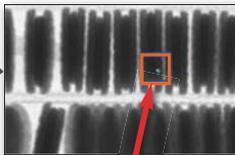
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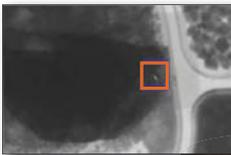


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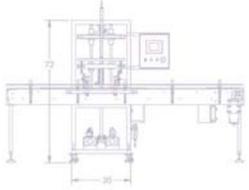






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announced acquisition of Contego Cartons. Graphic Packaging says the acquisitions provide “state-of-the-art web and sheet-fed converting assets.”

“The acquisition of A&R Carton’s beer and beverage packaging business enhances our position in the European beverage packaging market and enables us to extend our customer reach in the region,” says David Scheible, president and CEO, Graphic Packaging. “Similar to our strategy in the U.S., we are committed to growing our

European business around food and beverage end markets and optimizing our supply chain footprint around our customers’ needs.”

Change, of course, remains constant.

“One trend we see across most beverage sectors is change,” says Rick Reardon, general manager, FT System-North America, Suwanee, Ga., which counts E&J Gallo, Coca-Cola, Nestlé Nutritional, Nestlé Waters, Pepsi Bottling Group, Ocean Spray and Florida Natural among its customers. “When you consider the number of new products and packages on the market today that were not being produced two years ago, the need for flexibility is obvious. Beverage packagers are continually faced with products that have new process requirements, packaging with new materials, new shapes, new closures and new labels. Our customers are looking for solutions to meet current packaging requirements with flexibility to address future needs. We have to be able to offer systems that can be modified or expanded to meet the next new product or package.”

RIISING COSTS, INCREASING REGULATIONS

Of course, meeting these needs isn’t easy. There are at least as many challenges



Wayne Automation’s Quattro Partition Inserter has become a popular choice in high-production beer and wine plants like Miller/Coors and Gallo Wine.

as there are opportunities, industry insiders note with glee.

The two most-often mentioned challenges are cost and regulation.

“The biggest challenges facing the packaging industry are cost reduction and increased regulation, which are opposing forces,” Rossi says. “Tighter regulations means higher cost for processing and packaging plants, making cost reduction more complex. On the packaging inspection side of the business, the tighter regulations have increased requirements for inspection, which has helped our business. But manufacturers have smaller budgets for equipment, which makes the production of cost-effective inspection equipment more challenging due to the rise in raw material costs.”

And she’s not alone.

“No one can dispute that we have had to deal with extraordinary market conditions over the past few years,” Polypack’s Taylor says. “As a result, our customers must be vigilant with regard to controlling their capital expenditures. It is advantageous that we are positioned such that we can save our customers money by purchasing and using our equipment. Polypack is in the enviable position to show prospective customers that they

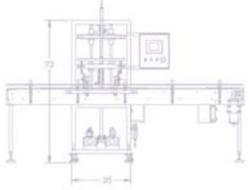
new ideas.”

“One of the biggest challenges facing our industry is the cost of raw materials and parts that we utilize constantly going up,” Accutek’s Couron adds. “Our company still manufactures in a minimum build (capacity) so we can still pass cost savings of building this way off to all of our end users, keeping prices down overall compared to most of our competitors.”

“We typically have the bulk of the machines built and in stock,” Black notes. “This allows us to modify the final portion of the machinery based on the customers’ specific requirements and deliver far quicker than our competition. We also offer the distinct advantage of increased quality and decreased cost because of this manufacturing method.”

“Economic conditions drive consumer trends and with a slow economy, consumers want lower prices,” Beer adds. “Hence companies need to find ways to reduce the cost of getting the product to the consumer. We intend to focus on those areas in which we feel we are best qualified and that is in package handling and warehouse automation and optimization. To be more competitive, we need better resources in trade skill workers and engineers. A ▶

can be both innovative and frugal at the same time. With the overall cost of our packaging lower than same-footprint historic packaging methods, our customers quickly realize that they can recoup the capital outlay in a remarkably short amount of time. Many producers in North America are turning to the European model of packaging innovation and looking outside their comfort zone for



good apprenticeship program would help improve the availability and quality of these resources.”

DOING MORE IN LESS SPACE, WITH LESS MATERIAL, FOR LESS MONEY

“One of the greatest challenges facing our customers, the beverage packager, is how to do more with less . . . how to package more product while lowering operating costs,” Reardon says. “FT System works with our customers to identify issues that have a negative impact on line efficiency or product quality. If we can automate a process for our customer, allowing him to save costs and improve quality, we consider that a success.”

“Processors seek the highest value and greatest versatility from machinery that takes the least [amount of] floor space,” Barr adds. “For inspection, they also need accurate event recording and traceability. That’s why we have focused on compact, modular designs. As a leading manufacturer of processing and packaging machinery, we have the capability to fabricate and customize equipment to fit existing and new line layouts.”

Taylor says Polypack believes that this “less is more” attitude is “the new normal.”

“Retailers, consumers and producers all demand a functional, attractive and sturdy package but also demand high value,” he says. “Beverage packagers are looking to shave off a few pennies at every step of the process. Bottles are getting thinner and thus additional factors such as the volume of the liquid, bottle shape and design all add to stability and display function. Soon gone are the days when bottles are shipped in corrugate and re-

moved for display. Direct store delivery companies especially are looking for attractive, functional packaging that goes from plant to shelf with as little waste and labor as possible.”

Of course, these machines also have to handle an ever-increasing workload.

“The biggest challenges probably relate to the increased number of packages coming down the line both in size and rates,” Beer says. “Things like faster speeds, less changeover time, greater machine flexibility, reduced package dam-



This Inline Filling System tackles the consumer drive toward fresh pressed juices.

age, increased cube on the pallet and in the warehouse, etc., are key challenges.”

Increasing worker safety remains a priority, as well.

“As with any other industry, the beverage industry is looking at different ways to reduce downtimes and increase operator safety,” Wulftec’s Tremblay says. “To answer this need, our innovative team has developed an approach that is a complete contrast to traditional film changeover procedures. It’s a revolutionary concept in the packaging industry that pays for itself by reducing the changeover time from hours to next to

none. On top of this, operator exposure to moving parts during machine operation is eliminated with our human-safe film loading zone. The film loading zone is now outside of the wrapping zone and is equipped with its own safety devices which do not interfere with the wrapping process. Therefore, the operator can reload the stretch film roll without stopping the machine’s operation while being 100 percent safe. A category 3 safety package is included. The WAVE (Wulftec Absolute Velocity Equipment) is equipped with a carousel with four pre-loaded 40-in., No-Thread-powered, pre-stretch film carriages which can be reloaded while the system is in operation, therefore eliminating downtime while ensuring operator safety.”

CRYSTAL BALL TIME

If customers continue to want increased flexibility and innovative, on-the-go, green packaging, just what will the future hold? Perhaps more of the same.

“The future of beverage processing and packaging is greener, faster, lighter weight and more convenient than in the past,” Rossi says. “We are already addressing these trends at TapTone by manufacturing

handling and inspection technologies for our equipment that meet the special requirements of emerging packaging, which is smaller and more prone to damage from the packaging and inspection process. We have a large research and development group that is always working to stay ahead of changes in the industry. In addition, more stringent regulations due to recalls and the potential for product tampering will require tighter quality specifications from beverage manufacturers—and our equipment is well suited for those tasks.”

Quality and great customer service

will never go out of style, many note.

“Our customers need for us to be their partner now and in the future,” Taylor adds. “Polypack Equipment has modular, all-stainless steel construction. This provides long life for our equipment and the option to update, upgrade and reconfigure should their needs change in the future.”

Sometimes that means knowing what your customer will need before he or she does.

“We see a continued importance for beverage companies to streamline operations and minimize costs,” A-B-C Packaging’s Sinicrope agrees. “Our dialogues with our customers and their concerns are impacting the equipment we design. When we help them run their lines more efficiently, that means more product out the door. It’s more than just line speed—considerations include cost of operation, changeover time, maintenance and support. As far as source reduction, we currently offer options for minimizing corrugated usage, and will continue to develop machinery to this end.”

But just how this plays out relies on several factors, not the least of which is the economy.

“Much depends on the longevity of the economic slump,” Westfalia’s Beer predicts. “In packaging machinery, flexibility and fast changeovers will be important to meet the increased number of package types and smaller sizes. Processors will need to be able to identify and track the product from source to consumer table.”

“We are not a processor, but we do case pack and warehouse the finished packages,” Beer adds. “We see the need to provide accurate tracking of these packages within the plant from the filler to the loading dock. The ability to identify the package with respect to date/time of filling and provide accurate, real-time tracking of that package in the warehouse is one area we focus on. Our automated warehouse systems (Automated Storage

and Retrieval System with Savanna Warehouse Management System) not only provide high-density storage capability but also track the location, date and time of entry of every pallet in the system. This provides the processor with the information on the location and elapsed time from filler line to truck loading. If some

quality issue is identified in the plant, the related pallets in storage can be recalled automatically and held from shipment.”

Some see a more throwback approach on the horizon.

“Accutek continues to monitor the packaging trends with our customers,” Black adds. “This hand-in-hand approach



Handled With Excellence

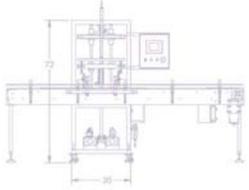
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The trend toward lightweight PET bottles seemed to change directions completely, with glass making a comeback, Bailey predicts.

Still more see the bag/pouch plus straw combination as coming up big.

“A lot of beverages are going to a pouch or a bag with a straw insert,” Accutek’s Couron says. “We are looking at ways to automate this process with new, innovative ideas and R&D research.”

Either way, no one anticipates the industry becoming less competitive.

“Beverage processing and packaging will continue to become more efficient,” Reardon notes. “Less down time, greater flexibility and higher line efficiencies will drive investments. FT System continues to develop inspection and automation solutions that allow beverage packagers to operate more efficiently while

at the same time improve the quality of the finished product.”

Reardon says one example of such an innovation is a line monitoring solution that not only identifies improperly filled or capped containers, but also identifies the faulty fill valve or capper head that created the defect.

“This information allows the line operators and maintenance team to take immediate corrective action,” he adds.

Another example would be systems that inspect containers and closures for defects before they are introduced to the packaging line.

In order to keep Wayne Automation’s customers competitive in the future, the company has developed a line of high-speed equipment that can keep up with the high-speed bottle fillers that the larger beverage plants have installed—which, in turn, helps keep up with the increasing demand of their customers, Dudley notes. Wayne offers the 70-case-per-minute VCE Case Erector and the 70-case-per-minute Quattro Partition Inserter, both of which have become popular choices in high-production beer and wine plants like Miller, Coors and Gallo Wine, he says. A new addition to the Wayne offering is a pair of BCI 100 or 120 Basket Carrier Erector/Inserters that can provide 50 or 60 cpm outputs to compliment the customers’ high-speed lines.

On the other side, Wayne works with beverage plants just starting up or moving to higher automation speeds where hand packing no longer fills their needs as the demand for their product grows. For these slower-speed but growing operations, Wayne developed a new WCE-40 Case Erector to meet the requirements of entry-level beverage companies who may only need five to 20 cases per minute, Dudley says. The distinct advantage of the WCE is its long-lasting, rugged construction and operator-friendly, advanced electronics; these allow a company to grow and run at speeds anywhere from five to 40 cases a minutes as requirements increase. Wayne also offers a low-speed partition inserter and a single BCI-100 Basket Carrier Erector/Inserter.

A-B-C Packaging also expects the rise in niche beverages to continue, both from startup companies and from the major beverage brands. These new products can require new primary and secondary packages, Sinicrope notes, adding that his company is working with customers to provide this capacity.

“We see a continued focus on speed, efficiency, safety and sanitation being benchmarks of future beverage processing and packaging,” Barr also notes. “We continue to invest heavily in product development for packaging and inspection machinery and control/information management systems to meet each of these needs, with resulting solutions to meet the challenges facing the beverage industry today and tomorrow.” **PMT**

Hilary Parker has been writing about issues in packaging and processing for more than a decade.

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