



From chef to chief

Selfmade entrepreneur RICHARD KUO started his label printing business without any printing background but today successfully runs EVA Enterprise Company. He now runs two businesses: printing labels and selling Taiwan-made AutoPak labellers. In November 2008 WOLFGANG KLOS-GEIGER visited the company in Bangkok/TH.

The professional career of RICHARD KUO started in his home country Taiwan where he worked as a chef. After deciding to move to Thailand (for »human« reasons) he joined an offset company printing folding cartons. From this base he met customers of this company who needed labels and so he decided to stumble into that business. At that time RICHARD KUO had no background in printing. This is, in short, how he decided to start his company EVA Enterprise in 2000.

The main market segments the company serves are food products, cosmetics, beauty and healthcare products and consumer products.

From small beginnings the young company today employs a team of 45, fifteen in administration and sales, the rest are technical and warehousing staff. As always and everywhere in the world, recruiting staff is a particularly onerous task. »We advertise our jobs in local newspapers or on job websites. But it is very hard to find skilled workers. So we have to do a lot of training on the job.«

How to learn printing?

When RICHARD KUO decided to start a label printing company he had no background in printing. »Basically learning by doing, training myself and on the job«, he smiled. »I went to graphic industries shows and visited press manufacturers to find out about printing processes. At the shows I investigated all that is required and found out about prepress and platemaking. I received a basic education on printing from some press manufacturers. But all of this was a long learning curve.«

The first machine RICHARD KUO acquired was a second-hand flat-bed letterpress unit he found on the internet. Unfortunately this press soon failed and KUO purchased a new letterpress machine from Taiwan, but sold it soon afterwards. Then he came across Smooth Machinery from whom he purchased a flat-bed letterpress machine.

Today EVA Enterprise is an all-Smooth Machinery house. The current machine park comprises three flat-bed letterpress machines (two

SPM-210DHL [web with 210 mm/8.25", max. printing area 330 mm x 200 mm/13" x 8.4" when single colour, max. four colours] and one SPM-280DHL [web with 280 mm/11", max. printing area 500 x 270 mm/20.12" x 11.4" when single colour, max. four colours]); one two-colour roll-to-roll flat-bed screen printing machine (300 x 300 mm/13.4" x 13.4") and an offline die-cutter, matching the printing size of the screen printing machine.



The latest addition is a six-colour letterpress machine SPM-340LR with full UV capabilities (UV curing stations from UVLight of Taichung/ROC) with a flexo varnishing unit and a rotary die-cutting station. The intermittent press offers a 340 mm (13.4") max. web width with a printing area of 430 x 330 mm (17.5" x 13") when fully rotary and 340 x 330 mm (13.4" x 13") when intermittent printing.

Left: Richard Kuo (right), EVA Enterprise founder and owner, and Tony Law from Smooth Machinery agent Labeltec Machinery, had welcomed the writer and explained the company story.

Right: The latest addition to the machine park is a six-colour letterpress machine SPM-340LR with full UV capabilities with a flexo varnishing unit and a rotary die-cutting station.



The semi-rotary letterpress machine *SPM-340LR* capitalizes state-of-the-art technologies like servo drives and automatic register-control. There is no technological overloading which has a very positive effect on pricing. *Smooth Machinery* is characterized as being the vanguard in the field of CNC controlled printing presses. This allows the automation of many functions resulting in higher print quality which to a lesser extent depends on the respective skills of the press operator.

Of particular importance is the easy and fast plate mounting with magnetic cylinder sleeves. All the relevant production data is stored in the respective facility of the machine especially for repeat jobs which results in significantly reduced make-ready times and the efficient production of small run print jobs.

The *SPM-340LR* is supplied with an automatic register control system which contributes to the reduction of start-up waste. The machine keeps accurate register during the whole print run which is most important for flexible substrates. Moreover, the system is also very useful at machine stops for reel changes, as there often is no waste or it reduces waste to just one machine length.

All presses supplied by *Smooth* are servo-driven and the servo motors are used for print register adjustment and for adjusting the inking units. The machine is operated via a HMI touch-screen where all the settings for all print decks are digitally controlled. For repeat jobs the respective data is stored in a special facility with a capacity for

about 100 jobs. After entry of the job name the printing units are automatically set into their working position which considerably reduces the effort for machine set-up.

Another characteristic of the user-friendly automation is the inspection status of the digital control which monitors the main functions of the machine. In the case of malfunctions like voltage fluctuations or problems with the servo technology the operator is warned immediately.

How to select a supplier?

RICHARD KUO is straight forward: »My decision to go with *Smooth Machinery* was mainly influenced by the way they do business, and by their machine performance. We experienced their machines as durable workhorses with a low percentage of breakage. *Smooth* offers good and stable engineering and a great service. Their agent here in Thailand is not too far away – *Labeltec Machinery Co Ltd* is based in Ayutthaya; their Sales Manager TONY LAW is also from Taiwan which makes communications even easier.«

»Pricewise their machines are slightly above average«, adds RICHARD KUO. »But what impressed me most was that *Smooth* put more emphasis on explaining the precision, the accuracy and the ease of operation of their presses while others were just highlighting the performance to push for a sale.« Talking about electronics in machines, RICHARD KUO has a clear philosophy: »When selecting a machine, our main emphasis is on accuracy, stability and speed of equipment. We request/consider automation to a



An offline die-cutter is available to process labels from the screen printing or the flat-bed letterpress machines.

degree only where it pays.«

Although performance of equipment is a vital factor for decision-making, there are other »soft facts« that count and close a deal.

Business environment

»When talking about loyalty«, says RICHARD KUO, »we have to differentiate between staff and customers. Staff loyalty in general is good, but it's less than with Taiwanese staff. But Thai people are »workers.«

»With customer loyalty we can state, that around 40% of our customers are very loyal. Their main reason for staying with our company is the quality and service we offer. If a customer leaves us it's mainly because they can shop cheaper somewhere else. For all our customers – the vast majority are Thai companies – this is true: they are all very price-sensitive.«

Scope of business

RICHARD KUO and his team know what they are doing. »We offer printing and converting of labels –

Left: EVA Enterprise offers a wide variety of labels; Many of their products are finished with specialty and effect varnishes.

Right: The company is an all-Smooth Machinery house. Pictured are the three flat-bed letterpress machines.



that's our core business. That's why our pre-press department is fairly small. In case the customer needs assistance in design work we will do this. For this we have the usual software packages in-house. But film output is made externally while making our *Toyobo* photopolymer plates again is in-house.«

The flat-bed die-cutting tools are made locally (in Bangkok) while the flexible dies are imported from Australia (*RotoMetrics*).

Material being processed is mostly from *Avery Dennison*. »We print about 60% paper-based labelstock, the remainder is filmic material (PET, PP, but no PVC!)«, says RICHARD KUO. Conventional inks are

of Japanese origin, UV inks are from *T&K* (Japan) and *Siegwerk* (Germany).

How to differentiate?

Is *EVA Enterprise* just another me-too label printer? »We try to differentiate through offering extra features on our labels«, says RICHARD KUO. »Many of our products are finished with specialty and effect varnishes we apply in screen printing, such as glitter, tactile varnishes, fluorescence and other effects.«

And why ISO certification? »A number of customers requested such a certificate, but it was mostly my own decision. The ISO 9001:

2000 certification was a costly experience, but it also helped to organize our workflow and the company structure.«

Is business stable and good? »It is good – it was good«, RICHARD KUO adds. The present economic situation has already affected the company. At the time of visit, KUO reported some substantial downturn. But he was confident that based on his quality, his service and his capabilities customers will stay with him.

- www.123eva.com
- www.smoothmac.com
- www.labeltec99.com