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Plus: We talk with FlexFilms vice-chairman Anantshree Chaturvedi

# Growth and responsibility after Covid-19

The global film manufacturing arm of India's UFlex, **FlexFilms**, continues to grow its presence in key markets around the world, despite the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic. It also has big eyes for sustainability and circular economies. Vice-chairman and CEO Anantshree Chaturvedi tells *Packaging & Converting Intelligence* about the company's immediate and medium-term future.

**T**he world is beginning to emerge from the Covid-19 crisis and is picking up the pieces. A year like no other, 2020, saw health services pushed to the brink, economies grind to a halt and societies shut themselves off from the wider world. For businesses, which to a large degree thrive off certainty, last year blew any opportunities present out of the water – many industries have suffered, countless companies have cut back or closed, and employment statistics have taken a mighty hit.

That FlexFilms International vice-chairman and CEO Anantshree Chaturvedi is speaking to us via Microsoft Teams from the back of his car is in itself a sign that 'normal' times are returning.

Traffic jams are, at least in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, a part of the morning routine once again.

But it would be wrong to suggest FlexFilms is returning to its pre-pandemic state. The company, which is the global manufacturing arm of India's largest multinational flexible packaging solutions company – UFlex – has continued apace with its bold expansion plans during the course of the last 12 months. "We made a commitment in 2017 to accelerate, and throughout 2020 we have been honouring that commitment," says Chaturvedi.

"When Covid-19 arrived, we had to figure out how best to carry on, and that was challenging. First and foremost, we had to make sure our staff were safe, and

Anantshree Chaturvedi, vice-chairman and CEO

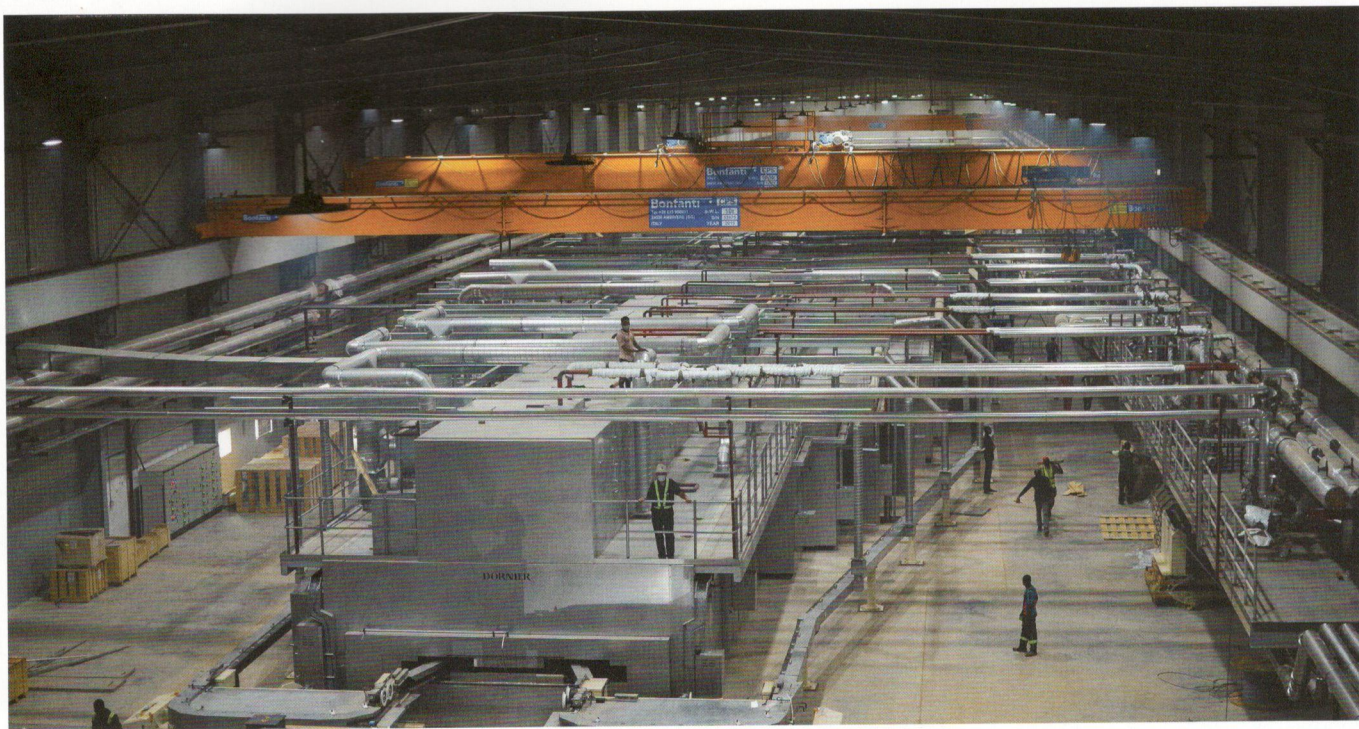


another challenge was keeping up the momentum amid all the travel bans and lockdowns – getting engineers to the right places at the right time for our customers.

"The situation also required careful judgement regarding the pace of our growth activity. Some markets we've had to take slower, whereas others we've been able to act quickly in order to maximise our advantage there."



FlexFilms hopes to produce and market its films in its second European home, in the above greenfield site in Hungary.



FlexFilms has developed a factory in Nigeria, a country it sees as holding major economic potential because of young demographics and entrepreneurial spirit.

### From Russia to Nigeria

A prime example of this is in Russia. Although FlexFilms already commands a strong share of the market for films, it realised the need to strengthen its position, with more and more competitors beginning to evaluate the potential of the market. As a result, the company moved an entire production line from Dubai, where it is now focusing on more specialised film production and research centred around sustainable products, which are biodegradable.

- biaxially-oriented polyethylene terephthalate (BOPET) films
- biaxially-oriented polypropylene (BOPP) films
- cast polypropylene (CPP) films
- metallised films
- alox-coated films
- speciality films.

Back in Europe, FlexFilms has also expanded its capacity at its site near Wrzesnia, a town in western Poland. Here, the company had been routinely

in Europe from which FlexFilms will be able to produce and market a wider range of films.

The company's FLEXOPP brand will be manufactured at the site, which sits around 45 minutes from Budapest – these are biaxially-oriented polypropylene (BOPP) films that have a wide variety of uses, including packaging and conversion, photo albums, confectionery packaging thermal lamination and much more. This is a specialist-grade product, its key properties being mechanical strength, moisture resistance, optical clarity, heat sealable (on one or both sides), tear resistance and dimensional stability, among others.

But the Hungary site is not all about producing industry-leading films to sell to a European audience. Chaturvedi is determined to provide an enticing working environment for employees and make FlexFilms an employer of choice.

He adds, "We are changing our traditional model of being away from cities with this site just outside of Budapest – it will provide a favourable arrangement for staff because it will be close to home and schools."

The location that, arguably, excites the Chaturvedi the most, however, is Africa.

The company has already been operating out of Egypt for a decade, its site in 6 October City supplying a range

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"Dubai is not an ideal place for large-scale manufacturing operations to be based," Chaturvedi says. "It continues to urbanise at an extraordinary rate, so we decided to convert our facility to an R&D hub with a one-of-a-kind CPP film line." FlexFilms operates state-of-the-art film manufacturing facilities across the world, and its cumulative production capacity stands in excess of 381,000Mt per annum. It produces:

operating at 85% capacity, a status quo that triggered the requirement to invest in expansion in order to keep up with customer demand. The biaxially-oriented polyethylene terephthalate (BOPET) films produced by the Wrzesnia facility are distributed across Europe, and will soon be joined by a brand new manufacturing hub in nearby Hungary.

A landmark greenfield development, it will provide a crucial second foothold



The plant of FlexFilms's parent company, UFlex, in Noida, India. It also hopes to expand there, meeting the country's rapidly increasing demand for flexible packaging.

of films (predominantly BOPP and BOPET) to regional and European customers. Indeed, it was the first to establish a BOPET film production line in Africa, a first-mover advantage that Chaturvedi is determined to build on. "We have chosen Nigeria because it is a country full of potential," he explains. "There is an incredible demographic of young consumers and entrepreneurs, and I cannot wait to get started there. We are nearing the final stages of construction and should be ready to start production soon."

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**Sustainable future**

FlexFilms has also unveiled plans to grow its capacity in India, the home of its parent company. Already present in the northern region of Uttar Pradesh, the

company plans to open a new site further south in Karnataka, where it will meet the country's growing demand for film products by setting up greenfield BOPET and CPP film lines. This vibrant and extensive global growth activity certainly shows that Chaturvedi and FlexFilms are following through with their pledge to honour its 2017 plan.

However, the vice-chairman and CEO is determined not to lose sight of the longer term in his outlook for the business. As the Dubai conversion project shows, cutting-

edge research underpinned by a sustainable ethos is equally if not more important to securing the future of the organisation. It is a subject that galvanises Chaturvedi's own entrepreneurial spirit. He points to

Project Plastic Fix, a UFlex-wide initiative designed to make the company part of a solution to keep plastic in the economy and out of the environment. It is here that he closes the conversation, speaking of the need for the stakeholders up and down the entire value chain to convert to sustainable practice, or risk being left behind by the next generation of buyers.

"If I walk into Walmart or most other stores, I can say that only 2% or 3% of products on display are truly sustainable in terms of their footprint," Chaturvedi says. "When you look at products with polymers, that number is more like 1%."

"What we find ourselves in at the moment is what I call a dilemma of beautiful conversations, which is great, but often overridden by a short-term view that is only concerned with quick returns. We must look long term. The consumers of tomorrow will vote with their feet and make sustainability an imperative for all products, those containing films or otherwise. My ambition is to make FlexFilms circular – it is critical if we are to secure our future." ●

[www.flexfilm.com](http://www.flexfilm.com)